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An Odd Couple

On September 1975, Professor Andrzej Lasota moved from the Jagiellonian University (Cracow) to the University of Silesia in Katowice. Although since then we were working in the same Institute, my very first personal contact with him took place around three years later at my home; he visited me and my wife Joanna to ask for a favor: Andrzej's one-year-old daughter Natalia was taken ill and her parents were looking for a good pediatrician. Why Andrzej decided to approach us? One reason might be that at that time we were living in the same housing estate but another reason was deeper and Andrzej had explained it briefly even without any Joanna's questions or mine: "You are Silesian autochthons and I am a newcomer still slightly isolated" – he said. Through a lucky twist of fate, one of our neighbors – a clinician at children's ward – has kindly agreed to help out. His treatment was very effective, to Natalia's parents gladness.

Not before long, our personal communication was getting closer, including mathematical discussions. Exclusively due to my fault (laziness and indecisiveness) we do not have any joint paper, although Andrzej was proposing several times to work on some problems which finally could have led to joint publication(s) (anyhow, according to MathSciNet my Collaboration Distance with Andrzej equals 2). For a plea of mitigation rather than a defence let me mention that Professor Lasota's perception of mathematics was slightly different from that of mine and he frequently made a point of emphasizing that. Everybody knows that his fantastic intuition and extremely exceptional ability of translating (and then solving) hard problems stemming from physics, biology, medicine, engineering, among others, into rigorous mathematical language resulted with many numerous, beautiful and deep achievements. In my opinion, only a few people in the world's mathematical community accomplished that kind of mastership in finding real applications of mathematics. Andrzej was frequently declaring that mathematics is universal and reality is its subject; good mathematics sooner or later will become a part of reality. My motivations

are more Platonic: I always was and I am fascinated with the beauty and ideality of mathematical structures and refined reasonings being incidental to a strong belief that such perfect harmony must finally be materialized. So, surprisingly or not, starting from different lines of departure we both finish with similar conclusions.

To give a more concrete flavor of such everyday intelectual struggle between us let me mention the following story. Once Andrzej came to my office and after an exchange of a series of jokes (many times a bit naughty) handed me a pretty thick manuscript of his new paper written jointly with Professor Józef Myjak with a request to read it and indicate any kind of necessary corrections, changes, remarks, etc. It was not an easy task to rebuff any Andrzej's request but in this case I had serious objections because subconsciously I treated him as a scientific mentor and I would not dare to correct him. He did not care and repeated his request saying that because of my preciseness and rigorous approach to mathematics he counts on me. Having no choice, I read the text in a few days trying to do my best. One of my modest remarks was: you should not write the sequence $\{a_n \colon n \in \mathbb{N}\}$ as for any function you should distinguish between the function itself and its range. This made Andrzej slightly irritated: "mathematics is an alive object and not just an idle play of symbols; when writing a paper you should also predict possible reader's feelings who might be disgusted at a frothy formalism" – he said. Finally, he acknowledged this remark from formal point of view but afterwards another long discussion started between us with regard to what is actually important in mathematics.

An impressive feature of Andrzej's personality was a renaissance scholarship which allowed him to discuss almost every topic with deep knowledge of the matter in question. Since his character, very complicated indeed, included also a kind of sybarite behavior, he liked to revel one's time drinking different kinds of beverages. I have shared these interests with him, so from time to time we used to discuss our outlook upon life at such occasions not excluding political questions. Andrzej declared himself a leftist (widely understood) with authentic respect the different ideas including these of mine. In numerous talks he used to estimate my political opinions, more or less diplomatically, as a virgin innocence (= naivety). This personality trait may be well illustrated by frequently offered help: "Tell me, please, what do you want to gain, for instance, during the meetings of administrative bodies, and I shall find adequate arguments to achieve your aim." This time I was irritated by his cynicism even more so that I knew he was able to do it. In many instances we behaved as an odd couple, indeed. Nonetheless, I wish to express here my

sincere gratitude for having the possibility to entertain long-lasting relations with a mathematician of that class as Professor Andrzej Lasota and, above all, for the pure friendship He bestowed upon me.