

Francesco: A Personal Reflection – Gary Melnick

Francesco and I met 37 years ago at Cornell University. I would be less than honest if I said we clicked as friends instantly. Rather, Francesco's was just another pleasant, but unfamiliar, face in the small army of bright young students Franco Pacini brought to Ithaca to collaborate with Ed Salpeter. At that time, in 1980, I was in a self-imposed exile working to complete my thesis, so I had little time to do anything more than just smile and nod when we passed in the corridor.

Things changed in August of 1983. Francesco and I, along with several others in attendance today, participated in the NATO Advanced Study Institute meeting on the "The Birth and Infancy of Stars" held in Les Houches, France. During the first 3 weeks of the 4-week workshop, Francesco and I chatted from time to time, having recognized each other from our Cornell days. During coffee breaks he would comment on something that would make me laugh, or I would say something that would make him laugh. By week 4, we succumbed to a universal law of friendship – like gravity, laughter is an attracting force and by the last week of the workshop we actively sought out each other's company during meals and breaks. Francesco asked if I'd like to join him on his return to Italy. As I had never been to Italy, I accepted. In addition to his great sense of humor, I also discovered his abundant generosity and kindness.

Over the course of his many trips to Cambridge to work with Steve – during which he often stayed with me for months at a time – and trips together with Sylvie in California, Hawaii, Paris, and Boston, joint return visits to Ithaca, travels through Japan, and my many visits to Arcetri, Francesco and I cemented our friendship. Distance was no obstacle. If our face-to-face get-togethers were the bricks of our friendship, then emails were the mortar... thousands of emails over the years, the last exchange occurring on the day he passed away.

Remarkably, even though we worked in closely aligned fields – he in star formation, me in astrochemistry – with few exceptions, our email exchanges concerned family, current events, and just day-to-day life, always, always with a light-hearted humorous twist. We just loved to make each other laugh.

All of the above is just a preamble to what I really want to say, which is for Sylvie, Barbara, and Arianne. He loved you immensely – this was abundantly evident in his writings. His pride in his daughters was beyond words.

On April 27, 2010, Francesco emailed me with the Subject line "Sad news" informing me of his father's passing. In this email, Francesco writes: "Although you met my father many years ago, I'd like to share with you some thoughts about him. In a few words, he was serious (unlike one of his sons), correct in his private and job affairs, and with a great sense of responsibility." The apple didn't fall far from the tree.

As far as I'm concerned, Francesco's hard work and endless striving for excellence were *acquired* traits. The gentleness, expansive curiosity, quiet caring, love, pride, and wonderful humor *was* Francesco. I'm sure this is how you'll remember your husband and father, as will his many friends and colleagues here today. As for me, I miss him like a brother.