

In memory of Maria Assunta Pozio

Mimmo Iannelli

When I met Assunta, in the mid-seventies, she was a student following my course on Real Analysis at the University of Rome. A few years later, I was her tutor and advisor along the process that on those times in Italy was the equivalent of a Ph. D. program. I share her memory as a student with a few colleagues who have been her class mates and, I am sure, remember her as a nice girl, enthusiastic and scrupulous about her work, friendly and sweet with everybody. Those who have known her as a mature researcher and teacher can easily confirm that these traits of her character have not changed since then.

At the end of the course, she asked me for a thesis and I proposed her to work at a review of the theory of integral equations of Volterra type, with the purpose of preparing a basis for further work in the field of population dynamics. Indeed, in those years Biomathematics was in its beginning as a discipline, and integral and delay equations revealed to be an important tool for modeling populations. I wanted to drive Assunta's interest into a field I myself was new to, in the perspective of organizing a research program in a new, promising area.

She did a great job graduating with honor and, after her graduation, I suggested her to follow the Italian way of the time to Ph.D. (actually a Ph.D. without a Ph.D. title), applying for a fellowship supported by the C.N.R. to develop a research program under the supervision of a tutor: she was supposed to work two or three years, publishing research papers and preparing to start a career in the University. I acted as her tutor, the program concerned mathematical modeling of populations and the university was Trento University because I was moving there, together with other people from the University of Rome.

Assunta applied and got a very high score in the competition for the fellowship. When I congratulated with her she showed doubts and hesitations on whether to accept, asking me if she had really to accept the fellowship: "maybe somebody else needs this support more than I do," she said... This sounds much like Assunta: a nice person, helpful to others, non-competitive, sweet, discreet. I remember that, during one of the first conferences in Biomathematics, somebody asked me who was the shy girl attending the lectures. But Assunta was not shy, she was not afraid of people: on the contrary, she was able to keep contacts with everybody, in her way, reserved and discreet.

In Trento, the quite large group coming from Rome and from other Italian universities formed a little community keeping together and sharing a common experience. Thus, our families used to meet often all together for dinners or so and

I remember that our children were always around Assunta. Indeed, she appeared to them as a sweet girl coming out of a fairy tale, if not a true fairy herself: her mood was fascinating and they loved her very much.

On the other hand, the fairy girl was a tenacious researcher, and a complementary image I keep in my memory, shows her, sitting at her desk, working hard. She was considering reaction diffusion equations arising in population dynamics, with typical non-linear integral term. When discussing, any idea put forward was analyzed by her, rigorously and in great detail. I guess that all those who have collaborated with her know how unhappy she was of vague conclusions and how much she wanted to be convinced in full.

After a few years she left Trento, moving to Rome, and her story as a mature teacher and researcher is the story our colleagues know. Since she moved, I had only a few opportunities to meet Assunta, and each time it was a pleasure to renew our friendship. Her mood was always encouraging and optimistic even when we met after she had hard times overcoming a serious disease. In 2011, I had the pleasure of her participation in the conference celebrating my sixty-fifth birthday and I could proudly introduce her to the audience as my brilliant first student.

It is not easy to accept Assunta's untimely death after the sudden merciless disease that took her away. I heard her by phone shortly before: I understood she was not quite optimistic but I felt her strong as ever, almost softening the true situation not to worry. I know we all will miss her and keep the memory of the fairy girl and fairy lady we once met.

Received: 16 February 2021/Accepted: 16 February 2021/Published online: 28 March 2021

Università di Trento, Italia

mimmo.iannelli@unitn.it

Open Access. This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.