

REMEMBERING PATRICK DEHORNOY

Patrick Dehornoy's untimely death was a great loss to mathematics, a tragic shock for his family and friends, and for me personally – Patrick was my closest friend in France.

I was introduced to Patrick Dehornoy by Jean-Pierre Ressaire in the early nineties and we immediately hit it off. Besides our mutual interest in each other's research, we were obviously on the same wavelength in many other respects – our common love of the French language and culture, our love of classical music, our close philosophical and political views. Soon Patrick invited me to his CNRS laboratory in Caen.

I have written elsewhere about our mathematical relationship, here I want to write only about the human aspect of Patrick's wonderful family and our friendship. I gladly accepted the invitation to the Dehornoy lab, and my wife Elena (whom I usually take along in my travels) and I flew in to Paris and took the train going to Caen, but got off at Evreux – Patrick met us at the station to take us to his house in the suburbs of that small city.

I was enchanted by Patrick's house, which he largely built with his own hands, and the adjoining courtyard with its little pond and miniature Spanish-style monastery, also designed and constructed by Patrick. We had dinner with the whole Dehornoy family and stayed the night. We were charmed by Arlette, and Elena immediately began an animated conversation with her about feminine matters, despite the fact that their only common language, English, was not the mother tongue of either of them.

In the morning, awakened by the frogs in the pond, I went out to explore the adjoining territory. When I entered the miniature structure, the first accords of Ravel's Bolero began to sound – apparently, I had crossed a laser ray guarding the entrance, and that had turned on a tape recorder hidden somewhere in the structure. Here is a photograph that I took on another occasion – it shows Patrick, Arlette, their two sons and my wife sitting in the patio near the house:



In the years that followed, our visits to Caen became regular. At the beginning of the second one, which was in June, Arlette suggested that instead of living in the city we use (rent free) the house that she has in Houlgate, a small seaside resort some 25 kilometers from Caen. So we lived there, and I shuttled between Caen and Houlgate three-four times a week on Patrick's bicycle. Elena and I fell in love with that house, surrounded by a small rose garden, with a view of the sea from the bedroom window. We stayed there on several other occasions, unrelated to professional official visits to Patrick's lab.

I must say I was becoming uneasy about being unable to adequately thank the Dehornoys for all they had done for us, but in 2001 I became the head of the CNRS laboratory in Moscow, and was able to reciprocate (in part): Patrick visited Moscow several times (once with Arlette), and I introduced him to a few Russian colleagues. In particular, I am glad that I introduced him to Ivan Dynnikov, not only because they coauthored two excellent monographs, but because Ivan, who is a first rate amateur violinist, played several Mozart violin sonatas, with Patrick at the piano, for the family and friends.

I last saw Patrick and Arlette in December 2017 in Paris (I was visiting professor at the IHES) at their cozy little *pied à terre* in the Latin quarter. After that, because of my wife's health problems, I was forced to turn down an invitation to a conference and to a talk in Caen, when I was eagerly looking forward to telling Patrick about my work on knot theory.

This I still regret, and I deeply regret the non appearance of the mathematical ideas that were surely in Patrick Dehornoy's mind, but were lost when he passed away, but above all I regret the loss of a close friend.

Alexey Sossinsky,
Moscou le 6 juin 2020