

REMEMBERING PAUL

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Our long and treasured friendship with Paul Erdős goes far back to the time when he was a member of the remarkably talented group of young number theorists with which Louis Mordell surrounded himself at Manchester.

When in the United States, Paul often stopped over to visit with us. First when we were at Notre Dame (1946–63) and then when we moved to The Ohio State University.

It was always good to see Paul. He was not only an inspired and inspiring mathematician. He was keenly interested in political and economic events around the globe and was well informed and up to date. His sympathy and concern reached far and wide.

As deep suffering moved from one corner of the world to another, material help was critically needed. Paul always responded from his own limited resources and through active encouragement to others to contribute. Paul's deep concern for those who suffered was heart warming.

During the more leisurely visits, my late wife Bee would try to get Paul to be more concerned about his personal appearance beyond the socially acceptable minimum. She would take him shopping for an attractive suit and other related items to go with it. Paul obviously enjoyed the attention. The effect of all this attention was not long lived as he resumed his traveling.

Paul's peripatetic mode of life has been well known to his friends. He always maintained close contact with his mother as he moved around the world. When one would need to reach Paul urgently one would phone his mother. His mother was a remarkably intelligent and warm person. She adopted Paul's friends as her own. She not only would know where he was but also what he was doing and with whom he was working. Her English

was unusually good. Via the telephone I came to know her many years before I had the pleasure of meeting her in person when she came to the United States.

Paul Erdős was a frequent visiting lecturer. I remember vividly his year-long visit with us at Notre Dame. He accepted my invitation to come. Over the years his visits to various universities were covered by modest research grants. I knew that contrary to the accepted view, he would be a superb teacher. Therefore, I arranged for him to come as a full professor with privileges and duties thereto appertaining. Paul was pleased to teach a course in set theory, one of his favorite research subjects, and also a course in complex variables. For each course I chose students who would benefit by his teaching and who would appreciate him as a mentor. I observed, soon after, that students were becoming deeply involved, and I turned to other pressing matters.

At the end of the semester Paul wrote out his exams to be proctored by someone else and mailed to him in Urbana, where he would be visiting his research collaborators. Many colleagues there were asking about what Paul was doing in his complex variables. When he described it, everyone was aghast. Oh Paul, said they, this was much too much. The exam will be a disaster.

Paul, being naturally very anxious, waited eagerly. When the papers arrived he opened the packet quickly. The top paper scored 100. Other papers were also very good. Going from office to office Paul happily proclaimed: look, look, look!

At the end of the year Paul decided to go to a conference abroad, and we put in motion a request for the required return permit from the Immigration Department. To obtain the desired permit it was necessary for Paul to be interviewed. An official interviewer arrived one morning with his tape recorder. The usual questions asked on such occasions were leading political questions. Confronted with these, Paul wanted to make sure that his interviewer understood the subtle differences between socialism and communism and appreciated other political subtleties. Paul's discussion lasted over more than one roll of the recorder's tape. Soon after the afterglow of the exchange of ideas in the interview discussed, Paul had misgivings which he shared with me. That he was right is now well known. In the political atmosphere created by Senator McCarthy, our Immigration Department did not find it possible to grant Paul the needed permission to return. Paul decided to take the trip anyway and the aftermath of this is well known.

Paul was a dedicated and a very humane person. We miss him very much.

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