Tribute to Shmuel Fishman

from Michael Berry

Like Shmuel's many scientific friends worldwide, I am shocked and saddened to learn that he has died.

He was a paradoxical man. In his personal life, deeply private, a loner, sometimes appearing wounded – perhaps by the unhappiness of his early life. Yet as a colleague he was gregarious, cheerful, convivial...

He was an animated conversationalist, with opinions on many subjects: the state of the Technion, Israeli politics, and – especially and always – physics. Physics was his obsession and his passion. His many contributions, sustained over the decades, were at the forefront of statistical physics, interpreted in the broadest sense. He told me that during his military service, guarding a lonely border post in the Negev, he whiled away the long hours writing his physics lectures for undergraduates. We always enjoyed long scientific conversations, but only last year did we seriously collaborate and publish together – a satisfying experience, stimulated by his insistent questioning of something I thought was obvious but wasn't.

I knew him for 35 years. During my annual visits to the Technion, he was a generous host. Almost every evening he invited me to dinner. We went in his car. That was an experience: a sequence of jerks and spurts that I can only describe as simultaneously optimistic acceleration and cautious braking. In the early years, his appreciation of food and familiarity with restaurants were – to put it politely – basic:

 "Where shall we eat – the Arab or the fish?"

But about a decade ago he underwent a phase transition, becoming suddenly enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the new eateries popping up all over Haifa, while remaining faithful to his local gas station cafe.

He had physicist friends in many places, in particular Bristol; he was a welcome guest at home, where my family regarded him with affection. To my children he was a good-humoured occasional uncle. We miss our friend and our much-loved colleague.

Bristol, UK, April 2019