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Obituary Notice for Joe Diestel

by Bernard Beauzamy,

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I met Joe Diestel for the first time in the late 70's, in Poland; we were both visitors of "IMPAN" (Mathematics Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland). I was a beginner and Joe a confirmed mathematician. He told me once during some meal: "Why don't you come to Kent?". I had no idea about Kent at all, but Joe was one of the leaders of the topic "Geometry of Banach Spaces" on which I intended to work, so I accepted the invitation.

Indeed, I came to Kent, Ohio, USA, but not just once or twice, but on a regular basis, during the 15 years which followed. Every year, I spent there at least one month, and sometimes a full semester, including teaching duties. At that time, I was Professor in a French University, and I could find the time for such visits ; they diminished and stopped when I created a Company in 1995: lack of time.

My first meeting with Joe, during my first visit to Kent, is worth remembering: he took me to a bar, named VFW (which means "Veterans of Foreign Wars"), in which he obviously had his habits and was well-known. I don't know if this bar still exists in Kent. It was populated by a large amount of strange people, some of whom, quite clearly, were not on the "right" side during WW2. Anyway, Joe was used to that place, as some kind of second office. He started explaining to me what were the "hot" topics in Geometry of Banach Spaces. His conversation was extremely hard to follow for a young foreigner, because the television set was quite loud, and covered most of his words, and also because the general atmosphere was quite dark. Let me say in a word that this was certainly less formal than our general working atmosphere, in Laurent Schwartz' group, in Paris, but at the same time much more friendly.

At that time, in Kent, the Chairman of the Department was Olaf P. Stackelberg, and the connections between people were easy to establish. The Department had under a single roof both mathematicians and computer scientists; during my next visits, I could develop research programs with both. I kept discussing various issues with Joe Diestel, who was always available for all types of mathematics. He also introduced me to his friend and "alter ego" Jerry Uhl (from the Mathematics Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), who died in 2010.

Joe Diestel liked mathematics, liked to promote his research area and to promote his Department. On the other hand, he did not like to promote himself. You might search the entire Internet with the most powerful search engine, you will never find a resume of Joe Diestel. Nowadays, people keep a resume, constantly adding a new line every time they give the most miserable talk at the most miserable place. Joe Diestel was not of that sort. He was quite modest; perhaps one could say shy.

He had a considerable amount of students (I refer to the "Mathematics Genealogy Project"); some of them I met personally, and many of them succeeded in distinguished academic careers. He also participated in the organization of the Analysis Group in Kent, a group which expanded and strengthened over the years.

He was the authors of several books, which are now considered as "classics" in Analysis : Sequences and Series in Banach Spaces (1984), Absolutely Summing Operators (with Hans Jarchow and Andrew Tonge, 1995), The Metric Theory of Tensor Products (2008).

I will miss Joe Diestel and his friendly attitude, even in bars, and I miss the atmosphere one could find in Kent at that time.

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