

40 Unforgettable Years with Boris Nikolaevich

Jurgen Appell (Wurzburg, Germany)

“Он был чудесный человек, каких немного – целая эпоха ушла!” (“He was a marvellous person, like only a few people - a whole epoch is finished!”) This was the first thought which came into my mind when I received the message, on August 6, 2013, that Boris Nikolaevich Sadovskij had been taken from us.

Knowing somebody for 40 years means knowing him or her for a whole life. And knowing a person like Sadovskij does not mean just adding another occasional acquaintance to many others in the past and future, but having a colleague and friend who continuously will influence you, from both the professional and even more the personal viewpoint, for a long time.

Only very few things in life depend on ourselves. Why do we meet a certain person, at that time, in that place, on that occasion? Some people call this personal destiny, some pure coincidence, some God’s providence. Perhaps everything of this plays a role, and perhaps much more we simply don’t know (and will probably never know).

Meeting Boris Nikolaevich in the Soviet Union. The first time I met Boris Nikolaevich Sadovskij was in 1976, when I was a DAAD exchange student in Leningrad and had the opportunity to go for a “komandirovka” to Voronezh (photo). I was deeply impressed by his



personality: in the framework of my diploma thesis I had studied his pioneering survey article on limit-compact and condensing operators [Uspekhi Mat. Nauk 27 (1972), 81-146 = Russian Math. Surveys 27 (1972), 85-155], and now Jurgen, the youngster and greenhorn, met the legendary author.

Three years later, I was again for a couple of months in Voronezh and participated in the famous winter school, meeting such distinguished mathematicians like Mark A. Krasnosel’skij and Selim G. Krejn. At the school in the countryside we had a lot of fun,

enjoying interesting mathematical lectures, nice personal talks, extended country-cross skiing, and of course continuous banquets in the evening with an incredible amount of vodka and music. Subsequently, I still attended the winter school twice, but it was never the same. In any case, I have many fond memories of that time.

Meeting Boris Nikolaevich in Italy. Of course, during Soviet times it was quite difficult for Russian mathematicians to travel to West European countries. So it was a pleasant surprise that Sadovskij succeeded in accepting an invitation to Florence with a research fellowship funded by the CNR (the Italian National Research Council). Subsequently, Italy became his second home country



(as France for Mikhail Kamenskij, or Spain for Evgenij Semenov). The last time we met in Italy was during an International Conference on Nonlinear Analysis in Florence in 2007. The photo shows him with two Italian colleagues, Alfonso Vignoli from Rome and Massimo Furi from Florence. Boris Nikolaevich seems to be very happy on this photo, probably because of the excellent Italian food. It was a remarkable meeting: leading specialists like Roger David Nussbaum (USA), Massimo

Furi (Italy), Mario Martelli (USA), Haim Brūzis (France), and Simeon Reich (Israel) met Boris Nikolaevich for the first time.

Meeting Boris Nikolaevich in Germany. Boris Nikolaevich has also been several times to Germany. His longest stay was during the summer term 2007, when he was appointed the Giovanni Prodi Chair in Nonlinear Analysis, a prestigious visiting professorship programme of the Department of Mathematics of the University of Wurzburg. The year before I was in Voronezh



with a group of 12 students from Wurzburg which was funded by a special exchange programme of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). This programme also provided financial support for a counter-invitation of a students' group from Voronezh to Germany. Boris Nikolaevich stayed one week in 2005 with the Russian students in Wurzburg for joint mathematical seminars and talks. Of course, Wurzburg is not Germany, so I took the group for an extended

weekend to the most (in fact, the only) interesting city in Germany: Berlin! The photo shows Boris Nikolaevich with some Russians and Germans on May 9, 2005, where our host Luchinka just

pronounced a sentimental speech, in both German and Russian, commemorating 60 years of the end of World War II which caused 25 million victims and incredible suffering among the Russian population: Never again! Never ever!!

Meeting Boris Nikolaevich in Russia. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1990, many things changed, some of them certainly not in the better direction. Living in big cities like Moscow became, and continues to be, tremendously difficult, but in Voronezh some nice things remained. Above all, this refers to the overwhelming hospitality I always enjoyed when I was there. The photo



was taken in 2010, when a commemorative plaque in honor of Mark A. Krasnosel'skij, the founder of the Chair of Functional Analysis and Operator Theory at Voronezh State University, was revealed. As usual, Boris Nikolaevich attracted a large audience when he spoke about mathematics, history, the plan for the evening, or life in general. In the morning of that day we had a series of interesting talks, and in the evening a long lasting sentimental banquet – what

else? 3 years later Boris Nikolaevich invited me to become a coauthor of his new book project, jointly with Lyuba Petrova and Ira Pryadko from the Chair of Functional Analysis, as well as Nguyen Thi Hien from Vietnam, his former PhD student. It goes without saying that I was both pleased and honored by this invitation, and I promised to come to Voronezh to start discussing details. Unfortunately, then the 6th of August in that year changed everything.

I would like to end my brief reminiscences by citing an email message which I received from an Italian colleague in response to my communication of Sadovskij's death: "Alas, also the great mathematicians must die. This is a sad experience, but it makes us feel like staying still closer together in our small and insignificant family of mathematicians which is immersed in the huge family of mankind."

Personally, I want to add: "Borya, we miss you very much."

Jurgen Appell
University of Wurzburg
Department of Mathematics
Emil-Fischer-Str. 30
D-97074 Wurzburg (Germany)
Email: jurgen@dmuw.de