
FROM COLLEGE TO RETIREMENT

*Olga STANCU**

To Prof. Dr. Eng. Dr. H. C. Horea SANDI, on the anniversary of 80 years

In the fall of 1963 I began my second year at the faculty of Civil, Industrial and Agricultural Engineering. After attending the first class of Strength of Materials with professor Mazilu, slightly intimidated by his fame, I was sitting in the seminar room anxious to meet his teaching assistant. Mr. Horea Sandi, a serious gentleman with a slightly timid air, entered the room and with a calm and smooth voice started explaining the slide rule. Little by little, we progressed through the curriculum and the seminars went on well. To the relief of many of my colleagues, I liked to volunteer and come up to the board; hence I acquired a solid knowledge base during the course of the semester. Professor Mazilu occasionally attended seminars and such visits kept everybody on their toes. Strangely, no visit was made to our group. At the time I did not know how to interpret this lack of visits to our seminars. I only later understood that Professor Mazilu saw no need to probe the quality of Mr. Sandi's seminars.

During the exams period consultation sessions were held a few days before each examination. Mr. Sandi held our session and proved to be the first teacher that answered all questions to the point, without reiterating general concepts from their beginning. I was struck by how quickly and directly his answers shed light on issues I hadn't fully understood before. Later on I realized this is a privilege of those that fully understand concepts to their roots. In the end, when asked if the maximum grade at the exam was achievable he answered that I shouldn't be so materialistic.

In my third university year, Mr. Sandi encouraged me to take part in the faculty's scientific

session. I gladly took on the challenge and was keen on exploring beyond the level of the course. It was a good experience and it made me realize how little I knew and how many new problems one can imagine around aspects that seem clear at the first sight.

The following year we benefitted from the same teaching crew for the Elasticity and Structural Dynamics courses. The atmosphere was much more relaxed at the course, as professor Mazilu had become pro-rector and he often amused us with adventures related to his new administrative position. However, the seminar classes remained unchanged.

Despite knowing we would be allowed to openly consult our notes, we were not exactly at ease in the elasticity exam's eve. For the oral examinations, students drew three subjects from the pool and went away with their notes to prepare the answers. As usually, the examination stretched well into the evening. While professor Mazilu occasionally lost his patience and raised his voice, the teaching assistants kept a good humour which helped us deal with the stressful circumstances. Out of the three subjects I presented two to the professor and one to Mr. Sandi. Professor's Mazilu examination procedure seemed light in contrast with that of his teaching assistant. Mr Sandi waited for me to present the subject and when I finished my demonstration and thought everything was sorted out, he started a fairly long series of "what if" questions. And all this took place after 9 PM in a winter day. In the end it seems I coped well with the questions, but more importantly it served me as a great example of how to probe someone's intellectual abilities.

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After graduation I opted for a design job, since there were no vacancies in research. After approximately five years I learnt about a scientific researcher opening at INCERC in Dr. Sandi's laboratory, for which I was selected based on a contest. Thus, ever since 1972 I have worked with Dr. Sandi. He was always highly demanding, because he would have liked us all, as his collaborators, to be up to his high standards. This is why we received mostly "fair" appreciations while researchers in other sections and laboratories received "very good" ones. This was however offset by the unique and important tasks we were required to solve. Finding the right solutions was not simple, so whenever we encountered problems that seemed impossible to solve his advice led us the right track. Naturally, some problems had simple solutions but required a wider perspective which was difficult to have after having spent hours and hours on the subject. It was in those situations that I half-heartedly sought help from Dr. Sandi who was always keen to provide it. Sometimes I had the feeling he would have been more efficient, had he started analyzing the problem himself. It was then that I understood it was simpler to solve a problem from scratch than to crosscheck someone else's work and identify the flaws. I must say he never hesitated to put aside his own work in order to address issues for which his help was sought.

He constantly encouraged us to synthesize the most important research results in order to use them in articles submitted to various conferences and symposia. Periodically he reminded us that a researcher that does not publish doesn't exist ("publish or perish"). When it came to international collaborations, he always tried to get all his interested colleagues involved.

The research topics proposed by Dr. Sandi as well as the implemented solutions were pure state of the art in the field. They dealt with either new problems or with problems to which no solution had

been found at the time. An analysis of the literature in the field shows that the themes he proposed were extremely timely, thing which is reflected in the subsequent numerous quotations of his work. It did not take us long to note the worldwide prestige of the scientist Horea Sandi, and at the same time to sadly realize that his achievements were insufficiently acknowledged at national level.

The atmosphere in Dr Sandi's laboratory and later in his section was totally apart. It was like an oasis. Whenever he had to deal with a complaint he sought the version of both sides. He always had a complete understanding for personal matters. I never heard him criticizing a colleague. With a heavy heart he told the concerned person that he had misbehaved and then went on.

He always addressed his colleagues formally using their last name in conjunction with the appropriate salutation. After so many years of having him as a teacher supervisor and colleague, I asked him why after such a long time he was not addressing me informally. He promptly answered that he would do so only after I will have had my second child. I took note and followed his suggestion. Thus after the birth of my second child, he spontaneously started calling me "Olga". I was no longer "Ms. Stancu"

And so, with good periods and sometimes more difficult ones, I have reached retirement. However, the collaboration with Mr Sandi went on... I personally consider the teacher, colleague and scientist Horea Sandi a model, and I believe I was fortunate to be able to interact with such a distinguished personality throughout nearly my entire career.

On the occasion of your 80th anniversary I sincerely wish you many happy returns of the day. May you be blessed with health and happiness.

Happy birthday !

Olga