



ELSEVIER

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A Personal Reminiscence

Bob had a significant impact on many scientists' lives, but probably the greatest on mine. We met for the first time about 4 weeks after I had arrived in the United States from Finland to work with Graham Cooks. Initially, I believe, we were attracted to each other by Coulombic forces—he studied negative ions, I positive ones. However, it didn't take us long to realize that intertwining the personal and professional lives of two scientists dedicated to gas-phase ion chemistry offered some attractive possibilities, such as being able to talk about gas-phase ions for 24 hours a day. I stayed at Purdue. Our drastically different cultural backgrounds—Bob a California boy, me a reserved Finn—added a surprise factor into the relationship. Life was never boring. Neither was the science.

Bob's thinking about science and life was crystal clear. While being friendly and supportive, he strived for ultimate understanding, and also expected this from others. He only respected a serious effort. The word "compromise" was not in his vocabulary. From this attitude, one might conclude that his special talents and intellect made life generally easy for him. But Bob had set the highest standards for himself, and he was humble about his abilities. He worked very hard, often 16–18 hours a day, to deepen his understanding on any topic—chemistry or other—that happened to cross his way and attract his interest. His obsessions at different times included various forms of high-level molecular orbital calculations, conical intersections, aerodynamics, and star formations, just to mention a few. Occasionally he got so excited about a questionable or provocative statement that a student made in a seminar that he dove into the science for days to figure out what was going on. The same process could be inspired by an especially

interesting question from his children Kai and Leah. If he happened to wake up during the early morning hours, he got up and checked the status of his calculations on his home computer. During his various hospital stays, he used a laptop computer to keep up with science. He was full of ideas and shared them enthusiastically with anybody. He could care less about who eventually received the credit for his thinking. Bob had a deeper passion for understanding than anybody I have known.

Professionally, Bob was my always-present critic and challenger, but at the same time an inspiration, strong supporter, generous in sharing ideas, and always ready to dive into a long scientific discussion of mutual interest. He did not accept my enthusiastically presented preliminary scientific findings without skepticism, and his "you know better than that" would drive me to work 24 hours a day until I had the answer—but nobody was as proud as he when I got my first NSF grant funded. He was sometimes intimidating with his probing and insightful questions that were intended to lead the way to a higher level of understanding. The same overall description applies to our personal interactions. At times, he challenged my strategies in pretty much every facet of life, minor or major—food shopping, dealing with conflicts, child raising, or just approach to life in general—while being the greatest possible partner in life and a wonderful collaborator in our joint research on small people.

Bob had a wonderful (at times perhaps somewhat weird) sense of humor that showed up in everything he did, and lightened up his passion for chemistry. He had bells and whistles attached to his flowing after-glow apparatus for use when especially exciting results were obtained. He attached an aspirin jar on

the second instrument that had various ongoing problems. He suggested for him and me to take a last name that joins both of ours: Squinttämää. When Graham Cooks came to visit him in the intensive care unit where he was hooked up to a ventilator and could not talk, he wrote on a piece of paper: “Graham, I give you ten seconds to find the mass spectrometer in this room.”

Bob was fearless. This applied to science, physical performances, and everything else he faced in life. His head-first dive into the four foot deep Sugar Creek during his first year at Purdue made him famous—and resulted in a head injury. Even a few years afterwards, he had to have small stones removed from his head. He loved rock climbing (perhaps except that one time when he saw me try it for the first and last time during our honeymoon in Colorado). When younger, Bob used to run races. Then he moved to fast motor bikes, and eventually flying airplanes.

When Bob first learned that he had cancer, it became his goal to live long enough for his children to remember him. He fought hard for those years and got them. He was a challenging but supportive, understanding, and loving father. He took his time to discuss in great depth the various issues that Kai and Leah brought to him. He loved spending time in the woods with his kids, watching stars, observing nature, and exploring life in general. Bob combined some of his long-standing dreams with family life. For exam-

ple, he had always wanted to be able to play Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata on the piano. When Leah expressed an interest in piano lessons, they started together. Every morning for about a year I woke up in the tunes of Moonlight Sonata. Eventually he mastered it. And I will probably never forget a note. He also fulfilled other long-standing dreams, such as learning to fly small airplanes, and spending the entire Biemann Medal cash award in Disney World with his family (it was worth it!).

Bob handled personal problems in a similar manner as science—with high standards. He kept difficulties private, and required himself to be able to deal with them without outside help. Very few people knew how ill he often was during his tremendous nine-year-long battle with an incurable lymphocytic lymphoma. He was determined to beat it. He only rarely discussed his health problems with me, preferring scientific discussions instead. When he made an exception, however, his purpose was to make me see his situation in an optimistic way. He had no use for sympathy or a defeatist attitude. He never gave up. He never showed fear. He fought for his life till the last moment. He lived up to his standards all the way.

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