

In memory of László Kalmár

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The following text was presented by Péter Komjáth at the Kalmár Workshop on Logic and Computer Science on October 2, 2003.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I want to apologize for not being able to attend this meeting.

I was a graduate student of László Kalmár. I arrived to Szeged fifty years ago, almost to the day, having completed my obligatory two months military service after my graduation from the Eötvös University of Budapest. I was supposed to arrive by the morning train and take the tram from the railway station. Professor Kalmár, or Uncle Laci as all the students called him, already wrote me two long letters to the army base describing future plans for the enormous curriculum he planned for me. He was already impatiently waiting for me at the door of the University building. He hardly gave me time to put down my luggage and took me to all the rooms of the Bolyai Institute, introducing me to everybody, while explaining to me Gödel's proof of the consistency of the Generalized Continuum Hypothesis, politely and absent mindedly knocking on all the doors whether we entered the room or left it.

Having described him above as the amiable old professor, let me remind you that he was not yet quite fifty, the same age as your present lecturer Péter Komjáth, my former student, who is supposed to carry on the banner of mathematical logic we handed to him.

To talk seriously, Kalmár was a scientist of enormous authority, a contemporary of Gödel, who was among the very few present at the cradle of Mathematical Logic, who completely understood both the mathematics involved and the significance of it. He had an unparalleled knowledge of contemporary mathematics and he could explain the main points of a subject with deep insight.

Paul Erdős, whose early papers he helped to write, often said that he was a mathematician of von Neumann's caliber. He added that he should have lived in a more fortunate country, where he could have devoted his energies entirely to science.

I am not sure Paul was right. I think and hope that Uncle Laci enjoyed his life, the struggle for his beliefs. His active mind always led him to new discoveries of

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science and that is how he became the founder of Hungarian Computer Science. I think that that is what this conference will mainly be about, so I could stop here, but I want to finish on a personal note.

I am very thankful for all the care and love he and his family gave me while I lived here. I will always cherish the memory of our long mathematical conversations. Later in my life, whenever I did or heard something interesting, I wanted to tell it to him. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes I did not. I remember, I learned about his death, when returning from abroad I wanted to tell him, that contrary to our earlier intuition there are nontrivial inequalities on cardinal exponentiation.

I am sure this will be the first thing I will tell him when we meet at the place I do not believe in.