

Lotfi Zadeh – Mentor & Friend



With Dan Ralescu and Lotfi Zadeh in Osaka 1999.

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I have been privileged to meet Lotfi Zadeh relatively early in my life, more precisely in June 1976. The circumstances in which I met him are as follows: in June 1976, while my husband, Dan Ralescu and I were in Paris, Dan was invited to attend a small workshop in Germany organized by a professor from the University of Bielefeld. The workshop was held in Reisensburg. We took an overnight train from Paris to Ulm. At the Ulm railway station two persons were waiting for us: the workshop organizer and another person, a slim man with a friendly smile. They whisked us away to see the Ulm Cathedral, where this person started taking a lot of photos - of the cathedral and of us. Having recently left Romania, I was, frankly rather startled by such behavior. At some moment, when this person came closer to me I was able to read his name on the workshop name tag. It was written Lotfi Zadeh.... Both, Dan and I were now doubly startled, I think because we could not imagine that such an illustrious person would be so friendly, so unassuming....

In 1977, we met Lotfi again, this time with Fay, his lovely wife, at the conference in Barcelona. Upon moving to the US we were often in touch with Lotfi (who insisted to be addressed this way rather than Professor Zadeh), who kindly called us often. Dan visited Lotfi in the summer of 1978. We visited them, Lotfi and Fay, often over the years and he came to Cincinnati a number of times. His last visit to Cincinnati was in 2009 on the occasion of NAFIPS 2009, which I had organized. I consider Lotfi my mentor, who helped me transition from the field of theory of probability to the field of "management of uncertainty in intelligent systems". There is much more to write about the deep and warm friendship that Lotfi extended to us, as I am sure he did to many of the researchers present today at this conference. Lotfi's legacy is, among others, a thriving fuzzy community....