

Professor Maria Semeniuk-Polkowska

Professor Helena Rasiowa. A remembrance

Professor Helena Rasiowa. She had a decisive impact on my professional career. I met her for the first time when I came along with a large group of sophomores in 1961 to the first lecture, I do not remember which it was : Algebra or Introduction to Modern Mathematics because She lectured on these two, the former was a 2-year long, the latter a semester course. We liked these lectures, systematic and in calm manner. Lectures were held in Auditorium Maximum, without any microphone. These lectures must had been a serious physical effort for Professor but She was able to conceal it from us leaving Her pain unnoticed and was giving us an example of clear elegant style and leaving us with a few blackboards covered with nice delicate handwriting. Exams with Her were renowned for fairness and pleasant not nervous atmosphere.

After two years I met Professor again. It was the lecture on 'Selected topics from Metamathematics of Mathematics'. I choose the Master seminar with Her. It was for us a source of wonder: we could not understand how Professor was able to carry out so many duties: a Dean, a lecturing Professor, a scientist travelling to many overseas universities, conferences and congresses, also family matters. She worked very hard and quite a few times She collapsed at University.

In 1965 I was preparing myself to the Master exam during the summer session when I got a call from the Dean office that the Dean wanted me to come. I was mystified as to the reason but when I came I was proposed a post of an assistant.. And so I begun the 50 year long stint of work at Warsaw University .

I could see how Professor Rasiowa was taking care of us, how She was thinking about our progress and noticed small successes. She was able to discover in each of us the best and exploit our best talents. As I was always interested in languages, I decided to devote my doctoral studies to the field of formal linguistics and Professor Rasiowa warmly supported this decision, her opinion about me was so warm and positive that I felt very strongly motivated. After doctorate which She promoted, She supported my decision to accept a post in the Chair of Formal Linguistics at the Department of Neophilology headed by Professor Olgierd Wojtasiewicz. I told Her later that all my achievements there I owed Her influence and example. Professor Rasiowa was wonderful as a human being, splendid as a scientist.

We were in touch during last years of Her life, often walking to the park along Frascati street. She remembered her childhood and school years, the Mrs Warecka School, studies at School of Music by the Warsaw Philharmony, and mathematical studies, beautiful lectures by Jan Łukasiewicz, other professors, her Master Thesis with Jan Łukasiewicz and Boleslaw Sobociński, tragic days of Warsaw Uprising. She remembered difficult afterwar years, at Physics Institute at Hoża street, then Astronomic Observatory in Botany Garden by Ujazdowskie, colleagues: Professors Andrzej Mostowski, Roman Sikorski, Stanislaw Mazur, Wanda Szmielew, Hanna Szmuszkowicz. Very warmly She spoke of Her students and collaborators: Cecylia Rauszer, Andrzej Skowron, Andrzej Jankowski, Wiktor Bartol, and many others.

Once, I started talking about 'Flowers of St. Francis' rendered into Polish by Leopold Staff. I learned that St. Francis of Assisi was the most beloved saint of Her and that Professor Rasiowa was a tertiary of the Franciscan Order. Participation in Saint Masses with Her was a source of deep spiritual experience, some of them at Her home, celebrated by Her beloved cousin Prelate Zdzisław Peszkowski, Chaplain of the Katyń Families.

I met in my life many very good, exceptional people to whom I am very grateful for the spiritual gifts given to me, but I think that, except for my mother, I am to the greatest degree indebted to Professor Helena Rasiowa, an exceptional human being.