

Some words in memory of my friend Eduardo Pontón

Dear colleagues, friends,

I would like first of all to apologize for not being here in person. Apologize to you all of course, but especially to Eduardo's mother and sisters in the first place.

I should also apologize with Eduardo, and I do, but we all know that he would have probably told me not to care, that this was not important.

This moment is to bring homage to Eduardo in his workplace, to remember and honor his skills in physics, his sense of duty, his incredible dedication to his work, which is most certainly one among many of his passions, which he all cultivated with the serene dedication he payed to physics.

I would like to dedicate my words to some of the Eduardo's qualities that make all the above possible, yet are probably less mentioned.

A short, personal story about how his deep, strong sense of human connection, of human brotherhood made it possible for us to become friends on the workplace, and for me to feel something different than just "one more guy within these walls".

Eduardo and I met in this very building. I can not recall whether in this very room, but certainly in this building, a bit more than five years ago. I have gone through my agenda and my journal very carefully, but I have not been able to spot any conference we have attended -nor any trip we went on- together. So we met in this building and our story unfolded in this city alone, and I believe it is very much part of our story how neither Eduardo nor I are in this room at this moment.

It is often difficult to tell when a friendship is born, when an acquaintance or a colleague becomes that something more, but strangely enough I have the feeling that I know when Eduardo's and mine started.

A bit more than five years ago, I was being interviewed for my position here, Eduardo was part of the committee alongside other people in this room. He was the youngest of the faculties, and the one who had been attracted here from somewhere else, so it was sort of natural that we the candidates would relate to him, and ask him questions. Especially, and maybe because, he seemed so easy to connect to, and so naturally accessible. Eduardo being, of course, Eduardo.

Right after the candidates' talks -which were held in this very room, some of them on Saturday and Sunday- two of us were chatting informally with Eduardo. One of us (not me) was commenting on the original format of the interviews and asked him:

{imagine thick russian accent now}

"[...] it's interesting how you merged a bit of the European formula with the American one."

At which point I could not stay silent and sprang before Eduardo could answer:

{imagine italian accent now, well actually Enrico's good enough for me}

"Well, we are in America, you know?"

I don't know how many of you can imagine a smirk on Eduardo's face, but that is what I remember, along with his answer to me -pronounced of course with a soft tone!- which was something on the lines of:

{imagine Eduardo's voice now}

"I see you are starting to get in the right mindset for coming here already."

I feel that that humor, that shared understanding accompanied us also later, when I moved here, it marked our first step and the rest of our friendship when I then moved to this city.

I wasn't difficult for both of us to quickly realize we have very different personalities, we both knew it soon enough. It could have been easy, especially for Eduardo, to ignore each other beyond simple courtesy; but from the very first days I have been here, Eduardo engaged himself in making me a companion, not only a colleague.

When he learned that I also dance tango as he did, he took me out showing me the places where to dance, he introduced me around, and the first few times we went he insisted for paying the taxi, for being a host (five years ago now, no Uber at that time!). You can easily imagine how it went when I tried to politely resist, to use some of my own banknotes in this currency new to me.

In this way, as in many other, Eduardo showed me an empathy that went beyond any obligation, any moral duty.

I never had the impression he felt obliged to hang out with me, as if he were a chosen host to the city for the newcomer.

What I felt -in that occasion as in many others- was that simple and beautiful impulse of wanting to make me comfortable, to show (to feel) empathy and sympathy, to welcome one other person, one other human being to his world. He reminded me, after many harsh years and too many careless acquaintances, what it means to build human relationships, starting from little. He made me sense -again after quite some time- a simple, beautiful desire to build bridges to other human beings. The stone that started our bridge was physics, but the bridge extended far beyond that.

We all have beautiful moments we have shared with him, and I know that all of us host many feelings in this moment. For me, over the last months, stands above all a dull, continuous, steady pain. Yet, it is constantly accompanied by a tranquil, quiet, fulfilling sense of gratitude toward Eduardo, an awareness of the great luck that has been endowed to me.

Crossing paths, becoming friends, has been an enormous privilege, which are accompanying me in my journey.

His kindness, his humanity, his smile, will be a constant guide in my life.

Hasta luego, Eduardo.

Un abrazo,

Fabio