

Louis Nirenberg

In 1963, there was a joint Soviet-US. conference in Novosibirsk, and I looked forward to meeting Gelfand there. He didn't show up. The person who got him the ticket, it might have been Kirillov, told me that Gelfand did not like travelling to meetings, and that he had made a mistake, he'd given Gelfand the ticket too early: Gelfand had time to return it.

After Novosibirsk, I visited Moscow and finally met Gelfand. I attended his famous seminar and was, of course, bowled over by it. Many people at the memorial can, I'm sure, say more about it than I. It lasted about 3 hours, with several different speakers. Gelfand would interrupt each one, getting up to explain what is really meant, going on for 5-10 minutes each time. It was remarkable. (After returning to New York, my colleague Friedrichs said we should run a seminar like Gelfand's and we could take turns playing Gelfand.)

I was then privileged to attend Gelfand's fiftieth birthday party at his home. It was a wonderful evening which I'll never forget, full of warmth and joy.

After that I saw Gelfand every time I visited Moscow. He was very kind and hospitable. Our conversations were always very interesting, though Gelfand had a way of talking in rather vague terms about a subject, just giving some hints about what he was really thinking. He didn't say things straight out. This was probably due to the atmosphere in the Soviet Union over many years. He was interested in everything. Besides mathematics, there was his work in biology!

After he moved to this country, we would meet at Rutgers, and I was always amazed at his great curiosity about all kinds of subjects. He ran his seminar there for many years.

Gelfand was one of the great mathematical giants for over half a century. His work covered an enormous span of mathematics, with, also, applications in physics. No one today can cover as much as he did.

He inspired generations, with fantastic new ideas, which he would pursue with many collaborators.

He was truly a remarkable man; his death is a great loss to all of us.

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