

Radu's Rides:

Those on whose shoulders we stand

Contributing Editor Radu V. Craiu would like to express his gratitude:

It should be obvious by now that some debts can never be repaid. Sometimes the attempt comes too late, or the gift is forgotten, but usually unpayable debts are usually too big to be matched. As you probably do not know, October 5 is World Teachers' Day (<https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldteachersday>) and since many of us loosely belong in this noble club, I propose we raise a glass to the profession that has been giving so much to the world. But before we do, we should also pour one out for those who helped us get where we are.

IMS is an international society and I suspect that many of its members, this writer included, have started their scholarly life in a different country, possibly a different system, than the one they currently serve. It is hard to envision the collective readership of this *Bulletin*, as diverse as it is, but I imagine all readers take some level of pride in their intellectual powers and accomplishments. Feelings of success and recognition are great, especially when they act as a force for the good, triggering the enlargement of our sense of responsibility. They can also come with pangs of impostor syndrome and, for some, survivor's guilt.

I am writing this in my mom's Bucharest apartment. She has a PhD in Probability from 1972. Some of the results in her thesis were cited in papers published at the time in reputable journals and, for a moment, there was a glimpse of hope and promise on personal and geopolitical levels. But it was not meant to be, and her life took a very different turn. Research time was regarded as a luxury

and its safeguarding shrunk almost as quickly as the number of opportunities for international exchanges. Instead, she taught thousands of students, most of them fearful, some of them grateful for her keeping of mathematical standards that allowed them, those young, hungry kids who were eventually born in more auspicious times, to succeed beyond her wildest dreams. She was obviously not alone, and likely not the unluckiest. Like her, there are thousands of professors and teachers around the world who have kept the flame alive in environments that are almost incomprehensible here and now.

There were places and times where a *single copy* of an *Annals of Statistics* or a *Statistical Science's* issue was arriving many months after its publication, its lateness accentuating its value as a vital link to the outside world of discovery and progress. The fact that these issues kept arriving was incredibly important to scientific communities that were otherwise cut off from the rest of their professional world.

This small infusion of information ensured that research could continue to be done, books to be written, and hope to be disseminated. In the absence of a traditional reward system, the most appreciated currency was the respect of one's peers, running as deep into the scientific community as it was invisible to the authorities. Brilliant people have lived in the shadows of history. For those of us who entered the stage at the exact time the fences were bust open, the choice of what to do next was preordained.

Others have written or spoken about the difficult transition performed by students

or fully fledged researchers migrating from one side of the world to another—or as some would say, from the past into the future. Expatriation is undertaken in search of a better life, but often the price is quite high. Learning, late in life, to function in a new culture and language is difficult and so is the separation from the social and familial cocoon in which one is formed. The academics' adaptation to a new world can be slightly easier to sustain when it is nourished by the ideation tendrils that keep alight their spirit, regardless of surrounding circumstances. A mathematician or statistician may have to change the language and mores they use to deal with life's immanence, but the *other*, universal, language is transcendent and will carry them through. I am therefore doubly grateful to those who have taught me and, in doing so, have given me the only kind of passport I know of that is universally recognized.

I sometimes like to end these *Rides* with an invitation or a suggestion for bringing some sort of upgrade into the IMS world. This time I am afraid that I will have to deviate from this overly optimistic (naïve?) habit. No single IMS member will be able to repay the debt they have incurred in achieving success; nor will we, as a professional society, be able to remove displacement and misplacement from the world. We can, however, try to embrace its diversity, understand its differences, value and help its talents, and honor its unsung heroes.

Happy Teachers' Day!