

Family memories

Alessandro Diambrini Palazzi

It was a starry, balmy night of August 1974 in our house in Cartoceto, in the province of Pesaro, in the region Marche on the Adriatic coast where we used to spend our summer vacation every year. We had just finished dinner with my grandparents, my father's family. Prof. Giordano's father, Alessandro, who I was named after, was an amazing person. What we would call today a "Renaissance Man". He had three degrees in Law, Political Sciences and Philosophy/Literature. He fought in the First and Second World Wars as a Captain. Was wounded several times. Received several medals of honor, was the Socialist Mayor of his native Fano three times and suffered persecution by the fascist regime for his social democratic and anti-fascist political views. He was a well known practicing Attorney with Law offices in Rome and Fano. He was a very tough but loving and moral man to which my father always looked up to as an example. Giordano's mother Beatrice was a wife, a mother and a critically acclaimed Paintress. She held a regular art gallery for years in Via Margutta in Rome's 50's and 60's art district, toured with her paintings in several art galleries in Italy and was listed as one of Italy contemporary painters in numerous art books receiving awards and positive reviews by art critics. My father lived in Ethiopia for a period of time, where his father Alessandro took his family during the war, to shield them from fascist regime persecution cause my father had been active as a partisan in his teenage years, had been arrested and sentenced to be executed, but later was freed after his mother plead to the authorities for his release due to his young age.

I was a sixteen year old teenager in 1974 Italy. I had very long hair, I already played guitar in several Rock Bands in Genova where my father had the Cattedra at the Physics Faculty, and in Fano where I religiously shipped by train every summer my beloved souped-up Vespa Scooter so I could be mobile. I dressed with Hippie indian shirts and smelled like Patchouli. I was full of dreams and was fascinated by my fathers explanations on science: on Quantum Physics, History of the Universe, The Big Bang and especially Evolution and Paleo-Anthropology which later became my secondary passion/hobby as a result.

It was after dinner then, and I was about to leave to meet my friends for a Rock'n Roll Jam session. My father was walking out with my little brother Raffaello and my mother Elena and said:

"Let's all go see the stars, they are very well visible tonight far from the city lights glare. I will show you the constellations that are visible tonight!" I turned off my

Vespa Scooter and walked with my family to a dark part of the field behind our house. He started pointing at the various constellations: Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Orion, etc. As the explanation unfolded I was fascinated and absorbed by all of it. I was in a trance. In a place in my mind where all the things that he explained added an incredible significance to the everyday trivialities of life. Where I felt part of the Universe as a living organism attached to something infinitely great as my biological being was inevitably connected to an expanding Universe of Galaxies, of Star matter, of Dark Matter and Parallel Universes. Something that made me feel that, my... “Rock’n Roll Jam Session could definitely wait” ...

He said:... “The light you see from that star at this moment, left that star at the times the Dinosaurs lived on earth, so if you imagine that you’re traveling at the speed of light in a time machine, that light emanated from that star is telling you exactly how much time has been since the dinosaurs roamed the earth when mankind did not exist. While that light was traveling thru space, an asteroid hit the earth, temporarily destroyed the eco-system on earth consequently decimating the dinosaurs’ species on earth. Then hundreds of thousands of years still passed, Mammals took over, mankind evolved from primates, human prehistory and history started...And then Alessandro and his brother Raffaello were born to Giordano and Elena, and here we are looking at the light that left that star millions of years ago...”

To listen to this was for me the most inspiring and awe generating experience of my life. His informative dissertations on science during our many long conversations together were just as inspiring as beautiful music was for me all my life. There were many more of these conversations with my father thru our life. All this inspiring knowledge helped me thru my life. Gave me strength thru hard times and gave me a sense of security and underlying well-being that most people look for in religion and spiritual beliefs. An understanding of life without prejudice, dogmatic beliefs, or superstitious attitudes. My father was an intelligent and sensitive man. Constantly inspired by his work just like I’ve been all my life with my musical work. I miss now this connection to him, and these beautiful conversations. Prof. Giordano Diambri Palazzi loved science and his work for the honest value and passion of discovery and in the interest of scientific progress. Thus he routinely refused to comply or accept offers that would box, trap or tie his career in corporate private industrial interests. And always thought of that as creatively stifling. Very much in tune with his social and political beliefs as his father did. He loved teaching and his students.

To this day, I carried around the world with me all the samples, articles, books and papers of his most prominent work and periodically look at it. I became a musician, my father Giordano had a true love for music and played Violin and Piano he loved Classical music, opera and 1930’s 40’s and 50’s Big Band Jazz as well as

some early rock 'n roll. He communicated this love for music to me. I, in return, was always fascinated with science and Paleo-Anthropology. Unfortunately, the pursuit of this passion to what maybe could have been, professional levels and goals, was made impossible by my terrible mental disposition with Mathematics and Algebra in school. I struggled all thru my school years with it and graduated my High School Maturità in Italy with a barely sufficient grade in Math. Thanks to my father Giordano I found inspiration and meaning in things and places that unfortunately a large number of people ignore. Because of his teachings I became an avid follower of human evolution and science discoveries progress and communicated the same spirit to my own children who were both born in the USA.

My father was born in Fano on the adriatic coast of Italy. He was a great swimmer and regularly participated in endurance swimming competitions like the “Nuotata Longa” in which he placed 2nd in 1993. When my father went back to his home town Fano, he could be a real fanese. He enjoyed good marchigiano food, good wine and could speak the fanese dialect and crack local old timer jokes with the local accent.

My mother Elena was a wife, a mother and a writer. She penned two novels published by “Cappelli Editrice”. My parents were married for 35 years, or all my life. When my mother passed away it was a great family tragedy. My father loved my mother deeply and with true devotion. And her loss for him was tragic. I can probably say now with certainty that it was a loss from which my father never recovered.

It was some time in the winter evening of a rainy day, November 1962 in Rome. We were living in our apartment near Piazza Bologna in Via Michele Di Lando. I was out with my mother grocery shopping. She had just bought me fruit candy. I asked her: “where is papà?” She said: “He’s working at the “Sincrotrone” in Frascati tonight. He’s coming home very late, you will already be asleep”. I replied: “what is he doing there?” She answered: “He’s working at the Particle accelerator”. In my wondering child’s mind I was puzzled by the association of these two definitions: “Sincrotrone” and “Particle accelerator”. One suggested something so big while the latter seemed to indicate a bunch of very small and cute little animals running very fast in a toy race track. I was determined to find what these particles looked like and how they got to be in such an ominous sounding place called “Sincrotrone”. Days later as we were having dinner at home with my Mamma e Papà I asked my father. My father proceeded to show me his plate and explained to me how the circular shape of a particle accelerator came to be and functioned. Then he broke very little crumbs of bread and rolled them

into bread balls so tiny, they were barely visible to simulate the particles. I said: “Why do you need such a big machine for something so small?” He explained to me that even though so small these particles have so much power that they make the sun shine. And they are everywhere even inside me. That day I thought my father was really incredible cause he had an enormous machine and inside it he kept tiny things that were so powerful that could make the sun shine! My dad was sort of like Superman! I told him.

And in fact, when he was young he sort of looked like Clark Kent. I imagined my dad would probably change clothes when he went to work, like Clark Kent when he turned into Superman. In school my little friends would ask me: “what does your father do?” I would flatly reply: “He accelerates particles in a Sincrotrone”. They would in return stare blankly at me and say: “What’s that?” And I would say: “Something so small and so powerful you can’t possibly imagine”. That would usually end it there! But sometimes the reply would continue with: “Oh I heard of that! It’s like an Atomic Bomb! So he makes Atomic Bombs!” But I knew for sure, my Father,...did Not make Bombs! But in my mind at that time, I was proud what my dad did was so unique that my friends wouldn’t even get it! It looked more powerful than a President of a country! I was really proud and really admired what my father did.

It was a Saturday morning of march 1967 in Genova Italy an our apartment in Via Stefano Prasca. I was in 5th grade elementary school at the time. Attending the all boy catholic school “M. Champagnat”. My mother called me to her as she was folding laundry and said: “How would you like to go live in United States America for two years?”. I was speechless. I was already a big fan of The Beatles at the time and owned several Beatles singles. In my mind The Beatles and the USA where all mixed in one big confused image. My mind was racing. The first thing I naturally blurted out was: “Will I get to see the Beatles?” My mother said: “We will see a lot of new things, even more than just The Beatles” My answer was an excited “Yes! Yes!” My father had been invited to present his experiment and collaborate in new experiments as a visiting Professor at Cornell University in Ithaca New York. Little did I know that I was going to live an experience that would change my life forever.

My father with his work allowed my mother, myself and my brother to live a different life than the average family. I guess Diplomats, Military personnel or Touring Musician’s families live this kind of life. Moving from place to place, residing in different countries months or years at a time. Apart from the airplanes, hotels and rental cars. It was a real trip to pack up, close our apartment in Genova,

park the family Citroen car in a garage and arrive in New York. I was literally catapulted from an all boy 5th grade catholic school with male priest teachers, where all students wore black aprons, to 6th grade American public school in the middle of 1968. Girls with mini-skirts and everybody looking like a miniature hippie. Teachers that looked like Movie actors to me. Everything looked so colorful and fun compared to 1968 Italy I was mesmerized. Needless to say, as I was already a fan of Beatles and Stones, I was exposed to an avalanche of 60's music. Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Joni Mitchell and assorted Psychedelic Bands too long to list. My little brother Raffaello was immediately put in violin classes with the advanced Suzuki method which at that time had not been discovered in the inflexibly conservative European music schools. Our life experience in the USA would make me and my brother become musicians. My brother a Classical Violinist and myself a Contemporary Guitarist. We both have been career musicians all our life. Thru the colorful two years we lived in Cornell too long to describe in a few pages, one event stands out.

- At the end of '68 the Vietnam war protest movement was at it's peak. One week it was announced that most of the student body would boycott classes to join a large peaceful protest gathering against the war. My father decided to join with his fellow Physicists and bring all his family in spite of my mother's disagreeing apprehension. A large Football field in front of Main Hall was occupied by thousands of students and Professors. A large stage and dozens of Barbecue grills were set up. Speeches by antiwar political activists came and went. And then folk singers started taking the stage. Unknown to me at that time I watched Folksinger Melanie and songwriter Tim Hardin. I did not know who these artists were then, only in later years, I discovered that I had attended an amazing music performance. But it was still magic at the time, and I felt so much in common with my father who allowed all our family to share this unique experience together.-

My father traveled the world for physics, but when he had to leave for extended periods of time he always took the family along. In chronological order we lived in Rome, in Hamburg/Germany, in Genova, in Ithaca/New York, in Geneva/Switzerland. It was sometimes difficult, but I had a very interesting childhood.

In 1981 my father worked at CERN in Geneva-Switzerland conducting an experiment on the SPS West Area. It consisted in smashing particles against each other intersecting a photo emulsion panel the moment of collision, so that the result of the collision would be visually recorded on the panel. These panels had to consequently be individually analyzed by a staff of graduate and under graduate

students thru a magnifying optical system to detect an abnormal streak that would indicate the appearance and discovery of a new particle.

By this time I had been a professional musician for several years. In and out of several different Rock Bands and concerts. I was also studying Classical Guitar and other advanced Music subjects at the Conservatory of Geneva - Switzerland. For a time I had been working giving Guitar Lessons and playing Gigs but I was finding myself in a dry spell, a confused period of my life, and was looking for a Job. My father offered me to come and work for a while among the group of students examining the emulsion photos. I was thrilled but also nervous. The first day I arrived at the office at 8am, I was very eager and very humbled! With a different attitude and another person from the rambunctious self that I usually was on a Rock'n Roll stage.

I worked many hours and several days, slowly and patiently examining dozens of photos and the white streaks on their black surfaces, following the other experienced examiners instructions. As I was waiting to prove myself, but nearly had given up hope, on one photo I thought I recognized an anomaly. A streak that was different. Everybody took the photo and re-examined it. My father came to see it. It was interesting and different. It could have been a result but needed further proof and evidence. It was a small satisfaction for an amateur like me. It was a great experience for me to see the patience, persistence and dedication that a scientist needs to find proof in scientific research. It was a great privilege to see my fathers work up close. But for me it was just another family experience with my father. To understand the lifelong dedication of a scientist towards a discovery. For humanity, for progress. Like Prof. Don Johansson discovering "Lucy" in Ethiopia or Mary and Lewis Leakey digging for our ancestors in Africa.

That was my father's life. That was our family's life together. My father, Prof. Giordano Diambrini-Palazzi, the Physicist.



Figure 1: Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi at Cartoceto.



Figure 2: Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi with his wife Elena.



Figure 3: Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi in his studio.



Figure 4: Award of the “Ettore Majorana” prize to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi, 1960.



Figure 5: Award ceremony for the “Fortuna D’Oro” prize to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi, Fano, December 22, 1986.



Figure 6: Award ceremony for the “Fortuna D’Oro” prize to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi, Fano, December 22, 1986.



Figure 7: Award ceremony for the “Fortuna D’Oro” prize to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi, Fano, December 22, 1986.



Figure 8: Award ceremony for the “Fortuna D’Oro” prize to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi, Fano, December 22, 1986.



Figure 9: Who's who 1998/1999 award to Prof. Giordano Diambrini Palazzi.