

MATHEMATICAL PERSPECTIVES

BULLETIN (New Series) OF THE
AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY
Volume 57, Number 1, January 2020, Pages 107–109
<https://doi.org/10.1090/bull/1682>
Article electronically published on September 24, 2019

ABOUT THE COVER: ANDREI SUSLIN, 1950–2018

ERIC M. FRIEDLANDER

To my friend and colleague

Andrei was my close friend for many years. We first met in Oberwolfach in the late 1970s. Andrei’s English was perfect; not only did he speak and understand the language, but he understood subtle nuances, which astonished me. We talked mathematics, but also about many other matters. This was the time his mathematical legend was already being established.

Perhaps few remember that Andrei was an “all Leningrad” gymnast. This showed when he lectured, for he seemed more poised at the blackboard. Some of us have never learned, despite much trying, to imitate his style of speaking slowly, writing very large symbols on the blackboard, all the while conveying elegantly and efficiently the essence of his mathematics.

A few years later, Andrei and I both visited University of Paris 7. An early memory of that year followed Andrei’s talk and gold medal at the Collège de France. We wandered around Paris at 7:30pm looking for dinner. All restaurants were empty, but all were reserved for the night, just as had been the case of restaurants in the USSR. One morning Andrei called me to say that during the night he proved the Quillen–Lichtenbaum conjecture for algebraically closed fields of positive characteristic and asked if I would photocopy his manuscript at IHES. Andrei stood at the entrance of the *périphérique* on the fringe of Paris, handing his coffee-stained manuscript through my car window as the car briefly paused before quickly merging into traffic. What did this Russian-to-American exchange look like to an observer? When he first talked about this result in a Paris seminar, the audience broke tradition to give him an ovation.

These personal comments were originally published in 2010 [*Doc. Math.* (2010), Extra vol.: Andrei A. Suslin sixtieth birthday], conveying my deep admiration for Andrei Suslin. They are reprinted with permission.



FIGURE 1. CLEAR COPY OF THE COVER: Andrei Suslin, 1950–2018. (Reprinted with permission, *Doc. Math.* (2010), Extra vol.: Andrei A. Suslin sixtieth birthday).

The 1986 ICM in Berkeley was the “Mathematical Congress of Absent Russians”. The world mathematical community eagerly anticipated the remarkable, almost mythical, creators of so much new mathematics. Sadly, Andrei was among those not allowed to attend, but I was given a manuscript of his plenary address. This manuscript consisted of page after page of new results on algebraic K -theory.

After spending time with Andrei in Paris, I had the privilege of visiting the Suslin family in their St. Petersburg apartment; my achievement was explaining the colloquial English in a popular cartoon series, not quite equal to Andrei’s explanations of mathematical lectures given in Russian which we attended in Novosibirsk. Food memories include the delicious “Russian salad” and the rich soup of ceps (from the woods near the Suslin *dacha*) prepared by Olga Suslina. A measure of time passing has been watching Andrei’s daughters Olga and Maria grow from young girls to successful adults with children of their own.

Andrei visited M.I.T. and the University of Chicago in the early 1990s. To my overwhelming delight and benefit, Andrei decided to join the Northwestern faculty in 1994. A frequent image which comes to mind is of Andrei pacing outside my office ignoring whatever weather Chicago was throwing us, while I stayed warm and dry by scribbling on a blackboard. The best of those times was our extended effort to prove finite generation of certain cohomology rings; this was a question that I had thought about for years, and the most important step I took towards its solution was to consult Andrei. Vladimir Voevodsky was briefly our colleague at Northwestern. Indeed, a few years earlier, I had arranged for Andrei to meet Vladimir, recognizing that their different styles and powerful mathematical talents could be blended together in a very fruitful manner.

So many mathematicians over the years have benefited from Andrei’s insights and confidence. If someone mentioned a result, then typically Andrei would say he is sure it is right. On the other hand, should he need the result, he would produce his own proof—typically improving the statement as well as the proof—or find a counter-example. With me, perhaps Andrei was a bit more relaxed for he would occasionally tell me something was nonsense and even occasionally admit after extended discussion that he was wrong. Those interactions are among my best memories of our days together at Northwestern. Andrei’s generosity extended to looking after me on the ski slopes, willingness to drive to the airport at an awful hour, and other matters of daily life. Our friendship has been the most remarkable aspect of my mathematical career.

DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA