

The 2014 American Mathematical Society Dinner

Celebrating Connection & Collaboration

Joint Mathematics Meetings - January 18, 2014

Remarks by AMS President David Vogan at the AMS Dinner held at the 2014 Joint Mathematics Meetings

To do this wonderful work of mathematics, all of us depend on a lot of people scattered across the country or the world: to tell us how things work, to tell us what's interesting, and to tell us who the next people are that we should meet. When Robin Marek told me last month to begin thinking about this speech, I decided to talk about three of the connections—three of the *people*—who've gotten me through this meeting.



The first person I want to talk about is Carla Savage, the Secretary of the AMS. I've known Carla for barely two years, which means that I thought I was managing just fine for nearly six decades without her help. Now I can barely tie my shoes without her (although her assistant Jesse Kenyon has sent me some useful links to places to buy loafers). Carla prepared the hundred-and-fifty-seven page script that I used to look omniscient at the AMS Council meeting on Tuesday. It didn't entirely work, but I can assure you that the unscripted me looks a lot less omniscient than that. Carla is the memory and the brain of the AMS. She remembers how we've dealt with all kinds of situations in the past, and (even more important!) how we've failed to deal with them. Mostly she does this by knowing and remembering everything; but on the rare occasions when that fails, she knows and remembers every *person*. She's connected, and she collaborates, and that makes the AMS work.

A second and longer-term collaborator is Peter Trapa, whom I've known for almost twenty years. With Peter I've actually written papers, one of which was published by the AMS. Peter helped to get me through this meeting by collaborating with Jeff Adams to arrange a clandestine encounter Thursday morning at 7 a.m. so that we could actually *do* a bit of mathematics. The doing mathematics part was good, but for me the main point was to have two hours not wearing a tie. (I *did* keep wearing my AMS tie pin; I didn't want to interrupt the secret recording that I suspect Carla is making of my entire term in office.)

I saved for last the very first collaborator I thought of: Paul Sally, whom I've known for more than forty years. Paul's contribution to getting me through this meeting came a month ago, when he called me up to provide the punch line for my introduction to Phil Kutzko at the awards ceremony.

Paul was my undergraduate advisor at the University of Chicago. He was one of the main people who showed me that math in general was a beautiful thing to do. For good measure he pointed me into the research I've been doing ever since. More or less because of Paul, I met Cary Rader, and Bert Kostant, and Ken Gross, and Becky Herb, and Harish-Chandra, and Stephen DeBacker. Paul didn't *introduce* me to Robert Langlands, but certainly he made me less afraid of Langlands. Each of those people, like Paul, taught me something about what mathematics was for, and how to practice it, and how to communicate it.

Paul served for three years as a member of the AMS Committee on Science Policy, and for ten years as a Trustee. The Trustee part always impressed me the most. Like the Trustees of any organization, those of the AMS must be wise, and financially prudent, and of unimpeachable character. At the same time, they need to be serious mathematicians. I'm not certain whether these characteristics are incompatible, but I know that I've very rarely seen them in a single person.

Paul also served the AMS as an author and an editor, writing at least four volumes and editing six more. I had the privilege of collaborating with him on one of the editing jobs. The papers in the volume we edited were all amazing foundational things that had never been published. Paul wouldn't put up with that: for him, and (because of him) for me, mathematics needs to be shared to be real.

Paul was planning to be in Baltimore for this meeting; but he died on the Monday after Christmas, having put in a nine hour day of math the preceding Friday. "Just as he planned it," one of his children said.

Doing mathematics depends on connections like Paul and Peter and Carla: on people whom you've known most of your life, and on people you just met whom you're *going* to know for most of your life, and on everybody in between. The AMS has always been about building and supporting those connections. That happens in ways like the Annual Meetings that are a hundred and twenty years old, in Mathematics Research Communities that are six years old, and in Student Chapters that are just beginning. The AMS is *you*, and I'm grateful for the chance to connect with you this evening.

— **David Vogan**, AMS president