

# Pierpaolo, a Great Friend

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We were young, very young...  
we had many dreams...  
we had a long time, ahead...  
we had no conditioning from the past...  
we had the songs of Bob Dylan...  
we were in the very early seventies.

## 1 Close Encounters

### 1.1 Encounter of the First Kind (when I *Saw* him)

It was a cloudy and cold evening in a rainy winter, as unusual in Pisa, where a few days in the year present very low temperature; but, rain and clouds, all the time... During the third year of my course of study in Physics, when I had just found that Physics was not the long list of rules that my Teacher in High School presented to us, poor pupils, I and two colleagues of mine, Mauro and Carla, were performing very strange and difficult experience in Electronics. In my small Group there was a tiny and nice maid from Lucca, one of the more enchanting towns in Tuscany. She had been very careful, up that time, in our measurements and the following data analysis; but, in the last days, something appeared in her behaviour that made us to suspect some problem.

And in that dark evening I discovered the problem, simply giving a look out of the window of our Lab, downstairs, on the road, where I saw a strange, skinny guy, with long hair and bell-bottoms pants: he was waiting for the arrival of our friend, Carla, who stopped her analysis to run down, in the arms of that strange young man.

### 1.2 Encounter of the Second Kind (when I *Heard* him)

Some days later, I was walking just after the usual lunch at the students “Mensa” (canteen), together with my colleague, Mauro. He was also my companion during the High School studies, in the same small town, Piombino, that lies on the sea cost, just in front of that wonderful paradise called “Arcipelago Toscano”, with Elba Island and other seven sisters... We entered a Cafè, the most famous in Pisa, haunted by students, called “Battellino”, that prepared the best quality coffee in the town; we sat around a table, where we met two girls, also students in Physics, but one year younger than us, R. and E. We started to discuss

about... something, I don't remember what; but, suddenly, I heard very close the voice of Carla that was talking with a guy who had his back to us. So I only succeeded in hearing the voice of this guy, that, because of the long long hair I supposed he was the same of some evenings ago. The place was really small, smoky and noisy, but it was quite easy to distinguish the strange accent of this guy. Perfect italian, also syntactically, and a reach vocabulary; but the accent sounds very foreign! But, also, something sounded ancient and familiar to my ears. Word after word, sentence after sentence, this mystery was explained to me: the accent was the same of my mother, born in the town of Fiume (now Rijeka, in Jugoslavia, at that time), but in Italy, when my grandfather was there and met my grandmother. At this point, I was driven to meet and know that guy, and to try to understand why he was so far from his town. But in a few seconds, Carla and he disappeared in the rainy outdoor.

### 1.3 Encounter of the Third Kind (when I *Touched* him)

Many days after, may be there was a wonderful weather, as sometimes it happens, also in Pisa, Carla and I were walking towards the Physics Institute, in Piazza Torricelli, a very, very small square in Pisa down-town, hoping to meet others colleagues to discuss some recent social events, very dramatic, that had upset the already troubling political life in Italy, in that time: the early seventies. Just before the entrance, I saw the same strange guy of the previous evenings, and I recognized him at once: hair longer than I supposed, but eyes so bright and so intense a gaze that I stopped to pronounce my jokes, as usually, waiting for his first move. His first move, so, was a very strong handshake, to which, I answered with the same strength, as usual. So, the first simple ordinary words: "How are you?", "What are you studying, here, in Pisa?", "Where are you from?". And so, I discovered that it was really Computer Science that led Pierpaolo to Pisa. And now, he is still here...

## 2 Lively Discussions

Well, I am sure that there are no subject, no argument, on which Pierpaolo and I didn't spent time, a lot of time, discussing; and, of course, from different positions and opposite points of view, even if we have, substantially,... the same opinions about the most part of arguments! Music, literature, politics, academic life, school of our children, place to spend holidays, the quality of a wine... Therefore: discussion for the only pleasure to discuss, to push our criticism a bit forward, and to know ourselves better and better. So, sometimes, we started to defend opposite positions, independently from our own, deep, opinions. Discussions with Pierpaolo is a creative experience, stimulating my best qualities; in fact, his way to sustain his opinions is strongly rational, and logical, even if with a large amount of emotional ardor. This doesn't avoid to reach, often, a hard contrast between the positions that are, sometimes, rather similar! Very interesting! But, however, at the end, you can be sure to find a glass of good wine.

And his deep, sincere smile; ironic sometimes. Just for example, I can remember a *voxata questio*: was the music of Mozart romantic, or not? How many times we started to discuss, without reaching a common opinion! From music to literature, and back again, with Beethoven, Haydn, Schubert, but also Goethe, as testimonial of our opposite positions!

### 3 A Great Friend

Pierpaolo (although he is a Colleague of mine!), is one of my best friends, whatever meaning one will give to this wonderful word. Friend since more than 40 years, during the which we spent together many intense experiences, happy the most, but also some dramatic. And after every moment, our friendship appeared stronger and stronger. The friend Pierpaolo and his dear wife Carla, with their fantastic daughter Ila, were very close to me in some dramatic moments of my life. And their help has been really fundamental for my Family. It's easy, and a pleasure, for me remember the period when I was preparing my thesis in Physics, period full of news into my life: the discovery, finally, that Physics, the experimental physics is a very exciting and challenging field where one can find the measure of his own will, and intelligence, of his ability, and a valid objective of the life. Also new friends, in a new country, Switzerland and France, in a new Lab., the most important in world for Physics, i.e. CERN, in Geneva. But when finally, the moment of writing and typing the results of a two years work arrived, again the friend was close to me, with a marvelous, red IBM typewriter (similar to the famous RED IBM...), giving suggestions, helping in writing and correcting the many pages that, one after one, were accumulated on the table; during the night, during the sundays. But the most important contribution I received from Pierpaolo, in that period, was in relation to decision, the hot decision, that I had to take: to present the data already collected, as soon as possible, even though they do not definitively probe the new ideas, or, otherwise, to delay the completion of my thesis until the complete collection of the data that amounted to at least six months. Pierpaolo said to me: "After two years of work, at the beginning of a new academic year, it is better to put the word 'end' to this work. If you want to follow the complete results, you can remain still a few months, but as a Doctor, no more as a Student". And so I did. But, those few months have become 40 years, the data were collected, analysed, and other experiments were done; and now, when I'm approaching the date to retire, I am sure that Pierpaolo's advice was really good! And it is one of the best I ever received. But not the alone advice Pierpaolo gave to me... The second one, unfortunately, cannot be discussed here in details... It must be sufficient hint that if I'm a happy husband and father, well, I have to thank a bit both Pierpaolo and Carla, and this is a big deal.

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