

Me and John R. Schulenberger

by

David S. Gilliam

I first met John R. Schulenberger in the mid 1970's while I was a graduate student at the University of Utah. I was living in an apartment just off of 13th East near Sugar House. John was a visitor for the year working with Calvin Wilcox. We met and found some common bonds with a background of living in Idaho. He was born in Shoup Idaho (near Salmon) and I moved to Idaho at the age of 13 from California. We became friends right away - he could see that I was a real country boy at heart. I still had the habit that plagued me for years of using the F-word at least twice in every sentence. It took many years for me to break that habit and John was not much better. The main difference was that I was using all the words I knew and he just liked to cuss a lot. John's main income (since beginning in graduate school when he translated the second volume II of van der Waerden's book on Algebra from German) was translating mathematics into English. He mainly translated Russian mathematics. I believe that while at the University of Utah he made more money translating than he did as a faculty member. I did not have any mathematical involvement with John during this period. But I am sure that John "ridgerunner" Lund will remember the time John asked him about his master thesis in complex analysis. As it turned out John had read most students theses just to see what everyone was doing. I remember that John Lund was very surprised.

Certainly one of the most memorable events of that semester was a departmental party hosted by us graduate students at our apartment near the end of the semester. John secretly gave us the money to throw the party and asked that we not tell anyone where we got the money. Everyone in the department knew we did not have that kind of money so everyone was trying to guess where the money came from. The party was a very big success. At one point John was making a move on Ulla Taylor and I remember Joe grabbing Ulla at one point and saying she better watch out because John, unlike Bill Coles, was serious and not just flirting. That night we floated the keg and had no more money so we had a collection and someone went out for another keg and some cases of beer. Then sometime in the wee hours of the morning people got hungry and John gave someone more money to go buy food. After drinking all night we had breakfast and then John finished his glass of beer and filled up a gallon milk container with beer from the keg. Then he got on his bicycle (with the beer) and headed out drunk for home.

But lets go back a bit before I met John and set the stage. John had a PhD in mathematics from University of Arizona where he worked under Calvin Wilcox in 1968. After he graduated Wilcox recognized that John had a particularly strong ability in math and he hired him to do research with him for many years after that. His main area of expertise was partial differential equations (especially the equations of mathematical physics) and scattering theory. Calvin also held positions at Cal Tech and University of Wisconsin before Arizona. After John graduated he also left Arizona and went to a variety of schools including University of Denver and University Utah. John went with him to these places and they published a lot of papers together. Lets fact it John could be a bit hard to get along with

at times - and apparently this was true of his relation with Calvin. As an example, John told me about the first time he quite working with Calvin (this story was at least partially collaborated by others including Frank Stenger¹ and Don Tucker. Anyway John's side of the story was that he was lecturing one day in the seminar and Calvin had interrupted him several times wanting him to use some different notations. At one point John laid the chalk down and said, "Calvin, why don't you just give the lecture cause I'm leaving town." He walked out of the room, packed his "grip" and headed out of Salt Lake City. He did not return for the rest of the semester - that was it.

After that John went to Caracas Venezuela for a year or so to teach at a research institute and we communicated by mail. He sent me some reprints that I struggled to read on the LaGrange Identity. When John returned from Venezuela, I was about to graduate in vector measures and Banach space theory and my advisor had already decided to leave and go to the University of Texas at San Antonio - I felt that I was in a bit of a fix. I had approached Calvin Wilcox to see if he had any interesting research problems in differential equations. But honestly, having never taken a course in partial differential equations nor ordinary differential equations, I was simply not prepared for what he showed me.

By this time I was living in the Maynard hotel - a house bought by my advisor, Hugh Maynard, and rented by a bunch of guys with similar interests - having fun and going to school. These good friends

¹"John and Cal ran a PDE seminar in which I actively participated, and in that way, I was lucky to learn a great deal about PDE from both of them. And it was because I was so impressed with John's abilities during that time, that I later recommended to David Gilliam that he get together with John, from whom he could learn a lot. And David did. Unfortunately, Cal and John had a falling out after John had spent close to three years in Math at Utah, at which point John simply quit the U of Utah."

included Bill Emerson and John Lund (along with a few others) more or less the same bunch that lived in the apartment when John was in SLC a couple of years before that.

Anyway, over time the Maynard hotel had become a location for many University of Utah Math Department parties. About this time (probably about 1975 or 1976) John returned from Venezuela and stopped through SLC on his way to Idaho with a buddy Poncho. On just such an occasion there were a bunch of us at the Maynard hotel on a Saturday night when John and Poncho showed up (I think that Don Tucker or Frank Stenger might have pointed them in our direction). They were a bit drunk and considerably rowdy. I had bought a bottle of Everclear (Everclear is a brand of grain alcohol (ethanol), at 95 % alcohol (190 proof)) which I mixed with wine and seven-up to make a punch. I will never forget John drinking the Everclear directly from the bottle – he drank it all. We all passed out there and they left the next morning.

At that time Hugo Rossi was the department chair and also a good friend. To make a long story short Hugo hired John for a semester to help me out. This began the long run of Me-N-John. Our first main work together was concerned with a rigorous development of potentials for equations of mathematical physics - essentially John was on a crusade to show rigorously that many hyperbolic equations of mathematical physics could be factored into a number of wave equations.

Lets face it, the math part of this story is not the most interesting part so lets get back to John. John taught a couple of classes – undergraduate differential equations for engineers and a graduate PDE class. I remember one day I was in the coffee room and John

came in followed by one of his undergraduates students who was trying to ask how John was going to determine the grades in the class. Right in front of everyone in the coffee room, John said, “Everyone in the class starts off with an A. From there your grade is determined by how much you bother me during the semester and right now you are bothering me quite a bit.” While he was talking he was also rolling a cigarette using a sack of bull durham. As usual he was dribbling a fair amount on the floor.² Also John worked in his office in the math building a lot at night. Most days, sometime late in the afternoon, he would walk down to the Seven-Eleven and grab a couple of six packs of beer which he brought back to school. On one occasion some of us graduate students were sitting on the front steps when John showed up with his brown paper bag. He pulled out a beer and offered one to each of us. Needless to say this was against the law and we declined. He just sat there, opening beers, drinking them and talking with us. John did not have a car so I drove him around a lot – mainly to liquor stores and bars. In any case we did have enough time for him to get me on the right path in some research. At least I began to understand what I needed to learn. In all honesty he did most of the work on our first papers.

After that semester he returned to his home (a house near the University of Arizona which he bought and paid for during the time he was a graduate student). Most important when I applied for jobs I told people I worked in partial differential equations. I got an instructor position at Texas Tech University in 1977 and have been here more or less since then.

²I remember during that semester there was bull durham tobacco on the floor everywhere. I particularly remember exactly which stall John always used in the mens room. I am sure the cleaning ladies did not like it much.

John and I continued to work together and after my second year at Texas Tech the department wanted to hire a visitor to fill Tom McLaughlin's position while he was on leave. I suggested John who wanted to give a seminar of Gelfand-Levitan inverse scattering theory. What a crazy year that was. I lived in a small house near campus and John rented a small garage apartment near me (just down the street). I had a student that worked at the liquor store (the strip) and gave us a deal on volume purchases. Each week he would drive to my house with a trunk full of beer a whiskey. I remember that we drank to worst whiskey in the world – it was so bad that there was a layer of what looked like rust in the bottom of the gallon bottle it came in. John also found a girl friend in one of the female graduate students and they were together a lot. It was fairly well known since they had some noisy episodes in Tom's office in the old Foreign Language Building. He even went with her to meet her husband – now that's bad.

Over the next few years John and I published many papers together on wave phenomena. Our monumental work was on the propagation of electromagnetic waves over along and through a conducting half plane (The Sommerfeld Problem). John had gotten caught by Uncle Sam for not paying his taxes – remember he mainly got money for translating. He paid them what they asked for and then decided to form a corporation as a tax dodge. He formed the ANAH corporation. Now John claimed that ANAH was an american indian word but in reality it stood for An Ass Hole. From that point on all our papers bore his commitment to the ANAH corporation. He would thank them for their support of his research efforts. On one paper he thanked the ANAH corporation and his ex-wife (Donna – Dippy) for her support and other favors.

During these years (about 1980) I took a leave of absence and visited Arizona State University in Tempe. I made several trips down to Tucson to work with John. Mostly we sat in his ramada (covered patio) where he had set up a keg in a frig. We would drink and talk about math. While there Chris Byrnes (who was a Harvard at the time) visited me and we drove down to Tucson to talk to John about writing grant proposal together since it was becoming clear that I needed to try to get some grants. John agreed and said he would write the first draft. Well, he wrote it alright. He sent Chris and I official ANAH documents concerned with ridding the world of Russian gothic architecture using earthquake bombs – we proposed to do the necessary mathematical study of earthquake bombs. In the document he gave each of us scientific names that reflected out particular expertise: John became Random Flapping Eagle, I was Loco Pony and Chris was Big Medicine. He even gave the NSF a special name as he asked them for money – he called them deep pockets. The proposal ended with an environmental impact statement that the work would not have any bad effect on the local environment provided Loco Pony would stop smoking. Needless to say that was the end of our great efforts to seek external funding.

I went back to Lubbock and texas tech the next year. In about 1986 or 1987 John once again visited Texas Tech for a semester. This was just after JT Guthrie and I had finished remodeling my duplex on 18th street. John rented a duplex on 14th street just four blocks from my place. His neighbor in the duplex was Lawrence Schovanec (small world right). One of the most important events of this period was that we introduced John to Miss Linn (Blackburn) who worked at Texas Tech and hung out with some mutual friends. Well after they meet one evening at the Elephant bar they were together most

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food and cleaned out my liquor supply. I was not to happy.

John worked at night and would often drop by for a drink late at night. Many times I would already have gone to bed. I would get up and he would hold up an empty pint whiskey bottle and say, “Dave, I just wanted a beer and a little squeezin’s.” I, of course, would say okay. Then he would head back to the kitchen and come back with a full glass of whiskey, his pockets full on beer cans and his pint bottle full. He would gulp down the glass on whiskey – thank me and head out the door. Several times I would worry that he might not make it back to his place safely so I would get up, get dressed and follow his home just make sure he got home. The main worry was that this was the middle of the winter and it could get quite cold. On one particular occasion, I followed him and looked in his window to see that he was safely inside and headed home. The next morning he called and asked if he had left his glasses at my house the night before. I looked around but could not find them. So I walked to his apartment looking carefully to see if they had fallen off as he walked home the night before. When I got to his apartment they were no where to be seen. It was very cold and there was several inches of snow. I have no idea what prompted me to look out in the street – 14th street was a pretty busy street – but there, I mean right there, in the middle of the street on a line of snow that had not yet been run over by the cars traveling in each direction were John’s glasses. Unbelievably they had not been touched with hundreds of cars driving within inches of them. Also during this visit, while John was walking around he found \$200 just laying on the ground with no one around. Needless to say we put that money to good use – he restocked my liquor and his.

At this point anyone reading this story that did not know John would say he is just a drunk but actually he was really into physical exercise. For many years he road his bicycle from Tucson Arizona to Salmon Idaho every year. He also ran several miles about every day and lifted weights. On the other hand, it is true that the thing he lifted most often was a beer.

When that semester was about over the was preparing to make his bicycle ride, this time from Lubbock to Salmon. About this time he was at Miss Linn's where he decided some weeding needed to be done. So he used a 9 iron (and many beers) to weed her front yard. The result was that his hands were completely beaten up with blisters. Nevertheless, he headed out for Salmon on his bicycle. When he returned he tried to work some kind of a deal to get a typewriter but got caught and had to return it. The best thing he got out of Lubbock was Miss Linn.

Miss Linn left Lubbock with John and moved to Tucson. They were married and have lived (happily) ever after until John passed away in February of 2007.