

I was deeply saddened by the passing of Vesa Ruuskanen and Bob Thews. Both men have had a profound and, curiously, similar impact on my life:

1. In the early days when “Hard Probes” was a Collaboration we worked together on Drell Yan computations for the LHC (S. Gavin, R. Kauffman (Brookhaven), S. Gupta (Tata Inst.), P.V. Ruuskanen (Helsinki U.), D.K. Srivastava (Calcutta, VECC), R.L. Thews (Arizona U.). Int.J.Mod.Phys. A10 (1995) 2961-2998).
2. both men essentially “adopted” me at one time or another.

Let me elaborate.

Vesa

I first met Vesa as a grad student of Gordon Baym in Urbana, Illinois. Vesa and his family had just arrived for a one-year visit. Vesa was the friendliest person I have ever met and he instantly made me forget that I was a lowly graduate student. I suggested we go to lunch at a bagel shop called “Lox Stock and Bagel” – now long closed. Vesa wanted to try American food. This was one of those singularly American places where you could get anything whatsoever served on a bagel. It was busy and full of students. We waited on a long line, chatting about soft pions.

As we reached the end of the line, Vesa – who was ahead of me – asked, “What is a bagel?” pronouncing bagel with a soft “g”. We were headed for trouble. At the end of our line was a server who would rattle off a thousand choices in rapid succession in a (then) somewhat unfamiliar language. There was no menu to read, no pictures to point to. As she ran down the list he looked at me in bewilderment. I stepped in and said “lox and cream cheese”. When he finally bit in to the sandwich, he flashed recognition. Lox, he explained, is completely familiar to every Scandinavian ... “lax” is a Swedish word. Who knew?

Later, I leapt at the chance to go to Finland for a postdoc with Keijo Kajantie at Helsinki. I visited Vesa in Jyväskylä often and we stayed up all night writing papers about soft pions. He taught me cross-country skiing. He took me out to the country side. I slept in his brother’s barn. Basically, he and his family adopted me.

Bob

I met Bob at a meeting in Aachen to plan for heavy ions at the LHC. Of course, I knew Bob by his reputation as a particle theorist and QGP aficionado, but it soon became evident that he was Helmut Satz’s dear friend. This is significant. Both Bob and Helmut are worldly gentlemen of uncommon sophistication. In their company I felt like a hillbilly. However, our common interest and collaboration in J/psi and Drell Yan drew us together.

The Hard Probes Collaboration was born. After a collaboration meeting in Trento, I traveled with my wife-to-be Kara to Siena. This was our first trip together. On the Piazza del Campo we ran into Bob and his charming wife Johnnie. We met for dinner at an superb restaurant that only they knew about. Kara ate wild boar for the first time. Bob taught us how to swirl wine in a glass to catch its bouquet. They filled us in on where to go and what to do. Importantly for me, Kara was impressed by the physics lifestyle. “Do you guys do things like this all the time?”, she asked incredulously. Only with Johnnie and Bob.

Later, I spent a year at Tucson, Arizona with Ina Sarcevic and Bob as a visiting assistant professor. I was looking for a permanent job at the time. Kara was still working at Brookhaven, so I was living like a student. Bob and Johnnie did their best to keep my spirits up during this trying period. They invited me for dinner and explained the wonders of Tucson, which is a truly magical place. When Kara eventually visited, we went to the Thews’ home for dinner. After a wonderful dinner, Bob took us to his wine cellar, which to be sure is really his winery. Now we have a home and a life in Michigan, but we miss him very much.

Hard Probes Collaboration

I can not discuss Bob and Vesa and not mention wonderful time we had working together in the Hard Probes Collaboration. This was a long time ago. Believe it or not, there was once a time when people needed to be convinced that nuclear collisions would be interesting at energies beyond RHIC. In fact, RHIC was under construction and jets in ion collisions had yet to be seen. Helmut and Xin-Nian had the clear vision that hard probes were the key reason for pushing to even higher energy. Looking at the magnificent data presented at this meeting this is undeniable. But things were different then.

If you will permit me a brief flight of excess, I would like to quote the famous speech of King Henry V to his men from Shakespeare:

This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

While I have no difficulty picturing Helmut on an armored horse ordering us unto the breach, in truth nobody faced harm in the Hard Probes Collaboration. It was hard work, but no arrows flew. The worst harm we faced was a little indigestion from too much Fondue. I hope that Ramona will forgive the gender specificity of the quote. But the fact is that the Hard Probes Collaboration played an important role in bringing the key people together to build theoretical interest for the LHC. So today let's remember our brothers Bob and Vesa, who did a lot for our field.

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