

ANDRZEJ BIAŁAS — MY DEAR FRIEND

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Andrzej Białas, Stefan Pokorski, 2012. *Photo: A.M. Kobos.*

The 90<sup>th</sup> birthday is a very serious matter and serious things have to be said first. Andrzej Białas is an absolutely extraordinary and outstanding figure in the Polish multidimensional scientific, cultural, and public life. But having said that, instead of being more explicit, I am strongly tempted to change the tone to a less serious one. And Andrzej may like it more if my words are now very personal. With Andrzej, we know each other since 1965, so for about 60 years. I am exactly six years younger than Andrzej (we were both born in July). In 1965, I was just after completing my master

studies at the University of Warsaw and those six years meant, at that time, a generation gap in the scientific community. Andrzej was for me an unsurpassed, unrivaled man of great success, just after long internships at CERN. He was building with great success the Kraków theory group in particle physics and gaining international recognition very quickly. At that time, Andrzej was also collaborating very closely with the Warsaw experimental group and I had many opportunities to meet him in Warsaw but I was simply scared to talk to him, really scared.

Around 1968–1969, we overlapped for about a year at CERN and we got to know each other more closely. But our relationship was still of the master-disciple type. Andrzej felt at home at CERN and I was a bit lost, intimidated by my first long stay there. He was teaching me how to deal with the great Leon Van Hove, our informal boss, a great friend of the Polish physicists but a very demanding character. Andrzej always called him “old man”, and there was a lot of respect and admiration in it. In that period, we wrote a couple of papers together.

Our relations developed with time, gradually changing into a close friendship. Now, we talk on phone regularly, every few weeks. Our conversations are always very upbeat, about all our colleagues aging, except us, of course. Last February, we had a funny conversation related to the approaching Andrzej’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. I mentioned to him that I had a problem. I discovered that, among a few papers written together, there is one written in 1969 cited altogether about 25 times, 20 times in 1969–1970 and about 5 times in 2025. Some people, like for instance Nima Arkani-Hamed, a new “Edward Witten” in particle physics, cite it in the context of the recent revival of the *S*-matrix approach to particle physics, instead of the field theoretical path. And the problem I shared with Andrzej was that after that discovery, I checked the citation list of Andrzej. I found about 9000 of citations of his papers. In particular, his 3 old papers on multiparticle production in hadron–hadron and heavy-ion high-energy collisions are cited about 1000 times each, continuously over the years, and with about 15–20 citations each in 2025. So what is the point in remembering our paper, suddenly rediscovered after 55 years. But Andrzej comforted me: don’t worry, one should stress its resurrection! Contrary to the case of the other papers, which were never forgotten . . .

Looking forward: I am looking forward to my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday with Andrzej giving a talk for me and to Andrzej 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with me updating the number of his citations! Long live the king!