

# Regret not to be in Chicago

For Seraphine's Ph. D., Chicago March 31, 2010

In June of nineteen eighty three -  
green and lush was every tree -  
high upon the mountains' top,  
I was in an Alpine NATO-Workshop.  
The Golf Hotel in *Les Arcs* had all the facilities.  
to house some 100 scientists from everywhere.  
On modified nucleosides with antiviral activities  
they talked, about their research there.  
The cream of the trade in this gorgeous spot.  
I didn't know what I would learn, by God!

One afternoon we all sat together and had a drink,  
everybody was ready for dinner, not to think.  
A waiter called me that I had a call  
there were four phone bays in the hall.  
The kind where everybody can hear what you say,  
Giulio Cantoni from NIH was in the next bay.

I had not gotten phone calls so many,  
my son Willi was on the phone, in Germany.  
Although the connection was quite weak  
"Papa, you are grandfather now!" he did shriek.  
"What is this? You have a child?"  
My mind was going completely wild.  
I asked: "A boy? a girl? What's the name?"  
"It's a girl, Seraphine she is called."  
"Seraphine? You take me in default.

"Sounds old-fashioned, heavenly", I thought  
"Oh no, Almut's Russian uncle had this name.  
Seraphine is exotic for you, but it's not a blame."  
"What shall you do now with wife and kid?"  
"They are both fine, wait a bit.  
In Düsseldorf we'll stay, everything shall be fine.  
We have a house on the bank of the Rhine."

He hung up and I was completely flabbergasted,  
he never had told me, the bum  
of the things to come.  
I went back to the lounge not knowing what to think.  
There Cantoni had silenced the crowd and blasted:  
"Willi has become grandfather, it's a gorgeous thing!"  
Everybody applauded and I was congratulated.  
The hotel director a case of Champagne donated.  
All the scientists drank on Seraphine's health,  
to her future, good luck, success and wealth.

I don't know you, my grand-daughter, very well,  
you were always far from France where I did dwell.  
At first, I came to Germany on every good occasion  
to visit a factory's guard house, not a big Maison.  
Along the Rhine I often pushed your baby carriage,  
but Almut and Willi never talked about marriage.

You came to France a few times, always too short.  
A playful little girl, wringing flower crown.  
My mother about the child did frown,  
but was always of much support.

To Cappadocia in central Turkey Almut had gone,  
in Uchisar, a town of sand, caves and stone.  
In Nevşehir you went to high school,  
your teachers found fast that you were no fool.

Vacations were the rare occasions to meet,  
a bicycle tour in Tourraine was a special treat.  
With brother Anatol and sister Justine  
we visited parks and castles and royal domains,  
we cycled through forests, drank at village fountains.  
In a lovely country inn we had dinner later.  
The two girls drove crazy the poor waiter  
because for their desert they did scream  
for some strange combination of ice cream!  
Like passion fruit, lime and coconut.  
The waiter thought "The guy must be a nut,  
to keep up with two such brats."  
He got an excuse and a tip – pretty fat.

To Ankara you went to METU –  
Middle East Technical University for you.  
With a major in Chemistry you had chosen well  
In the Sciences you were always on the top.  
So well that to the Chemistry Olympics you were sent  
and at the selection the flattering decision fell:  
you were the best of Turkey's crop.

To Holland for the World Science Olympics.  
In Groningen you did not compete in Physics  
but in Chemistry and you got the Silver Medal.  
When you showed me the exam, it was no surprise -  
for such knowledge I could not get a prize.

You finished gloriously with much security  
First student were you in Ankara's University  
out of over 2000 students: the best!  
Your hard working character did the rest.

I had gotten my Ph. D. 49 years ago  
in the windy city of Chicago.  
Now it is your turn to get the final degree:  
five years of research, you paid your fee.  
You started out your life under scientific applause,  
a 100 scientist-godfathers were probably the cause  
that so brilliantly you turned out.

I can't come to Chicago to applaud  
Seraphine's thesis defense.  
Don't think that I am a fraud,  
it's just old age and such nonsense.  
On my right eye had to be changed the lens  
at my old age this makes sense.

Heed what thirteen years ago I said – not in silence  
at another workshop when I left Science

*A thing that always did me strike:  
Do Science only, if you really like.  
Without joy, without fantasy  
to do Science - like Art - is heresy.  
The younger crowd I thus advise.  
To all of you now, my glass I rise.*

Your Grandfather Willi

Chicago, March 31, 2010