

KAROL BORSUK—PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

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Dedicated to the memory of Karol Borsuk

In the academic year 1930-31 I was a first year student at the University of Warsaw, while Karol Borsuk was an assistant conducting exercises in real analysis. I was a member of a class which was huge but he soon started to notice me and we got involved in several conversations. In the spring of 1931 he received his doctorate and I attended the ceremony. At the same time I attended a course on set theory given by Docent Bronislaw Knaster. There were two other students in the course, however, I was the only one who did all the homework. I struck up a friendship with Knaster which lasted as long as he did. Set theory naturally led to Topology, which in Warsaw meant strictly Set-theoretical Topology.

I remember a curious incident. In the fall of 1931 I was browsing through the Mathematics Library and I came across a book entitled Topology by Solomon Lefschetz. I looked at the bibliography to see to what extent the "Polish School" was quoted. I found only one reference. It was a paper of Knaster, Kuratowski and Mazurkiewicz in volume 15 of Fundamenta Mathematicae containing a combinatorial proof of the Brouwer Fixed Point Theorem. I was very surprised to find no other references and I conveyed my concern to Dr. Adolf Lindenbaum (an excellent logician) who was then the assistant in charge of the library. He told me that it was a terminological misunderstanding, that the book was not about Topology but about some sort of algebra.

With time Borsuk learned about Algebraic Topology (mostly Vietoris cycles) and as he learned so did I. He went to Zürich, Innsbruck and Vienna in 1932 and when he came back I eagerly learned about what was happening on the "other