George Piranian

This issue of the *Michigan Mathematical Journal* is dedicated to Professor George Piranian on the occasion of his 70th birthday, in view of his long association with the *Journal* as managing editor.

Piranian was born in Switzerland, in Thalwil, Canton Zurich, on May 2, 1914, of a Swiss mother and an Armenian father. His mother came from a poor family and only finished the fifth grade. George's native language was Swiss German.

His father was born in Turkey, but George's grandfather soon moved the family eastward, to avoid persecutions, eventually settling in Samarkand, in the czarist empire. Not long afterward a group of Armenian boys, including George's father, were shipped off to attend an Armenian school in London. Misfortune overtook them in Paris, where all but two of the boys were abducted by persons unknown and never seen again. After attending the London school George's father settled in Switzerland.

The father was converted to Mormonism by missionaries from Utah, and he decided to emigrate. In 1929 the mother and three children arrived in Salt Lake City. The father could not come initially because the U.S. authorities regarded him as a Turk, and the immigration quota for Turks was filled.

After high school George attended Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University) in Logan, receiving the B.A. and M.S. degrees (the latter in botany). Then he became a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford for two years, where he studied mathematics. He commenced graduate work at Rice University in 1939.

On December 22, 1941, Louise Mills and George Piranian were married. George reports that, over the years, Louise has produced a significant modification of his behavior.

In 1943 he received his Ph.D. under Szolem Mandelbrojt. He finished the war years working with applied mathematics groups at Columbia University and Northwestern University. He came to the University of Michigan as an Instructor in the fall of 1945, with a teaching load of 16 hours per week and an academic salary of $2500. He says that his mathematical education began the following year, when he met and began collaborating with Paul Erdös and Fritz Herzog.

The *Michigan Mathematical Journal* was announced in 1950 and the first issue appeared in January 1952 (the first paper in that issue is a joint paper by Lohwater and Piranian). The journal was started on a shoestring by the Mathematics Department: no money was provided by the University, a department secretary retyped the papers on a varitype machine, and they were printed from that. There was no managing editor, just a committee. This system soon broke down and George took over as managing editor in January 1954. When he outlined his ideas for changes to Edwin Moise and added "I don't want to be autocratic," Moise replied, "What this journal needs is more autocracy."

George had strong ideas about how to run a journal, and how to write mathematics. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* was his bible, and was warmly recommended to authors. He didn't hesitate to make extensive stylistic revisions in manuscripts. Authors had various reactions to this treatment. I like to recall one man who told me that he always advised beginning researchers to send a paper to the *MMJ* since they would receive a good education in how to write.

George set a high standard for the journal. I remember once he rejected a paper by a world-famous mathematician after a very negative referee's report that concluded with the phrase "however I suppose you'll have to publish this because of the name of the author." No way! (The author did have clout, however: the paper subsequently appeared in the *Annals of Mathematics*.)

Dear George: Happy Birthday from your many friends and admirers, and may you have a most active retirement.

—Allen Shields