

LEO AND ME

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I arrived in Berkeley in 1957, at which time Leo was an Acting Assistant Professor of Mathematics here. He had recently proven the “individual ergodic theorem of information theory”—a triumph—and since this was becoming central to my own interests, it would have been natural for us to work together. However, Leo’s interests shifted to more applied work, specifically statistics, and he soon moved to UCLA. So we never became collaborators, but we did become good friends, especially after 1980 when he returned to Berkeley as a Professor of Statistics.

We had a number of things in common other than mathematics: among them similar family backgrounds, leftish political views, our connection to Yiddish, and—for a while—our situation in the world as two divorced men seeking female companionship.

Leo was quite adventurous, much more so than I. He came up with proposals which usually I did not go along with. One was to rent a boat and float along the Sacramento River, drinking, playing cards, and presumably sweating. Another, which we did do together, was running the rapids of the American river: Leo, Mary Lou Stagg (whom he later married), my son Ben and me. That was wonderful, and I have photographs to prove it. In retrospect, I wish I had gone along with more of his wild proposals.

We were both born in January 1928, 13 days apart, and for a few years we would throw large joint parties sometime in between. Sometimes these would be at his house, sometimes at mine. There were always lots of people, food, and drink. There would be dancing, and once we even hired a band. They were fine parties.

Leo’s talents, creative energy and imagination spilled out beyond Mathematics. A few examples: he got interested in elementary education and spent some time on the Santa Monica school board. He once ran an ice factory in Mexico. He sculpted, and even had an exhibition of his work; this was in 1998 at the Nexus Gallery in Berkeley. He took up—of all things—glass blowing. He designed and supervised the building of the house in which he and Mary Lou lived during his last years and in which Mary Lou still lives.

I miss him.

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Received October 2010.