

Andrei P. Ershov in Nuenen

Whenever Andrei visited the Netherlands in the seventies or early eighties, he tried to extend his visit with a few days so that he could stay the weekend with me and my family in Nuenen, the little village in the Southern part of the country where we lived at the time. It became a standard ingredient of those visits that I would make him copies of all the EWD's I had written since his previous visit so as to keep the people in Novosibirsk up to date on the work I had done. He always was a most welcome guest.

Once, when he was not quite sure how to use the preposition "except" in an English sentence, I gave him my old edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, and we still remember his keen delight when he discovered there Fowler's exemplary sentences "we are all fallible, except the pope" but "not excepting the pope"! He would have been disheartened to learn that those beautiful examples are no longer included in the sixth edition.

At one of his visits, Andrei asked my opinion about Ada. I told him that Ada was such a mess that I shuddered at the thought that Western security would depend on it and that I would feel much safer if the Red Army were to adopt it as

well. Andrei smiled and gave the now famous answer "Don't worry....".

On a Saturday afternoon, when the weather was very nice, we took him out for a little trip. Seemingly aimlessly the car wound its way through the peaceful country-side, but I had a surprise in store for him: at a given moment I told him "Now we are in Belgium." "But I don't have a Belgian visa! And I have left my passport at your home!". He was reassured when we told him that we had left our passports at home too. On our way back we took a lovely little sand road. The scenery is still vividly in my mind: at the left a little forest and at the right mostly heather. Suddenly, Andrei said "Do you know that you are the first European who took me on an unpaved road when he showed me his country?". We were back home in time for tea.

I have had one somewhat frightening experience with Andrei. In the mean time we had acquired a tandem and it had become some sort of tradition that -weather permitting- visiting foreign computing scientists would be shown the village and its immediate surroundings from the tandem's second seat. The invitation was sometimes accepted with some hesitance, but when Andrei's turn had come and I proposed the tandem trip to him, he accepted the invitation

with great enthusiasm and immediately went to his room to dress for the occasion while I took the tandem out of the garage. When we were ready to depart, Andrei said to me "Do you know why I am so excited about this tandem trip? I cannot cycle.", thereby turning my innocent proposal into a risky adventure. I immediately got most uncomfortable visions of falls and broken hips, but Andrei looked forward to it so much that I did not have the heart to cancel the trip. The first corners we took were for me a nerve-wrecking experience, but we managed not to lose our combined balance and returned unscathed.

One of my last memories is of Andrei conversing for more than an hour in Russian with my daughter, who studied Slavonic languages at the time. (It was a strange experience, seeing one's daughter and one's friend having a great time together, but not having the foggiest notion of what they were talking about.) She told me later that he had been very sweet, speaking carefully with a clear diction until he had found out how much she could cope with. On that visit he left his toothpaste behind; she tried it once.

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