

In memory of Prof. J. Necas

Robert Finn

Although Jindrich Necas and I have worked from differing points of view on different kinds of problems, his name was consistently a model for me from the earliest days in which I started writing mathematics. There was a sense of independence and individuality about him to which I could respond, and he presented for me a clear example of single-minded devotion to science that transcended the political differences separating our countries at that time. And I learned very much from his beautiful presentation of direct methods for elliptic equations in his famous monograph on the topic. That material greatly deepened and extended my insights into the problems I had then been studying, and was of inestimable help in my further mathematical development.

Jindrich was active with original scientific activity until the last days of his life. On every occasion that we met, he had new and incisive ideas to show me, and the range of his interests and expertise never ceased to amaze me.

On one of my first trips to the Continent, Jindrich invited me for a week in Prague, during which he showed me historical sights of much subtler interest than are found on the usual tourist agenda. One of them was a church decorated with human skeletons. That experience gave me a strong sense of the continuity of history, and whenever I think of current world events, my mind invariably goes back to that church.

Jindrich brought me to his home for dinner. It was a startling experience for me to be greeted at the door by a two-year-old child who at that age could already speak the Czech language. I decided then that I was in a country inhabited by a master race of intellectuals with whom I could not hope to compete scientifically. During the intervening years, that two year old child became an accomplished scientist and was one of the organizers of the recent meeting in Jindrich's memory; she has amply shown that her early ability to speak such an inhibiting language was only the beginning of her range of competence.

I was born earlier than Jindrich, and I have survived beyond his time. That was a circumstance of fate over which no human entity has control. I am grateful to have had the opportunity, on the occasion of the meeting in Prague, to present some of my own mathematical work in honoring the memory of a superb mathematician and a fine human being.