

### **Rodolfo Vittorio De Sapia (1936–2017): InMemoriam**

Rodolfo Vittorio De Sapia (Rudy to everyone who knew him), Associate Professor Emeritus of the Mathematics Department of UCLA, passed away on January 24, 2017, due to complications arising from cancer of the bladder. The end was peaceful and some of his friends and colleagues were present till the end. During his last weeks, when he was unable to drive, his colleague and former TA, Paige Greene, helped him to shop and keep his medical appointments. His longtime partner Andrea Williams had died a couple of years before, and there are no surviving relatives.

Rudy did his Ph.D. in mathematics at the University of Chicago in 1964 and his specialization was in the areas of algebraic and differential topology. He was an Instructor in Stanford University till 1966 when he joined UCLA as an Assistant Professor. He was soon promoted to Associate Professor. He published many brilliant papers in the top international journals on algebraic and differential topology, and seemed to be well on his way to become a recognized figure in this area. He was deeply interested in the problem (still unsolved) of the existence of complex structures on the 6-dimensional sphere. But around 1980 the flow of his research papers stopped, perhaps due to his lack of progress in this problem or some other personal disappointment, and did not revive till 2000, when he again started writing research papers, one of which was a very fine expository re-

view with some new ideas on Spin (8) and the principle of triality.

Although his research work had slowed down, he began to take a deep interest in teaching, and soon came to be regarded as an exceptionally good teacher, among the best in the department. I can attest to this personally, since I once saw a comment by a student of mine who said (in that course) I was very good, almost as good as De Sapio. When I showed it to Rudy, he could not stop laughing. He wrote meticulous and beautiful notes on the courses he taught. He wrote a book, *Calculus for Life Sciences*, which was well received.

Although he was born in the US, his parents were Italians from the Naples region in Italy who migrated to the US. He grew up in an Italian neighborhood in New York City and was very fluent in Italian. He made many trips back to Italy, with Andrea and also by himself, but told me that he stopped visiting Napoli because the poverty there made him sick. He had a special fondness for some of his friends who were Italians or of Italian origin, like Rita Fioresi and Peter Trombi. In him the American and Italian cultures blended seamlessly and made him one of the most charming and gregarious of persons, although he had a streak of being a loner (not surprising since there were not many people around him who had his multicultural background). He was a delightful companion, with an encyclopedic knowledge of baseball, especially the New York Yankees. I have the distinction of stumping him once (and Stan Osher too, who seems to have never forgotten it) with the following trivia

question: in the 1965 World Series, the Dodgers lost their first two home games, and for the third game in against the Twins, were in dire peril, because no team had ever come back from a 0-3 deficit in a World series (this has now been accomplished by the Red Sox). The question was: who was the Dodger pitcher who won that third game, leading to the eventual victory by the Dodgers in seven, with Sandy Koufax pitching a shut out on two days' rest in the seventh.

After Andrea died, he was not the same man again and had essentially lost the zest for life that was so characteristic of him. When I saw him a couple of days before he died, I noticed the painting in the dining room area (a print of course, but properly framed) that is one of Leonardo da Vinci's greatest, The Lady with the Ermine. We had a small chat about it, and recalled that the Lady was Cecelia Gallerani, mistress of the duke who was Leonardo's employer at that time.

He left his mark on the people around him in his own way. There was not a mean bone in his body, and my wife and I were privileged to know him closely. For over twenty years he and I took lunch in my office every Monday, a routine that stopped only when I retired in 2014. His friends and colleagues mourn the passing away of a good colleague and a decent man.

V. S. Varadarajan  
Professor Emeritus and  
Distinguished Research Professor, UCLA