

A Tribute to Leon Knopoff May 5, 2011

Terrific Mentor and a Superb Teacher

by Jean Elkhoury

I received with great sadness the news about the latest development in Prof. Knopoff's health.

I was, still, very hopeful and very much looking forward to our next meeting.

There are no words that describe my gratitude and joy of having been his student.

I am, and will always be, thankful for learning so much from a great scientist with depth and scope into science that are seldom found.

I would like to share with you two of the many experiences I had with Prof. Knopoff that come to mind now. . . .

- During my first year at UCLA I recall Prof. Knopoff would always challenge me to defend any idea I would dare to put forward. Naturally, I would find myself speechless more often than I wanted to. And as usual, he would continue explaining to me with his characteristic vigor. At some point, I dared to suggest that there might be something not quite right with one of the equations we were discussing. He paused for a few seconds and said: "You are right". It was certainly one of the most enjoyable moments as a grad student. This validation, specially coming from him, gave me the confidence that transitioned our meetings from a lecture style towards a more vigorous discussion that proved to be a very effective means of learning. . . . The second experience . . . (well . . .)
- One time I had the opportunity to work on a small research project with another faculty member of the Department and I needed to have Prof. Knopoff's approval. I recall him telling me in a deep voice: "Jean, you will not have enough time to work on our projects, I do not like it but I will support you". This is a small example of his honest and clear support even against his desire.

I cherish all the moments in his company, from our frequent meetings to the wonderful Thanksgiving gatherings at home, which made feel in family being far from my own.

Students are academic children, and as such I deeply feel the loss of my academic father.

At one of my first scientific meetings someone asked me whose student I was. As soon as I mentioned Prof. Knopoff's name . . . that person exclaimed: "The walking legend Knopoff!"

I say it is truly a great honor to have learned from a great scientist and a legend. . . .