

**A Tribute to Leon Knopoff** May 5, 2011

*Travels with Papa*

by daughter Katie Knopoff Wadley

In 1984, I was a college student living in Paris. Papa was going on a scientific trip to Russia, and I begged him to let me go with him. Traveling to Russia was not easy then, and I didn't know if I'd ever have another chance to go. We had a remarkable time, in Moscow and in what was then called Leningrad. We saw so many lovely places and things. I was struck by St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square. And by the beautiful artworks in the Hermitage Museum. On one of the days we were in Leningrad, we visited the home of two of Papa's first cousins. They had been told we would visit them that day but did not know what time. So when we arrived, they had spread out quite a feast, and there were about 15 relatives around the table, prepared to wait for us all day if necessary. There was quite a language barrier, unfortunately. At some point I got the idea of making a family tree, mainly so I could figure out who was who. That turned out to be the icebreaker – and suddenly language was no longer a barrier. What a warm and friendly group it was! I was so grateful to Papa for indulging me and taking me on that trip. He was wonderful to travel with. Open to whatever experience we encountered, yet confident and in charge. I always felt so proud that he was my father, and that I was with him, because wherever we went people who knew who he was gave him such great respect and held him in such high regard.

That amazing trip was just one of many travels with Papa. Thanks to his sabbatical leaves from UCLA, we got to live in some pretty awesome places. We lived in Venice, Italy, when I was 6, Rachel was 5, and Michael was 2. We lived on the Lido Island at the end of a street with a field next to it, which I remember as being covered in red poppies the entire time we lived there. Rachel and I went to school for a few months, and then we all spent the summer going to the beach and eating gelato.

When I was ten, we spent the summer in Santiago, Chile, where it was winter. Rachel and I were not too thrilled about having to go to school during what was supposed to be our summer vacation. But there were shortages, and the gasoline ran out after only two weeks, so the school bus stopped running, and then we got to play at home with Michael. Then we left for Lima, Peru, and had a wonderful time there. We took a trip to Cuzco and Machu Picchu, which I remember quite vividly. We had flown into Cuzco, which is more than 11,000 feet in altitude. I remember we all felt rather queasy and sleepy and decided to take naps, except for Papa, who claimed he really only came alive once the altitude reached 10,000 feet. He went out exploring while the rest of us slept off our altitude sickness. When we got up to Machu Picchu, we could go exploring in all the terraces and through rooms of houses that were only defined by outlines of stones on the ground. It was a magical place.

When I was 13, we spent the whole year in Cambridge, England, and all three of us kids went to school. I think I took something like 15 subjects each in a week, including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. I remember sitting at the kitchen table as Papa tried patiently to explain to me how to understand a physics homework problem, and I ended up in tears because I just wasn't getting it. He didn't mind. He just patiently explained it all over again. During that year, we took lots of car trips to places around England. We must have seen every place there is to see, from the Cotswolds to the Lake District. We took the overnight train from London to Edinburgh. We spent New Year's in Paris. Over spring break, we went to Pompeii, Athens, and Israel. We saw Gilbert & Sullivan operettas at the local theater in Cambridge. We saw the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* in London. And we heard the Kings College boys' choir sing in the chapel at Christmas. Cambridge was a wonderful place to live, and a wonderful place from which to explore the surrounding

countryside as well as other countries. I marvel at how our parents had the energy to take us all those places, but the truth is they enjoyed going there too.

In 1985, we took a family trip to China, Hong Kong, and Japan. It was the first time I'd been to any of those places. We climbed up Huang Shan and celebrated Papa's 60th birthday at a restaurant at the top. Papa was willing to try anything. He tried bitter melon and sea cucumber and a drink called maotai. I always felt I should try to keep up with him, but he was far more adventurous than I was.

Papa was a very adventurous person. He loved to travel and to see new places. He went to China shortly after it opened up to Westerners in the 1970s. He went to Tibet and Nepal. China and Japan. Israel and Jordan. He went to Turkey. Tunisia. Tajikistan. Malta. Czechoslovakia. Taiwan. Canada. Mexico. Indonesia. Egypt. The Galapagos. He took numerous trips to the Soviet Union. And to all of the countries in Western Europe. He even visited the South Pole. He shared many of these trips with his family, although admittedly not the South Pole.

We took the most wonderful vacations to Europe trips nearly every summer when we were growing up. We cruised down the Rhine River and up the Yangtze River. And always in the most wonderful style. I don't know how my parents managed to do it, especially with three children and especially when we were younger. But vacations were family time, and the whole family traveled together.

Papa was an explorer. He instilled in all of us a love of travel and a love of seeing places with incredible beauty, culture, scenery, and history. Papa created in us an attitude of openness to whatever experience might come our way.