

A tribute to Jacob Palis on the occasion of his 80th birthday

David Mumford

As an octogenarian myself, I am delighted to say to you: welcome to this select club Jacob, it's not so bad! Though I'm not sure you are as equipped to take it as easy as many of the rest of us do, or to celebrate being relaxed, even lazy, so I fear that you may miss some of its great advantages. You have always been one of a kind. What comes immediately to mind is the truly rare combination of social/political/interpersonal skills with deep mathematical talent. Including my own experience, I have come to believe that something like 50% of research mathematicians are somewhere on the "autistic spectrum". How could it be otherwise? Research for most of us is a solitary occupation, necessitating endless hours of mulling over abstract ideas, trying to sort them out and imprint their key ideas into our brains. This can be torture for the gregarious nature. But now and then, someone comes along who transcends this trap, someone who can work collaboratively and also love the give and take of mathematical discussion. Even rarer is the individual who possesses such personal charisma that both powerful and wealthy people rise to the challenge of understanding the deep importance of math—then, wonder of wonders, they agree to fully support our work. Needless to say, this great institute IMPA would never have existed without your stewardship, your infectious enthusiasm and the political skills that brought it into existence. The IMPA is something like Coleridge's Xanadu, a true pleasure dome for our community of math lovers. There it is, rising above the chaotic craziness of Rio into the midst of a beautiful tropical forest, an assembly of intense people drinking the strongest Brazilian coffee and *talking math!* I will refrain from describing the beauties of your math itself and your life-long program of making a coherent picture of the global properties of generic n -dimensional dynamical systems, as others are much more capable of doing this. What you have accomplished, that I have glimpsed from afar, is something so inspiring that it has often made me wish for a second life to devote to that field. One thing I do know: we had tremendous fun working together all over the world at meetings of the International Mathematical Union and I have had so much unforgettable pleasure and delight from my half dozen visits to Rio at your invitation.

Agradeço do fundo do meu coração.