



Invited Letter

Enrico Drioli: A Professor with a Vision and an Inspirational Leader

Soccorso Gaeta

GVS Filter Technology, Bologna, Italy

Email: sng@gvs.com (S. Gaeta)

When I was invited to write this letter I thought: "It is an honor and a privilege for me! What can be easier than celebrate Prof. E. Drioli? I have countless memories to share! I know many of his achievements that make me proud of being the first (or second) student that he supervised for a thesis". Actually, when I started writing it I found difficult to focus on selected memories. Prof. Drioli always appeared to me as a man with infinite energy, never too tired to work, to motivate people and institutions, to go places around the Globe to support or trigger membrane science and technology. Many times I worked with him full days to discover by the end of the meetings, when I was tired, that the day before he was in a different continent and that he had travelled 18 hours to reach us! At those time, I understood why when I was a student some people - admired by the energy of Prof. Drioli - used to joke by asking the question "*What is the difference between God and Prof. Drioli?*" ... their answer was: "*God is everywhere, Prof. Drioli has already been there*".

I met Prof. Drioli 42 years ago when in Spring 1976 I walked into his studio located at the third floor of the Chem. Eng. Dept., Naples University.

In the studio, I saw a young man dressing a short sleeve shirt sitting behind a desk overloaded by magazines, letters & envelopes (yes, in 1976 there were no e-mails, just letters and related envelopes), papers, membranes in various configuration, test cells, spinnerets, polymers, etc.. Behind him, two big pictures were hanging on the wall: One displayed his children, Alessandra and Carlo, jumping and elevated in a blue sky as if they were flying; the other picture was even bigger and displayed a crowd of people followed by a military tank. Later I learned that the first picture was taken in Bent, CA, USA where at that time Prof. Drioli use to work in Summer and the second picture was a shot during the "Prague Spring" in 1968. The two pictures appeared to me in antagonism: joy for life was expressed in the first picture as much as panic and brutality was communicated by the second one. Why were they hanging in the same wall? Today I know that they represented well the commitment of Prof. Drioli to family and joyfulness, and his unbeatable desire to contribute to improve society - often in unconventional ways - despite obstacles.



In this scenario I told Prof. Drioli, whom I had never met before, that I knew nothing about membranes; nevertheless, I was interested to work for my Engineering thesis under his supervision. Prof. Drioli gave me information about scientific and technological tasks related to “*membranes*” and asked me if I were truly interested in the work and if I was determined to work hard. I answered that I was and that same day I was in the lab reading ‘The Dual Mode Sorption Model’ of Vieth et al. and editing my work-plan to develop ‘capillary Polysulphone membranes’.

I am truly thankful to Prof. Drioli for having encouraged and continuously supported my interest in membrane science and technology since then. Undoubtedly, his vision and passion for work, and for innovation in science and technology has oriented all my professional life. In fact, I have had the privilege to work with Prof. Drioli in several R&D and industrial projects (involving also the startup and successful development of a company – Separem SPA) aiming at developing new industrially viable membranes and processes. Always I could see that the same rigorous work ethic and passion about membrane science and technology (and work in general) which fascinated me in 1976 is still there, always getting bigger and bigger as long as membrane technology has grown in these past 42 years to encompass many areas of our daily lives: water treatment, air purification, biomedical devices, food processing, industrial effluents and processes, automotive, life science, and much more. Moreover, I have always been fascinated how these qualities have always been accompanied by a high sense of pleasure for life, friendship, equanimity, and vision for breakthrough innovation.

Today, I know that he has been able to achieve what 40 years ago appeared to be an impossible dream; i.e., improving the life of people through membranes: both, membrane that help our daily life because they work efficiently and membranes that have created many jobs, including mine.

Thank you Prof. Drioli for what you are continuously doing for us.



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