

Donkeys

I went to Chile in the Atacama Desert in October 1975 to set up the first Swiss astronomical installation at the site of the European Southern Observatory (ESO official acronym: European Southern Observatory). Switzerland was not yet a member of the organization – but that was thanks to the successful conclusion of a settlement negotiation led by our Director *Marcel Golay* of the Geneva Observatory. I then discovered the richness of life that the desert could conceal despite its apparent aridity.

But far less concealed were the donkeys, introduced earlier by the conquistadores and other European emigrants, some of whom occasionally broke free and later became “wild”. We often had the visit of their herds attracted by the local vegetation enriched by our wastewater and by the overflows of septic tanks surrounded by tomato plants from the observatory's amenities. Green mini-oases in the vast russet landscape.

They were relatively peaceful beasts – but extraordinarily noisy when they started to bray! It often happened at night and we were often "frightened to jump out of our socks" - as some English-speaking people say - when passing next to a donkey which began to bray a few meters from us and invisible in the dark night. It was even more terrifying when you were at work in an astronomical dome. The spherical shape of the dome could reflect and focus the sound coming from outside and amplify it a few tens of centimetres behind the head of the observer...

One of my colleagues from Toulouse, *Marc Azzopardi*, remembers donkeys well. The night sky having clouded over, he decided to cease his observations and return to the lodgings located some two hundred meters from the dome. Ready to go to bed, he had a doubt about whether the telescope was properly powered down. As the night was still very dark, he decided not to get dressed and to go up to the dome, in pyjamas, to check. Arrived almost at his destination, he was surprised by a terrible howl and the sound of hooves approaching at full speed! He just had time to run home – without falling on the floor – and take refuge in his room.

The night hid the spectacle – which must have been highly comical – of an astronomer in nightwear running ahead of a donkey in the desert....

Atacama Desert Donkeys



Bread

It was in August 1966. I was travelling in Turkey in the company of an excellent friend I met at the Swiss Institute of Technology (ETHZ) and an earlier, and very dear friend from Lausanne – a girlfriend who hadn't yet decided on her existential choice – but who ended up during the unfolding of circumstances by marrying my friend...

After visiting Istanbul, Izmir, and reaching Ankara, we then took a bus to Samsun on the Black Sea. With the intention of later reaching the city of Trabzon, then crossing the country via Erzeroum to Iskenderun – the ancient Alexandretta founded by Alexander the Great in the year 333 BC and situated close to the Syrian border. A first journey of 440 kilometres took a day through an arid landscape before reaching the Pontic Chain, and interrupted by a single stop at an isolated relay in the desert landscape for a possible midday meal.

We had taken drinks and food and had no intention of sitting down for a restaurant meal – but we were short of bread. I then went to see the boss of the relay to ask him if it was possible to buy bread. He went behind the counter and brought me a large loaf of fresh bread. When I wanted to pay him, he looked at me sternly, raising his head and saying, *"Have you ever seen someone pay for their bread in a restaurant?"* and we left it there...

Bread had a very important cultural value in Turkey then – and perhaps still does. It was the staple food of the rural population and is mentioned constantly in the writings. When I played with my childhood buddies on the street in Trabzon, you could possibly drop a candy or throw a chewing gum, but throwing the smallest piece of bread was a capital crime!...



Palm

It was 1945 – in the city of Trabzon bordering the eastern coast of the Turkish Black Sea – we had moved from the Ortahisar district to a house located in the heights of Taksim Street located closer to the town centre and the port which my father was to undertake the construction.

It was a small two-storey house with a large vegetable garden and an ornamental square, near the entrance, occupied by a palm tree surrounded by rosebushes. It regularly dropped black "seeds" - unripe fruit? – that I planted and which germinated producing a large leaf. I remember that this tree must have been the only one of its kind in that part of the city.

The port being finished in 1955, we then left this pleasant dwelling - with memories of early childhood, of friends met in the street, of the vacant lot nearby where we flew our kites.

By revisiting the city with Google Earth, and going up the Taxim Caddesi (Turkish for "the street" and is pronounced "djaddesi"), I see that everything has changed radically. Rows of buildings, shops, offices, no more vacant land. But no more house either – replaced by a morose and greenish building and its parking lot...

But the palm tree is still there!!!



Watch

In the early 1970s a young Swedish astronomer, *Birgitta Nordström*, came to do an internship at the Geneva Observatory. By then I had already made several trips to Scandinavia and knew a little about the Nordic mentality and culture. She did not yet master French, and that led me to introduce her – by speaking English – to French-speaking Switzerland and its surroundings.

At that time, the European Observatory in the Southern Hemisphere (ESO – European Southern Observatory) had just been commissioned in the Chilean Andes and was still based at CERN in Meyrin. *Birgitta* eventually met a young Danish astronomer, *Johannes Andersen*, who had an activity at CERN and – after some time and many trips – they got married and settled in Denmark...

They had become good friends of mine that I met in Denmark. Often, but especially him, at the La Silla Observatory in Chile. *Johannes* also sometimes returned to CERN to attend congresses. It was an opportunity for him to buy a few kilos of Gruyère cheese to take home - and for us to take walks in the region. On one occasion, during breakfast, noticing that he had the day free, he said to me “*why not go see the “real” mountains up close?* “. We left for Martigny. “*And why not the Col de la Forclaz?*”. Arrived at the pass, I felt obliged to show him the way to the “*Bisse du Trient*” (narrow alpine irrigation canal) and the glacier. At the end of the valley, the glacier, and – to the left – a pretty path that led up to a high mountain pass. “*Why not go up a bit to get a clearer view?* “. After some time - at the *Fenêtre d'Arpette* pass and over a thousand meters higher - we came across a group of hikers wearing anoraks and leggings, with their big rucksacks, ropes, ice axes, crampons and helmets and who could not take their eyes off my friend in “conference attire”. He had undone the tie of his white shirt, wore his jacket on his arm and got along relatively well with his “city” shoes... But the “Watch” - that's another story...

In the early 1980s *Johannes'* father, who was a prominent cardiologist in Copenhagen, died shortly before his son left for Chile. *Johannes* had to liquidate the estate and assets. Among these was a mechanical watch of a certain age. Leaving for South America, where thieves are very active, he thought of taking this old watch rather than his own – much more modern and attractive!

On his return from his mission, he took advantage of a stopover in Rio de Janeiro and a brief taste of swimming at Copacabana beach. Very briefly – because waking up after having received a blow on the head he noticed the disappearance of his camera and his watch!

On his next visit to Geneva, he took the opportunity to contact Rolex with his father's papers with the intention of replacing this family keepsake. “*Very interesting*” was the reply. It was a limited-edition piece – hard to find and likely to sell for over CHF 25,000. “*Do you want us to do some inquiries?* “. His family keepsake still remains a “reminiscence”....

Trient Glacier seen from the Fenêtre d'Arpette pass (1972)



Copacabana beach seen from Pão de Açúcar (1978)



Willkawayin

At the end of October 1980, returning from a mission in Chile, I took advantage of a stopover in Peru and visited the region of the “Callejón de Huaylas”, a part of the upper valley of the Rio Santa which runs along the Cordillera Blanca – dominated by Mount Huascaran (6768m). A green landscape – but you had better not suffer from altitude sickness.

Descended at the city of Huaraz (3060 m) with the intention of visiting the ruins of the temple of Chavín de Huántar (3180m) 90 km on the other side of the mountain range, I was looking to find a means of transport. Mass tourism had not yet penetrated these regions....

In the meantime, and accepting to walk some 8 km and climb a little on a narrow stony road, one could visit the remains of a small temple of the Huari culture (500–1200 years) in the village of Willkawayin (3400m).

It was November 2 and a happy coincidence for the tourist that I was. The natives celebrated and put on their best clothes to go to the local cemetery and keep their dead company.

The temple – well preserved but not very spectacular and, according to archaeologists, is provided with a large network of collapsed and inaccessible underground galleries. I shared market-bought oranges with a bunch of kids watching the passage of time sitting on the roof of the temple.

The descent - made in the company of a couple of peasants bringing the products of their harvest to a market in Huaraz. Well dressed for the occasion, the man walked in front - his wife a few meters behind was carrying a big bundle on her back containing all the merchandise... I was very comfortable in this friendly company - the natives spoke Spanish just as badly as I and we understood each other all the better! When I said something, he would turn to his wife and do the Quechua translation and she would nod with a big smile!

Concerning the occasional tourists, he did not understand why these people came from so far “*to this uninteresting country – ran around taking pictures – and left immediately! ...*”. I explained to him that his country was very different and that we had come from perhaps 10,000 km to see it. The distance meant nothing to him – I then estimated it in number of steps. The multiple thousands more told him even less... I then said “You would have to walk night and day without stopping for about three months! ”.

He thought for a moment “.... *They are crazy!* ”.



The town of Huaraz with the Huascarán



The temple of Willkawayin



Halloween



Simple

The Antofagasta – Santiago bus followed the Pan-American route in the Atacama Desert. A totally arid landscape that could frighten some – but which I found soothing and regenerating by its absence of traces of human activity. My neighbour was a merchant who was returning to his grocery store in the capital. We chatted about this and that – about my work at the Observatory where I was going before returning to Switzerland. He spoke to me about his family and his still single daughter – gently asking me if I didn't want to meet her to “*dejar un recuerdo*” – leave a memory – in Chile before returning?... But we also discussed other subjects – and Nescafé, which I lamented, was the only form in which this drink was served in Chile. The brown powder was presented in its original box – naked in popular bistros, set in a handcrafted carved wooden container suitable for the box in restaurants – and fashioned in silver in the upper classes... “It’s true” was his answer “In Switzerland, Nescafé is undoubtedly better! ”.

This relativity of food conception is a global phenomenon. One day, having dined well with someone who was not yet my cousin by marriage, he told me about the invitation made to acquaintances from France. Knowing that they liked to eat well, he and his wife laboured all day to prepare a fine and elaborate meal with all the proper attributes. At the end of the meal, the host exclaimed with a big smile “*It was simple - but good!* ”.

Atacama





Licancabur volcano



Salt deposits close to San Pedro de Atacama

Booze

The Swissair DC-4 brought me back to Switzerland from Istanbul at the end of my summer vacation in 1952. My parents had put me on board so that I could return to the boarding school where I was placed in Lausanne. I was seated in first class! Children under the age of twelve benefited from a 50% reduction on the price of the ticket - but not those in the "ordinary" class. It was advantageous and good to take!

I don't remember the details of the meaning of "first class" other than the fact that the hostesses agreed to give me a sample of Swiss spirits distributed to passengers in a small box and told me *"I'm not certain to give you this..."* - but I received it anyway...

In Athens, the first stopover of this seven-hour flight, the aerodrome still bore the traces of the last war. The airstrip was apparently adequate, but to approach the terminal, which was a simple wooden construction where we were served a fairly diluted fruity drink, the ground had been covered with a web of metal planks in place of concrete to allow access to the aircraft.

Later, while flying over the Po plain, the pilot invited me to the cockpit to show me the approach to the Alps. An impressive white-capped wall that seemed to block our access! An image that helped to shape my future conception of life – because, flying at 2500m these unpressurized planes had to weave through dangerous mountains to reach their destination – more secure and situated much lower.

Forty years later, in one of the first Air France connections to Santiago de Chile with an Airbus A 340, almost all the passengers had got off at the last stopover at São Paulo. We were two or three to continue in the big plane. I had a good chat with the purser – and the captain invited me to see the approach of the Andes over the Argentine Pampas from the cockpit. I then remembered my childhood...

And, what about the first-class liquors?

Arrived in Lausanne the resident professor, *Mr. Ramella*, took care of them!

The Andes – flying over the Argentine Pampas



The Aconcagua

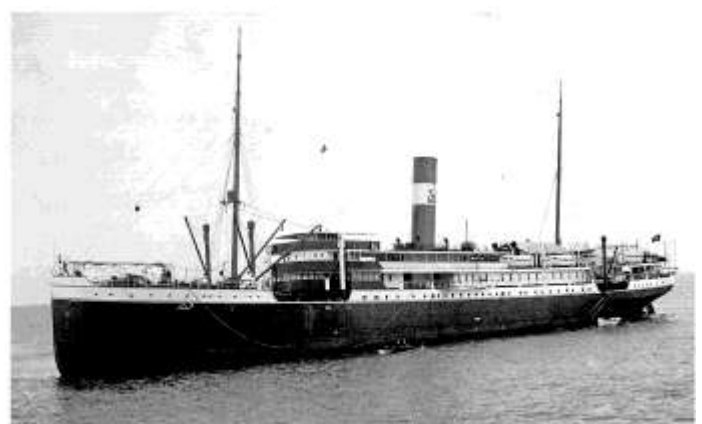


Pipe

This was before August 6, 1945. Before we moved into our new home in Trabzon on the Black Sea and I first heard of “Hiroshima”. It may even have been before the year 1945 – when I was still the age at which residual memory is inscribed with short but precise episodes in a messy whole.

We were on board the “*Tari*” on the way to Istanbul where my father was to meet various people in connection with the construction project of the future port of Trabzon – and my mother to do her shopping there for things that could not be found elsewhere. The *Tari* was an old steamship from the Ottoman era that still bore its name in Arabic script on its prow for several years after the proclamation of the Republic. It navigated the Trabzon – Istanbul route in a week, stopping at each coastal town. Even if one could observe through a hatch on the bridge the machinists shovelling coal in the boilers all day long, time was lengthy for a small child...

And, the passage was not without danger. The Russians (even then!) had laid a number of mines, many of which had drifted into the rest of the Black Sea. Navigators systematically scanned the route to reduce risk (years later I witnessed the detonation by army snipers of a mine that had drifted into the port under construction). Arriving at the mouth of the Bosphorus, the ship had to wait for the anti-submarine nets to be removed. It was also the moment that the submarines were waiting for to stealthily pass by... And, it was most certainly the case at the time of our trip. All the day before I saw my parents worried about this “pipe” that we saw following us nearby, emerging above the waves and which my father called a “periscope”!



^ The “*Tari*” anchored offshore

< The town of Trabzon before the construction of its harbour. The passengers and cargo are transshipped using boats.

Done

In 1952 – it was my first ski camp in Switzerland! And my first opportunity to associate with the community of skiers. In Montana, which was not yet “Crans – Montana”, the two villages were then of modest size and very distinct, separated by pastures and a few scattered chalets among which was the “*Pension des Anémones*” where we were staying. Before starting the ski lessons, we had sleds with which we descended a good distance on the road – not cleared of snow at the time – in the direction of Sierre to then go back up with the postal bus. The following days, we were at the ski school in Crans.

It was on this occasion that I tasted *raclette* and *fondue* for the first time. I preferred *raclette* and hated white wine (I have since changed my mind on both of these two subjects!). I also learned that you had to wipe your mouth before drinking from a glass – on the orders of *Monsieur Ramella* who was our accompanying master...

Returning from skiing one late afternoon, we witnessed the conflagration of a chalet located on the slope above the road. A few brave people entered and threw mattresses, bedding, furniture and other objects out of the windows. The fire-fighters had arrived safely but were only observing the fire – their pump was not powerful enough to send water to the chalet located further up the slope...

For skiing, one or two ski lifts could be used. The longest went to "Mont Lachaux" and had just been put into service (Le Cry d'Er currently?). One day, at the shelter, we saw three people arrive – it's *Charlie Chaplin!* Whispered my neighbours...

In those times there were relatively few people on the slopes – nothing like what we are experiencing today. Without constant supervision, we were left to our own devices on the slopes. One late afternoon I was descending quickly and alone from Mont Lachaux when I lost my balance and had to struggle seriously not to fall. There were no safety bindings yet - falls could be dangerous. Arrived at the bottom of the slope, a skier who had observed me told me “well done!! ”.

I was proud of it! And that's why I still remember...

Somewhere at Crans-Montana



Kindly...

In June 1991, finishing my mission at La Silla Observatory in Chile, I went to Cerro Paranal, some 800 km further north in the Atacama Desert. The construction work of the European VLT (Very Large Telescope) Observatory was soon to begin and it was planned to establish a small Swiss telescope near the site. I had to prospect to define a possible location. But this plan did not ultimately materialize.

At the end of the mission, the organization accommodated us in its "Guest house" while waiting for the plane to return to Europe. This is a beautiful mansion in the Vitacura suburb of Santiago. But when it was fully booked, we were placed in nearby hotels, and that was my case.

Arrived at the hotel, one of the maids led me to my room and spoke to me – in French! Her name was *Carmen* – if I remember correctly – and she explained to me that she had lived in Quebec for a few years with her husband before returning to Chile where she now lived alone with her ten-year-old son. We talked for a while about Switzerland, Canada and Chile – She only had a monthly salary of about 200 dollars...

The next day I went to a nearby native craft market. They sold blankets and carved wooden tableware made by the *Mapuche* Indians of Araucania. Not having enough space in my luggage after my purchases, I decided to leave my non-essential items there. I told *Carmen* to come to my room after her shift. She looked at me with some suspicion – but she agreed anyway... And I gave her some clothes, the Chilean money I had left and an almost new but bulky photographic tripod, saying "*vende le bien !*" - sell it well! while wishing her a good life. As she left she said to me "*you are the only one who has been nice to me*".

While taking the taxi to the airport the next morning, I briefly passed her on her way to work. She then gave me one of those very rare smiles expressing feelings of happiness, complicity and sadness.

Cerro Paranal before the construction work (1991)



Atacama



Archaic

In June 1968 the city of Lausanne began to organize the annual event “*La fête à Lausanne*”. This popular festival – which, becoming too politicized – was cancelled in 1971. But from 1973 onwards it became the “*Festival de la Cité*”, with a more cultural and “appropriate” vocation. The same year, I had not yet taken off for an uncertain future and three times less well paid in the astronomical circles of the University of Geneva. I worked in Zug for the firm Landis & Gyr in the Nuclear Physics department. My decision to take flight was not obvious at the time – my father had advised me against it – but a few years later the department was abolished and its employees dispersed to other less rewarding activities. I have generally been lucky in my radical existential decisions...

In June I was on vacation for a few days to visit friends in Lausanne. Seeing my school friend *Michael Reinhardt* who was then sharing home with the actress *Martine Paschoud*. The girl I had one night – after a drunken student night out, scared by driving her home some years earlier with my motorbike a bit too fast. She was called “*Zénobie*” and she had a reputation for being “generous”. It was an opportunity for my friend to get to know her. *Michael* had started studying physics like me. He then opted for mathematics by leading a group of “*Bourbakist*” mathematicians before turning to medicine where he ended up distinguishing himself as a paediatrician.

It was with him that I discovered the party that was being held in Lausanne at the time. He was still very active in the milieu of the *Belles Lettres* student-society and all the local artistic and “marginal” activities – lively, provocative and unusual for that time. He introduced me to the artist *Géa Augsburg* who was sitting in a corner of the street and was doing your minute portrait “for a penny”. Seeing me, he asked me “*where does your archaic face come from?*” - And he did my portrait.



Squirrel

My father passed away on April 11, 1975 at the hospital in Uster in the canton of Zürich. I had come urgently a few days earlier to the nearby village of Mönchaltorf where he lived. On the morning of the 11th, an exceptional off-season snow whitened the landscape – and lightened the sadness of the dark and overcast sky.

A few months later, sent on a mission to the European Observatory in Chile for two years, I took advantage of my free time to visit South America as much as possible. Argentina, nearby and easily accessible, was particularly interesting. The desert Altiplano in the northwest and the tropical forest further east, the arid Pampa bounded by the Andean mountains and the Atlantic in the centre, and the plains of Patagonia extending to the south to the Strait of Magellan, and Tierra del Fuego.

At the foot of the Andes and on the edge of the great Nahuel Huapi lake is the town of San Carlos de Bariloche. A holiday resort modelled on our alpine resorts. Swiss expatriates have left their mark. At the “Casita Suiza” you can eat fondue – very correct – but accompanied by “spätzli con goulash”... and in a store you can find a “chocolate suizo” made locally and quite good.

I went there the first time, a few days before the overthrow of the government of *Isabel Perón* on March 24, 1976 by *General Videla*. There was a certain social tension and economic insecurity, and in the street an individual offered me a good amount of Pesos in exchange for the five dollar bill that I offered. These Pesos then allowed me to spend three nights in a decent hotel, eat a fondue (without goulash!) and buy me a few bars of “suizo” chocolate – not found in Chile. I also took advantage of visiting the forest of *Arrayanes*, golden bark trees endemic to the region on Isla Victoria off Bariloche. This island was also used for the “acclimatization” of foreign plant species. There were hazelnut trees that bore hazelnuts of exceptional size. I picked one up, stuffed it in an auxiliary pocket of my parka and forgot about it.

Returning to Switzerland a year later, I found myself in a suburb of Zürich waiting to meet the notary who took care, in my absence in Chile, of the formalities of my father's succession. It was on the edge of a park. At that moment, a squirrel came down from a nearby tree, ran towards me and climbed up my pants (very sharp claws!) to look at me at waist height. I then took out the Patagonian hazelnut – which he quickly took – and he left as quickly as he had come!

Isla Victoria and lake Nahel Huapi



Arrayanes forest



The Great Mythen

In 1962, my father and I toured central Switzerland for two weeks on the Vespa he had given me the year before. He came from Turkey every year to take his vacation in Switzerland and we visited all parts of the country together, staying without a predefined program in the hostels we met along the way. On this occasion we were on a scooter with minimalist luggage on the luggage rack. He had his "Ikoflex 6x6" camera on him and, on this occasion, he took a photo of the mountains, the Mythen, which dominate the city of Schwyz from the village of Seelisberg on the lake of the 4 cantons. These mountains had impressed me at the time. Three years later, when I was at the Zürich Polytechnic Institute (ETHZ), I went up there three times.

The first time was in the spring of 1965. I was lodging at *Mrs. Zell's* home on the Titlisstrasse. We were 3 tenants. A secondary school teacher - whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, but not that of his partner! She was a German named *Hannelore* – a pretty girl very open to “communication” and who was called by us *Hanneloreley* – alluding to the Nix that wrecked boats on the Rhine by bewitching their navigators...

The other roommate was *Ulrich Schaaf*, an architecture student at ETHZ from Füssen in Bavaria who became my friend. It was with him that I went with my Vespa to the Holzegg alpine chalet and then took the path (steep and vertiginous!) to the summit at 1898m. But shortly before the summit, the very steep path was dangerously snow-covered and we gave up...

The second time was with *Marc Siegfried* the same year. My "fraternal" friend from Zofingen in Aargau met in 1954 and who remained so until his death in 2017. He studied chemistry at the University, and we saw each other regularly at the "Studheim" for lunch. On this occasion I told him about the Great Mythen – and he said to me “*why don't we go there now?*”. The weather was fine and that's what we did. Late in the afternoon we were alone on the summit, and it was magnificent. When he returned at nightfall he was very freshly welcomed by *Inge* – his future wife – who had been waiting for him all evening without knowing where he was!

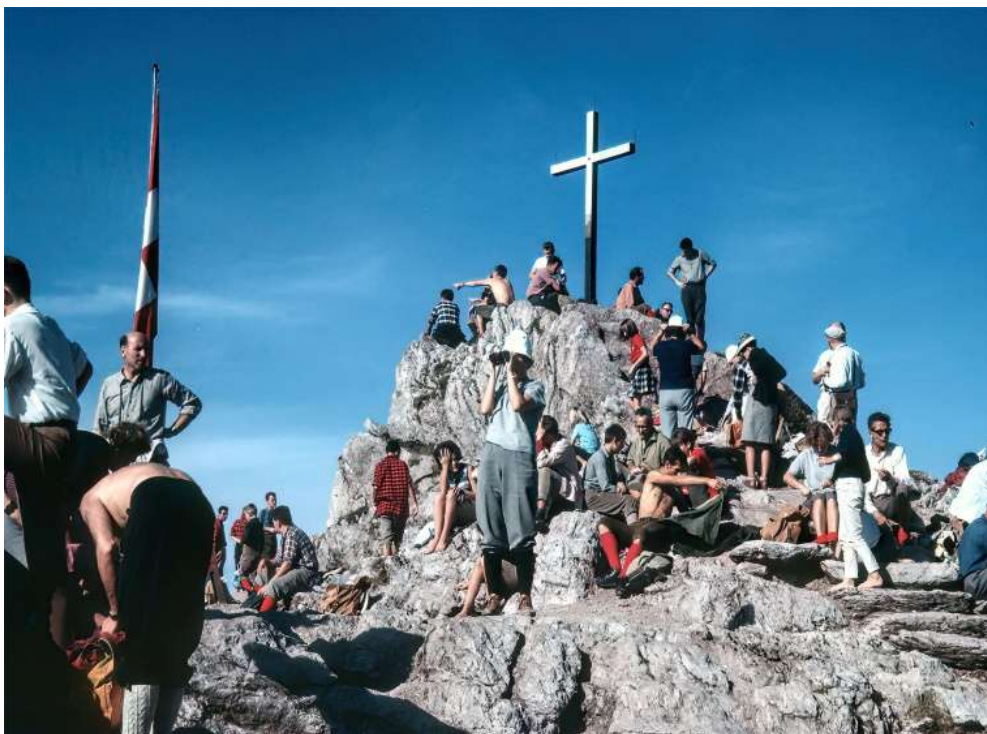
The third time was with my girlfriend from Finland (and future “ex...”) in 1967. It was a Sunday – I was then employed in Zug – and the summit was very popular with weekend hikers.

It is from the summit of the Great Mythen that one enjoys one of the best views of central Switzerland – but not at the end of the week!

The Mythen and Schwytz seen from Seelisberg (1962)



A Sunday in 1967 at the summit



ABC...

It was the age when we know how to count “one – two – three.... A lot! ”. The war was not over yet. Turkey had remained neutral in the conflict, but any passage of a plane in Trebizond, close to the Russian border on the Black Sea, nevertheless worried my parents a lot. It was when my mother terrified me trying to put on the gas mask we were given! But - despite the circumstances, you could buy Nestlé “Tutti Frutti” chocolate bars at the little grocery store that sold everything around the corner! I'm not sure we can find such exotic variety at the same place today. The times were different...

At the end of each year, we went to Bornova, a suburb of Smyrna, to visit the grandparents. There I experienced for the first time some harsh realities of existence: the rescue of a wasp drowning in the fountain – which stung me as a reward for rescuing it! The flashlight bulb found in my grandmother's drawer among the 19th century corset stays which - threaded into the socket of the live lamp "bit" me with its 220V!

But also the memory of the extraordinary adventures of my grandfather – Papa Emile – when he sat me on his lap and told of his life in the French secret services in the Middle East. He – handicapped by his cataract – whom I guided by holding my hand in search of “mushrooms”, as he liked to say, through the alleys of the city. Also – the camels gathered in the dead-end alley leading to my grandparents' house which left countless pellet-shaped droppings as they left – and which my grandmother made me believe was what she served fried and delicious for dinner...

When we were passing through, many people from the more or less distant “Levantine” family came to visit us. On one occasion, a lady (I don't remember her name unfortunately...) who was teaching a children's elementary class for local expatriates, asked me if I knew “*the A, B, C alphabet*”. I replied yes! – And she warmly congratulated me! Though, I did have some misgivings at the time...

Because A,B,C – I knew! But I had no idea of what came next! ...

Not many years later – I knew!



Vespa

The winter of 1962-63 had been particularly harsh with a long period of intense cold. Several lakes had frozen over, notably that of Zürich with the memorable "*Seegfröni*". It was also during this period that I left the Lausanne flat that I shared with my friends *Michael Reinhardt* and *Jean-Luc Dubugnon* – son of the pharmacist of Aubonne – to continue my studies at the ETHZ. I had left my belongings with my school friend *Jeanne Golay* while waiting to pick them up once I was settled in Zürich.

It was in January 1963 that I returned to Lausanne for a few days with my Vespa 125 – the first of three vehicles of the same type – except for a Honda 125 motorcycle – before my first car in 1977.

It was very cold. The Bern - Lausanne road was starting to freeze. On the way back – loaded with a mattress rolled up and strapped to the rear seat, a suitcase with my things on the rack, my Lenco record player between my legs, my military bag on the rack I had set up in front and my army rifle slung over my shoulder – I set off again for Zürich! In the heights of Lausanne I met a policeman who looked at me with astonishment – but when he started to react I was already too far... The road Lausanne – Bern had meanwhile completely frozen and no car was circulating – and I made the trip pleasantly alone with both feet dragging on the ground to stabilize me...

Seven hours later, and at the entrance to Zürich, the rear tire punctured... but the Vespas then had a spare wheel. Once the wheel was changed, the main difficulty was to straighten the heavily loaded scooter. And the rest of the trip proceeded comfortably to my accommodation in Zurich!

On another occasion – in 1964 – I spent the Easter holidays with *Marc Siegfried* and his family in Zofingen in Aargau. After supper, we both went to the local cinema to see a German western – quite folkloric! - adventures of the Apache "Winnetou" based on the books by *Karl May*. When we got back we wondered what to do the next day. I suggested "*we could leave with my Vespa for Lausanne and visit friends – now?*". *Marc* prepared a thermos of hot tea – and off we went! It was very cold! Especially so towards the Chalet-à-Gobet pass before Lausanne in the early morning... And it was *Jeanne* – who we woke up... and who very kindly served us a pleasantly hot breakfast...

The return was done quietly via Neuchâtel. Arrived in Zofingen in the afternoon, *Marc's* mother was very worried - despite the reassuring words of "*Maruja*", the Spanish servant who told her "*Madam, don't worry. They must have found women for sure and will be back soon!*".

I did another similar "Vespaian" trip from Zürich with my Turkish friend *Doan Leflef* who wanted to join his girlfriend *Janine Maerki* in Lausanne in December 1965. On the icy road at Chalet-à-Gobet we had to insinuate ourselves between the cars that could no longer move forward and were scattered in all positions on the way. But that's another story!

Seegfrörni at Zürich – february 1963





Isérables

In February 2010 my friend from studies at the ETHZ, *Gérard Philippin* who, at the end of his course had emigrated to Quebec to teach mathematical physics at Laval University, sent me an unexpected email concerning an encounter made some years ago.

By keeping one of his children in a playground when he was still in Ithaca (USA, in 1976) he had met another father in the same situation. While talking with the latter, whose name was *Murad Taqqu*, also a mathematics teacher, they realized that *Murad* and his brother *David* had been two of my good friends at boarding school in Lausanne in the years 1952-54! Their parents were then living in Iraq. They were also part of those students “expatriated too far” who stayed at the boarding school during the short school holidays and who were occupied by going on outings and excursions.

This was the case at Easter 1953 when we brought our small group of destitute fellows to the village of Isérables, clinging to the steep side of its Valais mountain. I have a fuzzy memory of the cable car ride and a village so unattractive to a 12-year-old child that the “fuzziness” then became “void”. But – the church – was something else!

There were a few "big guys" among us - one of whom knew how to handle the keyboard well. The church being unoccupied, they managed to start the organ and we were treated to a lively concert of "Boogie Woogie" - until the priest arrived to drive us away, supported by the invectives of some inhabitants of the village.... The return to the plain was then made joyfully by the access path while running down in the company of our accompanying master!

It was almost fifty years later that I went back there with my wife José during a visit to Valais. We took the cable car which was still the same – before its renovation in 2009. We shared the small cabin with two ladies in traditional dress and whose fragrance clearly revealed their rural origins. They spoke with a local accent that somewhat evoked the countries of the south. The village had become more interesting to my eyes which had experienced more of the world. It was a pre-election period in the canton and two processions criss-crossed the alleys, scrupulously avoiding each other. One of the two was preceded by some young teenagers with Mongoloid features proudly carrying the banners of the PDC (Christian Democratic Party); the other, which displayed its Radical character more modestly. After taking a quick look inside the church, which seemed to have gained in splendour compared to my memories, we went for a drink at the bistro near the cable car. A number of supporters had taken over the place and when I asked them if they were

PDCs, I was curtly put in order by the Radical who was leading the group... Afterwards, we took over the cabin that we had to operate ourselves to begin the descent.

And – what about *Murad's* brother? *David* continued his career as a researcher in elementary particle physics at the *Paul Scherrer Institute* based in Villigen in Aargau, and in connection with the ETHZ.

A small mountain village is thus associated with Canada and fundamental physics....

Isérables



Rapa Nui

During my first stay in 1975-77 at the European Observatory in the Chilean Atacama desert, the aviation company Lan Chile offered at the end of 1976 a big discount on the tickets for the weekly flight Santiago – Easter Island. It was to revive the tourist attraction that had become non-existent under the military dictatorship. I took the opportunity!

Leaving with the six-hour flight to reach the small 23 km island of Rapa Nui, lost 4000 km away in the middle of the Pacific, I was thinking about the week that was going to follow – but with the hope that the duration would not be extended! A Danish colleague who had preceded me had to stay there for 2 weeks – his scheduled return flight having been requisitioned by high-ranking members of the “Junta” who were returning from their stay in Tahiti!

The native *Juan Luis Pakomio* and his family, met at the airport, put me up for the week. The absence of tourists was welcome. But, in return, you had to do most of the exploration of the island on foot – or on horseback.... Thus, to get to the quarry which had been used for the carving of most of the 900 statues and located at the crater of *Rano Raraku*, 20 km from the village of Hanga Roa, a horse could come in handy. This was my first (and last) ride! After having received an animal – but which *Juan Luis* nevertheless considered too “tempestuoso” – we exchanged it for a good-natured animal who accepted his muzzle to be stroked with resignation. Trotting merrily to the fork which on the left joined the village, and on the right went towards the other end of the island, the horse went to the left.... After a number of pulls on the bridle and other attempts at persuasion - he turned his head, looked at me for a long time with an expression that clearly said “*you - you’ve never been on a horse - and you want to contradict me!*” then set off again, this time in the right direction – but at a leisurely pace! A long ride on an uncomfortable wooden saddle with protruding nail heads – but then rewarded with an exceptional experience among the countless statues in all stages of finish. The horse – more motivated this time – returned with a steady trot. The exploration of the other *Maunga Terevaka* and *Orongo* volcanoes on the island was however done on foot!

My mission at the Observatory from December 1986 to February 87 took place in the company of *José*, who had not yet been to South America. We had decided to visit the island of Rapa Nui at the end of the mission and we had the plane tickets established accordingly. While waiting for the plane in Santiago, we were assailed by relatives of residents of the island who begged

us to take goods with us for their families. We had little luggage and we accepted a large bag filled with preserves and fruit which must have weighed more than twenty kilos! No one was yet talking about booby-trapped baggage! Arrived at Hanga Roa, a 13-14 year old teenager came to collect the bag. I warned him that the package would be very heavy – “*no hay problema!*” he said proudly. The bag unloaded, he went to get it - but remained nailed to the ground!... and an adult of the entourage came to help him take it away.

Much had changed in ten years. The landing strip had been adapted by NASA to serve as an emergency-landing runway for the space shuttle. It was made much wider and extended on both sides of the island by supports on pillars. The airport shack had taken on a semblance of a terminal and a few vehicles were driving through the dirt streets. But the population was the same. The inhabitants offered their accommodation to the few arriving foreign passengers. We were the only ones, and we agreed to stay with *Maria Hey's* family near the group of *Ahu Tahai* statues - seeing which José's first thought was “*How bored must they have been - for doing that !*”. *Maria* and her 11 children of ill-defined paternity led a colourful and friendly community whose life we shared with two young French nurses who had come on vacation from Tahiti, and the elder of whom had worked at the HUG (University Hospital of Geneva) in Geneva!

The week went by very well touristically with even a swim in the sea at the only beach of *Anakena* - in the north of the island - and we learned on our return that the sea there was richly populated by sharks... But that - that's another story!

On the way back to Santiago, the ticket check-in controller looked at our final destination and pronounced with reverie and nostalgia “*Ginevra.... Suiza....*” and tore off the stopover coupons. I dreaded checking hand luggage because it was known that the intensity of X-rays was often incorrectly adjusted and veiled photographic emulsions. But a hidden door leading to the waiting room directly allowed us to sneak in... And – it was only after the flight took off that we realized that the controller had snatched the Santiago-Geneva coupons and not those for Santiago! This was no small matter as our tickets had to be sent back to *Hanga Roa* to be authenticated and returned with the correct coupons on the following week's flight! Luckily we had planned to extend our journey in the south of the country for the next two weeks. But that – that's another story too!



October 1976 - Rano Raraku



February 1987 – Orongo Crater



Waiting for the plane to Santiago (1976)



In the Rano Raraku Crater



Juan Luis Pakomio



Ahu Tahai – comparisons... (1987)



Anakena

Christmas

The Christmas party in the city of Trabzon, located at the eastern end of the Turkish Black Sea, was in the early 1940s very different from ours. The population was almost exclusively Muslim. Apart from *Father Leonardo* and *Fra Angelo* of the Catholic mission and the English consul and his family, we were probably the only Christians present. This did not prevent my friends from coming happily to share the "Noel Bayrami". And they in turn invited me for their "Sünnet" where I could see them - crowned but displaying a very sad face following their circumcision... But I particularly remember one of my first Christmases - "weighted" by one of the gifts received. I was playing with the toy bomber (Europe was still at war..) that could drop "bombs" while my parents were out for a while - when I accidentally swallowed one of the lead bombs I had put in my mouth... When they came back I said "I swallowed a bomb!! ". I still distinctly see their reaction of incomprehension and fright... and the catastrophic arrival of *Dr. Osman* who put me on a diet of bread crumbs soaked in milk until the ammunition was naturally evacuated!

Many other Christmases have passed without strong memories. Except perhaps the first one lived much later in the southern hemisphere in Chile. It was strange to see these "Santas in disguise" at the entrance to department stores when the temperature was scorching. Or the large posters with "Papá Noel" on his sledge pulled by reindeer – and the identical greeting cards – as well as the decorated "fir trees". And it is true that on December 25 – it is pleasantly warmer there!

And what about my very first Christmas? The first one I remember was also in Trabzon. It must have been in 1943 when I had approached my third year of existence. When I woke up, the vision at the foot of my bed was surprising. A few objects that I no longer have a precise memory of were there. But I can still see the two or three inflated balloons – elongated and pale white – hanging from the ceiling. In the midst of the world conflict it was very difficult to procure such trifles of cheerful colour.

And – as I come to think of it – wouldn't my parents have parted with some no less valuable condoms?

One of the « Christmas trees » at La Serena in Chile.



Freedom

My first paid job was in the nuclear physics department of the firm Landis & Gyr in Zug. The work involved designing radioactivity monitoring and alarm systems for the nuclear power plants commissioned at the time (one of our systems caused the *Lucens* reactor to be "buried" in 1969!), developing instruments for measurement and detection of radioactivity for the army as well as systems using radio nuclides in industrial or other processes. The work was not uninteresting, but any publication was signed by the head of the department and not by the researcher! And "the schedule" clashed with my need for freedom. In 1966, for example, the five-day week was not yet practiced everywhere and Saturday morning was not a public holiday...

Living in Zürich I took the train every morning to arrive in time before 7:32. We then crossed the factory gate and the guard stopped us if the time was over and identified us. But then there was the morning break from 9:37 a.m. to 9:59 a.m. in the cafeteria located beyond the gate – which had to be crossed in time on the way back! This "off-gate" situation served me well on a few occasions when I missed the morning train. Arriving during the break, I looked for a croissant in the cafeteria and walked past the guard as if nothing had happened... Having the status of "employee" I should not clock in like the "workers". I was in charge of two laboratories located in the basement and on the 5th floor. What if they said they had been looking for me – I said I was in the other lab...

It was in the summer of 1968 that the sky cleared. While travelling to CERN for the reception and commissioning of an ambient radioactivity monitoring system that had been delivered to them, I met *Guy Janin* – a friend from when I lived in Lausanne. He worked at the Geneva Observatory and introduced me to *Marcel Golay* – director at the time – who suggested that I come and work there as assistant responsible for the mountain observation stations (Jungfrauoch and Gornergrat and later in Chile). Unfortunately, he could not initially offer me more than "the subsistence minimum" in his own words – i.e. a third of my salary in the industry... I accepted!

The "price of freedom" was largely compensated later during the 37 years of professional autonomy that followed!

And – what about industrial nuclear physics? The department was abolished a few years later and the employees were either laid off - or redistributed to other sectors...



Freedom !



Visions

It was before "Hiroshima 1945" - when we still lived in the Ortahisar neighborhood in Trabzon. The apartment located in an old building was on two levels. A dark, narrow hallway of stairs led to the front door one floor below that faced the street. Often, when the doorbell rang, it was beggars begging for a few pennies. My mother then sent me to open. It was much more acceptable if a small child rather than an adult closed the door without further explanation. But there was an exception made for the *Dilsiz* ("without tongue" in Turkish). He was a middle-aged man who only uttered A-A-A...with big gestures. I then shouted "Mom! – it's the *Dilsiz*!! and my mother would come downstairs with some money for him.

This green-painted wooden door also figured in a dreadful recurring dream: Pursued by a pack of hungry wolves I finally managed to cross the threshold – but the door lacked just a few centimetres for me to be able to close it!... and I woke up!

A nightmare experienced in sleep can be forgotten upon awakening, but an awake hallucination is of another nature.

We had an old family Bible, large and illustrated with many engravings. I often looked at them and one that particularly impressed me was of *God* – white-bearded and sporting a stern, accusing gaze who loomed above the clouds. One late afternoon I was sitting with my mother in front of the living room window which overlooked the sunset and distant hills. Large cumulus clouds were developing on the horizon and looked furiously like those in the Bible... I then said to my mother "*look! Look over there! – There is God who hides behind the clouds!*". She replied "*don't speak about God like that, he will get angry*". And, at that moment I saw a dazzling star fall from the sky and burst blindingly in front of the house! My mother had a hard time calming my wailings and cries which she did not understand – because she had not seen anything!

Shortly after that we went to friends for the evening. On the way back we were waiting for a taxi as a storm threatened with its distant thunder. I then thought of this *Good God* who frightened little children – and at the very moment a dazzling and zigzagging lightning from the sky struck at my feet! I had got used to these demonstrations and did not react – and my parents did not see anything...

I don't have any other mind-blowing memories - but maybe I did - and without realizing it?

The hallucinogenic window



Kryisia

Recently watching *Polanski's Knife in the Water* set in the Masurian Lake District, the main character, *Krystyna*, and the short scene of the stolen windscreen wipers reminded me of the year 1968.

When I was still working at the Landis & Gyr firm, the laboratory assistant *Jan Büchlin*, of a Polish mother, had married a Polish girl named *Krystyna* – and whom the familiars called “*Kryisia*”. Her family lived in Katowice in Poland and the couple went there on vacation when the circumstances were favourable. This was the case in the summer of 1968: the Czech Republic had freed itself (temporarily!) from the Soviet embrace and the journey by car was simplified. I joined them for the trip which was to last a month.

A number of preparations were necessary. *Jan* told me to buy Zlotis (Polish currency) at the exchange office at Zürich station. I received a small jackpot for a hundred francs (Without suspecting that this sum would be enough for us for almost a month in the country!...). The man at the counter seemed happy to get rid of it but strongly warned me that importing into Poland was strictly prohibited and great care had to be taken! *Jan* took care of them by hiding them in the springs of the bonnet of his car and in other ill-defined places...

Kryisia, on the other hand, made a number of merchandise purchases. She was a smoker, but I found that she had bought an odd number of cartons of American cigarettes. I realized later that these products greatly facilitate customs clearance...

The departure took place on a Friday evening. *Jan* wanted to make the trip in one go – non-stop – to arrive in Katowice the next day! We saw Vienna pass from the highway in the morning and *Kryisia* got rid of a first batch of Americans crossing the Czech border in a joyful atmosphere. The crossing of the Czech Republic was accompanied by popular Polish songs: *Kryisia* had a very beautiful voice – when she was younger she had been selected to be part of the Mazowsze ballet choir but her mother had objected because “*the girls in the group led a bad life !*”. And she kept telling us about the “*Barszcz*” soup and the *Carp* with dill that we could eat at her house. “*Nothing comparable in Switzerland! – apart from fondue!*” Then long formalities at the Czech-Polish border and receipt of cards on which the minimum official change of ten dollars a day had to be certified. The rest of the journey to Katowice was done quite quickly – in a state of great fatigue...

An enthusiastic and warm welcome by the *Kozyra* family. I was introduced on occasion, and with some insistence, to the youngest daughter *Maogoshia*. A

pleasant young woman who was a little prudish and not very talkative – but who had learned French! And we left it there.

We left a few days later for Krakow – after clearing a drunk who was lying on the ground in front of the car. Then visit of Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains in the south of the country. We ate *Barszcz* and Carp in the restaurant of a hotel whose architecture testified to an aristocratic past, in the company of a team of slightly disoriented workers who had been lodged there by their factory for their official holidays. Ascent north to Czestochowa (sung at length by *Krysia* during the trip!) and to Lodz where we were the only guests occupying the local youth hostel.

While waiting for *Barszcz* and Carp to be served by unmotivated waiters at a restaurant in central Warsaw, one gazed at the Palace of Culture – a grand building in the socialist realism style that some locals scoffed at. We went up there with a series of elevators and the last floor was only accessible by a staircase so narrow that it was difficult to cross despite the massive concept of the architecture - but the view of the city - without any other tall building at the time – “was worth it because you couldn’t see the tower! “

On the way to Gdansk on the Baltic Sea we visited the Masurian lakes where *Polanski* made his first major film. While walking along one of the lakes *Krysia* was enthusiastic about the beauty of the landscape and the beaches. A stretch of gray water under a low sky of the same colour and beaches made up of pebbles and shale dotted with rocks. She got upset when I communicated my impression to her in this way...

In Gdansk, there was *Barszcz* - but no Carp! The city was already at that time extremely beautiful. Few tourists – apart from northern Baltic residents who came with their ships, disembarked, took a brief look at the city, stocked up on plenty of vodka and then returned home on their “drunken boat”. Then return to the south via Torun. Very beautiful city and cultural centre where lived *Copernicus* - who rectified around 1512 and at his expense - our vision of the world.

The month of vacation over – the return. Crossing the Polish border where *Krysia* charmed the customs officers with her exuberance and the remaining cartridges of American cigarettes and who forgot to check our exchange declarations which had remained blank... But her charm failed at the Swiss border when she wanted – out of ancestral pride – to present her Polish passport, and that she had to resign herself to taking out her Swiss passport in the face of the insensitivity of the Swiss customs officer...

A few days after our return to Switzerland, we learned that Russia had undertaken to “normalize” the Czech Republic in its customary way – and we were glad we were no longer in Poland!

And the wipers?

One – but only one – was stolen from us during our visit to the Masurian lakes...



Krysia

Palace of Culture at Warsaw



Town Hall of Gdansk



Monkeys

The Chilean Atacama Desert is still the place with the darkest night sky on our planet. This is the reason why the most important observatories in the world are established there, including that of the ESO (European Southern Observatory) on the mountain of La Silla. In 1975, the Geneva Observatory received authorization to build a dome there, initially equipped with a small 40 cm telescope dedicated to astronomical photometry. I went to install it – before carrying out 18 other observation missions there with many colleagues until June 1997.

The austral winter sky is very spectacular there during a moonless night. The central part of the Milky Way is visible in its entirety and passes at the zenith, while with us it only touches the southern horizon at the same time - during our summer.

I can still see myself – having left the observatory dining hall in the dark with my flashlight to join my telescope by a stony path of a few hundred meters in order to begin the observations.

The light issuing from tens of billions of stars and which took up to a few tens of thousands of years to reach us forms at every moment in the sky the image of our galaxy – the Milky Way. And this vision is very “local”. Our most powerful telescopes detect some tens of billions of other similar and much more distant galaxies to the limits of their resolving power.

Our observation of the Cosmos has made great progress in recent decades. But with new knowledge came even more puzzles that challenge what seemed so clear in the context of contemporary physics.

To quote the recent remark of cosmologist and Astronomer Royal *Martin Rees* of the University of Cambridge: “...*Indeed, we cannot even be sure we understand the answer – just as quantum theory is too difficult for apes... Physical reality at its deepest level could be so profound that its elucidation would have to wait for post-human species – however depressing or uplifting that may seem, depending on taste.*”

My eyes having now become accustomed to the darkness, I turn off my flashlight because the light of the stars and the Milky Way distinctly illuminates the rest of the path to follow.

Tens of billions of stars of the Milky Way above the Observatory



The Milky Way rising over the Andes. The two bright stars at the top right are Alpha and Beta Centauri. Alpha (the lower one) is our close neighbour 4.367 light years away. It is actually a double system composed of two stars similar to our Sun. Even closer to us is the third component of the system, named Proxima, 4.244 light years away but much less luminous and is thus invisible to the naked eye.

Proxima



Alpha and Beta Centauri. Beta, the bluest, is a much more distant star – about 390 light years away. It is actually about 7000 times more luminous than Alpha but appears similar because of its greater distance. The faint red star Proxima – marked by the arrow and shown in an enlarged inset – is actually the closest star to us and is part of the Alpha Centauri system.



Setting of the Milky Way over the Pacific Ocean.

Elephants

I left the confined environment of an industrial physics laboratory in Zug for a part-time position with the *Jungfrauoch International Scientific Station Foundation* in January 1969. An existential choice - less money – but much more freedom !

The Station, located at an altitude of 3,460 m and facing the Aletsch glacier, was established in 1931 and was initially intended for research in medicine, biology, geology and glaciology. In 1937, the *Sphinx* building was inaugurated, located 130 m higher and accessible by an elevator on the rock of the same name on the mountain ridge connecting the *Mönch* to the *Jungfrau*. It housed a weather station, a cosmic radiation measurement facility of the University of Bern and a solar spectroscopy laboratory of the University of Liège, Belgium.

In 1968 the Geneva Observatory added a large astronomical dome to the roof with a telescope equipped with a 76 cm mirror and intended for stellar photometry.

As “astronomical assistant” to the Foundation, I was then responsible for the Station’s astronomical installations as well as part of the Foundation’s public relations. But the majority of my activity took place in Geneva as a researcher in astrophysics using the data thus acquired via stellar photometry.



The Sphinx Rock with the observatory in front of the Aletsch Glacier.

The Scientific Station at the base of the rock and located facing south is very comfortably furnished and run by a couple of caretakers who live there permanently. Researchers, on the other hand, must take care of their own supplies and prepare their meals.

It was under these conditions (and later on at *Gornergrat*) that I did my apprenticeship as a chef cook, which I happily practice today as a full-time retiree!



The Sphinx seen from the Mönch (1970).



The dining and living room.

A very pleasant place in the Station is its library – meeting room. Large windows give a view of the glacier framed by the *Jungfrau* and the *Trugberg* and overlooking the glacial confluence of *Konkordiaplatz* with the *Eggishorn* pyramid in the distance flanking the Rhône valley.



The library.

The layout of the room has not changed much (even now!) since its design in 1931. The furniture is original with the tables covered with slate slabs and - as throughout the building - the walls are covered by alpine Arolle-pine (*Pinus Cembra*) wood.

The shelves in the room contain a large collection of old publications dating from the 1930s – 1940s and dealing for example with *hypoxia* syndrome or other physiological subjects linked to the effects of high altitude, to local geology and glaciology.

Sometimes also concerning less expected subjects such as the importance that mushrooms can have in avoiding nutritional deficiencies of Alpine populations in times of war – or also the difficulty encountered by a researcher whose mission was to measure the body temperature of free-roving elephants in the African savannah... Entertaining readings when bad weather did not allow astronomical observations.

The magnificent landscape made it easier to withstand the harsh conditions of night-time work while acquiring measurements with the telescope. For a duration of around twelve hours without any respite in winter with temperatures reaching -35°C . Not to mention the few extra hours needed to prepare the observations of the following night. This left us a little time to cook – and get some sleep....

Fortunately the Alpine weather graced us occasionally with a good snowstorm!

Night views from the Sphinx Observatory



The Aletsch Glacier by moonlight. The bright “star” on the left is the planet Jupiter. The lights of Turin and Milan illuminate the clouds on the horizon.



The constellations of Canis Major with its bright star Sirius on the left, Orion in the center, Taurus and its Pleiades cluster above the Jungfrau – by moonlight.



The telescope (1985)



Snow removal from the dome by my colleague Bernard Pernier before opening it (1969).



Visit of King Baudouin of Belgium. With my colleague Gerald Goy who had studied with him at the Collège Calvin when he was educated in Geneva in the late 1940s - and who some of the students called "Baudruche" ("balloon" in French) without fully realizing who he was...

Responsibility for public relations also involved leading or participating in the organization of frequent visits to the Station by journalists, other scientists or notables visiting the country. King Baudouin's "state visit" had been the most delicate to carry out with its protocol requirements, bodyguards and plainclothes police officers as well as journalists who sought by the most clever means to approach their prey...

Later my professional activity led me increasingly to the *Gornergrat* observatory, and finally to the *European Southern Observatory* in the *Atacama* desert in *Chile*. And that – that's another story!

But - by the way - how did the biologist measure the body temperature of wild African elephants?

He cautiously followed the herd at a minimum distance – and every time an elephant dropped a dropping – he ran to stick his thermometer deep into it!