In celebration of the life of Professor János Aczél

BRUCE EBANKS AND CHE TAT NG

Source of photo <https://unideb.hu/hu/node/1282>

From the archive of the Department of Pure Mathematics, University of Waterloo.

We thank the editors of *Aequationes Mathematicae* for the invitation to write a covering article for this special volume dedicated to Professor János Aczél on the occasion of his 95th birthday. With much sadness we learned from his beloved daughters that he passed away unexpectedly several days after celebrating his birthday, and before we could present him with this volume.

We wish to recall some of the personal stories he told us orally over the years. Although our memories are not perfect, these are our best recollections.

János found his love in mathematics, and particularly in the theory of functional equations. His school years came at a time when Europe was in the thick of war. Universities were disrupted and not operating normally. The lack of resources put teachers and students in a very difficult situation. There János showed his leadership even at a young age. He joined forces with four good friends and together they organized seminars and delivered lectures voluntarily to keep the academic programs going. The four became his life long close friends. We think that during this very early stage of his career he collected and digested a massive volume of literature on functional equations which later laid the ground for his first book (in German). He knew many languages, and the literature assimilated for his book included papers in several of them. He had a practical side as well; his first employment was with an industry where his role was accountant and statistician.

At the end of WWII, he led a group of brilliant students in Hungary. There they advanced the use of functional equations in connection with information

theory. He also kept close cooperations with Polish mathematicians, and with Professor Marek Kuczma, founder of the Polish school of functional equations, at the Silesian University, in particular.

Professor Ralph Stanton invited him to come to the University of Waterloo. He settled down and brought his family there. His wife Susan helped with the project of building up a subject classification index and bibliography database for functional equations. He founded *Aequationes Mathematicae* and set up an editorial office at Waterloo. The bibliography index Susan helped prepare was published and has been updated periodically in *Aequationes Mathematicae*.

During his tenure at Waterloo, he brought a continuous stream of scholars to the university. Some of them came to Canada to attend the International Symposium on Functional Equations, some came to Waterloo as visiting scholars for a few months, and some came as faculty members. The lectures they delivered broadened and deepened the subject areas. He wrote a mini-course type survey article on webs and quasigroups. Amongst his doctoral students at Waterloo, Mark Taylor carried that torch. The two of us were more interested in information theory. John Baker specialized in analysis. János always allowed his students to develop naturally.

On his way to attend a ceremony where he was awarded an honorary degree at the University of Debrecen, he and the second author walked through a public park. During that stroll he said that the most important thing for a teacher to do is to encourage his students to publish their new results in their own names, no matter how small, and he practiced what he preached. No matter how (in)significant a result we obtained, he enthusiastically persuaded us to present it at research meetings.

He continued to write papers for many years after his retirement in 1993. Scholars continued to send questions to him and seek his aid and direction. His last few papers were written on cognitive and behavioral sciences with Duncan Luce, Tony Marley, and the second author.

He was the driving force in the establishment in 1962 of an annual International Symposium on Functional Equations and its continuation to the present day. The study of functional equations has spread around the world to many countries, due in no small part to the untiring efforts of János. His accomplishments and leadership have been recognized by universities in several countries with the award of honorary degrees. He will be missed by many, but his spirit lives on as an inspiration.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Bruce Ebanks and Che Tat Ng
University of Waterloo
Waterloo
Canada
e-mail: ctng@uwaterloo.ca

Received: March 27, 2020