



Editorial

From Antonio's former students

It was December 2004: Antonio's 60th birthday was approaching and we, as his former students, were wishing very much to dedicate him one page in this volume. Hence, during the Christmas' holidays, we planned a top secret reunion at the Department of Mathematics in Palermo. We all agreed on one thing: we wished to contribute with a *special preface*, that would focus on some of Antonio's aspects that only we, his students, are probably fortunate enough to know. We wished to tell about his kind attitude that cannot be separated from his outstanding scientific profile. Perhaps this is what makes Antonio a "milestone" for us (this is incredible... Everyone used the same term to "define" him!): Antonio looks at everybody in front of him with extreme attention to the person and to all his aspects and qualities. This is the way Antonio himself uses to tell us about his "maestro" and friend M.P. Schützenberger or about his best times at the Istituto di Cibernetica in Arco Felice, telling us many funny stories with his peculiar sense of humor and acting capabilities.

We all feel that being his students is a great privilege. But, how can we tell people about all the times that Antonio surprises us and provides us with renewed enthusiasm for our research? We all remember the many times when some of us got stuck on a research problem and Antonio would say: "There should be something on this subject in some LITP technical report back in 1987". Then he looked at several stacks of papers on his desk or his shelves and said: "It should be in this stack". Then, he started going through this stack of papers and magically took one paper out of it: needless to say, it contained exactly the solution to the problem! Or when, in the biology laboratories, looking at shelves displaying jars with strange insects, seeds or leaves preserved with formalin, we felt a bit uncomfortable with our theorems and counterexamples. Then Antonio used to say: "We should put our examples in a jar, with some labels like *Example of language with property X* or *Thue-Morse word, disproving conjecture Y*, so as to find them when needed!".

Finally, when the top secret meeting in that December afternoon in Palermo was over, we realized that we had spent most of the time just telling each other our respective nice memories and stories about working with Antonio. We all really had a great time, but we were still left with the problem of writing all those memories in a way that would be really suited to Antonio... Indeed, he does not like "commemorations" at all.

After a while, we all agreed that the best thing would be to write in the simplest way what we all felt:

Many thanks Antonio for everything and our hearty wishes for your birthday!!!

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