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Most of us know Rudi as a great information theorist. Today, I wish to mention some other things that make him so special, such as his insatiable curiosity, funny character, and ability to reach to different scientific fields and many people.

I never worked with Rudi but visited him once in Bielefeld in 1993 when I was with Humboldt Foundation. We also met at many conferences. One of these encounters stands out for me. It was in Sweden in 1993 when Rudi offered me a ride back to Bielefeld. He, Ning Cai, and I soon arrived in Copenhagen, where we learned that Rudi wants to show us the city. It was an amazing intellectual tour de force. For two good hours Rudi guided the two of us through the narrow streets talking about history with such a detail as if he were present there at the times of Hans Christian Andersen.

In fact, Rudi was always much interested in many different subjects. He got a very rigorous classic education in languages, philosophy, and mathematics and it took him a few years to choose mathematics instead of philosophy. He kept reading and refreshing Encyclopedie Britannica through all his life. This curiosity and versatility have also motivated his research. For many of us, he is foremost an information theorist. Some mathematicians will consider him an equal authority in number theory or combinatorics. Yet, he also made some seminal contributions to coding theory. Jointly with Mark Pinsker and Leonid Bassalygo, he opened the whole new area of codes correcting localized errors. Within a few years, the three of them essentially closed the field by constructing exact bounds, almost optimal codes, and decoding algorithms with polynomial complexity.

This brings me to his outstanding ability to work with a huge variety of people. Throughout his life, he had many dozens of long-term visitors in Bielefeld. From the former Soviet Union alone, there were tens of visitors coming from all scientific centers (Moscow, Novosibirsk, Yerevan, and S.-Petersburg).

Finally, Rudi had a great sense of humor and an ability to make things look funnier. At the international conference in Tashkent in Uzbekistan in 1984, many participants got food-poisoned. Unaware of this, all went for a long 4-hour bus trip to the ancient city of Samarkand. Outside of Tashkent, the life was quite simple at those times, to say the least, and normal public amenities were sometimes almost non-existent. Many participants were in desperate need of public restrooms but most laughed when Rudi – sick himself – declared that there was no other conference with such an urgent call for papers.

Last time, I talked to Rudi in September 2010 in Dublin. There was the same twinkle in his eye and the same excitement about his new grant and the new problems to be solved. Rudi carried this love for research and curiosity through all his life. To me, he always was a Renaissance man of many gifts and talents, and I will remember this feeling of fun and excitement that he could bring to his own life and the life of others.