

International Journal of Modern Physics A
Vol. 24, No. 30 (2009) 5531–5537
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**MAURICE JACOB:
A FEW PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS**

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Received 18 November 2009

In memory of our colleague and friend, Maurice Jacob (1933–2007).

I met Maurice for the first time in October 1953, when we were both admitted to Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He was coming from Lyon, and I from Algiers. Ecole Normale Supérieure is one of the *grandes écoles*, like Ecole Polytechnique or Ecole Centrale, to which students are admitted following a very selective competition for which they prepare, after the end of high school, during a two-year period spent at special institutions called *classes préparatoires* (in Paris for Maurice, in Algiers for me). At Ecole Normale all fields are represented in the humanities and sciences. Maurice and I were studying physics. We spent four years there in a wonderful atmosphere, taking our meals in the same dining room, attending the same lectures at the Sorbonne as well as at Ecole Normale, going to concerts and theaters, spending hours discussing various questions. Maurice was a very close friend, full of energy and enthusiasm, always ready to help people and to share his ideas.

At that time, modern physics was not really taught at the university. We attended a few special lectures given in Saclay by French physicists like Albert Messiah and Anatole Abragam who were back in France after spending a few years in the US or the UK. During one year, Maurice and I, together with about 20 other students, went to Saclay every week to attend lectures on quantum mechanics, magnetic resonance and nuclear physics, given by Albert Messiah, Anatole Abragam and a few other people, like Claude Bloch. We were also both admitted to the 1955 summer session of the Les Houches Summer School in the French Alps. Together with about 40 other students from all over the world, we spent two months there, in July and August of 1955, in small chalets in front of the Mont Blanc, attending lectures given by the best physicists of the world, like Julian Schwinger, George



Fig. 1. Photo of Julian Schwinger (left) and George Uhlenbeck (right), taken during the 1955 session of the Les Houches Summer School.

Uhlenbeck, Wolfgang Pauli, Norman Ramsey and Charles Townes. (As an example, the photo above shows Schwinger and Uhlenbeck.) This was where we became highly motivated to continue doing physics.

At the end of the fourth year spent at Ecole Normale, we had to pass an exam called *agrégation*, which gave one the qualification to teach in high schools. Maurice's father (whose first name was also Maurice) invited me to spend the Easter vacation with Maurice in their cottage near Briançon. He was himself a renowned physics professor in one of the best high schools of Lyon, and he wanted to prepare us for the exam that we had to pass a few weeks later. I have wonderful recollections of those few days spent with Maurice's family and of the very warm and friendly atmosphere that I found there. From that time onward, I kept close relations with Maurice's father. It was always a pleasure for me to meet him when I was in Lyon or when he came to Paris. My wife, Jacqueline, was born in Lyon and she also knew very well Maurice's father, with whom she passed exams when she was in high school. We were very sad when Maurice's father died a few years ago.

After passing the exam and before leaving Ecole Normale to perform our military obligations, which lasted quite long at that time because of the Algeria war, Maurice and I, together with all the other students of our physics class, made a one-week trip to southwestern France. This was a tradition at Ecole Normale. The director of the *ecole* went with the students and each year the group visited a different part of France. We spent a wonderful week, visiting several factories and sightseeing, and

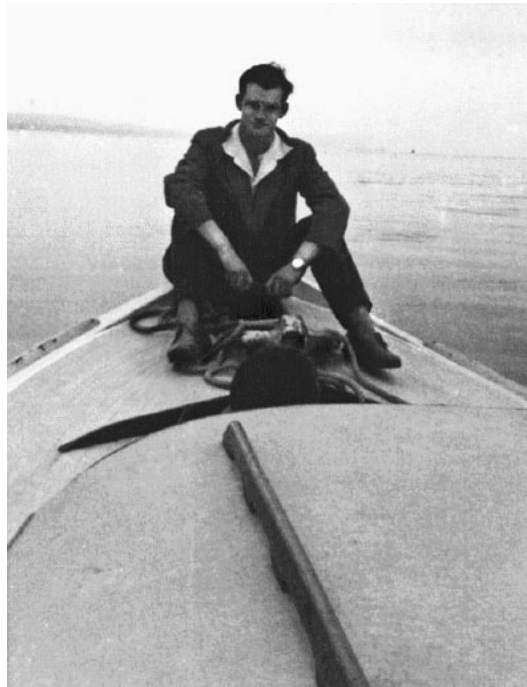


Fig. 2. Photo of Maurice during a boat trip in the southwest of France.

also went to nice restaurants near Bordeaux which offered excellent wine. Maurice was full of drive, always joking and telling good stories. I have found a photo of him taken during a boat trip (photo 2).

We then took different paths in science. Maurice chose high energy physics and spent some time in the US working with Gian-Carlo Wick before getting a permanent position at CERN, where he became, a few years later, head of the theoretical physics division. I chose atomic physics and optics, and I did a PhD with Alfred Kastler and Jean Brossel at Ecole Normale, before getting a position at the University of Paris and then at the Collège de France. We were no longer living in the same place, but we were always very happy when we had occasions to meet again with our families and our children. Maurice was always enthusiastic about the new developments in his research field, explaining them to me with great talent. He traveled a lot to attend various scientific meetings and to convince the European countries to support CERN, which is a wonderful example of international scientific collaboration. Maurice accepted several important responsibilities, like the chairmanship of the European Physical Society. He was a very generous man, always ready to help and to bring his own contributions to a collective work.

For my 60th birthday my wife, Jacqueline, organized a surprise for me. We were supposed to spend two days in a family house of Jacqueline near Lyon. When we arrived there, I was totally surprised to see several members of my family and

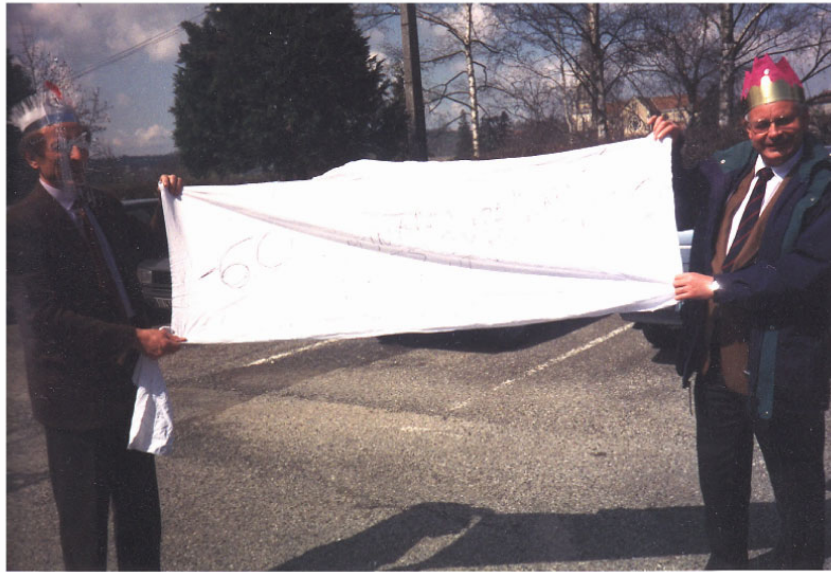


Fig. 3. Welcome reception at the station for my 60th birthday. Maurice (right) and another close friend, Claude Robert (left), are holding a welcome panel.

close friends waiting for us at the station. Maurice and his wife, Lise, were there. I was so happy! This was the best birthday gift I could have imagined. Photo 3 was taken at the station; when we arrived Maurice (right) and another friend from Ecole Normale, Claude Robert (left), were waiting for me with a welcome panel. Photo 4 was taken during the birthday dinner in a restaurant close to our house. Maurice is sitting on the right and Lise on the left. The day after, we took a walk in the countryside, and photo 5 shows three very close friends, former students of Ecole Normale, very happy to be together.

A small scientific colloquium was also organized in Paris for my 60th birthday. Maurice came to attend it, and photo 6 shows him having a discussion with Norman Ramsey during the lunch break.

A few years later, Maurice retired from CERN. I came to a symposium that CERN organized in his honor. Photo 7 shows both of us at the end of this symposium, and, as always, very happy to be together.

When his terrible disease started, Maurice fought against it with a great courage that impressed all his relatives and friends. He found great support from his family. He was proud of his daughter, Irène, a great movie actress, saying that he was so happy to see that she was better-known than him. He had good periods when he was in good condition and bad periods when he was suffering a lot. He came to Paris occasionally. Photo 8 shows him with Jacqueline in our home during one of those visits. It is difficult to believe that Maurice is no longer with us. We all miss him enormously.



Fig. 4. Birthday dinner. Maurice is sitting on the right and his wife, Lise, on the left.



Fig. 5. Photo taken during a walk in the countryside. I am with Maurice (left) and Claude Robert (right).

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Fig. 6. Maurice (right) having a discussion with Norman Ramsey (left) during the lunch break of a colloquium organized in Paris for my 60th birthday.



Fig. 7. Maurice with me at the end of a symposium organized by CERN for his retirement.



Fig. 8. Photo of Maurice with my wife, Jacqueline, taken at home during one of his last visits to Paris.