



On 6 August 2011, Henri-Pierre Garnir succumbed to protracted illness at the age of 61. Unfortunately, he did not even reach to enjoy full retirement, although he did enjoy seeing his and his wife's, Francine Monjoie's, son grow up and found his own family and their grandchildren.

Beyond his family, Henri will be missed by a wide community of physics colleagues. After being trained in nuclear physics and being employed at the institute of experimental nuclear physics (IPNE) of the University of Liège (Belgium) in the late 1970s, he switched his activities to beam-foil spectroscopy, mostly using the smallish local ion accelerators before traveling and taking part in experiments at larger machines elsewhere, too.

The late 1970s saw the rise of affordable laboratory computers, for example the memorable Apple IIe, and that device and its successors sparked with Henri. He mastered the tricks of how to achieve maximum performance of (in hindsight) awfully limited small computers, built control systems for the laboratory, devised superb data handling and evaluation programs, and spread his knowledge through teaching in the laboratory and collaborations. In fact, he shied away from high profile positions and avoided to pose as a figurehead (not quite successfully, as his years of presidency and several periods of vice presidency of the Belgian Physical Society attest), but his practical help to so many people gave him insight and connections to many people and places without playing politics. An example is his work for the European Group on Atomic Spectroscopy: He was involved with organizing the EGAS meetings at Liège and at Bruxelles, and for more than a decade he served as the webmaster of the organization - almost behind the scenes, but actually providing a first line of contact for many people seeking information and contact.

Henri cared little for status of his own. Although he steadily rose in the hierarchy up to the professorial level, his personality was independent of those designations. He taught, researched and helped people, mentored graduate students and provided a supportive laboratory setting for the evolution and development of the nuclear institute into various applied branches, ranging from space sciences to material studies for car race engines and to archaeometry. Theses written in those fields will help the institute (nowadays named IPNAS) to carry on - and to employ young physicists.

Belgian atomic physics has been in financially dire straits for a long time. There is the legendary story of the EGAS meeting at Liège with a reception by the mayor for which the city had no money whatsoever to serve any refreshments. The conference organizers had been promised subsidies from some source for their own reception, but the money did not arrive in time. So the organizing team bought supplies on their own money and made sandwiches for everybody. When, long after, some funds eventually materialized, the money was used over the years to subsidize a joint pub visit of examiners, examinees, students and friends after each doctoral examen. Equipment often had to be scrounged. For example, an English-made cryogenically cooled CCD camera had been acquired by the university of Lund and then used in experiments in Japan. Eventually it found its way to Garnir's laboratory who found the device not working as well as expected, and the surviving manuals did not give useful clues. Henri dug in, phoned to England, did systematic tests, detected an unexpected sensitivity to air humidity which apparently influenced a heat flow problem which in turn led to discovering a missing wire connection to the CCD chip which he restored. Lo! and behold, the repaired camera became reliable and possibly worked better than ever before.

The atomic physics community has lost a most friendly and extremely helpful hub.

Elmar Träbert  
Ruhr-Universität Bochum