

The Early Days of Moriond.

Dear colleagues and friends, Mario Greco and I have experienced how difficult and daring it was for Tran Thanh Van to start the first series of winter physics meetings. We lived the fascinating atmosphere of the first years of Moriond many times together. We suspect that only a few of you know what happened during those early times - the first Moriond Rencontre was 35 years ago -, of the difficulties that were encountered, of the beautiful goal that was reached. The success of this endeavor is totally due to Tran Thanh Van. Therefore, Mario and I have taken the initiative of honoring Van with this Session on the occasion of his 65th birthday, and to include in this Session an introductory "recollection" speech of mine.

Why am I the speaker? Because I am as senior (actually, a bit more) as Van is, and I was a frequent attendant of the early Moriond meetings. However, in preparing this speech I realized that my seniority, that made me a candidate speaker, should also have been used as a reason against me: I remember only weak traces of so many facts that I would like to tell you about! I have forgotten even the joke that was famous at Moriond and that I had to repeat inevitably every year at the toast time of the gala dinner. However, by thinking hard and talking to some old friends I was able to reconstruct part of the events of the first Moriond years. Van is here and I rely on him to correct my biggest mistakes.

The Rencontres de Moriond owe their name to the small mountain village where the first meeting was held. I believe that the first meeting in 1966 was a sort-of extended group meeting of the Orsay people, the purpose being to merge together local experimentalists and theorists. I was not there. I had heard of only one Italian physicist who was. The following year in January 1967 Vittorio Silvestrini, a Frascati physicist and close friend of mine, called me at CERN and simply said: "Guess where I am? It is a beautiful place, great snow and hot physics discussions among a few friendly colleagues! Grab your transparencies and get here!" I found it hard to understand what that was, but he insisted and I went.

I called Vittorio yesterday and told him of this special event where we honor Van by remembering the old days. He asked me to extend his warm wishes to Kin and Van, and helped me to refresh my memory.

The 1967 meeting was in Courchevel. There were about 40 physicists in a small hotel, L'Etoile des Neiges. We worked 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours before dinner, with plenty of time to ski in between and a big group dinner at night.

Courchevel is a very "chic" place where Brigitte Bardot used to go skiing. Some of us ran into her on a slope, a lucky one. The hotel was a small and isolated building at mid height on a ski slope. It could be reached only with a snow car. However, many of us were strong and young and we could

carry our luggage uphill in deep snow. There was lots of snow. Those of us whose room was on the lower floor could put on their skis and start skiing from the hotel window. After a short trip one would get down to the bottom of a ski lift.

The style of the Rencontre was dictated by Tran. He would stand at the lecture room entrance at the start of the working time, and note the names of the attendants. If somebody dared not to show up on time, he would approach him and very seriously invite him to obey the rules. I soon became part of the hosting team, and I helped with great pleasure in this security control job.

At dinner time we arranged the table as close as possible to each other, and chattered, laughed and shouted as if we were a big family.

At Courchevel I got to know and became a friend of many distinguished colleagues and of their companions. Besides Van and Kim, I remember Pierre Lehman, Andre` Martin, Alfonse Capella, Peter Sonderegger, Michel Gourdin. Surely there were many others that I don't remember at this moment. In that and in the following Moriond meetings I built up much of my close personal relationships with people in my field. It is at Moriond that I met first Arnon Dar and Clem Heusch who are good friends of mine and who became regular hosts of La Thuile.

The following two years the Rencontre was held at Tignes and, I believe, at Verbier. Too bad, maybe the hotel rate at Courchevel was too high. Van asked me, among others to help raise interest in Italy for the Rencontre and to build up a good scientific program. I was happy to help, also Tignes and Verbier were very attractive ski resorts. However, soon I encountered a serious problem. Most of the local INFN Directors were very skeptical that one could do serious science in such attractive vacation resorts. They felt that it was an excuse to have a nice time and to charge the cost to the Institute. Eventually, I went to Rome and talked to the President of INFN, I cannot remember whether it was Claudio Villi or still Giorgio Salvini. My argument was that I had experienced enough during the Courchevel edition to be able to certify that rather than being an excuse, it was an honest and realistic way of making a profitable use of the time spent in a physics meeting. I stated that, rather than Moriond being an excuse to have a good time at the cost of the Institute, one might suspect that the huge international conferences could be an excuse for some to tour the world. I emphasized the merit of living an entire week in close and friendly relationship with other colleagues, and how this was important for young people. I was able to convince him.

Indeed, the Moriond meetings had some special features which made the value of the Rencontres unique:

- each participant was due to give a talk;
- the graduate students had the same reception, allocated time and dignity as the Nobel Laureates;

- the relations among people were primarily personal. Scientific discussions, which were often very hot indeed, followed naturally as part of the conversations after people had gotten to know each other and felt at ease together.

I believe that these are still now distinctive features of the Rencontres. We should highly praise Tran for this.

After Verbier there was La Plagne, Flaine and Meribel. At the hotel Le Lac Bleu of Meribel the Rencontres stopped for several years.

Those were golden years. The hotel was just large enough to host the Rencontre, that had grown to maybe 80 people.

The dinner tables were long, rectangular tables of rough solid wood, which could barely accommodate all of us and were arranged very close to each other. The light was provided mostly by candle. The wine was available self-serve by drawing from a barrel in a room corner. Messier Raiberti was a great landlord. He became a friend of ours. He used to sit with us at the dinner breaks, and sing with us after dinner. Several times we played music and we danced after dinner. Mr. Raiberti was a great partner and an enthusiastic dancer. Mario Greco reminded me of an impressive episode starring Michel Gourdin and Mr. Raiberti. One evening we were dancing with the music using an old record player that a nice Orsay secretary had carried from Paris. It was about midnight and Michel Gourdin wanted to sleep and could not stop us from making lots of noise. He grasped the record player and ran to his room and locked himself inside. We were all upset, but Mr. Raiberti was mad. Banging Michel's door did not help. Then he removed a hunting gun which was hanging on a dining room wall, went upstairs to Michel's room, crashed down the door with a big kick, pointed the gun towards Michel and asked for the record player. Michel was shaking terrified: we got the record player, but I suspect that we did not continue dancing for long.

The Moriond evenings were also occasions for intense discussions on social problems. Van was desperate about the ongoing war in Vietnam, and was keen to find ways to help his poor and unlucky Country. He thought that we could help to create a feelings of friendship or at least of mutual tolerance between the North and the South by holding a particle physics conference there. At those times it was not possible. We know that eventually he was able to realize his dream in more recent years. This is Tran Thanh Van, always in love with his Country even if he has been forced to stay away from it for most of his life.

He was able to do something to help us to know bits of the sweet Vietnam culture. He hosted for several years a concert of a musician from Vietnam. This guy would play with forks and spoons and glasses, and always smile. This nice person and skillful musician brought us to know a bit of the folklore of Vietnam from close up.

One year a Palestinian physicist was among us, while Arnon Dar was also

there. Many of us were involved in intense discussions with them on whether there was a way to peace in their beautiful Country. The two main performers were extremely rational and good-willing and not at all opposing each other in principle. However, a way out to the interminable confrontation between their people did not appear in sight. Regretfully, we must note today that no visible step towards peace has been made there in 30 years.

When the Rencontre moved to Les Arcs, it was clear that that place was so convenient and well equipped to host an ever increasing group of people that probably Moriond would not have moved away from there any more. This was indeed what happened.

Of course the Rencontres de La Thuile, which are 20 years younger, were born out of the Moriond example, but there is more. In the early eighties I proposed to Van to hold his Rencontre alternatively one year in their land of origin, the Tarantaise, and one in the nearby Aosta Valley. After all they were used to traveling around, they were fully international meetings, and the Aosta valley was geographically very near to the Tarantaise and shared much of the French culture. I felt that it was appropriate for Italy to host periodically the Rencontres. However, it turned out to be too hard. Moriond had become very important for the French community to accept that it be moved away from their Country. It was also difficult to reserve any hotel on alternate years. I understood, but I started considering whether Italy could possibly initiate independently a new series of winter conferences.

This is not the appropriate occasion to dwell much in detail on the birth of La Thuile. I will only mention that in talking to Mario who had successfully organized a large p-pbar meeting at Aosta in 1985, I understood that he had considered this possibility as well, and moreover that he had the right connections and support in the Valley. We talked to the Officials and we were encouraged. However, we wanted to add something to Moriond, not to copy and compete with them. We wanted a different site and a different program. We have been able, I believe, to make the program different enough and we run our Rencontre near in time to Moriond, without overlaps. However, we were not able to make our site as different as the castle that I am going to show to you in a picture.

As a way to be different and to acknowledge the history of the valley, we wanted a castle. We visited this one and two more. The regional Government was ready to restore one of these castles for us. However, none of them were in good enough condition to be occupied nor in order enough for us to trust that it be modified quickly enough for it to become a comfortable home for the new Rencontres. After attempting for an entire year, one day we were losing hope up and we turned our car back to Aosta. We were very tired. We were talking sadly with Bruno Baschiera who had been driving us to visit the last castle. He asked us once more why we didn't want to consider a hotel. He mentioned that the Planibel hotel at La Thuile could be good enough. Then we made a detour and came here to visit it. After having seen we made our

decision in a flash: it had to be good enough after all. We would not shock the world with a historical castle and our site would not be very different from the Moriond one, but at least we would host our people comfortably.

So here we are today. We honor Tran Tan Van as the initiator who paved our way, but we also hope that we are not too bad followers.

It is a little sad that at La Thuile, nor at Moriond I guess, that it wouldn't be appropriate any more for us all to laugh together at the same joke every year, again and again.

Even though that I am now too old of a senior to really amuse myself by telling that joke, I will let you know what it was and tell it for the last time, as a document of our past and a souvenir of our youth.

The story tells of two dedicated and heroic soldiers of the Italian Alpine Division, who were serving to protect the country borders during the Second World War. They were really expert skiers, who spent each day skiing and checking the borders with their team. One unlucky day they hit into a strong group of enemies, which after a big fight was able to disperse them. Only our two heroes could escape, because they were able to run away from the enemy thanks to their great skiing ability. Later on they were always terrified and afraid to be caught. They learned how to live out of hunting and raw vegetables, and by drinking the melted snow. They would ski away at the smallest hint of somebody approaching. In order to be able to run away fast in case of need, they stayed near the snow areas at all times and never, never took off their skis.

The war was eventually over, but they would not know it. Their wild life lasted nearly two years, till one day by pure chance they hit into a group of tourists. After a moment of confusion and some risk of fight, the tourists were able to convince them that the war was really over. They then decided to sky down together to a village at the bottom of the valley. Down they were soon, where they found a big crowd waiting for them, since the amazing news had reached the village by phone. Among the crowd there was a smart journalist, who had spotted the scoop. He immediately approached the two soldiers and tried to interview them. After a few minutes the two men were convinced to talk to him, and although they were still confused and mumbling, some conversation became possible.

"Now that you know that your life is going to start again, tell us: what will be the first thing that you are planning to do?", asked them the journalist.

"How can you ask me that?", answered one soldier, "I want to get a girl, a woman or anything similar!", while the other one was nodding absently. "Fine, of course", laughed at him the journalist, "I mean, what will you do just after that?" "God, I shall take off these bloody skis, for sure!".

Thank you very much.