

Memory of Isolde Field

Michael Eichmair | January 17, 2007 | Memorial Service at Stanford Memorial Church



Figure 1: Isolde Field on the occasion of her 80th birthday | June 2005 | Palo Alto, CA

“Isolde. I first met you very shortly after my arrival at Stanford. I was looking for you to convey my undergraduate advisor's regards. The morning I found you was the morning a very close friend of yours, Mary Sunseri, had died. I remember kneeling in your office at your feet, holding your hands while you were weeping and sharing with me how very, very special this person was to you. It was exactly then when I knew that I wanted to be your friend. In the years to come you would be the first person I say hello to, actually ‘Guten Morgen Sonnenschein’, every single day I spent at Stanford. Usually I would catch you at 7:30 on the third floor, brewing coffee and sending your unfailing optimism through the department. There were days at the beginning when I came to the department only for this moment. With your unfaltering belief in me you were the person I could hang on to and be sure of, you are the reason I felt that I belong here until I had the confidence to open up and set foot in this department on my own.

I remember the long and enduring conversations we had. Often we would resume an argument - you are one of few people I have ever truly argued with - we would resume with an argument after months that we hadn't mentioned it.

This is how I learnt just how serious you were about your convictions, and, what is much rarer, that you were conscientiously challenging your beliefs so that at any moment you knew from deep down that what you were doing was the right thing.

Often you would tell me stories about the 'beautiful people' you had met over the years. You have indeed been the memory of this place, and probably its soul. No-one ever slipped through your net of care. You identified the needs of the people around you and were unflinching in taking care of them. With this glowing warmth of yours that you had for the department and its people - I really think for people in general - with this warmth you passed on your profound humane insights into mathematics and really life in general to young students like myself. To me you are, and will always remain, a landmark of direction. Better than anyone else I've ever met you knew how to place a friendly word, and I have certainly never met someone who could laugh so entirely, so sincerely as you did. When you spoke of difficult times and how you had overcome them, the last thing you would always say was: 'Whatever happened, I never lost my sense of humor.'

Isolde. You are the beginning of many of the best things in my life. You have instilled in me such a vast amount of direction. That I could come so close to someone so wonderful leaves me hopeful for my life, and I know that so very many people feel the same way about you.

I will always remember you."

Links

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- [Memorial Service at Stanford Memorial Church, January 17, 2007](#)
- [Response from Neil Trudinger on receiving the Leroy P. Steel Prize for Mathematical Exposition 2008](#)