



Matti Saraste (1949-2001)

Matti Saraste, Programme Coordinator for Structural and Computational Biology at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, died in Heidelberg on May 21, 2001.

Matti came to EMBL in 1990 to lead an independent research group and was promoted to the very senior post of Programme Coordinator in 1996. He was highly respected in the fields of molecular and structural biology and served as managing editor of the scientific journal FEBS Letters. One of his latest projects at the EMBL was to establish a facility for advanced electron microscopy. This facility will be dedicated to his memory.

Matti will be deeply missed by his friends and colleagues at EMBL. He is survived by a wife and children.

The best tribute to Matti can be made by those who knew him personally and professionally, and on the next page they have shared some of their memories and feelings.

I have always known Matti as a kind and friendly person with whom to interact was a true pleasure. His reserved but humorous character was in nice contrast to the often met overambitious and attitude-loaded scientists in our small scientific world.

For me personally, he was a kind of father figure to whom you looked up and talked with great respect. I will certainly remember Matti not just as a great colleague but also a friend, and I deeply regret that we lost him so early in his life.

--Walter Witke

I knew him from lectures and EMBL corridors. I didn't know him personally, but whenever I passed by I felt I had passed by a friend.

--Sanja Tomic

I was chairman of EMBL SAC when Matti was appointed at a very young age to be Programme Coordinator for Structural Biology at EMBL. The appointment was a wonderful recognition of Matti's achievements in science, his ability to incorporate structures with biochemistry, and his leadership qualities that enabled him to steer this programme with imaginative young appointments to the triumphs that we see today.

--Louise Johnson

I will always remember Matti as that big figure that used to attend structures seminars and ask the best questions, and show a true interest, with great humour. Giving a seminar in his presence was always an enjoyable experience.

--Miguel Andrade

Our years in Heidelberg were very good years, and his support -- both scientific and personal -- has helped us a lot to bring us where we are now, and to master some difficult times. This we will not forget, and the Matti we will remember is a optimistic and forward-looking one.

--Mathias Gautel, Gudrun Kunst
and Gidon and Livia Gautel

Whatever the task at hand, it is difficult to think of someone more pleasant to work with than Matti, who made it a matter of course to cut down to absolute zero all unnecessary fuss. I still have his deep voice over the phone in my ear, pondering difficulties and offering easy-to-implement solutions. Our relationship had taken from the start a very friendly tone, which matured well as years went by. It was always a pleasure to stop by in Heidelberg and visit him and his family.

--Jean-Luc Popot

He was a truly wonderful colleague and collaborator. He was generous in all his dealings. He put people before his subject but he also strove to advance his own subject in a selfless way. He was the last to allow petty jealousies or personal competitiveness to rule.

He has advanced his subject in a deep way but above all, left a legacy of true friends and admirers throughout the scientific community. He is sadly missed.

--Andrew Thomson

I have chosen to remember Matti on a sunny evening in Birmingham, in July 2000. We had a couple of pints, and spent a few hours talking in a modern, spacious bar, quite unlike the traditional English pub. Large glass windows gave us a wonderful view of the deep blue sky which later turned reddish, and of the busy street outside. Inevitably, we talked science, and equally inevitably, he enquired about the political situation in the Basque Country.

I can clearly see Matti now lit by the sunset. His hair, his face and his clothes had acquired an earthy shade, the colour of the Finnish woods in Autumn.

--F.M. Goni

You have been appreciated as co-ordinator of our Programme, perhaps more than you realised. In planning for the Programme, you used your generalist nature to advantage: you did not show bias but endeavoured to take decisions that would bring the Programme forward collectively. Also, at a more individual level, you did not play games with people -- such that a person could approach you and speak openly without fear of jeopardy. These qualities were highly valued.

Reciprocity in life is rare: Perhaps you supported us more than we supported you. But we miss you now and we'll continue to do so. Rest in peace, Matti.

--unsigned

I will remember him as a calm, listening person, smoking his beloved pipe. He always had time to listen and gave friendly advice and warm words.

--Mervi Lampinen

Things that come to mind thinking of Matti: lake pipe sailing mushrooms green polenta Brandenburg concert no. 5 barbecue

In our garden in Ljubljana we planted a hydrangea (ortensia) for him. Beautiful blossoms.

--Kristina, Oliviero and Natalia

The Laboratory was shocked and saddened by the death of Matti.

He came to EMBL as a Group Leader in 1990. His interests in biology and structural analysis were very wide, and his contributions numerous. He specialized in Biochemistry and Structural Biology, with main interests in membrane and modular signalling proteins, and in structure and function of enzymes or protein machines involved in oxidation/reduction and energy metabolism. In 1996, after an open search to which he was drafted by his colleagues, he was appointed Coordinator of the Structural Biology Programme in Heidelberg, which he led until his death. He proposed and achieved the re-naming of his Programme as Structural and Computational Biology. He had a strong belief that computational approaches had to be integrated into experimental biology, and therefore he carved out of the Structures Programme the resources to reinforce Computational Biology in Heidelberg, in parallel to the EBI Outstation. Another passion of his was evolution - an interest he brought into his own work, and advocated as part of the EMBL Scientific Programme. Within Structural Biology he had a strong commitment to electron microscopy, and he worked assiduously to persuade us to develop an EM core facility to serve both structural and cellular biology, and to furnish it with advanced equipment making it a facility broadly useful to the European scientific community. This facility will be dedicated to his memory. His broad interests and sense of service to the community led him to accept the responsibility of serving as managing editor of the scientific journal of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies, FEBS Letters.

In the EMBL community Matti was deeply appreciated for his science, his humanity and his quiet but robust leadership. He was an excellent manager of his Programme and used its resources to best advantage. He was kind and thoughtful for all people, but also insisted on standards of performance, the serving of the common good, and the placing of priority on the younger scientists. He loved EMBL passionately, considering it the model of how a community of scientists should function. His thoughtfulness and community spirit extended to his sense of social justice and his political beliefs. I admired him for his constructive attitude, his excellent citizenship in the Laboratory, his high level of culture and his mature, reflective habits of thought.

He will be deeply missed by his friends and colleagues at EMBL. May he rest in peace.

--Fotis C. Kafatos