

Alan, the Dream Group and Fausto ... in a few snapshots

Fausto
June 1st, 2005

Snapshot 1: The first contact

When: the Saturday morning after IJCAI-87, while driving Alan to the Airport

Where: in the streets of Milan, on my white FIAT Panda,

Why: Alan had to catch his flight and I was driving him to the airport. I had applied for a position as research fellow in the DReaM group at the Dept. of AI of the University of Edinburgh. For lack of time the interview was done in the car, with me driving.

Facts: *Alan:* “So, how would you metatheoretic reasoning ... ?”

Fausto: “... semantic attachment and reflection”

Alan: “While answering you should look at the street”

Snapshot 2: My first evening in Edinburgh

When: September 28th, 1987 (+ or – a couple of days)

Where: Pizza Hut in South Bridge, near the Department

Why: Frank van Harmelen, Alan Smaill, and Toby Walsh took me out for dinner, as part of a small welcome event

Facts: *Fausto:* “Well, the pizza is better in California, but the work environment here seems much much nicer”

Snapshot 3: An insight on how life goes

When: a Friday night between October 1987 and March 1988

Where: Alan Smaill’s flat

Why: a DReaM group dinner

Facts: *Toby:* “.... busy”

Alan (more or less): “ ... I ... avoid getting involved in committees as much as possible ...”

Toby: “Interestingly enough, one spends the first part of his life trying to get involved in as many committees as possible. Then, in case of success, he spends the second part of his life trying hard to avoid them.”

Snapshot 4: P =NP?

When: between 1987 and 1988

Where: Alan's office

Why: Alan used to have regular half an hour meetings with his RA's, if I remember correctly once a month

Facts: *Fausto:* "I am trying to find a polynomial time algorithm for solving propositional satisfiability"

Alan: "ok, you will tell me your results during our next meeting"
... soon after I gave up, and we never talked again about this

Snapshot 5: Interacting and doing research with Alan

When: while doing work on abstraction and abstract theorem proving, and also during many informal discussions

Where: in Edinburgh and later in Trento

Why: Alan often provides very interesting insights and suggestions

Facts: how I learned to be identify and state a research problem, to be concrete and to strive for clear thinking even when the problem is still poorly understood.

Snapshot 6: Writing papers with Alan

When: Many times now

Where: in Trento, and also during my visits to Edinburgh (many years Ago)

Why: it is fun to write papers with Alan

Facts: How I learned to structure a paper

Snapshot 7: Bannermann's

When: In 1987-1988, on Friday evenings, and many more times

Where: at Bannermann's

Why: A good opportunity to drink good beer

Facts: It was fun!

Snapshot 8: The 2005 dreamers Reunion

When: Monday, August 1st, 2005

Where: in Edinburgh

Why: Alan organized it

Facts: It is very nice to be back in the town which was so crucial for my work career, ... with all these old friends