

In appreciation of Professor Walter Goldberg

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My friendship with Walter Goldberg began in the early eighties, starting with a visit to Pittsburg. It was around that time that Walter had begun devoting more of his time to classical fluids, and, increasingly, our interests began to overlap. Since then, we have come together at many meetings, exchanged scientific ideas, and spent pleasant moments discussing broader issues. I am richer because of these interactions and owe tangible and intangible things to Walter. I admire him greatly. It is with great regret that I have had to cancel my participation in the celebration of his eightieth birthday; but I do feel privileged to be able to write this note of appreciation.

The first quality that amazes me about Walter is the enormous breadth of experimental physics that he has covered: it ranges from classical fluids (such as the dynamics of two-dimensional and three-dimensional turbulence, surface waves and wetting) to complex fluids (such as liquid crystals, binary mixtures, polymers and gels). The two major themes underlying these studies are his extensive experience in critical phenomena and dynamic light scattering. It is extraordinary how much he has accomplished without mega grants, large research groups and, generally, great fuss.

That he has been able to accomplish all this reveals one essential thing about Walter. He has been a practicing scientist in the pure sense, not much into other things even if those ‘other things’ such as administration are motivated by lofty thoughts of ‘service’ to the community. He sincerely works to gather details of whatever interests him, and is not content to paint a merely hazy picture on an empty canvas. In a recent meeting in which we were both participants, he sat through most talks, made notes and asked genuine questions. He is one of the least pretentious people I know, always trying to find the best in others, hardly ever practicing one-upmanship of any sort. If he entertains negative thoughts about anyone—which I somehow doubt—he contains himself effortlessly. It does not mean that he does not have opinions. He does. And, if you probe him a bit, he will give them to you without any trace of rancor. I cite one genre of instances: on several occasions when I used him as a referee for Phys Rev E, even for the work he regarded as below threshold, he always had appropriate advice and encouraging words for the authors.

It is thus no surprise that Walter has been an excellent mentor. He has a knack for converting students of unproven record into something about which both he and the students can be rightly proud. It is thus natural that some of his former students and post-docs are now scientific leaders in their own right. As they come together, along with a number of other distinguished scientists, for two days at Pittsburg to celebrate Walter’s scientific achievements, I have no doubt that the meeting will be a great success.

I have great pleasure in wishing Walter Goldberg many more years of productive and happy life. I am honored to have known him.