MY RECOLLECTIONS OF IAN KOGAN

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Ian was born and spent his school years in Glazov, a provincial town in the Eastern part of European Russia, between the Volga and the Urals. His parents worked there in a big factory, which belonged to the Russian Ministry of Middle Machine Building (later – the Ministry of Atomic Energy). So they had some relation to physics and, because this factory dominated the town, school education was also oriented in this direction. Ian became interested in physics at school, educated himself a lot and succeeded in becoming a student of Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology – MIPT. (This was not easy for a Jew! I know this well from the experience of my own son). On becoming a student he realized that his knowledge of physics as well as his general culture level were lower than that of some of his classmates who came from Moscow. So he worked hard – and succeeded again.

I met Ian for the first time in 1977. He was a second year student, like my son Lev with whom he was friends. In the summer of 1977 we organized a trek in the Pamir mountains. Besides me, three boys participated in this trek: Ian, Lev and Borya Yusin. The latter was an exceptional person – he was younger, only 17 years old, and a second year student of the Mechanico-Mathematical Faculty of the Moscow University. At that time, it was almost impossible for a Jew to become a student of this Faculty since they got low marks on entrance exams regardless of their ability or knowledge. (Sometimes, the exam was continued for five or six hours, until the examiner succeeded in getting the desired result.) Borya became a student because he had got the First Prize on the International Mathematical Olympiad of Scholars and there was a law that such winners could enter any University without exams.

At the beginning of the trek the weight of our rucksacks was about 35 kilos and with this load we had to go through a pass of 4600 m. We succeeded in ascending the Gogol peak (5300 m) and in getting over two icefalls to reach the upper part of the Shini-Bini glacier. Then Ian was unlucky – he twisted his ankle and fell, badly smashing his lip. He could hardly walk on and under the merciless Pamir sun his lip became very inflamed. So we had to turn back. But the most surprising thing for me was that Ian took with him a notebook and at any stop he took it out and did some calculations in physics. No minute must be lost! Always the same.

Later on I was a supervisor of his PhD thesis. To work with Ian was a great pleasure: just as in his first work he suggested the idea of the calculation, in all cases he caught the idea immediately, it was unnecessary to explain the details to him.

The last time I saw him was in May 2001; he invited me to visit Oxford. As usual, he was very enthusiastic about physics and I could not imagine that I was seeing him for the last time ...