

Some shreds of memory with
Richard M. Barrer and Leonard B. Sand

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In this brief article I would like to share with the members of the IZA community some personal memories of my experience with two *Monuments* of the IZA history, R. M. Barrer and L. B. Sand. I had the opportunity to spend with both of them long periods in their Departments as visiting researcher, with Barrer from October 1968 to November 1969 and with Sand from July to August 1976.

Those I am going to report are sporadic episodes and anecdotes, but I believe that the little facts make often possible to learn more than the great events about the personality of the people.

My memory of the first conversation with Professor Barrer, after I arrived in his huge office at the Department of Chemistry in the old building of the Imperial College in London was his low tone of voice. When I later asked one of the students in the lab why Professor Barrer talked in a so low voice, he replied that who has interesting things to say doesn't need to talk

* See a brief CV at the end of the article.

loudly, because everybody is all ears to understand what he is saying.

In that occasion Professor Barrer discussed with me the research program he had chosen for my stay in his group, quite innovative at that time, concerning the systematic investigation of the crystallization fields from systems with mixed organic and inorganic bases. I was then assigned a lab and I still remember the particular sensation of being at the centre of the world, because in the other rooms there were young PhD students and post-doc coming from all countries of the world.

Even though Professor Barrer was the Head of one of the largest and most famous Chemistry Departments in the world, every day (with a few exceptions, during the period of the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in July), early in the afternoon, he used to visit all the labs to be informed on the state of the work, asking the question which became famous: “Any results?”. And some of researchers who had no fresh results to talk about were used to disappear during the time of his visit.

During the period of my stay I published three papers with him and I was envied by other colleagues in the lab, because, since my name begins with the letter A, I have been one of the rare persons who preceded Barrer’s name in the list of the co-authors.

Although Professor Barrer was a very reserved person, quite jealous of his private life, I had once the honor of being invited to dinner in his house and I still remember that he introduced me to the ancient English tradition of a glass of sherry (medium or dry) before dinner and a glass of Porto after.

After my return to Italy, in 1974, in the occasion of my application for a Full Professor position, Professor Barrer wrote for me a very nice recommendation letter which, as I understood later, was much appreciated by the Commission.

In 1994 many of the students and associates who were in his lab at the end of the 1960's gathered in London for what we called the 25th anniversary of the Barrer's Research Group.



R. Aiello with R. M. Barrer during the 5th IZC in Naples (1980)

My memories of “Len” Sand are first of all those of the relaxing and familiar atmosphere I found in his lab where people appeared to work quite cheerfully even though the system was perfectly efficient. This derived from Len’s personality who managed to put at ease everybody, both at work or at home, where he often invited friends and associate for a barbecue.

I have a special memory of a weekend in Nova Scotia, when we went for a wonderful fishing holiday and where he rent a cottage near the beach. During that excursion David Hayhurst, who was at that time at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the early stages of his brilliant academic career, was with us.

Another memory regards one thing that struck me: Professor Sand signed his documents as “Professor of Chemical Engineering”, since he changed very frequently his courses at the College. This was strange for me, because in Italy every professor is holder of a given and fixed program for the whole academic life.

Leonard Sand was also a man with a great human sensitivity. I still remember that once, while he was accompanying me home, we stopped in a coffee shop for a beer. At the end I asked him the privilege of paying the bill and Len accepted. At that time I wasn’t accustomed to the American system of tips, which were higher than those in Italy, so while I was going to the exit, Len, without telling me anything and believing that I wasn’t looking at him, put a one dollar note on the table.

Another thing that really enjoyed Len when we spoke together during the International Conference on Natural Zeolites in Budapest in 1985, was a parallel situation about myself and Carmine Colella (who also was with Len Sand for a couple of

months the same year I was there), on one side, and Len and Fred Mumpton on the other side. Carmine, in fact, graduated in chemistry, whereas my first academic degree was in mineralogy, but curiously, during our academic careers, Carmine would have been involved mainly in natural zeolites, while I would have focused my studies mostly on zeolite synthesis. And it was funny that the same situation had previously occurred with Leonard Sand and Frederick Mumpton; Len, in fact, was a geologist and became a pioneer in zeolite synthesis, while Fred was a chemist and became the world leader in natural zeolites field.

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