

# Preface

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The idea for this book was not born behind a desk, nor during a quiet moment of reflection, but on the road – quite literally – and in conversation.

In the summer of 2006, Marcello Anile happened to be in the Netherlands for several days. He had come to Eindhoven to give a lecture and to discuss various academic matters, but, as was typical for Marcello, the visit was about much more than mathematics alone. We talked, we argued, we laughed – and we ate very well. We enjoyed excellent dinners in Oisterwijk (the famous restaurant ‘De Zwaan’) and Tilburg (‘Auberge du Bonheur’, close to the university), because Marcello was a true *bon vivant*. He loved good food, good wine, and good company, though always with a touch of self-discipline: the cheese cart, tempting as it was, usually passed him by – cheese, he insisted, was something one should enjoy only once a month.

After his stay in the Netherlands, we set off together by car for Kaiserslautern, crossing Germany in long, unhurried hours. Our destination was a festive celebration in honour of Helmut Neunzert – the undisputed ‘Mr. Industrial Mathematics’ of Europe. Neunzert stood at the cradle of the European Consortium for Mathematics in Industry and later founded the Fraunhofer Institute ITWM in Kaiserslautern, a unique and highly successful centre for mathematics and computer science. The celebration itself was warm and convivial: beer, generous food, and the presence of many distinguished colleagues, including Achi Brandt. Helmut was deeply respected, not only for his scientific

vision, but also for his extraordinary talent as an organizer and connector of people.

The drive to Kaiserslautern became, in hindsight, a defining moment. Marcello had with him a new electronic device – a novelty at the time – on which he had begun to record notes. During the journey, we talked about everything: science, travel, culture, people, food, and the strange privilege of living a life in which mathematics opens doors to the world. Marcello promised to send me his notes once he had worked them out back home in Sicily.

After Kaiserslautern, Marcello returned briefly to Sicily. Only a few days later, we met again in Sinaia, Romania, at the Scientific Computing in Electrical Engineering conference, organized by Daniel Ioan and Gabriela Ciuprina. Sinaia, nestled in the Carpathian Mountains, provided a magnificent setting. The conference dinner took place outside the town, high on a hill, in a Serbian restaurant where vast amounts of meat were served – far more than any table could reasonably finish. The date was September 20, 2006.

I was seated opposite Marcello. As so often, he was telling stories – about places he had visited, people he had met, histories he knew by heart. And suddenly, in that moment, the idea crystallized. I said to him: ‘Marcello, you travel so much. You know so much about the places you visit – their history, their culture, their food. You should write a book. You should call it *The Travelling Mathematician*.’

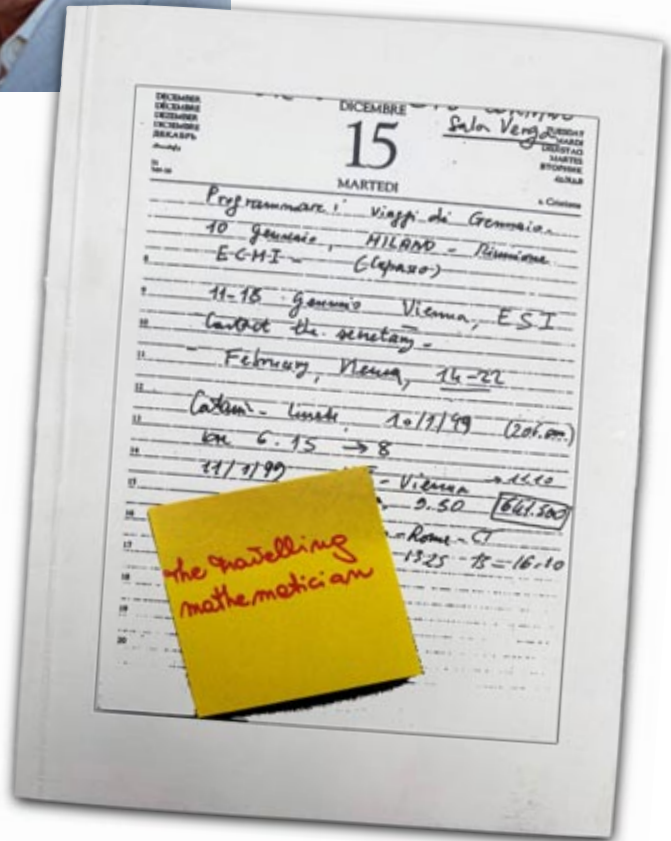
He looked at me, smiled immediately, and said it was a wonderful idea. When he returned home, he told his wife, who was equally enthusiastic. But then, quite unexpectedly, dark clouds gathered over Catania. Marcello sent me an email with part of his notes, ending with the words: ‘Wil, I am not feeling well. I will send you the remaining part soon.’ That second message never came. Marcello fell seriously ill; surgery could not save him, and in 2007 he passed away.

His death was a great loss – not only to mathematics, but to everyone who had known his warmth, generosity, and intellectual curiosity.



Marcello Anile

Booklet *The Travelling Mathematician*,  
compilation of excerpts from Marcello  
Anile's diaries and travel notes.



Shortly after his passing, his wife, Marisa, founded the Associazione Marcello Anile, and about a year later at the first workshop organised by the association, a small book was presented, also titled *The Traveling Mathematician*, composed of excerpts from his agendas and travel notes. It was beautiful and moving – but it was not Marcello’s own voice. Not his stories, not his reflections, not his experiences at the dinner table.

From that moment on, I knew that one day I would have to write this book myself – and dedicate it to him. It took time. Years of travel, of encounters, of accumulation. But now, finally, the book exists. It is written in the spirit of that conversation in Sinaia, during that long drive through Germany, and in memory of a friend who embodied, better than anyone I knew, what it means to be a travelling mathematician.

This book is therefore dedicated, with gratitude and affection, to Marcello Anile.