

The Karl Strnat I Knew



It was Dr. Karl Strnat who introduced me to the field of rare earth permanent magnet materials and it has been exactly 26 years since I first met him. I still clearly remember our first meeting at the Airport in June 1980. When I was at the luggage claim area waiting to pick up my suitcases from the carousel, I heard somebody calling me from a distance, "Hello!" Then, a vigorous man in his early 50s rushed up to me. While he warmly shook my right hand, he seized the largest suitcase from my left hand and carried it for me. From then on, started my association with Dr. Karl Strnat.

I spent a total of eight years as a visiting scholar and then a graduate student under the guidance of Dr. Strnat and Dr. Alden Ray. Dr. Strnat's broad scientific knowledge and tireless work habit made very deep impressions on me. I will never forget many sleepless nights spent in the lab, especially before due dates for submitting technical papers. I was also deeply moved by his extreme care and great concern for other people, especially those who needed help, such as foreign students and visitors.

It seemed that Dr. Strnat had special feelings toward China. His sentiments might be related to China's long history of civilization and, probably also to her rich rare earth resources: the rare earth resources in Baotou area alone were more than 70% of the total world rare earth resources! He made many visits to China over the years and gave very warm impressions to his hosts everywhere.

In addition to work, we often talked and discussed many other subjects ranging from music, religion, and even politics. Names we mentioned most include Mozart, Beethoven, Goethe, and Einstein. At that time I was an atheist. While Dr. Strnat's views were influenced by his Catholicism and believed that the world could not be the consequence of a series of accidents. We once drove to downtown and saw a church that had burned to the ground. I immediately took this as evidence to support my beliefs. "If there is a God, he would not allow this to happen." I argued. He laughed, but apparently was not convinced.

Since Dr. Strnat's sad and unexpected death in 1992, every year on Memorial Day, I visit his gravesite in Byron Cemetery in Fairborn. I also often visit the "Strnat Bench" located in a public park near Yellow Springs, where he liked to spend his spare time and where I joined him on many occasions. Every time I sit on the "Strnat Bench" surrounded by high cliffs, tall trees, and the murmuring sounds of the nearby creek, I seem to see his kind smile and hear what he said once when we discussed the meaning and destiny of human beings: "Our destiny should be to make the rare earth better permanent magnets, and to make our earth a better place for every human being to live." Yes, our world is better because of his work. His example continues to give me strength and encouragement in my journey toward my destiny.



With Dr. Strnat near his home in May 1985 during the 8th REPM Workshop.

(From Proc. 19th International Workshop on REPM, p.iv.)