

ANNA TRAMONTANO, a personal recollection.

<Libertà va cercando ch'è sì cara>.

Anna came to talk about becoming a Biochemistry professor, more or less at the end of the millennium. At the time I used to chat with Demetrius Tsernoglou who held the chair of Enzymology with the remit to build, from scratch, a protein crystallography unit. I felt we should scout for a young brilliant structural biologist to inject new blood; when Demetrius whispered: "*Anna*". "*Yes indeed, but is she going to come?*"; "*I can call*", he said.

Anna arrived at my office after a couple of days. I understood immediately that freedom was what she needed to spread her wings wide and fly high. It took 1 minute to get in phase and 5 minutes to strike a deal: the Department had little space, little money, but good students and as much freedom as she could handle, an irresistible bait. In the following weeks the proposal was discussed within the Beati Paoli and accepted formally by our Head, Carlo De Marco. The *Concorso* was a success: coming from a non academic institution she had to deliver a lecture to demonstrate that she could teach; the talk was a delight. In 2001 she started as full professor of Biochemistry in the Department of Biochemical Sciences, and began working to establish Bioinformatics at La Sapienza and to secure more funding than I could possibly make available, and which was badly needed to create a group.

It was obvious that she had to have a full time collaborator to create a nucleus; Milina Chiancone was crucial to secure a CNR position that was offered to Veronica Morea, at the time in Cambridge UK. Veronica was hired and in 2001 she began as the second in command, with two people in the group. I had a very good time for several years to follow. Anna arrived early in the morning from Grottaferrata on board a fast Alfa Romeo; and I was there. We often used to sit in my office to sip a coffee and chat: she, smoking like a chimney, and I enjoying my toscano. No agenda, just free talking about science, politics, family, Europe, the weather, sometimes sailing, ...She was busy writing applications to build up the group, and the prospect was quickly becoming more positive. When she was awarded the very rich and prestigious KAUST grant, I asked : "*How did you manage?*"; she replied "*I promised ... questo mondo e quell'altro, and they believed me*" laughing with that funny mix of joy, empathy and with a twinkle in her eye.

Over the first decade I was witness to many successful endeavors: she continued to be the living spirit of CASP that for her remained a very exciting challenge; she was more and more effectively engaged in teaching, and started the Master in Bioinformatics with Stefano Pascarella; she was writing a book on "Bioinformatica" published in 2002 by Zanichelli; she was asked to sit in many committees from EMBO/EMBL to EU and ANVUR; and more, more and more, an explosion. Sometimes I felt she was like a candle burning at both ends.

This escalation in success and respect can be grasped from reading her CV; the one I like best she wrote in the first person. When she was diagnosed a lung cancer, it was a blow yet not totally unexpected. Over the last two years we only met when she delivered a talk at some meeting; I went to listen when I could, and she looked fine. I never visited while she was in the hospital, clearly an act of cowardice. When Angela Santoni early in the morning whispered "*Anna left us*", I regretted having missed the chance to chat once more. Now I am uncertain: prominent in my mind is the memory of the glorious days and the recollection of the precious talents that Anna generously distributed to those that had the fortune to cross her path.

(Maurizio Brunori, Rome).