EDITORIAL

„Restless Soul” – professor Gallia Butnaru

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The prestige of University is not measured by the years in function, but mostly about the people that contribute to its development. The TRUE human been makes a place holy... says an old proverb, but I believe the place stays holy even after the man is gone. Somebody said that is difficult to be a women, but I am sure it's even more difficult to be a women in science.

"Gifted souls”..... years in the school! One may expect to write about a lady who is already tired, sad and waiting for her life to develop as the destiny will decide. BUT you will see a woman for which to do means always I can do it and for which to be happy means to like to do what she has to do. She experienced many problems and obstacles but they made her stronger and wiser. Sometimes our words are not enough to describe an educator, and we are too small in facing a life which was dedicated to the education of many generations of students and young researchers.

It’s normal to demand respect according to our behavior and actions. We have this right. But who counts today what is normal and what is right? The respect is a fundamental need of a human been. It can behave like a coenzyme - when its function is altered then the physical and intellectual development of person can be affected.

I've been asked to write about a great LADY who was my teacher, mentor, boss and friend. I will not follow the classical way in pointing out all the achievements she acquired during a long and remarkable career, since all of this can be found in her resume. I don't know if I am the right choice, but I will try to show another side of this LADY which few of us know. I will tell you how she is in reality and about the impact she had on many of her collaborators.

In 1994, being a student in the 2nd year of University, at Genetic Engineering section, I met Professor Gallia Butnaru at the first Genetics Course. I have to say that we already knew from the first year that we have to deal with Genetics and it will be very hard to pass the exam. It seemed to me exaggerated, at that time, since I always admired this phenomenal field of science.

My first impression about Professor Butnaru was excellent. She had style, right attitude, a special way of tackle the problems and it became clear that I had in front of me an educator from the old school of teachers, which have almost disappeared today from the Universities. I felt a strong attraction for Genetics. I remember the practical lessons from the Laboratory. We had lab coats, proper behavior, always in time for the class and with the notebooks in our heads we were facing the difficult questions and storm our brains trying to give an answer. During the Genetic Course my hands were always painted by vital staining reagents and the adrenaline never dropped down. It was one of the courses you remember for the rest of your life. Now, 12 years after graduation when we meet, there is no way we won't mention Genetics. The fait decided that she has to be responsible for our year during the University studies. Since then we were treated like her own kids. We were scolded and complimented according to our behavior but always encouraged and told to learn and to fight for our dream because this is the only way we will succeed.

One of the best memories I have, was a Christmas card that came on my parents name, one year. Besides the good wishes, she wrote down my grades and situation at school (fortunately for me a good one). My parents face became illuminated and since then I got from them the trust every kid expects from his family.... I wonder, how many teachers are
doing this nowadays?

As students we had access to her book collection and journals which at that time were a gold mine for study and documentation. It was for the first time when someone expected us to read the foreign literature. We were visiting periodically the National Library in order to gather information about specific terms, who were let outside explanation, with the purpose to learn how to search and read the scientific papers. In this way I learned things that latter helped me a lot.

At the end of the second year I decided to join the Scientific Genetic Group which was held at the Department. We had meetings every week and I was immediately integrated into the undergoing research projects. I've been treated like one of their own, having same degree of responsibility in reporting the work I was doing. The diploma work was done at Genetics and also here was for the first time I attended to an International Symposium. Slowly I started to know better the human side of professor Butnaru. I always saw a woman who loved her job deeply and with a great desire to share her knowledge and experience. I admired one of the qualities that every manager and good boss must have: the problems from work were not mixed with personal ones.

I remember lots of so called dramatic moments in relation with my boss. She was very demanding in everything. I don't know how many times I cried and wanted to give up because no effort seemed to be enough. But one day I realized that either I faith and improve or I won't be able to do anything. She told me many times to leave on one of the two doors of the Department if I don't want to stay, but next day I was back. She was smiling almost undetectable and accepted my decision. I did not knew at that time why she had this behavior. Now I see that she was pushing me to the edge just to be able to learn how to manage in different situations. We were tested periodically. As part of the research team it was obligatory to know English, to handle PC, to work in the field and read news in Genetics. Everyone of us had to present in front of the group a paper or a progress report. Of course it was terrible and I did not like it since she was the only one with this demands. Latter I was grateful because all the exercise I've done there helped me as I didn't wanted to believe.

I remember her words: I know you don't like it but latter you will thank me. With my limited experience I replied, in my mind, that this will never happened. I was wrong. Latter she proposed me to became a young assistant at the Department. I was excited but for very short time. Although, I was like family, I realized that I was facing a true competition with another competitor. I did not understood her but I knew that this was my chance to prove something. I won the position on my own without her recommendation. In this way I gained trust in myself and since that day I realize that if I want something I can do it. This experience prepared me for the latter period of my carrier.

At the Genetics the working day had many hours. Professor Butnaru came first and turned off the lights in the Lab in the evening. Every weekend she was working, making sure that everything will be prepared for next week. When we had deadline for reporting no excuse was accepted. I made use of this training in the moment when I became to work in a true competitive environment abroad where all these rules were applied.

Those who will read this sentences and those that know Professor Butnaru, will tell for sure that things cannot be nice and happy always and the reality is different. It's true. Working with people it's not easy especially when you have a boss with a strong personality. You have to adjust and in this situations honesty and being part of the team is the key to survive. I will tell you a funny situation I've experienced during the time I was working with Professor Butnaru. I was responsible for the in vitro experiments. At one point some experiment went wrong and the things got out of control. I had a serious problem. How could I explain my mistakes? My brilliant mind decided to put the problem in another way and get out from this clean. I prepared my speech in every detail and I went to Professor Butnaru to report the results. I started to talk as planed but after a while she stopped me, look at me with her eyes above the glasses and told me: dear Cristina, I have seen many like you, go and come back when you have something to say.... That was the first and the last time I had ideas like this. I
realized that telling the truth, even if it hurts and had consequences, its better and more useful.

I am not God to judge a person. *Those who have no sin should cast the first stone...* I think we have to remember this today more any time before. When working with people you take them like they are. I don't want to emphasize the bad parts of Professor Butnaru because then it will be fair to tell about my owns. If we have defects it better to correct and not to expose them. My relationship with my boss was many times tide but somehow she always tried to correct her actions when they were wrong.

Professor Butanru can confirm that I was criticizing her decisions many times. After a difficult situation and when the euphoric moment past, we always had a discussion who ended up with a solution that was better suited for the given time. This is another quality a good professionist must have, to know how to handle unfavorable situations and to redirect all the energy thorough something positive. Life has learned me to be more tolerant and today I see things differently than 10 years ago.

Although our relation had many tensed moments these were always kept inside Departments doors. The human nature is predisposed to complain of what it's happening to him without realizing that he already decided for himself and none can make decisions in his behalf. I don't remember Prof. Butnaru to complain (except the situations we were not working enough and efficient) of something since she was perfectly aware of her free will. I admired her strength and even if she was suffering I could not see this. She had a great desire to succeed and to take form life the most and even beyond. She had the power to overcome any situation. She loved her job and still dose. Many time she was traveling to another City in the evening and next day in the afternoon she was back to work and we were wondering how can she do this and from where she has all this energy not only mental but physical as well.

I will tell you another funny story. We were attending a Conference in Iasi. The Conference location was quite far from the hotel. It was evening when we finished and weather nice, so we decided to walk. My boss took the leading position. Soon she imposed an alert rhythm. We could not be impolite so we had to follow her. After 15 min. of running I will say, we were finished but she was ahead and finally left us behind. In the end we got to the hotel and she was witting us with a cappuccino and of course smiling. We were making faces and thinking that for sure she drinks some energy stimulator. I found the answer latter. Her energy lies in a positive way of thinking no matter what. This is another thing I learned from her.

Nothing from what we are or we could be was in other heads then ours and good God. I believe that whatever happens in our life has a meaning. Every person we meet is because we have to deliver or to receive something. I know one thing, that I meet a remarkable person in professor Butnaru with a tremendous life experience that many times is more important than anything else. She experienced poverty, hunger, joy, disaster with the same intensity but she started over again and succeeded. I can't forget her words...*what you have in your had nobody can take it...* and I have to say this is true. She wanted to say that if you are good in what you are doing you won't be left outside. She proved this in 1990. She is forced to leave the University for something she did, but I don't know exactly the facts so I can't describe them. At 50 she gets a guest researcher fellowship in Perry Gustafson Lab at Missouri University, USA. She will work on gene manipulation in cereals. In 1992 she accepts the offered professor position at the same University from where she left. For somebody in her situation and her age this would be a disaster but not for her. She did not give up and proved that everything is possible if you want. She told me latter that for her it was a step forward as she is grateful that this happed. Professor Butnaru was the only educator at this University, as far as I know, who declared hunger strike jut to get a denied right to have a technician position at the Department. I have to say that she tried to implement another way of thinking to people who were not ready to accept such behavior after years of communism. Most of us are not ready even now, after 20 years.

In spring 2008, after 4 years abroad, I got a letter from my former boss in which she offered me to come back home to start a research lab. I was not surprised at all and I
realized that she is indeed a restless soul because even now at her age (not exceeded 30 as she likes to tell) she won't give up school and efforts to contribute to the development of her Department. I have to be honest and tell that if the University did not want to help me with my coming back home project she gave me all the money to start my grant.

Dear Professor Butnaru, I won't forget that always you told me to do what the priest says and not what he does. I want to thank you and ensure you of all my respect.

in the end....

Today most of professors and students don't have time (and desire...) to build strong relationships. What happens its like this: if some educator/student opens the way of communication then the student/educator is expected to be interested or not. The student life is one of the most exciting period. The educators expect from students to behave like students, and this is hard at the beginning since they come to the University with a different point of view. They get a lot of information's and not sufficient time to understand. The educator has at this point a very important role. To make them flowering, to became adults, to develop further personalities and to drive their interests in the right way. The biggest quality of a educator and student as well is to be motivated. Once you are motivated then everything seems possible.

Professor Butnaru has given her best to motivate, in many ways, generations of students and future researchers or educators. If she succeeded, we should ask those who are professors, researchers, directors, and so on, working all over the country and abroad. I wonder way she still get so many letters from former students and why every time they visit the University they end up at the Genetics? Of course I know the answer and you know it as well.

The relationship between educator and student it's just a simple human relation. No more and no less than that. Relations like this are build step by step and last for the rest of our life's, but implies from both sides one of the most important law of communication, to listen what everyone has to say.

If it will be to characterize Professor Butnaru Gallia in one sentence I will say that:

she is a women who enjoys herself when she succeeds and when she fails.