

Editorial

What Would I Have Done Had I Known

PIERANDREA LO NOSTRO

Department of Chemistry “Ugo Schiff”, University of Florence, 50019 Sesto Fiorentino (Firenze), Italy
E-mail: pierandrea.lonostro@unifi.it

Richard Weiss, a distinguished Member of our Scientific Committee and one of the founding fathers of *Substantia*, suddenly passed away on December 28, 2023.

He leaves a terrible empty space in our minds and hearts.

Richard promoted our Journal in the scientific community with great fervor, we will always miss his advices and support.

In our website, at <<https://riviste.fupress.net/index.php/subs/about>> we show the video that he recorded in 2017 at Georgetown, when we launched the Journal. No one else could have better communicated our intentions and hopes for a new way of doing scientific publishing than him! Today, after seven years, his words still reflect the sense of our work with the Journal, a challenge full of satisfaction.

The very first time I had a chance to interact with him was in 2005-2006, when he edited two papers of mine submitted to *Langmuir*. I remember his dedication, help and care in evaluating the papers for that journal.

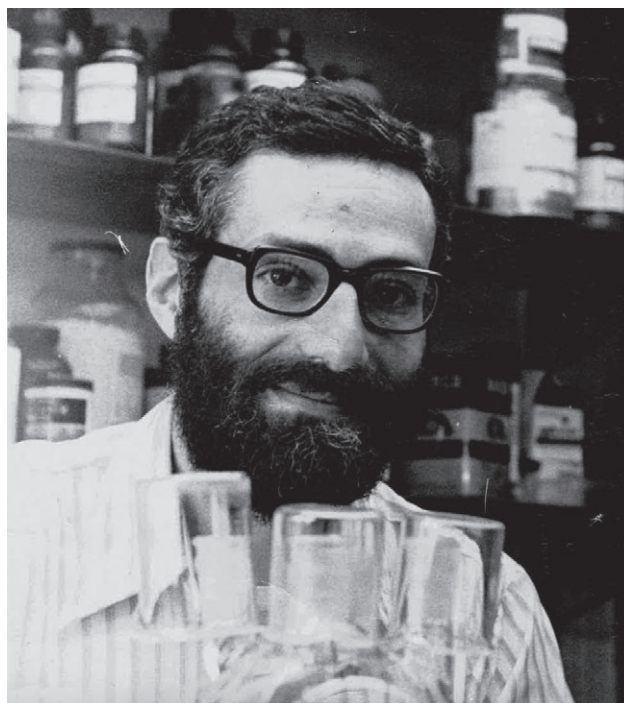
Then we had other chances to meet and discuss topics of common interest.

We will miss his friendly dedication and long-term outlook.

We will do our best to make the most of his wisdom.

Now we believe that the best way to commemorate Richard and his participation in cultural and societal activities is to publish the last contribution he sent us in June 2023, on the anniversary of “Juneteenth”, the liberation of African American slaves in the US.

It may be presumptuous of me, a white man whose ‘ancestors’ arrived in the US on ships from Eastern Europe during the 19th century, to write about Juneteenth. Still, that will not stop me. Please keep in mind that what I write is one person’s opinion, without claiming that it is factual or



Richard G. Weiss (1942-2023).

even useful to anyone besides the author. Also, that ‘utility’ is only for his experience.

Until a very few years ago, Juneteenth had little meaning to me. And even now, that meaning cannot and should not be extrapolated to others. It does resonate with me because shared oppression, subjugation, and mistreatment are things which I recognize were a part of what it was and is to be black in America today. When my family and I were living in Brazil, many of our white and mixed-race neighbors refused to recognize that the same racism I saw in my youth was rampant there. The nuances were different, but

the basic societal issues were the same—lighter skin translated intrinsically to higher social standing.

Today, in my neighborhood, almost all are 'white' because of economic and social inequities, many of which can be traced to before and after the Civil War. To place this in a more local perspective, my parents were clearly racist, and some of their ideas did creep into the way that I looked at African Americans (and how they looked at me!!). Endemic prejudices, introduced in one's youth are very difficult to erase. When I think about the injustices perpetrated by Georgetown University, my employer for more than 50 years, I ask myself: "What would I have done had I known the misdeeds of Rev. Thomas Mulledy, the former president of Georgetown, who sold 272 human beings to pay off the university's debts, and separated the families without regard for relationships? Even more vexing is the question, "What would I have done had I been a member of the faculty in 1838 that sold the slaves?" I cannot answer either of these questions honestly.

I only hope that I would have respected the human dignity of and fought for the enslaved people involved. But I don't know...

Richard G. Weiss