

Renaissance Man

I lost a good friend in October—one that many of you might know. Carlo Costi of Sogimex S.A.S. in Caponago (Milano), Italy, came out of the EMO show in Milan on October 28, caught a taxi and called his wife, Mariella, to tell her that he wasn't feeling well. He died—in the taxi—on the phone—talking to his wife. He was 60 years old.

Carlo was a gear machine tool merchant, widely known in the Italian gear manufacturing community and the worldwide Gleason and machine tool dealer communities. He will be missed by those who knew him. I will miss him not only because of our business relationship, but because, over the years, I got to know Carlo as a person.

He was a very unique man, who came from a unique background.

Carlo's father, Marco, was an Italian Jew who left Italy with the rise of Mussolini and went to Cairo, Egypt. There he met Carlo's mother, Maria, a Roman Catholic. Their 1941 marriage was blessed by the Catholic Church with the understanding that their first-born, who would be Carlo's brother, Enrico, was to be raised Roman Catholic. Carlo, like his father, practiced Judaism. I've always admired how comfortable each of these brothers was with the unusual religious makeup of their family. To each of them, it was always perfectly natural having a brother and a parent with a different religion, which is probably rare today.

Both Enrico and Carlo were born in Cairo, and after the war, the family moved back to Milan. In 1950, Carlo's father formed Sogimex—at first a trading company and later a machine tool merchant. Enrico joined his father in 1962 for a short period, left, and returned in 1970. My father had met Marco in the 1960s, and I met Marco and Enrico in the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, Carlo went to see the world. He came to America in the early 1960s, studying and then teaching philosophy in New York. While his brother and father were working in the machine tool business, he enjoyed the freedom of the hippie generation, studying, learning and teaching about a lot of the things that add richness to people's lives. We met in the early '80s.

My wife, Marsha, and I, shown in the photo with Carlo in 1995 in Estoril, Portugal, had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time with Carlo, Enrico and their respective families, especially at the annual meetings of the European Association of Machine Tool Merchants (EAMTM), which are held in such places as Sorrento, Malta, Lanzarote, Barcelona, Sante Margherita and Cannes.

Our trips to those places were always more enjoyable because of Carlo. He was truly a Renaissance man. He easily and comfortably discussed the literature, architecture, history, wine and food of Italy and Europe. The depth of his knowledge, often first hand, was always quite surprising. We only had to mention that we were going to visit a particular area, and Carlo immediately would be able to tell us, in detail, of all the best places to visit, the best restaurants to try and the best foods to eat.

I talked to him often on my way to work, and I always enjoyed his excitement when watermelon or white figs, a memory of his childhood, were in season, and he always looked forward to Panettone at holiday time.

I also had the good fortune to spend time with his daughters, Micol, Miriam and Muriel, whom he adored. I have vivid memories of walking around Portofino with Micol and Miriam on each arm in animated conversation, with Carlo and Marsha behind us, deep into architectural discussions. When the EAMTM held its conference in Malta in 1998, Carlo brought Muriel, then 13. We all had such a good time together that we arranged for Muriel to come and stay with Marsha and me during the summer of 1999.

Carlo had a sweetness about him that is not often found and probably less often appreciated. He is already sorely missed, not only by his family, but also by others who knew him.

Arrivederci, Carlo. I'll have some Panettone for you this year.



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