

# Many happy returns, George Peter Hansbenno Styan<sup>1</sup>!

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## Abstract

George Peter Hansbenno Styan, uniquely known as GPHS, was born almost 70 years ago, 10 September 1937; in Hendon, Middlesex (now part of Greater London), England, UK.

Our society knows George pretty well. In early April in 1985, in Budapest, I met Professor Shayle R. Searle and I asked whether he knows GPHS. Shayle's wife Helen replied immediately "Oh yes! Everybody knows him, except maybe somebody in the moon". Almost exactly 20 years later, in Auckland, New Zealand, in the 14th International Workshop on Matrices and Statistics (IWMS-14), Shayle still knew George very well.

I met George first time at the Tampere Airport on 22 January 1976, at 12:15. (Since then, we've met in numerous airports—two highlights being the 7 a.m. meeting in the New Delhi Airport on 9 January 1993, and on 10 April 2005 at 6:30 a.m. in the Airport of Auckland, from where our trio, Jarkko Isotalo as a personal driver, headed towards Papatoetoe, the Waikato University, and Lagavulin in Raglan to be provided by Murray Jorgensen.) On 22 January 1976, George was flying from Oulu to Tampere to give a 10 hours lecture series at our place. He was spending a sabbatical year 1975–76 in Helsinki, but there his lectures started at 8:15 on Friday mornings and that was too tricky for me and Erkki Liski. Hence we invited him to Tampere. In a nutshell, our cooperation yielded the Honorary Doctorate to George, "for his great scientific contributions and merits in mathematics and statistics, and in the promotion of research in the University of Tampere", awarded in Tampere, on 19 May 2000.

Why do we know George so well? (To go the other way round, I recall George saying that with Alastair J. Scott they figured out that together they know anyone who is anyone.)

I think the answer is that George is a "man of the society", so to say. George likes to run the show, and there are many shows in academic life.

From 24 February to 18 March 1976, Professor C. Radhakrishna Rao, a birthday-buddy to George (being 17 years senior to George), was hosting George and Evelyn in New Delhi. After returning back to Finland (via Calcutta, Teheran, Istanbul, ...) in April, George and Evelyn invited Erkki and

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<sup>1</sup>George P.H. Styan is Professor Emeritus at McGill University, Montréal, Canada. Ph.D. thesis in 1969 entitled "Multivariate normal inference with correlation structure" (T. W. Anderson, advisor) from Columbia University, New York City. Since 1969, worked at the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, McGill University; promoted to rank of Professor Emeritus in 2005.

me for dinner to their place in Helsinki (Kontula, Naapurintie) and Evelyn cooked us outstanding chicken (first of many superb dinners to come). After the dinner, George drove us to the train station but I had taken a careless look at the time table and as a result we had to kill some time in a restaurant at the station—beginning of many memorable railway-related activities with George.

Regarding important airport visits, I have to add the event of the 2nd of December 1982, when George and I went to pick up Professor Peter Bloomfield at the Montréal–Dorval Airport. George had agreed that Peter would carry the latest issue of the *JRSS-Series A* in his left hand upon arrival so that we would recognize him. Indeed we had no problems in getting Peter back to town but this was not so on the next day when we all three went shopping oysters (for 60 people) and George’s famous red Saab was hit by some idiot’s lousy old car. (Note that in the trunk George had a remarkable amount of Beaujolais Nouveau, some of which gave unusual colour to a recently bought copy of Cook & Weisberg’s *Residuals and Influence in Regression*.)

One further airport trip should be mentioned: on 3 May 1988, George and I went to the Montréal–Mirabel Airport to welcome Jerzy K. Baksalary for his first North-American visit. Jerzy was rather exhausted after the long flight, telling that all his flight through he had been reading and correcting the thesis of Augustyn Markiewicz. “Oh, those youngsters and their writings ...”, was Jerzy’s comment.

I’m happy to tell that George has taught me a lot about the art of traveling. Yet, another necessity of life, eating, that is the area where I am not his best student. (Knut Conradsen is George’s best eating buddy if somebody does not know that.) Having an absolute restaurant-ear (tongue?) George is of great company around lunch and dinner time, where ever you are. Professor C. R. Rao told that when in Delhi somebody was asking him for advice about the decent dinner places, he asked him to go and ask George.

As for eating in Delhi in January 1993, I have warm memories about our regular evening diet: George, Ludwig Elsner and I, we had some nuts in a balcony in the guesthouse of the Indian Statistical Institute, a drop of pre-dinner refreshments, and then we took a 3-wheeler (after heavy negotiations with a driver) to a place that George had chosen for that evening. Enjoyable!

Earlier was mentioned that George is a society man. He enjoys doing things together, as many of us have experienced. To describe his contributions in a nutshell in this frontier, it is best to refer to his 2003 Harry C. Carver Medal for exceptional service to the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS): “For dedicated and enthusiastic service to the IMS and the statistics profession throughout his career . . . and for elevating the taste of the statistical community with élan and savoir faire as a gourmet par excellence”. Well put.

Many happy returns, George!