

Hilary L. Seal

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Hilary L. Seal

January 11, 1991–July 25, 1984

It will be ten years this coming July that Hilary Seal died after having suffered a massive heart attack.

As was his costum he came on that Monday, July 23, to the Computer Center of the Federal Institute of Technology to do numerical work on his ongoing projects. In the early afternoon he complained, that he did not feel well. Within minutes he collapsed. The ambulance took him to the University Hospital at Lausanne. He seemed to make a spectacular recovery and joked, even while in intensive care, with the hospital personnel. All Tuesday, he continued to improve. In the night to Wednesday, July 25 he suffered a renewed attack which his weakened heart could not withstand.

Hilary Seal retired in 1972 from his active academic and business duties in the United States and moved with his family, his wife Myrna, and his two young children, Dorothy and Gavin, to Apples (VD). He immediately contacted us at EPFL to find out about possibilities for collaboration. Since he was particularly interested to continue his research activities, he needed the infrastructure of a Computer Center to do so.

During six years he taught post-diploma courses for engineers and actuaries and he was active in the weekly statistics seminar. Through his excellent contacts we had frequent visits of illustrious statisticians and actuaries. Hilary also served on several thesis committees. He took an active role coaching the doctoral students.

While an official position at EPFL was not possible due to Hilary's age, he served us excellently during thirteen years as a permanent unofficial visiting professor. The rapport d'activité from 1973 on lists all his publications as part of the statistics unit of the Mathematics department. From [44] on they all carry the "Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne" label. He entertained excellent relations with the actuaries of the Institute of Actuarial Science of the University of Lausanne. He held an honorary chair at Lausanne University during the spring term 1980 and gave a course on "Mixed Poisson Processes and Risk Theory" [61]. He also took an active interest in the activities of the Swiss actuaries. In the same year, 1980, he was elected a corresponding member of their association. We also profited from the unusually complete and valuable private library of Hilary for which, unfortunately, after his death, no satisfactory solution could be found.

It was clear that retirement for Hilary never did mean to stop being active but to do precisely what interested him the most at the moment. He wrote a book [B, 3] and one third of his articles (from [44] on) while living in Apples.

Hilary was extremely well read. This together with his intellectual curiosity made him an ideal discussion partner on subjects well beyond actuarial science and statistics. But he also enjoyed good cuisine and he was knowledgeable about wine. It was a pleasure to visit the Seals. They kept an open house and were superb hosts. Hilary enjoyed very good health. He was never hospitalized and up to the day of his attack he never cancelled appointments due to ill health.

He is surely missed, and walking through the couloirs of the Department or the Computer Center, one occasionally thinks the walls will reverberate from the roaring laughter which was his trademark.

The following bibliography was compiled by Hilary's wife Myrna, who died just five years after her husband.

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