

Bruno de Finetti Centenary Conference  
Rome, November 15, 2006  
Fulvia de Finetti

It is a pleasure for me to be once more in this University where my father spent many years of his academic career as it has been remembered in June by professor Renato Guarini, rector of the University whom I have to thank again for the hospitality given to the two events meant to remember him here in Rome. As you all probably know it was in 1954 that my father conquered a chair in this University and it was in 1961 that he moved to the Faculty of Science to teach Probability.

This was the happy end of a story that goes back to 1927 when my father, just graduated, reached Rome to work as head of the Mathematical Service of the Istituto Centrale di Statistica. He had already in his mind Probability and after finishing his work at the Institute he used to attend the seminars that took place in Panisperna street, next door to his office. He was particularly impressed by Enrico Fermi whose rapid career became a target for him.

He immediately gained the attention of the great mathematicians that worked here at that time: Guido Castelnuovo, Tullio Levi-Civita and Federigo Enriques.

Guido Castelnuovo at that time taught probability and so he explained why he found probability an interesting topic to teach: *"Probability is a science of recent formation; hence in it, better than in other branches of mathematics, one can see the relationship between the empirical contribution and the one given by reasoning, and between the process of inductive and deductive logic used in it. The fact that it is a science in the making explains why it is appropriate to give frequent examples to show the applications of known methods or to introduce new ones."*

If you compare Castelnuovo's sentence with what Bruno wrote to his mother when student in Milan: *...Mathematics is not by now a field already explored, just to learn and pass on to posterity as it is. It is always progressing, it is enriching and lightening itself, it is a lively and vital creature, in full development and just for these reasons I love it, I study it and I wish to devote my life to it...*

It will not surprise you to know that Castelnuovo often invited Bruno at his home to see the progresses of his work. To open the door was a little girl wearing her hair in pigtails. She was Emma the daughter of Castelnuovo. In a letter dated July 28, 1928 Castelnuovo examines the work of Bruno, recognizes his capabilities as analyst, gives advices on how to present the work and concludes, *"I feel sure that you will be able to give important contributions to Probability Calculus and its applications"*. And so it seems he did if important names in this field have accepted to come from U.S.A. and Europe for this Centenary Conference.

When in 1961 the Faculty of Science decided to resume for Bruno the chair of Probability that had been of Castelnuovo but extinguished when he left, the main concern of my father was that the same thing might happen when he would leave. In April 1973, Savage had already died, my father received from the University of Michigan an invitation for the year 1973-74. I think it may be of interest to read part of the answer of my father to decline the invitation: *"...I am very pleased and honoured for such attracting invitation and for the interest in my research.....and in my point of view about subjective probability. I would be surely willing to support it, especially in your University where L.J. Savage spent several years of his admirable activity..... I am involved in many programs here, highly depending on myself (my collaborators are too young to be fully responsible for the courses)."*

I am sure my father would be very happy to know that the Faculty of Science not only preserved the chair of Probability but increased the number to three and that some of those "too young collaborators" are continuing his teaching and research.

