

My memories of Prof. Jaime Carbonell

As a student, post-doc and a colleague, I have worked with Jaime for the last nine years. In these years, apart from Machine Learning, we had enriching discussions on a wide range of topics. Chess was a keen interest shared by both of us. Whenever I had a good game against a titled opponent, I felt proud to share it with him. Jaime would precisely sense the single move that clinched victory while analyzing the board. Busy he was, but he too often shared his games with me, and over the chessboard in his office, we would discuss chess lines as animatedly as we discussed research ideas.

One of my collections of poems was dedicated to the great teachers who influenced me the most. I asked Jaime, has any of your students dedicated any collection of poems to you? He smiled, and said, "no, you are the first, and if you ever join Bollywood, you would be the first again!" I was thrilled to know that among the luminaries he guided as an advisor, I was finally first in something. When Jaime told me that he once translated a Spanish collection of poems, it reinforced my belief that there would be hardly any intellectual pursuit this man has not explored.

Machine Learning, languages, poetry, music, chess, politics, and intriguing ideas like countries with large population may speak their respective languages faster because there is a competition to be heard -- of all these moments when I was enthralled by Jaime's brilliance, and on uncountable occasions I experienced the nurturing of a kind genius, one moment stands out to me. My graduation day coincided with a paper-rebuttal deadline. Jaime and I were editing the rebuttal draft before the hooding, and it was still hundred words over limit. I thought that I would trim the final submission after the graduation party. When I came back from the party, I found the draft was already trimmed and perfectly fits within the allowed word limit. Knowing that the graduation was my big day, Jaime expended his time to edit the rebuttal on a Saturday evening letting me enjoy the moment.

Once we submitted a paper in a maddening rush. The results came in late and we had one day to finalize a 15-page draft. I wrote it quickly (and badly) and apologetically confessed "the draft looks awful". Jaime assured me that we still had the whole evening and he would edit and make it better. He viewed time as an extensible guideline to figure out what can be best achieved within the timeframe. And in his exemplary pursuit of scientific excellence, he lived his 66 years in one of the best possible ways any 66 years can be lived!

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