



In Memoriam: Helmut Zelloth

Ronald Sultana

I received news of Helmut's passing via a text message sent by friends at the European Training Foundation in Turin, Italy, where Helmut worked since the year 2000. The date was 12th July 2020. I recall sitting down, and kept staring at the cell phone in disbelief, not quite grasping the reality of it all. How could it be that Helmut was no more? How did it happen? What about his wife Marketa? What about his 10-year-old daughter Sissy? What about his family back in Austria, where his parents were waiting for him to celebrate his sister's wedding? And what about his colleagues and friends spread all over Europe and beyond?



Helmut was taken from us when his heart failed him as he was walking on the mountain trails he loved so much. Only a few months earlier he had told me how much he appreciated the clean, refreshing air, not to be found in the busy city below, where his home was. He had already had a close brush with death due to a skiing accident some years back, and despite the broken bones and surgery, had made it back to health. This time, however, it was not to be.

I found some solace re-reading emails we have been sending each other over the past twenty odd years. I also fished out photos of him, taken in some of the places we went to on joint missions, almost always related to the promotion of career guidance: Scotland, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, among others, with the most recent event being in Kiev, where, under the auspices of the ILO, Helmut, Gideon Arulmani and myself contributed to a training workshop in support of policies for the fledgling career guidance sector in Ukraine.

These photos are strikingly reminiscent of the Helmut that we have come to appreciate and love: smiling, always fashionably dressed, always ready with a quirky joke, never cynical even when in some missions we were clearly working against the grain, and somehow always remaining positive and courteous in the face of adversity. I do not recall a single occasion where he spoke with malice of anyone, and even when criticising, comments came from the heart, and were carefully respectful of others. First and foremost a family man, I recall the email he sent me when he learnt that finally, the much hoped-for baby was on its way... and the subsequent emails, sent on a regular basis, with updates about Sissy's development, and his pleasure of sharing new activities with her as she grew older. Some of these characteristics boil down to the personality he was fortunate enough to be blessed with; others were cultivated on the basis of his humanism and deep faith, about which he spoke with conviction.

Needless to say, Helmut will also be remembered for his many contributions to the related fields of career guidance, TVET, apprenticeships and work-based learning. In his writing as much as in his presentations, Helmut managed to make meaningful connections between theory, policy and practice, and was thus able to reach out to a diverse community in over 60 countries, showing himself to be not only a true European, but a global citizen. As one of his colleagues put it beautifully, he "reached out to so many people, and left a personal memory, like a fingerprint, in each of us that will not fade away."