

50 years of gamma ray astronomy with Nanni and friends

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I had the privilege to work with Prof. Giovanni Fabrizio Bignami (he was ‘Nanni’ for me, and I was ‘a Piè’ for him) since the end of the 70’s on several space programs, and scientific endeavours, as well dealing with personal life’s challenges. In particular, our first contact happened during the proposal phase of the high energy Gamma-ray camera to be selected aboard the newly approved NASA CGRO satellite, and, just after, on the GAMMA1 Soviet high energy gamma-ray mission, to provide a state of art start traker, that was successfully designed and built, but never delivered to IKI. At the end of 1990-beginning of 2000 we worked together on the EPIC X-Ray XMM focal plane detectors of which he was the ESA PI. In parallel, during the end of the ‘80s till the middle of the 90’s, working to the proposal to launch an ESA gamma ray Observatory, materialized in the faulty proposal of the GRASP satellite (as M1 mission) and just after the successful attempt with the INTEGRAL ESA-NASA-Roskosmos M2 mission, selected to completion in 1995, and launched 7 years later from Baikonur with a Proton rocket. Just after its selection INTEGRAL was close to be cancelled due to the withdrawal of US and English Agencies expected to provide half scientific payload, then rescued by the Italian-French collaboboration, fully supported by ASI and CNES Space Agencies. The Observatory was successfully launched on October 17, 2002, still providing nowadays outstanding science after 22 years in operation. At the time of the crisis I was asked by ESA Executive to re-design the > one ton imaging/timing telescope as Principal Investigator of a new consortium, and was fully encouraged and supported by Nanny, chair of ESA-ISEC (INTEGRAL Science Evaluation Committee). At that moment I was verydoubthful to accept the load: almost 3 decades later, I am so happy to have accepted that challenge, that has finally left an indelible mark on my scientific way.

More recently, when Nanni was INAF President, I was appointed as the first Director of the Institute for Space Astrophysics and Planetology, supported by him, criticized, pushed to do the best in all the common activities among INAF. This was our common walk in the last 5 decades: Nanni was an unargued leader and he was always thinking about the best for Science and for the Astrophysical community at large. He served as President of the Italian Space Agency (2007-2010), of COSPAR (2010-2014), of the National Institute for Astrophysics (2011-2015), and other international bodies.

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