

# Prof. De Bakker, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Boss

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The name De Bakker came to my ears for the first time as a student mathematics, during topology courses. One of many names of people that were apparently shaping mathematics together, somewhere on Mount Olympus.

February 1991 I started as a PhD student at CWI, and Jaco became a person of flesh and blood. But he remained a distant figure, as the boss of my boss. At that time the financial situation of CWI was not so rosy, and every month, at the end of an AP (Afdeling Programmatuur) scientific meeting, Jaco would remind us of this fact. With his sonorous voice he would recite the financial losses and reductions in personnel at AP. Depressing stuff.

January 1997 I moved to Swansea in Wales, where the head of department John Tucker turned out to be a very good friend of Jaco. They knew each other from a time when John worked at CWI. Jaco and his wife had once visited the Tucker family, an episode which had found its way into the Book of Legendary Visits. John used to say “I am president of the Jaco de Bakker fan club” (after a short visit to The Netherlands he once jokingly added “and possibly the only member...”).

From September 2000 onward, as theme leader at CWI, I started to share John’s views and learned to fully appreciate Jaco. As my direct boss he was always ready to give full support and sound advice, based on his wide experience and exceptionally good memory. His guidance prevented me from several pitfalls and stimulated me to venture in new directions. Moreover, I found that he is truly interested in personal matters and family affairs. By now for me Jaco is one of Four Fatherly Figures, key persons in my scientific career and development.