



**A Tribute to Anatoli Ilyashov, CALIF Board Secretary & Labor Organizer &
Labor Relations Professor
NO RUSSIAN HAT IN THE SUMMER**

At the height of the heat wave two weeks ago, Anatoli came to the office early for the Board meeting. He was looking very tired and was sporting a t-shirt. Gone from his head was the Russian hat he used to wear as he usually came, dressed to the hilt. Anatoli has been on my board of directors since 2005 after meeting him on an Access ride. We were both going to a meeting on a disability rights issue. We were quick to make the acquaintance and I learned that he was once a professor of Labor Studies in an Ivy League University back East. He had a son and MS set in. Anatoli had a quiet wisdom about him which immediately impressed me and I invited him to come to CALIF to check us out and see if he wanted to be part of our Board of Directors.

I was delighted when one day, he actually came and visited us at the Center. We talked about a lot of things and in a few months, he agreed to be part of our Board. As a member of our Board, Anatoli was a reflective listener and carefully weighed things needing attention and support. He was focused on bringing ahead the meeting agenda and nonsensical in his approach to things that did not need dragging on with useless banter. He led the Board to be on task, asking the pointed questions.

This summer, he and I worked together for his trip up North for his son's graduation! He was immensely proud of his only child graduating from UC Berkeley. We made arrangements with our contacts in the disability movement to coordinate his transportation, his attendant and other things he wanted to do during the trip. But shortly after he got back, although energized, Anatoli lost the

ability to sign his signature on our paperwork. He has accepted that with grace, with even more vigorous support for CALIF.

But the day for the Board meeting, he worried me because he was losing his voice and looking very weak. He could not even drive his motorized wheelchair anymore and my assistant propelled the chair by powering the control box as he walked alongside Anatoli. The chair was jerking but Anatoli rode through it patiently, without complaint. He was the earliest to arrive among the Board. We offered him water but all he wanted was to rest a bit. At the board meeting, Anatoli was quiet and nodding when consulted. His eyes were alert, assuring us that he was following the conversation. We had very critical things to decide on that day and his participation was precious. When it was time for him to meet his ride downstairs, he promptly left or he would have been stranded at 7 pm, like he was a few times before. But we were careful to avoid that.

After he was gone, I keenly felt his absence—he was like the gentle wind that came and went, leaving us even just a tad cooler. I sent a prayer of thanks that he decided to come even in the oppressive heat. He could have called in on the conference phone and that would have been fine. But Anatoli made an effort to show up—a real trooper, present for battle. Maybe too, he needed to get out of his apartment and get a feel for the outdoors for a change. Either way, in the current status of the relentless issues facing our community, Anatoli's presence was a comfort to me. He and I don't get to spend a lot of time just catching up like we used to do—we are deluged by the work, the daily grind—the omnipresent stressors of our health, budgets, personnel, community meetings, fund development, visitors, committee work, etc., etc.

I called him finally yesterday to thank him for coming to the meeting, to tell him how much we love and appreciate him. A woman came on the phone to relay the messages to him—he could not speak loud enough for me to hear anymore. But she understood his responses and spoke them back to me. I asked if we could visit with him this week but to my delight I was told, “this week is too hectic—so much going on around here but in two weeks is better!” I was happy to hear that things are in fact, hectic for Anatoli! Hectic means life remains busy—like always. MS or no MS but still vital! Even as conditions like MS, come and go with remission, life quietly moves on, like the waters of a silent river that continues to flow and support life.

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Lillibeth Navarro
CALIF Founder and Executive Director