

Greetings from Tonie Botha

I happen to know Derrick since our student days in the late 1960's.

Derrick was a student studying Operations Research – which was the real big flavor of those days for the highly gifted students and nerds. He was my junior by at least one or two years. Although we never studied the same subjects we co-operated when he approached me as a computer science student to develop a Fortran program for his efforts to establish a student *dating* program. This was done on the *Tukkies* (University of Pretoria) IBM 1130 computer, housed in the university's Engineering Department, long before the first romance and dating websites started to crop up on the internet. Today he often refers to this occasion as it was most memorable: he got in trouble with this with the University's management that regarded this to be "un-biblical" and *onaanvaarbaar* for the University's reputation! Derrick, being the unorthodox person we know him to be, still only smiles about this little incident.

The second memorable occasion I recall was very similar. Another operations research student (today a professor in this subject), *Kobus Wolvaart* (*Wollie*, back then) and I developed an election results forecast program for the election of 1970 (I think). I developed a FORTRAN program on the same IBM 1130 and Kobus' algorithm was based on an iterative update of results of the election as they were announced on the radio. Every time a new result became known, we entered it on the 1130's console, determine the "swing" from/to the different parties and then forecast the end result. Derrick was very interested in his party's progress and came and visit us about every hour or so. Because the first results were mostly favoring his favourite party (I will not publish which one that was!), it seemed up-front that a shocking "swing" was about to happen. What I can recall very clearly (amongst my fear of a

possible program bug!) was the absolute enjoyment of Derrick for this apparent big "swing"! Needless to say, the algorithm kept on converging towards the real end result which did not favor Derrick's party. We published the results hourly on paper in the cafeteria area; and we are still very proud that our simple algorithm outperformed the very sophisticated ones used for the forecasting at the SABC. We forecasted the end result long before anyone else!

Years went past. Derrick went overseas and returned as *Dr* Kourie; but he maintained his humorist self. As I was still involved as an external lecturer in Computer Science I then discovered Derrick to be a member of that department.

Eventually, Derrick became my study promoter for my doctorate. He happened to be an excellent study leader and assist me in a large way with better formulated English and approach to the study. I know that he was very patient with this outside student –who tend to take all the off roads and first study those as well as the real goal– for which I am humbly grateful. He made one key remark at the most opportune time during the final parts of my writing the thesis. He said to me: "*Remember, this is only a Ph.D!*". Only afterwards I realized how an experienced person such as Derrick can make a huge difference in the motivation level of the student.

To end: We are co-authors of our book on knowledge management, together with *Retha Snyman*. I am proud to be associated with Derrick and the Department at *Tukkies* which has such academics as him.

[via EMail: 27 May 2008]

Reference

Antonie Botha, Derrick Kourie, Retha Snyman: *Coping with Continuous Change in the Business Environment – Knowledge Management & Knowledge Management Technology*. Chandos Publishing. ISBN: 1-84334-355-X, Oxford: 2008.

Greetings from Roelf van den Heever

A ROAD WELL-TRAVELED

Becoming 60 is a reason for celebration. This is a short note to convey my sincerest gratitude for knowing, cooperating and collaborating with Derrick for most of my productive life. The setting here on my visit to shady, sunny woods north of Atlanta provides perfect reflection ambience. Derrick too has reason to celebrate as will become clear from the following glimpse at his life, a road well-traveled.

We became friends and colleagues, I at the tender age of 28 and he some years younger and a bit wiser after returning from the UK, newly minted with a doctorate in Operations Research. That too was my area of specialty. We both had to be transformed and morphed over the years to become comfortable in Computer Science, then Information Technology and then ICT, last characterized by ubiquitous and pervasive computing. What a shock towards the end of the laborious morphing process! To move from being the high priest promoting and practicing ancient CS rites based on wisdom and knowledge about how to program a computer by means of commands for sequence, choice, and iteration, later spiced up with procedural abstractions to almost just an ordinary person. The constant challenge for vendors and academics over the years was to make computers easier to program and use. Guess what; they have been successful, accompanied by a dissipation of our CS priesthood.

What follows is basically a *Party-Schrift* (PS) and not a "high-priest" contribution, but rather celebratory. Organisers of this "party" be warned that you will have to be available and ready for Derrick's 70th and 80th academic cum having-a-good-time party since his mother got her degree when she was close to 80 and the all-encompassing

intellectual/academic/spiritual bent runs in the family.

Possible goals with this PS are: recollections of our years together, possibly some rumination about ICT in general.

The Oracle of Delphi: Derrick exudes an "in touch with the 'gods'" ambience (think more about ancient mythology than modern religion). I thus had the privilege of my own oracle when confronted with potentially life threatening and enriching decisions in academic/departmental/social (lives of students and to lesser extent university colleagues – including myself) context. Unlike the real Oracle of Delphi who was licensed by Zeus to interpret his vague rumblings from the innards of the earth, most often to please the crowd/customers by giving ambiguous answers, Derrick's responses were always wise, very well reasoned, rational etc., rounded with sprinklings (showers?) of humour.

My mother-in-law very often reminded me that my mouth would cause me to get a beating/hiding. Foregoing loses some of the semantics hidden in the original Afrikaans: "*jou bek sal maak dat jou gat slaek kry*". Besides realizing that I was fully connected with my mother-in-law, oracle Derrick on several occasions then alerted me audibly to remember my mother-in-law without any other participant in the meeting knowing about the reprimand and the full meaning of: "remember your mother-in-law". Needless to say, it saved me on several occasions – he was thus also a sort of fairy godmother to me.

It is perhaps safe to say that Derrick was the *first* non-Afrikaaner AND non-Dutch-Reformed-Church (AND non-...?) appointee at the University of Pretoria! That happened during the latter part of the 70s and our division/department was never the same again. Not exactly like the smoke, fumes (and mirrors) at Delphi; CS department at UP executed its strategy given from above (admin) but became a very interesting, exciting blend (brew) of political, academic, religious, roundtable coffee-pot discussions fuelling a critical mass of controversies all with hindsight to the betterment of the participants and the institutions where they participated and got embroiled in.

After the initial period of above mentioned "*Sturm und Drang*" we (Derrick, myself plus n others, n approximating 0) came to the collective conclusion that the CS department is destined for relative insignificance driven by a serious lack of resources and a "detached admin" (in business this means management). After a torrent of coffee-pot/water-cooler discussions in order to break the admin (at that time) grid-lock we got a break to do advanced software development for money and best of all to make a profit which we could use to appoint assistants, developers and to buy hardware and software. Many students completed their honours and masters studies, attended conferences, etc all financed from our own sources. We could thus move forward via our own free will.

Derrick was a huge contributor on both academic and research/development levels. His intellect has always been a cornerstone of our offerings; so his ability to speak and write English (in view of his Afrikaans colleagues). Just to keep the balance: he and one or more local and international participants from other religions/no religions would get embroiled in never ending search for truth discussions. I have no recollection if anybody ever succeeded in changing others' opinions/beliefs. Perhaps that was not so important – the mere act of exercising the collective intellect, test controversial ideas were more enjoyable and in the end important.

The company that was born from this profit-motivated research and development and reinvestment in the department, eventually went off-campus, is now international, and employs close to 600 people and is called EPI-USE (USE stands for Unit for Software Engineering). We will always remember those initial years, fights for survival and the constant challenge to have a synergistic, symbiotic interplay of academic and profit goals. Related anecdotes follow.

We two acted as optimization consultants during the 70's, using linear programming for most of our projects, predominantly for needy banks with money. It was not difficult to show how our optimization techniques could outperform a human

decision-maker in a specific, deterministic situation. What was difficult was to do proper sensitivity analyses mimicking some uncertainty in real life. Computers of the day took ages to reach an optimal solution that would take present day computers seconds or part of seconds. It was on one such night where we had the campus computer to our disposal and where we had to do several runs and realised that in order to get through the night we will need lots of coffee, supplemented by Coke (soft drink) and then as a gesture of our successes thus far, a nice cigar. Derrick at that time was still a committed smoker. I stopped smoking some time ago before that night. At about 1:30 that night my heart pounded as if it wanted to get out of my chest. I realised all the caffeine and nicotine based stimulation was overwhelming. Because I did not want to die right there where Derrick would not know what to do with the body, I told him we should quit, left for home where my heart got back to normal at about 6:00am. Moral of the story: he can outwork, outcoffee and outsmoke you when required. He is also a firm believer in the conservation-of-sin law whereby each person is born with a constant (old deterministic world, no quantum effects) allowance, called *zeta*. Derrick's given zeta is used up by the foregoing sins and that is why he can actually have his 60th birthday in a church.

The very first EPI-USE project was to build a protocol converter for Amdahl Communications Systems Division, at that time a USA silicon-valley company. The challenge was to transmit IBM bisync messages via an X.25 cloud and back. Whatever we did had to comply with all relevant specifications and standards, the end product to be used in Amdahl commercial software offerings. The initial challenge was to retool from a "difficult" sequential programming mindset and experience (remember all the 1st year and other students having great difficulty with using the 4 abstractions above) to a real distributed environment. We noted some of the standards used finite state machines (FSM) for specifications. We started to use FSMs for specification only to discover after some time that

there is something lacking, causing an uneasiness and lack of trust (our own) in the completeness of our specifications that served as basis for programming. We then discovered *Hoare's* work on communicating sequential processes (CSP) and realised that this is what we were looking for. Our own CSP-light was used as the specification tool. The emphasis was (still is) on message (event) exchanges between processes and we experienced it as very intuitive. It turned out that it then was relatively easy to extract relevant FSMs from the process specifications for programming purposes. Many years later a similar approach was published in the book by Jeff Magee and Jeff Kramer from Imperial College. Needless to say, Derrick was again the intellectual engine behind this approach that served us very well in years to come.

Derrick gave significant guidance and participated in the development of the system for Amdahl, called the RTX system. RTX was so well specified, programmed, tested that we never had any come-backs after delivering it to Amdahl. In my view this formed the basis for later successes of EPI-USE. Several bright CS students grew up with EPI-USE – they benefited from mentoring and indoctrination received from Derrick. Many still communicate with Derrick and have great respect for his inputs over the years. There was even one (a bright young female) that had some sexual discussions with Derrick; but as you could gather from his instantiation of the above conservation-of-sin law, it was on a pure academic level.

Experience with the RTX system exposed another challenge: how to develop reasonable confidence in the correctness of the system at each phase of specification and eventual programming. We used a small project done for what is now known as Telkom, called the Beltel project, as the guinea-pig. The idea was to do the specification with CSP-light. Derrick would then use his considerable *Prolog* knowledge to transform the CSP-light specification into a Prolog-specification (bit of abstraction) with emphasis on the exchanges of events between processes (can be considered as active objects). The Prolog specification was used to generate so-

called traces i.e. expected sequences of events that may result from the specification. These were firstly analysed to determine whether they reflect the intent with the system. Many specification errors were caught relatively easy. After programming (remember FSMs from CSP-light) the traces were again used as a mechanism to generate test cases. It was amazing how successful the entire Beltel development process was. There was only one major hitch caused by an index that went out of bounds in the Pascal program. The foregoing development process born out of necessity was used where relevant and always with good results.

It is easy to not take note of his culinary prowess when reading the above. I e.g. had the pleasure on occasions to experience his mastery of making his famous garlic based salad. It added value to students' learning experience in that they could not get close to us after such a luncheon. Mutton plays a significant role emanating from his background; his father a butcher and ancestors from Palestine. During 1990 we got another futuristic attack. We realised that after 8 years of contract research and development work, although we succeeded in hiring more assistants, bought hardware and software and graduated excellent students, that we were not internationally competitive. It was back to the drawing board. The overall goal was to come with plans on how we could look and be like a respectable international university regarding availability of resources to accomplish the major university goals. It was concluded that if we could pool all the ICT related resources on the campus and use them without boundaries within the different existing departments then we should perform much better. Thus was born the concept of the *School for Information Technology* (SIT) which was formalised seven years later and become an official entity at University of Pretoria. Even before this stage we already benefited from the cross-fertilisation brought about by SIT. You guess it: Derrick was part and parcel of all planning and execution processes and as always played a critical role. You all know him as broad spectrum; exactly

what was needed for SIT. Silo-oriented personalities do not have the ability to create something like SIT. I retired from the University of Pretoria the same year that SIT became official. Derrick's career then bloomed as never before. Because of that you have this extensive party for him attended by friends, colleagues, students that not only admire him and his lifestyle but very important, value the contributions he made to their lives.

Derrick has been the perfect partner. Always willing to tackle any challenging problem and before long venture into unknown, hazardous territory where not many could follow him. His broad spectrum of interests, enthusiasm, commitment, ability served all of us very well over the years. I got the impression he was never driven by the desire to put himself up front and build monuments. Thus thanks for the organizers for organizing this occasion on his behalf.

[via EMail: 05 June 2008]

is?". I looked around, there was no-one that I could see wearing yellow! Why was everyone looking at me? Oh, no – why me! I stammered something along the lines of "I did not read the work", got a response that I should have and that I will be asked again at some later stage. This event was life changing; I never wore yellow to class – darker colours were better; I diligently did my preparation before going to class - for a couple of months; I remember more about databases – especially cascading, deleting and nullifying tuples – that any of my fellow students would. I was no longer a student number with familiar handwriting – I was known, a face with a name. Derrick, I hope you will continue to pick on unsuspecting students dressed in yellow, they may end up teaching others and aspire to be as wise as you are.

[via EMail: 06 June 2008]

Greetings from Linda Marshall

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE "YELLOW" KIND

Many years ago, when Derrick had achieved what I still wish to achieve and was at the (st)age (in life) that I am now, I had my first encounter with him. It was expected of every second year to have read the chapter that was going to be presented in the next lecture. Well, as you can imagine, not many of us did it then, not many a second year do it now! So, not having had had my date with CJ (that author of the DB books in the mid-80's for those not in the know) the night before, wondering whether I'd have a dough nut from Dom Gert's for lunch, would I be able to finish some other assignment in time if I sat in some of my lectures looking very interested and writing like crazy... The melodic lecture changed to: "And you in the yellow, what do you think the answer

Greetings from Stefan Gruner

HI DERRICK :-)

We met like modern people meet in these days: via the internet. I had just broadcast some of my usual comments to the entire membership of Formal Methods Europe (FME) via that organisation's mailing list, when you –then head of department here at CS/UP– where in search for an external PhD reporter for the thesis of Marlene Ross (who has, by the way, also written a contribution for this festschrift). In those days a member of FME as well –I don't know if you still are today– you picked up my message and –for whatever reason– you decided to reply. You might imagine my surprise about a response from so far away as South-Africa on the other half of the globe, but your message caught me and we kept in touch. Not much later I was officially declared external reporter to

Marlene's thesis – a book like a brick! – and I still keep (in one of my dozens of paper boxes) the official letter from UP with all those funny words in *Afrikaans* printed on it: *Faculteit der Natuur- en Landbouwetenskappe, Universiteit van Pretoria*. This PhD reporter job was the first one of that kind for me, only two years after I had received a PhD (of very modest quality) myself. Yes, those were the days of small bureaucracy – I doubt that in our times of big bureaucracy any academic committee would agree to the proposal of having a young dude as external PhD reporter, with no substantial publications to his name and completely unknown to the academic community (except for making a splash via the mailing list of FME). But Derrick, as we know him, does not think inside the box of customs and traditions, and I was so proud of being chosen as “external” that my report about Marlene's “brick” was probably the longest external PhD report in the history of the department. Not much later you – still head of the department – offered me a position as lecturer, which I *nolens volens* declined because I had just subscribed to my position as a research fellow at the University of Southampton (where also Judith had been for quite a while – in fact she had just left before I came), and I did not want to upset anybody by resigning from a job to which I had just subscribed. (By the way: my research mentor there at Southampton had just written a CSP Model Checking Tool in Prolog, something that you had already done some twenty years ago.) You, Derrick, showed a lot of understanding for my situation, and we decided to keep in touch until, at a later point in time, another job opportunity here at CS/UP would crop up. This happened in the year 2005 (though you were then not HoD any more) and *only* 18 month later (thanks to the *rapid* processing of my residence permit application by South Africa's efficient immigration bureaucracy), in July 2006, I eventually arrived. Needless to say how well we got along together since that day, both inside and outside *varsity* (as they call a university here in this land). Only briefly I want to mention how you acted like the biblical *good Samaritan* when I was recently hospitalised, and

how you also helped me with your signature under our NRF-supported Roggenbach-project which I was not allowed to sign due to my lack of South-African citizenship. As a token of gratitude I asked Markus to write a paper for the festschrift too :-)

As a foreigner with some sensors for language phenomena, I have noticed again and again that South-Africans seem to be “hooked” – possibly even unconsciously – to three particular “buzzwords” in these days. Open any newspaper or listen to any official *Verlautbarung*, and you can be pretty sure that any of these buzzwords will not be far. These three buzzwords are: “leadership”, “empowerment” (to “empower”), and “celebration” (to “celebrate”). Words, especially such “public” phrases, are like windows through which a language-sensitive foreigner can look straight into the soul of a nation, to see their hopes, their dreams, their wishes and aspirations – regardless of the factual truth which might occasionally be very different. The reason why I mention these three words here is their suitability for providing a contrast background against which you, Derrick, are standing out: *unzeitgemäss*, as a man like Nietzsche would have called it, beyond the fashion of the day. Where the common voice calls “leadership”, you emphasize (and practice) the moral as well as epistemological autonomy of the individual, or, in the words of Kant: *Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit*. Where the common voice calls “empowerment”, you would rather and more cautiously speak about “enabling” – knowing from 60 years of life experience that power is something with its very own problems attached to it: either as an illusion of power, to keep the de-facto powerless calm, or as a too-much of de-facto power in the hands of some people onto which it should better not have been bestowed at all. Last but not least: there, where a self-righteous *zeitgeist* is keen to “celebrate” almost anything and everything, you Derrick have not forgotten that we are fallible and that the quality of our achievements will be judged by history: *not now*, but only in 100 or 200 years from now (or even *after* history – if you want to assume a religious point of view). In fact,

history has shown us plenty of cases in which those, who were regarded as important in their own time, are now as dead as they can only be, whereas others, who have been ignored or belittled during their own lifetime, are now coming out into the light as those ones who truly deserve attention and respect. Thus, in contrast to the popular values of "leadership", "empowerment" and "celebration", Derrick has put his emphasis on *autonomy* (versus "leadership"), *modesty* (versus "power") and *skepsis* (versus "celebration"). These three indeed –and not those fashionable buzzwords– are genuine academic values, the values of a scholar, and I hope and wish that you will be keeping them alive as long as you live and work amongst us. Derrick is leading by not trying to lead.

As mentioned at the beginning of my greetings, with *broadcasting* it all started, and now we are doing broadcasting again :-)) namely with the newly invented CSP partial-parallel operator (though my own contribution to its development is, as usual, very negligible). Philosophically it has been an interesting time as well, with more Popper, Kuhn, and the School of Frankfurt –and occasionally even Teilhard de Chardin and pope Benedict!– than it is generally recommended for mental sanity. I am glad for all those opportunities which you have made possible, and I thank you very much for them. May there be many more to come.

Thus, happy birthday, *herzlichen Glückwunsch und alles Gute*, from a German "gypsy" who is always far away from home, and very much at home at the very same time.

[Pretoria: 08 June 2008]

Greetings from Jan (and Clarisse) Roos

We are here today to remember a son of Witbank and Pretoria. He has become a friend and a brother. My connection with Derrick started in the early 1980's when we were both teaching Computer

Science at Pretoria with Roelf van den Heever as head of the department. I was not really a computer scientist. I was an engineer and my passion was networking. Roelf was an allrounder – he was head of department, businessman, engineer as well as a computer scientist. Derrick Kourie is the real Academic Computer Scientist and since those early years he was involved in automata theory, etc. These were good days. I still remember our long discussions with cups of coffee in the tea room and solving all SA's problems. Derrick's style does not show ambition. He rather makes his point through intelligence. He takes everything in his stride. He is successful without obvious effort – perhaps an authentic academic. He enjoyed the short cuts. In a way, he, as well as us, sometimes seems surprised with his success. Famous letters were often written "from the dean to the pope" on important issues. They were never expressed in an aggressive manner but in a coherent and convincing style and left the reader with no option but agreeing. After such a letter he would smile and enjoy his successful feedback. There is more to Derrick that meets the eye. Derrick does not look like an athlete, but he won the 880 yard race at school. He is not the most attractive guy around but he has a beautiful wife. He has challenging children and remains a loving and dedicated father. He does not have grand cars but he has many cars. He is fun and easy to get along with and his ability to provoke and enrich conversations is amazing. His traits that stand out are kindness, friendliness, humbleness, patience fruits of the Spirit. I celebrate him as a blessed man: a real God lover.

[via EMail: 09 June 2008]

Greetings from Sergei Obiedkov

DEAR DERRICK

When in spring 2005 I sent you an e-mail asking about a possibility of doing a postdoc at UP, your response was so efficient that just three months

later you were meeting me at the Johannesburg airport. From my first day in South Africa, I knew that I could count on your advice and I felt your support all the way through, for which I will be grateful forever. You are a wonderful colleague and working with you is a privilege I hope to enjoy again, but even more important to me was your amazing personality and your concern, which was one of the reasons my stay in Pretoria was such a pleasure. I am sure the life will bring along many talented students for you to work with and many nice and interesting people to talk to. I hope that whatever you start will be fulfilling and rewarding. So, best wishes to you and your family, and, well, many happy returns of the day!

[via EMail: 09 June 2008]

Greetings from Bob Jolliffe

CONVERSATIONS WITH DERRICK

During my short stint at the fine department of Computer Science at the University of Pretoria I enjoyed many a conversation with Derrick. Mostly these were excuses to smoke a cigarette, but we nevertheless made great progress on solving the problem of getting students to produce quality in program code. Nowadays I don't get to see him so much and I worry that some of our earlier insights may be lost. I'd like to take this opportunity to smoke another cigarette and try and summarize where we are.

Both Derrick and myself start from a sensible common position, which is surprisingly missed by many: the programming of a computer is first and foremost a human endeavour. It may bear some resemblances to a sausage factory or to a machine (where programmers are referred to as "resources") but these are just resemblances. Stripping away the veils which software engineers erect to confuse us, the process of constructing a computer program consists of a myriad acts of

authorship. In the tradition of all good academics, it makes good sense to refer to Wikipedia at this point. What is meant by "authorship"?

"An author is defined both as "the person who originates or gives existence to anything" and as "one who sets forth written statements" in the Oxford English Dictionary."

The second definition provides an accurate account of what is being done but doesn't give us much hint as to why it is being done, and certainly not how it could be being done well or badly.

The first definition suggests the author is doing something more than just "setting forth". She is the author as creator. That is, she is doing what human beings do when they are being most human. Now what drives the author to create quality in these creative acts is where Derrick and I begin to diverge.

I think for Derrick, and I look forward to him correcting me for putting words in his mouth, it has always been at least something of a question of ethics and a moral imperative. The programmer *should* strive to produce quality code because it is somehow the *right thing to do*. After all, the production of a sloppy piece of code can have nasty consequences ranging from an ugly user experience through to lives being placed at risk. Or even, God forbid, some capitalist losing pots of money.

I in turn have argued that the programmer, if she is to be a good programmer and a self-conscious creator, should seek to produce elegance and beauty in her creation because she *can* rather than because she must. These very acts of creation are acts of emancipation.

We are probably both a bit off the wall, perhaps overly effected by nicotine craving, but I think our different madnesses have had an interesting consequence to our approach to teaching generations of students. There is a well known (mis-)saying that you can lead the hordes to culture but you can't make them think. After many years of trying I have come to believe the truth of this with increasing conviction. But if you can't make the buggers *think*, you can at least make them *feel*.

Whether driven by a Catholic sense of guilt or a marxist drive for self emancipation, I think we have both recognised that it is sometimes possible to inculcate into these aspiring creators a sense of responsibility for their muddled thinking. Something that makes them *fee*/the need or the urge to un-muddle themselves.

In this I think Derrick and I have shared something, which besides the odd cigarette, I have thoroughly appreciated. Of course he's still got a lot to learn about Marx and authorship, but he's showing good potential. I, on the other hand, am probably something of a lost cause – perhaps if I could just make it back to the confessional I might yet come right.

[via EMail: 17 June 2008]

Greetings from Gabor Barla-Szabo

DEAR DERRICK

Thank you for all the knowledge you have passed on to me over the years; from Compiler Construction to Prolog I have learned a great deal in your courses. A great many thanks also for all the post grad support you have given me in the final year of my Masters and publishing of a successful article thereof. our help was invaluable.

I wish you a very happy 60th birthday

[via EMail: 19 June 2008]

Greetings from Deon Oosthuizen

A DECADE WITH DERRICK

I spent approximately 10 years working together with Derrick Kourie: probably the most enjoyable phase of my work life.

The day I met Derrick, he invited me into his office, saying: 'please come in, and my apologies for the untidy office, but I do not need to impress people any more, because I have "arrived"'. I was somewhat taken aback, but soon understood.

Derrick has reached a point of contentment and maturity which freed him from the need to impress people with small things. He then went ahead and told me that he would stand back to allow me to teach my field of specialty – Artificial Intelligence - while he would study and teach some other subjects. Remarkable indeed!

This first meeting was a preview to my subsequent experience of working with Derrick, a trustworthy, supportive colleague; always available to listen and be a sound board, and to advise me when I was faced with difficult issues. It signified the beginning of a decade of delightful collaboration and hours of interesting discussion.

I discovered by accident that Derrick kept my interest at heart. While I was on sabbatical leave in California I once emailed him telling him about some news about South Africa I saw on TV in America. Those were the early days of email and Derrick edited and forwarded it to the Computer Science staff email distribution group, not realizing that it would be forwarded to me. So, there I was sitting in California and after a few minutes received my own email back, neatly edited to eliminate politically risky words! This is what a good friend does behind your back: he forwards news giving you the credit but removing potentially harmful aspects.

Derrick believes in being sincere, but together with that, also in academic equality. Viewing the rector as one among equals, he was unhappy about the existence of a designated parking spot in front of the Education Building - feeling that the rector was thereby assigned elevated status. And I remember the day he and I had an appointment with the rector and Derrick sat in the holy office with his feet crossed on top of his chair signifying his equal standing! It is a privilege to know Derrick.

[via EMail: 26 June 2008]