ARTICLES

13 A Guided Tour of Program Design Methodologies
G. D. Bergland
After describing, applying, comparing, and evaluating four major methodologies, this guided tour concludes with an interim procedure for use until the "right" method appears.

38 Computing in China, 1980
Harry D. Huskey
China is moving to western technology and a revamped educational system to help her computer industry recover from the effects of the Cultural Revolution.

48 On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace
Danny Cohen
Which bit should travel first? The bit from the big end or the bit from the little end? Can a war between Big Endians and Little Endians be avoided?

58 A Survey of the State of the Art of Design Automation
Melvin A. Breuer, Arthur D. Friedman, and Alexander Iosupovicz
Automated layout of PCBs and LSI chips is a successful operation; testing is an active area of development. DA tools, however, are seldom used in logic design.

76 A Program of Continuing Education in Applied Computer Science
Richard Hinderliter and Stephen D. Shapiro
This existing curriculum presents state-of-the-art material to MS-level technical staff with no formal computer science background. Cooperation between industry and academia made it work.

81 MP80: A Microprogrammed CPU with a Microcoded Operating System Kernel
Giacomo Bucci, Giovanni Neri, and Fiorenzo Baldassarri
How can the performance of systems containing obsolete technology be improved? Emulation and microprogramming provide cost-effective answers for real-time applications in a process control environment.

93 Tutorial Series—13: Computer Memory Systems
A. V. Pohm and T. A. Smay
Because there are no very fast, cheap, reliable memories on the technological horizon, memory hierarchies will continue to play a key role in computer system design.

SPECIAL FEATURES

111 Monterey Workshop on Computer Packaging
John W. Balde

114 Open Channel: Heat Instead of Light? A Feedback Experiment
David C. Thomsen

80A Tutorial Week West 81 Final Program

DEPARTMENTS

4  R. E. Merwin: A Eulogy
10  Letters to the Editor
116 New Products
122 IC Announcements
123 Microsystem Announcements
124 New Applications
126 Update
128 Call for Papers
130 Calendar
132 Classified Ads
134 Book Reviews: The Politics of Privacy—Planning for Personal Data Systems as Powerful Technologies
135 Short Courses and Seminars
136 Advertisers/Product Index
137 The Bookshelf
Reader Service Cards, p. 136A; Order Form, p. 136C.
Computer Society Membership Application, p. 8.
IEEE Student Membership Application, p. 56.

Coming Next Month:
Pictorial Information Systems
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COMPUTER
We have lost a great professional society supporter, a remarkable human being, and a wonderful person. To many of us Dick Merwin will remain one of the few persons to whom these words can genuinely be applied. Whatever volunteer task he undertook for the Computer Society—from minor support roles to the presidency—he always devoted his full energy to the task at hand. And yet, he never lost his sense of humor. That’s probably why working with him was always fun as well as productive.

Dick’s contributions to professional activities were often at the expense of personal income. When he worked for the society, he spent his own time—and for a man who earns part of his bread through consulting, time is money. In spite of this, he rarely turned down a request to serve.

Dick Merwin started his Computer Society participation in 1974. He had learned that we were initiating the Compcon Fall conference series in his home area, Washington, DC, so he contacted the newly appointed organizer. His opening words were something like, “I understand you need some help.” To my knowledge Dick never had to volunteer again: we never let him get away.

Dick’s diligent and personal approach to his duties often led to his being asked to do several jobs simultaneously. In 1976, and until his death, he served on the society’s Governing Board, and in 1977 he began service on the Executive Committee. He was responsible for conferences and meetings in 1977 and was an IEEE division director in 1978 and 1979. In 1980 he was the general chairman of Compcon. He drafted to be society president for 1981.

While holding a couple of these assignments, he was approached to serve as our program chairman for the 1979 National Computer Conference, a major undertaking. After much urging on our part he finally, reluctantly agreed. I remember when he accepted the job, he told me he had two provisos: (1) that I help him explain to Sally-Ann and (2) that he might have to step down if he had to find a job. Luckily for the Computer Society, Sally-Ann had long since learned to grin and bear it—and The George Washington University kindly furnished a job providing food for our program chairman’s table.

Dick’s legacy to us is a stronger Computer Society upon which we can continue to build.

Merlin Smith

Tse-yun Fung

Dick always had the ability to laugh at himself—a quality that put other people at ease. One such event that stands out in my mind occurred just last year during the negotiations between the Computer Society and the National Computer Graphics Association regarding their possible co-sponsorship of our new quarterly IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications. Dick and I met informally with several NCGA members late the night before, at their conference hotel in Washington, D.C. Following our meeting we enjoyed one or two glasses of wine together before Dick finally dropped me off at my hotel on his way home to Georgetown. I was scheduled on the NCGA Board agenda the following morning to discuss the possible cooperative effort, and Dick told me he would pick me up in front of the hotel lobby at 8:20 am.

I arrived at the pickup point at 8:00 am in case Dick might be a little early. Eight-twenty came, then 8:30. I began to get nervous. My slot on the agenda had been estimated at 9:00 am.

At 8:31 I called a cab. I ran up the stairs at the NCGA conference hotel to the mezzanine parlor where the board meeting was going on, and walked a little breathlessly into the room, looking flustered no doubt.

There, seated against the wall with a puzzled look on his face, was Dick!

‘Where have you been?’ he whispered hoarsely to me as I sat down next to him. ‘We’ve been calling all over the place for you. I was about to send somebody to look for you.’

‘Where have I been? Where have you been?’ I said, after I caught my breath.

Then he remembered. I’ll never forget the sheepish smile that broke over his face.

I’m sure the NCGA Board members thought we were a strange pair to be representing the Computer Society, as the two of us sat and laughed between ourselves. We got many a laugh afterwards as we recounted that story.

The last time I spoke to Dick was on a Wednesday, after the Sunday when he was released from the hospital. I called to see if there was anything I or anyone could do for him.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I feel fine, considering everything. I’m going to take it easy for a while. I probably won’t be going back to work for a few weeks.’

That was on a Wednesday. Two days later he was back in his office. Work was simply too much a part of his life. What a beloved friend we have all lost.