In Memoriam

David Notkin
1955–2013

We recently lost one of the leaders of the software research community when David Notkin passed away. Many of us have always been familiar with his work. But in many, many conversations since his death, it has become more and more clear how others in the research community cherished not just his technical contributions but his contributions in other dimensions: his mentorship, friendship, and character.

To capture some of these stories, we’ve created a webpage in David’s honor (www.computer.org/notkin) and have provided a place for visitors to share their thoughts. If you were one of the many people who interacted with David and would like to add a few words, I’d like to extend an invitation to visit the page and reminisce.

—Forrest Shull, IEEE Software editor in chief

Comments from the Community

David was not only a highly distinguished and respected scholar but also an enthusiastic mentor to many people in the community. He inspired and literally changed the lives of many of us. His philosophy about working with students follows that of his own advisor, Nico Habermann: “Focus on the students, since graduating great students means you’ll produce great research, while focusing on the research may or may not produce great students.” He also had a lasting impact through his strong drive and commitment toward increasing the participation of women and members of other underrepresented groups in the field.

It is a small comfort to know that in February, hundreds of his “extended family” joined in honoring him at the “Notkinfest” and that he knew that the International Conference on Software Engineering (ICSE) 2013 that he had been planning for over three years was coming to fruition. I am sure that his spirit and commitment will live on in all of the persons whose lives he touched.

—Frances Paulisch, IEEE Software advisory board chair emerita

I am deeply saddened by the passing of David. Loved by his students and peers alike and universally respected for his principled, objective, and outspoken stand on burning community issues, David was one of those rare humans who combined his academic excellence with a multitude of endearing qualities. His well-documented technical and research contributions speak for themselves. It’s his fairness, sense of justice, humbleness, elegant articulateness, dedication to teaching, and regard for others that made him a great mentor, person, and colleague that I think most of us will remember him by. And aren’t those qualities the most enriching when we’re alive and most persistent when we’re gone?

—Hakan Erdogmus, IEEE Software editor in chief emeritus

Over the 20 years that I knew David Notkin, our relationship evolved and grew. I first met him at ICSE 1993 in Baltimore at a colocated workshop on software design. I was a PhD student then.

I say I met him, but actually, I mostly watched him pace back and forth across the back of the room, stroking his considerable beard, pausing now and again to ask questions of the speaker, or making insightful remarks, as he often did, to bring a discussion that had drifted back on track.

Each year since then, we met at least once, typically at ICSE, and each year I learned something new about software engineering and about David. And so it was with David, a brilliant software engineering researcher but also the most personable of human beings with whom conversation about engineering and life mixed easily. As the years went by, I felt more and more comfortable confiding in him about all sorts of matters—personal and professional.

We did coauthor a short workshop paper together two years ago, but it is the professional and personal interactions that I will cherish most. As my counterpart as editor in chief of the ACM Transactions on Software Engineering and Methodology for the last three years, we shared experiences and many discussions about the future of software engineering and the nature of research publications in our field. But to be honest, it is the strangest and most personal of interactions that I will remember most—his grabbing hold of my arm and guiding me around the streets of Nagoya in 1996 on my first ever trip to Japan in search of a cough medicine, and the “big hug” he emailed me six weeks ago, which turned out to be his last message to me before he died. I will miss him terribly.

—Bashar Nuseibeh, IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering editor in chief emeritus

0740-7459/13/$31.00 © 2013 IEEE