

Monologue 6.4mods: Oct 9, 2015

I just spent my last summer on campus as a UR employee. No students or classes, great weather, heaven, no? If you weren't here, I gotta tell you... it was hellish. Take my office (beat)--- no, that happened already. It was 55 degrees in there (not Fahrenheit, the other one), and escaping wasn't easy, since Otis had 8 guys in CSB all summer reconstructing both elevators out of 13 tons of spare parts (yes, and there was an RIT film crew on location in the shaft shooting a *Die Hard* sequel.) The bright side: we all obeyed Commandment Six of UofR's new mandatory wellness program UfitRelse : "Thou shalt climb 500 stairs per day."

Outside, more (well, nothing but) construction chaos. I felt like Theseus (younger and better-looking, but still...) in a chain-link labyrinth, dodging backhoes and hopping over Minotaur pies (they're blue with little boney bits). I heard that a campus tour group of 7 youths and 7 virgins from Athens went missing without trace. Still, if your ears are bud-plugged, your nose is in a brochure, and you're wandering after some sophomore walking backwards through a FEMA Category Three disaster area, what do you expect? I had no Ariadne, but there was lots of helpful signage: **Detour** (no arrow); **Blasting, take cover when**

**siren sounds; Danger! Mutagenic Spore Zone** (this turned out to be another RIT film crew shooting a post-apocalyptic epic. But you never know...) My favorite: **Wegmans is getting piles! U of R not responsible for hearing loss. Earplugs at Bursar's, \$5.99 + tax.** But the Bursar's building was surrounded by a white miasma, guys in hardhats, hazmat suits, and Darth Vader rebreathers pouring God-knows what death-dealing nanoparticulate powder into a trench with rebar jutting up from its bottom.

The Wegmans Hall construction site is just one part of Wegmans's relentless expansion. Over in Webster there's a row of new boutiques by the giga-store: a W-Data kiosk of course, but also Weggo-chow Petfood, Waggy-Weggi Pet Store, W-O.K. Authentic Korean Food Stall, Dr. Daniel's Urgent Care, and finally W-XYZ (The End) Funeral Parlour... But now, CS enrollment is doubling every year. Wait, that's a problem! Natural urge is to hire good faculty to meet demand, like "Let's bring back George Ferguson, that'll help, yes?"

They forget. Years ago, when word got out that George was taking over "My" AI class, in two days the Registrar put a "cap cap" on how many times we could raise its enrollment cap. By then we were planning

lectures in Strong Auditorium, with overflow seating on the quad with a Jumbotron. In desperation, we added a qualification pre-test.

**Boom**, the post pre-test enrollment was 40. Oh, the test? Simple,

George asked: “how to you spell AI?”

Top wrong answer: [alphabet tune] MACHINE LEARNING.

Runner-up bad answer: NUERAL (sic) nets.

Now when consuming a good **increases** demand for it, we microeconomists say the good has “Bass-ackwards-elasticity”. It’s common, actually. Examples in Academia are: good professors, bad administrators, sex, drugs, and parking. So bass-ackwardness created our current Parking Administration Leviathon (your PAL for short), starting 20 years ago with construction of the Intercampus Drive and Park lots.

But Park Lot is free to retirees! Wait, you say, don’t they pay **you** to park there? Hey, free is fine! It’s going to cost \$200 for the new G lot: from November through April you can park on the Genesee. And it costs another \$50 to ice-fish from your car. Park lot is so big that thousands of us routinely obey UfitRelse Commandment Three (“Thou shalt take 10,000 steps per day”). Open secret: this year the huge headliner

Hercules C-130 transport plane, arriving for the Air Show, lined up to land on Park Lot (a natural mistake). It was waved off in the last seconds by a squad of Parking Guys. With whom you don't want to mess: the only thing they had to wave with was those yellow wheel-boots, one in each hand.

Meanwhile, it was sad leaving my office. Yes, it was a corner office, but (truth) I only wanted to be located next to Jim and Dave – greedy of me. Thanks to the new BME building it lost two lovely views, but I've had my naïve idiot computer questions answered instantly by neighbors, so screw the views.

Big job clearing out that office... Like most AI researchers, in 40 years I'd had a few efforts that didn't quite pan out. There were seven industrial-sized rolling trash toters of those. I kept one box, originally holding "ballet slippers, 4-AAAA , girls age 6-8". Putting in that small award plaque from Pakistan, the old love letters, and the last paperclips still left lots of room to spare.

I also kept fond memories of conversing with students, both undergrad and graduate. Nowadays we seem to have less to discuss, less in common... Sometimes it seems like we don't even speak the same lan... Nahhh, I'm just an old fart...

Of course I miss guiding the steps and shaping the minds of talented but inexperienced grad students -- in other words, advising, 'Ja hear? In a big step forward, the NFL cheerleaders last summer officially became NFL employees! Makes sense to me, since I've done nothing but cheerlead for 40 years. My advising starts in one of two ways:

CASE 1. Student: I think I want to do X.

Me: [thoughtfully, judiciously] Oh, you want to do X? [madly thinking: what the **hell** is X?] Great! Go for it! Or...

CASE 2. Me: Why don't we try Y? [Dana Ballard taught me when to say "we" and when to say "you".]

Months pass...

The more mature Student: "CB, we need to talk about Y: I consider that of all the dashed silly, drivelling ideas I ever heard in my puff, this is the most blithering and futile. It won't work. Not a chance. Z is a helluva better topic." [now, Z is in the null space of Y: nothing in common.]

Me: [thoughtful, judicious pause] Great! Go for it!

So I've relied on students for all 'my' serious work. But we all rely on staff.

After several years of Sturm und Drang, The Chair's Office Complex now has a celestial, non-violent, mindful serenity. A universal transcendental, a beatific meditative awareness of the non-being of all being (and vice-versa). I was noticing Melissa seemed taller, and almost said something, but Emily Post tells us "personal remarks are never in order," and also meantime I'd realized that she was just levitating. Ergonomic chair? Pfui!

Eileen? I could never put it better than Randal, from his song at her recent 40<sup>th</sup> (birthday, was it?) celebration: [Irene goodnight tune]:

I went to a conference on Maui,

Dropped my laptop into the sea.

Eileen drove in on Sunday, (through a blizzard),

And e-mailed my talk down to me.

And JoMarie and Niki. Wrangling grad students is a tough job: my wife Suzanne had it briefly. She was great at details and organization, but

after April 15th she'd get calls from anxious applicants asking for our decision. 99 and 44/100ths percent of the time, this was 'No', in which case she'd just burst into tears, which made nobody feel much better.

But I was thinking: "Gosh -- lovely, smart, empathetic, great dresser, too young for me, **and** off limits: she's the one!"

And Marty, Pat, and Robin, our front-line first responders and flak catchers – would **you** want to sit with your door wide open, just waiting for those god-forsaken new Chatty Cathy elevators to disgorge the next desperate student, uninterested tour group, or assault squadron of helicopter parents supporting their monosyllabic young genius? No wonder that the only part of Wegmans Hall dedicated to undergrads is the space for 50 people to line up for Marty.

So I'm done, and feel great about passing the torch to my colleagues, who won't, like me, drop it in the mud or set themselves on fire. I never really belonged here anyway...I'm a philosophy major, for Plato's sake!

The last computer I wasn't scared of was the IBM 1620. Sincere thanks to them, past and present, all of whom have always had more brains, talent, dedication, and vocation (in the professional sense) than I, in whose reflected glory I've basked for a handful of decades, and who have

been my valued mentors.

Like my running buddy Roger Gans of ME. Though thirty-three years and thousands of miles together, I quickly lost sight of him in races, but in training he provided thousands of facts and answers on everything, and kindly corrected thousands of my statements (all of 'em, basically).

Professor Herb Voelcker, another computer-wise Mechanical Engineer, induced me to visit Rochester during a robotics conference in Nottingham, not unlike Robin Hood recruiting Friar Tuck. He and his wonderful brainy sunny wife Jean put me up and put up with me while I hunted for housing, built a platform bed on their driveway, and even after I asked Herb if I could use one of his chisels to chip paint. I worked on his influential Production Automation Project for two years. Herb and Jean are why I decided to come to (and stay in) Rochester, and I thank them both for all their wisdom, kindness, and great dinners over 40 years.

What now? I'll keep "tending my [metaphorical] garden" (assuming it counts to just contract out all that stuff). I've been sitting in on UofR UG courses, enviously observing really good teachers and meeting CS-like,



engaged and talented students. I'm still being seduced and pursued by my siren *bête noir*, music. So self-improvement, self-flagellation, and self-indulgence all in my short-term future.

Thanks a ton to the organizers, Randal, Marty, Ted, and George, to the sponsor and CS Chair Sandhya, **and** to you all for such a superlative celebration!

---

Musical interlude: *Grandfather's Clock*.

- Bob Zimmerman, mandolin
  - Mark Wambach, guitar
  - Our own Peter Dibble, bass.
  - Bob Flentke, rhythm guitar.
  - Chris Brown, banjo (uncredited)
- 

This Merle Haggard ripoff was meant for a graduation ceremony.

Nowadays it would need a trigger warning for students. And parents.

Everyone **else** there might have been OK with it.

*Marty Tried*