

Bob didn't care much for small talk. He thought deeply about ideas, and loved to discuss them at length. While I have been able to abide a certain measure of small talk throughout my life, I found that I really preferred the deep discussions that I cherished from the day I started to get to know Bob while I was courting his sister, until the day that aphasia took away his voice. That was almost as sad a day for me, as June 30th was when I learned that Progressive Supranuclear Palsy had taken his life too soon.

My bond with Bob began because we both loved his sister, Karen. Yet it didn't take long for me to form a strong friendship with Bob. We shared many common interests, from computer science, to flying as private pilots, to discussing and enjoying technology in its many and varied forms, to discussing a wide variety of topics, most frequently bringing the discussion around to human behavior, and how it could be influenced for the better. In everything we did together, and every idea we shared, one common thread endured. Bob and I shared a passion for optimism, and we believed that things would work out for good, no matter how bleak they may have seemed.

Bob carried this into the cockpit, and was a master of keeping his cool when the flying became difficult. When the engine of his ultralight stopped, he landed on the local golf course and we ended up reading about it in the Berkshire Eagle. When he and Margot, his mother, were flying across South Dakota during winter and the cold weather led to engine failure, he glided to a safe landing, then flew on to Arizona to visit us almost as planned. He viewed his flight to visit friends who were homesteading in Alaska with Margot as an exciting adventure. I got to experience his optimism several times in the cockpit, including one time when he challenged me to perform an extremely short field landing at an airport in the Albany area, then celebrated with me when I successfully met his challenge.

Bob loved history, especially the history of technology. While I didn't know Bob at the time, I have relished hearing the stories about the igloo Bob built in the 1960s. That year Stockbridge got enough of the right kind of snow that Bob and his friend Dale Read could cut the properly sized snow blocks in the correct shape so they could build an authentic igloo. The igloo was large enough that Margot was able to take the entire Brownie troop inside, and Bob slept in it frequently during that winter despite typical Berkshire winter temperatures.

Bob also loved ideas that offered the hope of improving society. Four examples of this come to mind demonstrating his commitment to ideas he believed had value. He was captivated by the idea of Loglan and Lojban, engineered languages that were designed to be completely unambiguous, perfect for machine translation and artificial intelligence, to the point where he taught himself Loglan and Lojban and got involved in the Loglan Institute. He traveled to NYC specifically for the purpose of purchasing an electric typewriter with a Dvorak keyboard, and taught himself to use it because it was designed to overcome the intentional limitations of the qwerty keyboard we most commonly use today. He also documented his ideas about economics and society in his lengthy essay, Choice and Constraint, containing his ideas about a world coalition government designed to promote a just and stable society.

There is also a fourth example that deserves broader explanation. I have been fascinated by computers well before I "met" my first, a DEC PDP-8 in 1972 with 4k core memory. As I got to know Bob, I found someone who shared my passion for learning what we could do with computers to make our lives better. Through Bob I learned of the Free Software Foundation, the importance of open source software, and how software freedom could improve our lives. At the same time, Bob and I discussed and bemoaned Microsoft serving as a stark example of why software freedom was so important. We learned more about computers and software freedom together, and I dearly miss the days when we could compare notes on what we were doing, and talk about strategies for making software freedom more relevant to the rest of the world.

Bob died of a rare neurological disease called Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, usually abbreviated as PSP. This made Bob's death particularly cruel, because Bob was careful to take good care of his body,

but this disease took away his ability to speak long before it took his life. For the past several years, the hearts of many of us have been breaking because we seemed to have already lost the Bob we loved.

However, I am convinced that Bob would not have wanted us to bemoan his fate for long. Yes, we do need to grieve, each one of us in our own way. However, the grieving is easier when our hearts break together. I believe Bob would have wanted us to remember and celebrate his life, extend his thoughts during our own deep discussions about ideas, especially the ideas Bob cared about most. And I am sure that he would not have wanted us to engage in small talk.