

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.