Today I went into Salon Music to buy tickets for “Let the Bright Seraphim” and was offered 10% if I was a pensioner. Sadly, the show takes place nine days too early, but it made me realize that I was really reaching one of the last of Shakespeare’s seven ages of man (or woman). Those of you who have heard me tossing papers and files and proceedings into the bin over the past weeks will also know that this has been a period in which I have been able to look back on some of my time as an academic, and I wanted to share just a few of the real Tukkies highlights with you.

“2-10-1991 VERTROULIK Geagte prof Bishop AANSTELLING Dit is vir my ‘n genoëë on names die Universiteitsraad u vanaf 1 Januarie 1992 as ‘n permanent-voltyds Professor in die Departement Rekenaarwetenskap aan te stel. U aanvangsalaris is R90 717 per jaar.” Following which, I received with great jubilation, my first salary slip of R4 647.55.

So, when I arrived, they gave me on request a Mac II, with a dual screen – this was 1992 – can you believe it? Everyone else was on green screen PCs with DOS 3. And I started changing things. My most notable innovation was the class photos, which have survived from that day, with a few gaps to mark when I was on sabbatical 😊. Other innovations such as Java and C# as a first teaching language, recognition of matric Computer Studies, and the MSc(IT) – Linda, Serena and Vreda’s degree – have not survived as well!

But I want to recall with all of you the wonderful things we have done together: the 15 Java Courses we ran in the Purple Lab in the 1990s, teaching over 500 people; the Interface conferences which were the first time that teachers and lecturers came together in SA; the five IFIP Summer Schools – the first in 1993 in the Kruger Park, when we dragged a Xerox machine there to copy papers; all the SACLAs and SAICSITs; the Linux server that the first Techteam Louis Botha and Tony Abbott and I, set up in the lab over in Chemistry in 1996 so we could run real pracs independently of the creaking Informatorium at the time; and the formal tutorial sessions we organised for first years (Linda and Willem were also tutors). I recently saw the timetable for 1998 for those and it showed 11 classes of 22 students each – 7 classes in Afrikaans and 4 in English where the attendance was virtually 100%. How times have changed.

The department in those times was a very happy and distinguished place. We had more overseas PhDs than any other department in the country, a position we retained while anyone was counting, and people were coming and going on visits all the time. I still wear the Java shirt Jan Roos brought from his sabbatical at Sun Labs in 1998.
We were all proud of Deon Oosthuizen’s language translation software. People like Vali Lalioti and Bruce Watson churned out the postgrads (more than me, actually) and made staff meetings really fun. And of course, we had in the early days two amazing leaders – the visionary and eclectic Roelf van den Heever and the wise and broad-minded Derrick Kourie.

[6]
And where am I going now? After 17 years of this, and 31 years since my PhD, I shall be Director of Computer Science: External Research at Microsoft, Seattle, under Tony Hey. My job will be to network with famous universities worldwide, so maybe we will meet again sometime. Tony was a professor of electronics who worked on transputers (the quad cores of the 1980s) and I helped adapt the language Ada for those computers while at Southampton University. In the toss out yesterday, I also found a dot-matrix printout of a 1991 email from Tony in which he bemoans the new head of department at Southampton as “having a definition of computer science that is so narrow that it would not only exclude any work in parallel architectures and explicit parallel software, but is in danger of excluding people like yourself and myself.” Well, it seems that Tony and I have excluded ourselves off into a pretty nice part of the world and I hope you can come to visit me in Seattle. You will always be welcome, all of you.

[7]
If I look around the staff today, I am proud to say that I have taught two thirds of you up to honours level. That is a huge investment and legacy that I will leave behind. I hope that I have taught you not only how to program in Java and to traverse a tree but also how to look beyond the jacarandas to the wide world beyond. To see that the work you are doing is always, but always, related in some way to the wonderful web of science that is out there and that is done by others as equally searching and as bright as you. And if circumstances are such that you cannot travel as much as I have been fortunate to do then just reverse the gears and get those people to come to Pretoria. Think of the people who have been visitors here just because I asked them: Niklaus Wirth, Dame Wendy Hall, Jeff Kramer, Tim Lethbridge, Kurt Geihs – the list goes on. Our network is second only to our integrity as our most valuable asset we build up during our career as an academic.

[8]
End of lecture. It is time to say goodbye and thank you. Thank you first of all to Tayana for organizing this wonderful feast. Thank you to Andries for probably paying, and also for putting up with me this past year. Thank you to Cynthia and Elmarie for always being there and for always smiling. Thank you to Derrick for being the truest and best friend there could ever be, and for your wise words which never stop flowing. Thank you to Serena and to Stefan my Polelo mates for all the fun and activities over on that side, and then to everyone: thank you, and goodbye.