Some thoughts about a reunion

August 3, 2013

Last night, there was a reunion of IPTers. People who had worked together decades ago. Over the past few months, I located a number of people. Some of the people that I found helped, in turn, to bring in others.

The results were satisfactory. I was especially pleased to round up three of the original figures; P.J., the Air Force Colonel, and Steve. My goal, and I planned this part from the start, was to see the three of them stand together one last time.

I succeeded in this. It seemed right.

These people were not necessarily friends. In some cases, this would not be close to true. Steve, in particular, took advantage of an autistic Young Coder's fear. Fear of being lost in the world. Lost in Time.

The Young Coder worked seven days a week. Sometimes 365 days a year. Birthdays and holidays. Often until midnight or 4:00am. Someday I'll write of the reward that he received. Steve took advantage of others as well. The Civil Liberal used to say that Steve had had edges that other people possessed worn away by stress and necessity.

Steve's company went bankrupt more than once. This was one of the reasons that he preferred to use initials for the name of the company. After a bankruptcy, the use of initials meant that he could continue to use the name. He'd simply change what the initials stood for. It struck me as a clever approach to the issue.

But Steve was an excellent salesperson. Somebody to be respected for determination and efforts. And the company had memorable and interesting teams and projects.

Decades ago, the Air Force Colonel and I created the machine that the U.S. Government used subsequently to convert its supply of old microfilm to microfiche. We did a good job. The machine was still in use a decade later.

My contribution was about 400 pages of well-commented assembly language code. A complete camera operating system. I think that this was 8085 assembly language. I hadn't written in this particular language before. However, no bugs ever showed up in all of the code.

A decade later, the Colonel went to patch the code. But there were no bugs. It was to adjust the acceleration ramping tables. They'd used the machine so much that the ball bearings had started to wear out.

The Air Force Colonel has fought Parkinson's Disease for a decade. We were pleased to see last night that he was in fine spirits regardless. He leaned on his cane, shaking a bit, and pointed out that his hair was still the same color. It was true to an extent. He did not seem very much older.

Misty Auras and I talked too. She and Dai the Serene, her husband, were two of the people that I went to find in 2008. After I spoke with Twisted Time as he floated in the tank of water in the hospital. 2008 was an odd year. But, then, for me that has been true of every year.

Misty Auras and Dai were both IPTers. They met and fell in love there about two decades ago. Misty Auras had spent years picking colors for Apple Corporation devices, but she'd moved on recently. In the past, I'd asked her once or twice, "White... Black... White... Black... what is there to decide?" She'd pointed out that there were subtleties involved.

Her husband, Dai, was only 15 years old when he started at the old firm. A few years earlier, I'd brought in my brother Ken Kiraly, a teenager and college dropout. Ken had worked out, so Steve, the head of the company, decided to try more teenagers.

One kid just wanted to ride his skateboard :-) Dai, another kid who was about the same age, was different. He worked out as well as Ken had. But Dai was much more relaxed than Ken. In fact, I pointed out to Dai last night, decades later, that if there was a nuclear holocaust, Dai might simply shrug off the event. Not worth getting upset over.

When Dai was about 17 years old, he realized that the company needed to put some work into one of its products. Or the product was going to die. Steve, the CEO, was a fan of "Don't reinvent the wheel". This was his mantra. To Steve, the principle meant "Never write original code". So Steve ordered Dai not to proceed.

But the work was needed. Therefore, Dai shrugged off Steve's warning. He proceeded with my assistance. We worked on the project each night. If I remember correctly, we wrote a Fortran to 'C' translator, used it to convert old code, and wrote new code to fill in gaps.

Steve couldn't fire Dai for disobeying him because the resulting program proved to be the company's most important product.

Last night, most people seemed to recognize me. Initially, Dai did not. He indicated that I'd lost so much weight that I looked very different. We discussed health and aging with another associate. I said, "the Near Death Diet is effective, but it is not recommended."

F.J. Gumby was at the event. Looked the same as ever. He's a startuper more than twice the age of most. In the end, he'll succeed with some novel ventures. As a note to Ken Kiraly, if you remember F.J. Gumby's parrots, one of the birds is still alive and well after two decades.

For the benefit of others who may wish to imagine Mr. Gumby, he has been known to wear a live parrot, he is one of the people who tries to launch rockets into space based on private enterprise, and it is rumored that decades ago his paperweights were made of spent uranium. Those things were ridiculously heavy.

The Knight set up the event itself. He is a military type. Therefore things were organized and well-run. The food was also quite good.

The Knight had more depth than Steve did. In retrospect, Steve should have given him more control. Steve would have been more effective if he'd limited his role to head of Sales.

Amundsen was present. He'd flown in from Norway. In fact, the date of the event was based on his schedule.

Amundsen and I spoke at length. I'd thought of him as younger than most of the group. Figured he'd be in his 40s now. I was surprised to learn that he's only a few years younger than me. If he is old, then I must be old too. It's a sobering thought.

P.J., a developer who is about 80 years old, was there. He is another of those I went to find after I woke up. Woke up on the night of March 31, 2008. It's five years ago now. And five minutes.

P.J. was my first manager at the company. I worked with him on software to count votes. It appears that we were responsible for half of the U.S. vote. At the time, I thought that it was only one-third.

When I arrived at the firm more than 30 years ago, P.J. handed me some code in an assembly language that I'd never seen before. Data General, in this case.

I was told that votes were disappearing. This needed to be addressed. The clue was that it was happening every 65,536 votes. I realized immediately that a 16-bit rollover was probably the issue. I checked for Data General instructions that might be vulnerable to problems of this type. Found the culprit code in an hour or two. It was fun.

Many others who the younger coder had known showed up last night. I may write of them over time. I find that it's difficult to put more words down presently. I'm not sure of what it is that I'm experiencing.