In Memoriam: David Notkin (1955–2013)

It is with great sadness that I write to mourn the death of David Notkin, who passed away on April 22, 2013. His passing is a great loss to the software engineering community and to the discipline of computer science as a whole. There already have been many tributes written about David and his numerous achievements and qualities, so the best I can do here is to offer my own personal tribute and those of the TOSEM Editorial Board.

David was my immediate predecessor as Editor-in-Chief of TOSEM and, in that role, he greatly improved TOSEM's visibility, number of submissions, and turnaround time, and thus its timeliness, all without sacrificing the high standards of quality that have been a hallmark of TOSEM since its founding. In this regard he is a clear role model for me and for the Editorial Board as we carry TOSEM forward in the coming years.

But beyond TOSEM, David has long been a mentor for me both as an academic and as a human being. I first had the privilege of working closely with David when he was Program Co-Chair and I was Publicity Chair of ICSE 1995, which was held in Seattle, the city where David spent most of his professional career. In subsequent years, I enjoyed working with him routinely on the ICSE Steering Committee, the SIGSOFT Executive Committee, and eventually TOSEM.

In all of these situations one could not help but be impressed with David. He was a big, tall guy with an outsized beard, a quick wit, and an easy laugh. I suppose such traits would lend any person a commanding presence, but it was his insights, his clarity of thought, and his quick ability to cut straight to the heart a matter in a sea of seemingly contradictory facts, considerations, and opinions that made him a real leader.

Most of all, David instilled in me a keen appreciation for the importance of achieving the highest level of quality in every academic endeavor, be it in running a journal like TOSEM or professional body like SIGSOFT, organizing a conference like ICSE, evaluating candidates for recruitment or promotion or tenure, grooming PhD students for outstanding dissertations and outstanding job placements, or governing an academic department or indeed any organization in a way that keeps its people happy and inspires them to attain a superior reputation for being the best at what they do.

As a person, David was a true *mensch*. He knew when to take himself seriously and when to be frivolous, but he was never overly serious nor overly frivolous, and he had a unique way of combining the traits simultaneously. There is no better illustration of this than the series of “fun flames” sessions he organized for some of the SIGSOFT FSE conferences. I fondly remember these sessions—usually conducted in the evening with endless beer, potato chips, and one-liners—because they produced some of the most thought-provoking technical ideas, insights, and discussions I've ever experienced at a software engineering meeting.

It's a cliché to say so, but David is a person who truly will be missed for many reasons, not just by me, but by the full Editorial Board, who have offered the following tributes of their own.

“It's not how or when you die that matters, but how you live. Thank you for all you have done for us and for me. Safe journey.”

“He was kind, gentle, brilliant, and always smiling, and I think our community will do well if we can remember to constantly chime in the spirit

of David: whenever someone makes too strong, exclusive, or stereotypical a suggestion, to begin responding with ‘Lookit’ and gently dismantling the idea.”

“Dear David: Your enthusiasm for the ‘amazing potential of software’ (your own words), and your genuine interest in people (developers and researchers alike) continue to be an inspiration to me and many others. We will miss your wisdom very much.”

“David was the wise old man of our community, even though he was young and young at heart. I personally had a number of occasions where I needed some advice and he always succeeded in providing another perspective on the situation that helped me think through it.”

“During his illness I kept thinking about him. I deeply appreciated what he has done in research of course but also his great courage and good humor with which he handles everything. I wrote to him as an admirer and he was so gracious to respond.”

“David was one of the pillars of our community. I will miss his insightful, witty, and always supportive feedback.”

“David Notkin’s passion for ideas reached out to touch people he barely knew as well as those close to him. His last precious months were spent dedicated to the preparation for ICSE 2013. It proved to be a conference at which fate cruelly denied him (and us) of his presence, but not his influence. His life was a testament to the privilege of research in which we all share and of which he regularly reminded us. Thank you, David.”

“David had a big heart, really cared, and was always available to listen and give advice, no matter who was asking. He left a big void, and I will miss him dearly as a colleague, a mentor, and a friend.”

David S. Rosenblum
Editor-in-Chief