Derick Wood In Memoriam

My dear friend and colleague Derick Wood passed away in Waterloo, Ontario, on October 4, after a long and devastating illness. Apart from the loving wife Mary and other family, he will be missed by the theoretical computer science community all over the world.

The respect and appreciation towards Derick's scientific work became recently apparent in the special issue of *The Journal of Universal Computer Science*, published on the occasion of Derick's 70th birthday. The issue appeared also as a book with many pictures. I am sure that the numerous contributors to this issue, as well as other friends and colleagues of Derick, have their own particular memories of this extraordinary person and outstanding scientist. This writing reflects mainly my personal recollections.

Derick Wood was born in Lancashire, England, in 1940. He received his BSc and PhD degrees from the University of Leeds, England, in 1963 and 1968, respectively. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Courant Institute, New York University, from 1968 to 1970. This is where I first met Derick, in an Italian restaurant in lower Manhattan in June 1970. We discussed mostly problems concerning context-free parsing but I remember Derick also eagerly awaiting phone calls from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Very soon after that he joined the Unit of Computer Science at McMaster University, being the Chair of Computer Science from 1979 to 1982. As will be explained below in connection with our MSW work, I stayed numerous times in Derick's house on Bond Street, enjoying his hospitality. Our work usually continued in the evening in his house but he also occasionally took me to movies or to a football game. Derick also organized at McMaster, in March 1973, one of the early conferences on *L Systems*, with most of the people active in the field being present.

From 1982 to 1992 Derick was a Professor in the Department of Computer Science, University of Waterloo, and after that a few years a Professor in the Department of Computer Science, University of Western Ontario. His last position was in HKUST in HongKong, where he stayed from 1995 until his retirement.

Derick Wood worked in numerous areas of theoretical computer science. The list of his publications contained in the aforementioned special issue consists of 330 entries. His best known books are "Theory of Computation," published by John Wiley, and "Data Structures, Algorithms, and Performance," published by Addison-Wesley.

Most of my personal memories of Derick are from our *MSW years* around 1980. Then we spent long times together, both in Finland and in Canada. The MSW group, *Hermann Maurer, Arto Salomaa, Derick Wood* was very active scientifically. One can perhaps say that it has been one of the most successful

and happy triples of scientific collaboration. Altogether 30 MSW papers were published in main journals. We also presented the stuff in many conferences, although rather seldom all three of us were present. As a matter of fact, we always worked as follows. Two of us got together in the other's place and wrote the paper. Later the third one checked it. But each of the combinations MS, MW, SW met at least once a year. Undoubtedly Derick's calm and solid argumentation was essential for the scientific outcome. Another factor that made the MSW work so fruitful and pleasant was that nobody ever counted the amount of work he did. Everybody tried his best and did not worry that the amount of work was evenly distributed. Sometimes Derick's dry wit made our failures seem milder. *When one cannot solve a problem, then one has to change the problem* was one of his remarks.

Those days it was difficult to get travel money. Most of the time the guest stayed in the host's home. This of course meant that working days could be some 14 hours. Derick liked to stay in my country home. We still call the middle room upstairs "Derick's room". The place is very quiet, no traffic or people nearby. Still during the summer Derick used to complain about the "terrible noise" during the night. The bees started their activities in apple trees already around 2 a.m. because it was so light. Derick got up latest at 6 and had a good time with my mother-in-law although they had no common language.

Derick's Lancashire background was often present in our discussions. Bolton and Blackpool were often mentioned, notably because of their famous football teams. One of our theorems is called the *Bolton-Blackpool Train Theorem.*

Although MSW work started to fade out in mid-80's, I still had many forms of scientific cooperation with Derick. Apart from occasional joint publications, Derick served as an external examiner for some of my Ph.D. students, and vice versa. Many memorable happenings come to mind from these later years. My wife and I will not forget our visit to the Valamo Monastery during Easter 1985, or our stay in HongKong in 2002, Derick's apartment on 55th floor and his expertise on moon cakes. During last years we still met Derick a few times in London and in Waterloo.

Derick Wood was a wonderful scientist and a great person to have as a friend. *Dear Derick, we will miss you. Sit tibi terra levis.*

Kingston, Ontario, October 5, 2010

Arto Salomaa