Memories of Kees:
C.G. van der Laan, 1943–2015

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Kees (really Cornelis Gerardus) van der Laan, 22-12-1943 – 24-08-2015. TEX guru, Macintosh and Post-Script *aficionado*, but most of all a warm and generous man who made friends wherever he went, and who will be remembered with deep affection by all who had the pleasure and privilege of knowing him.

In 1988, Kees was one of the founders of the NTG (*Nederlandstalige TEX Gebruikersgroep*). He gathered together many other TEX enthusiasts and worked hard on building a network of people and organisations using and experimenting with TEX. Many activities were organised, such as meetings, courses and workshops. Kees persuaded several people to join him on his trips to BachoTEX and even to Russia, where lots of TEX activity was developing. Bringing together kindred spirits in order to generate even better ideas and develop them into new projects and new products was always on Kees's mind. He was a true TEX evangelist, and was made an Honorary Life Member of NTG in recognition of the quality and quantity of his contributions to the TEX world at large (his early work included TEX code for typesetting crosswords, Bridge and the Towers of Hanoi; the implementation of stacks and queues in TEX; TEX algorithms for sorting and searching; and many many other ideas as well).

In the Netherlands, he (and the NTG) actively supported a project to develop the very first plug & play CD-ROM with TEX software. This turned out to be a giant leap forward by providing a consistent TEX set-up for use both by beginners and experts alike that worked right out of the box.

In Poland, Kees was guest of honour at one of the very first GUST ("*(Polska) Grupa Użytkowników Systemu TEX*") conferences, and was formally made an Honorary Life Member of GUST at the AGM which took place during that meeting. Until then, national TEX user group meetings had tended to be just that — national — but BachoTEX set out to be a truly INTERnational user group meeting, and succeeded beyond its wildest dreams.

At that time, Kees was working on some extensions to `manmac`, and his talk at the 1994 BachoTEX meeting was entitled "Manmac BLUes". By 1995, Kees's work on extending `manmac` had grown into a complete format, "BLUe's format", as Kees called it.

Photo courtesy of Frans Goddijn

Based on `manmac` (amongst other sources), but primarily consisting of Kees's own unique work (Kees described it as "build[ing] upon `manmac`, upon functionalities provided in the *TUGboat* styles, and upon experience gained by the AMS in TEX formatting"), BLUe's format (or "BLUeTEX", as it later came to be known, probably by analogy with Blue-tack!) was publicly released at the 1995 BachoTEX meeting, and Kees gave the first of many, many talks to GUST on that subject during the conference. BLUe's format, which takes its name from Knuth's apocryphal "B. L. User" (in Britain he would be called "the man on the top deck of a Clapham Common omnibus" — i.e., the average person, as opposed to a TEX wizard), set out to make the full power of TEX accessible to the average user by encapsulating in a single format all of those elements that are essential for an advanced use of TEX but which would almost certainly be too difficult for the average TEX user to program for him/herself. Of particular interest to Kees was his wish that the user should adopt "minimal markup", and he would return to this theme time and time again.

As well as pure computer science and programming — for instance, Kees helped establish a FORTRAN interface for Algol 68, to facilitate use of existing FORTRAN libraries — Kees had a keen interest in computer graphics (a theme that was to become ever more important to him as time passed), and his 1996 papers were on "TEX and Graphics — a reappraisal of METAFONT/METAPOST" and on "Turtle graphics in TEX (a child can do it)!". During the years that followed, Kees presented papers on "TEX inside, or insights in TEX?", "A little bit of PostScript", "Tiling in PostScript and METAFONT", "Syntactic Sugar", and many, many other topics. In recent years, he combined his all-time passion for mathematics and computer graphics by creating beautiful illustrations of mathematical theorems, publishing his results in various journals and BachoTEX conference materials. He demonstrated how PostScript can

be used to elegantly compute and display fractals of any kind. In fact, Kees showed that for any 2D, 2.5D and 3D problem that can be modelled as a mathematical equation, PostScript is a great tool to explore and solve that problem. But Kees was also an art lover. Whenever he noticed symmetries or mathematical inspiration in a piece of art, he would try to model and emulate it in PostScript. In particular, the works of Gabo, Mondriaan and Escher (minimalists all!) inspired him. And of course, this work was presented not only at BachoTEX and NTG meetings — Kees was a regular attendee at EuroTEX meetings, TUG meetings, and anywhere else where he could exchange ideas on mathematics, computer science, computer graphics and computer programming with other like-minded individuals.

Kees was always very generous in sharing whatever he had developed. He always published his work for free, and wrote more than a hundred articles in MAPS (NTG's journal, http://ntg.nl/maps), explaining how it all works and how it could be adapted to anyone's own needs and preferences. He was a big advocate of keeping things simple ("minimal markup" was one of his hallmarks). The TEX or Postscript code he wrote was typically very neat, concise and elegant, much in line with the programming style that Knuth (whom Kees admired greatly) used in his `manmac` macros. Sometimes his code and articles were hard to follow, but they were always worth the time and energy. There was a lot to be learned from his fresh and clever approach to solving problems.

But Kees's interests were not restricted to the technical domain — he was a great conversationalist, as well as great company, and the authors of this short tribute are just a few amongst many who have spent countless happy hours with Kees in and around his home in Garnwerd (in the early days, always accompanied by Beer-the-dog), and it was Kees who introduced many of us to the Netherlands custom of eating fresh herring dipped in onion and washed down with some good Netherlands lager. Also to *krupuk* (think "giant prawn crackers"), and to many other Netherlands delicacies as well.

Kees loved people, and made friends wherever he went. He was particularly interested in Russia, and made many very good Russian friends, some of whom would visit him in Garnwerd and stay at his home, and with one of whom, Sveta (Svetlana L Morozova) he fell in love and subsequently married. Sveta was Kees's constant companion in the later years of his life, and his greatest concern was how she would cope when he was no longer here. Sadly that time has now come, and this short series of recollections is dedicated to Sveta, in Kees's memory.

Farewell, Kees — it was an honour and a privilege to know you and to spend time with you; TEX conferences, and life in general, will never be the same again.

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