

Remarks upon an Occasion to Remember JQ Johnson

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I am honored with the privilege of speaking about a colleague and a friend today. JQ had the office next door, and we enjoyed the proximity that made it easy to hang out in each other's doorways when an idea, question or inspiration arose. When I dropped in to chat, JQ was always intently focused on multiple computer monitors, but he would swing around in his chair and flash a friendly grin, usually quipping that my timing was good because he had a question for me. I liked talking with JQ and it's clear from the constant procession of people headed into his office that a lot of other people shared my opinion.

It wasn't always that way. I can remember back to the time when JQ came over to the library from the Computing Center. It was 1994 and I'm sure more than several of us wondered how a Professor from the Computing Center, the Director of Network Services, was going to fit into library operations. Sure, he had been promoted to full Professor with glowing reviews and was characterized as "a national network citizen as much as a local University administrative official." And true, JQ had played a major role on the Task Force for Campus Infrastructure and Technology and was instrumental in helping produce the 1992 University Computing Strategic Plan. And certainly, JQ was no total stranger to library operations. He was extremely helpful in keeping the Head of Library Systems informed and involved in network activities at the UO and within NorthWestNet. In particular, JQ made an effort to involve the Library in the development of UO's Gopher and the members of the Technology Task Force who were assembled as part of the library's Public Services Self-Study found JQ's participation quite helpful. So, even if some of us might have been a bit dubious, a few enlightened individuals within the organization foresaw the brilliance and possibilities inherent in JQ's move to the library.

JQ took on the somewhat vague title of Academic Education Coordinator and began to make his mark. Bit by bit, it started to become clear to everyone concerned that JQ's contributions would be bigger than anyone could have imagined and that the library was poised to evolve in ways that made JQ's expertise and experience extremely valuable. In many ways, JQ represented and embodied the coming of the technological revolution that the Internet and subsequently the Web were about to unleash on every aspect of society, higher education and certainly library operations. It was revealed that JQ's real strength lay in his ability to plan for and envision how and where technology was moving and the impact it would have on teaching, learning and scholarship. In 1994, no one in the library had a systems programming background, nor had anyone taught Symbolic Programming at Cornell, a graduate course in advanced Lisp and AI tools. Today, the UO Libraries employs at least 5 programmers—a testament to how times have changed and what a harbinger of the future that JQ represented. On a side note, Jennifer wrote that she believes JQ "is an alpha creature to computers and therefore they kowtow to him," and he proved that to be true at work as well as at home.

As Academic Education Coordinator, JQ was responsible for designing and implementing a training program for University students, faculty and staff in the use of educational technology. This new role signaled the entrée of the UO Libraries into an expanded role in the planning and development of information technology in the academic setting. In this capacity, JQ was responsible for many significant initiatives and accomplishments over the years:

- Management of the Lane Education Network
- Creation of the Faculty Consultants Network
- Leadership in the formation of the Knight and Science library Information Technology Centers
- Development of the annual conference, “Techniques for Teaching with Technology”
- Chairing the Library’s Digital Library Initiative Task Force
- Teaching myriad courses on web publishing and use of HTML
- Implementation and system administration of the Blackboard course management system
- Development of technology fairs and webcasts on multimedia technology
- Establishment of the Faculty Instructional Technology Training (FITT) Center
- Integration of the New Media Center into the library
- Providing campus education on the Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act (UCITA) and giving testimony to the Oregon State Legislature
- Maintaining the library’s web site
- Assuming responsibility for managing the overall operation of the Center for Educational Technologies (CET)
- Integrating the FITT Center into CET Consulting
- Developing an institutional repository, Scholar’s Bank, for the UO campus
- Serving as one of the institutional representatives to EDUCAUSE and CNI (Coalition for Networked Information)
- Assuming the role of Director, Scholarly Communication and Instructional Support
- Chairing the library’s Scholarly Communications Initiative Group
- Implementing the Open Journal Systems software to manage the publication of open access journals
- Nurturing the new student publication, Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal
- Providing leadership in the UO Senate’s passage of resolutions endorsing the use of authors’ rights addenda
- Organizing Open Access Week and the Symposium on Open Content and Open Source
- Establishing the university’s Open Access Publishing Support Fund to grant aid to UO faculty and graduate students in paying publication fees to peer-reviewed open access journals
- Attending the Frye Leadership Institute, a weeklong program for established leaders in higher education

And folks ... I’m just hitting the highlights here! I’ll sum up by using the words of Dean Deb Carver: “JQ is definitely regarded as the most knowledgeable person on campus with respect to open access and new paradigms for scholarly publishing ... he has had a significant impact on the nature, role and responsibilities of the UO Libraries. He has the technical skills plus a strong understanding of scholarly processes that have made it possible for him to have an important and sustained impact.”

JQ’s professional life and his many accomplishments are alone just cause to gather and celebrate his memory today. But, JQ also lived a vibrant life beyond the boundaries of the campus where he worked. In JQ’s case, many of us here today probably know more than might be expected about his life outside of work and certainly details about his family, as well as his valiant struggle with cancer. The reason we know these things owes its existence to Jennifer’s blog, understatedly entitled, “Health Report for JQ.” On Thursday, April 8, 2010, Jennifer wrote that she was “establishing this blog in order to make factual information available about JQ’s health status for family and friends.” And, nearly every day for over the past two years, she has written, and continues to write, an entry that not only kept all

of us apprised with regard to JQ's health and well-being, but gave us her take, her insights and thoughts on what was going on in their life, filling in countless details and setting a context that ultimately helped us come to know and love this family as they moved forward together during a time involving many challenges. Ostensibly, this is a story about cancer—a disease of cellular dysfunction, involving a range of biological activities that promote unregulated proliferation—but, truth be told, it is more a story of hope, grace, happiness, love and the incredible care amongst the members of a close-knit family.

A chronicle such as the one Jennifer has written is unprecedented in my experience. I know a lot of other people who blog, but Jennifer took up this writing journey precisely at a point when many of us would probably shut down, tuck away our feelings and hide painful facts from ourselves and others. Instead, she made the decision to share her family's odyssey with us in a deliberate, unflinching manner, looking stark reality in the face and articulating her thoughts, joys, sorrows, fears, hopes and frustrations. In the process, Jennifer has created something beautiful and transcendent. Yes, we learn about the diagnosis, we recoil in shock and dismay at the pain, discomfort, and debilitating symptoms of chronic illness; we go along for surgery; we hear about treatment plans; we deal with the health care system; we cringe at the nightmares and conundrums of dealing with insurance companies; we manage the cornucopia of medications (Eribix, FolFox, Avistan, On-dance-a-tron, Foss-a-prep-uh-tent, Lorazepam, Dex-a-meth-ah-zon just to name a few); we learn the ups and downs of responding to chemotherapy; we tag along for infusions at the cancer center; we come to understand details of various medical procedures, like paracentesis, chemotherapy pumps, ports, laparoscopy and debulking surgery; we comprehend the side effects of medications and we gasp at the significant financial costs of medical care ... yes all of this ... but we also come to know JQ and his family and understand their unique love story.

In fact, the narrative that chronicles the last two years of JQ's life is full of action, joy, beauty and accomplishment:

- A zillion delicious meals are eaten; many prepared by the principal characters who are introduced to us as: the oldest son, his partner and now husband, the middle son and the youngest daughter. Luscious fruit—blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, cherries, peaches and of course quince—are consumed by the bushel and some is made into fresh ice cream. I must confess to having clipped several recipes from the blog along the way: Sasha's Beet root dip and Jennifer's Scalloped Potato with Kale, Leek and Cheese.
- The antics of the family menagerie, the chicken villa, the chickens, Jo-Jo, Amy, Beth and poor Meg and the cats, Sam (now gone), Jason, Amelia, Georgia, are described at length and with great delight. At one point, Jennifer writes, "No one wants cancer in their family, but once you have it everything changes. Some changes are surprisingly good ones, like discovering your true priorities. And like ending up with a flock of chickens you'd otherwise never have had."
- Produce from the yard converted into a garden are cultivated and picked and the delights of the Winter Green Farm CSA boxes are savored.
- And travel abounds! Portugal, Spain, the Oregon coast, Berkeley, Baltimore, Berlin, Boston, Chicago, Providence, Stuttgart, Amsterdam, Denmark, Hawaii, Switzerland, Cape Cod, Cancun, college visitations, the McKenzie River Trail, Mt. Pisgah, camping on the Metolius, hiking in the Three Sisters Wilderness, nearly every national park between here and the East coast and perhaps most meaningfully, Indian Lake, NY (JQ's childhood summer home in the Adirondacks ... as Jennifer writes, "a good place to swim, to hike, to read, to rest and relax").
- Graduations and celebrations of undergraduate and graduate school admissions create great joy.

- Scholarly papers are published.
- Conferences are attended.
- Presentations are given.
- Many, many cookies are made and decorated for the famous yearly, mid-December holiday cookie party. Here is how Jennifer describes the event: “People bring cookies, toddlers, and the holiday season into our house. In return we give them eggnog and hot mulled wine and we put out toys downstairs. I suspect we do this every year so we can celebrate the solstice with our friends; it might be dark otherwise. And it is good too to have a deadline to get the house decorated for Christmas. Perhaps we have the party because JQ loves parties and I like seeing him happy. Or perhaps we do it so we can observe people we know from separate spheres connect at the party – either because they already knew each other in some other way but we didn't know that (it turns out they both play marimba or take yoga together) or maybe they just met at the party and discover a shared passion for Chihuly or Philip Glass or Kierkegaard. Very satisfying to watch these connections happen around us and feel the embrace of community. Yes, but surely the main reason we hold the cookie party every year is so we can end up with a lot of delicious cookies.” Yet in 2010, she also records this more somber, yet compelling reflection that resonates with us all: “The party was a different for me in another way too: I was aware that this could be our last cookie party, although I think too maybe we will have many more. In fact, the possibility that the current party is our last has always been the case—each year could have be our last until of course we had another—but at no cookie party before this one did such a thought cross my mind. ***Our reality is in some ways everyone's reality (this could be anyone's last year, last party, last day) but at the same time it is necessarily so much more real for us. Being aware of mortality and our uncertain future is surprisingly life affirming. Right now we are alive and surrounded by love; that is certain.***”
- Anniversaries, including dining at Café Soriah, birthdays, concerts galore and a joyous wedding are marked and feted.
- And we can't forget art camp, stenciled t-shirts, art projects, saxophone lessons, long walks, the bicycle rides and the naming of beloved objects: Katrina the valiant hybrid, Sally the Subaru Forester, Jacob the wheelbarrow, and Murdock the Christmas tree

And amidst it all, Jennifer writes of how it makes JQ smile, of how proud he is of his children, the tremendous delight that he takes in hearing their stories, eating their meals, in debating mathematical physics, in talking about philosophy and computer theory, reveling in college offers received and ultimately seeing his daughter take her place at Harvard—JQ's alma mater as well as that of his father, also JQ, and ancestral relative Thomas Shepard, Harvard College, 1653.

Yes, in many ways, this is a sad, and in places, heartbreaking, story, but, in her prose, Jennifer has given us a gift of a life well-lived, a life well-loved, a life savored, a life enjoyed. She writes for all of us when she observes in a timeless way that, “A challenge at this juncture in life is how to plan for the future. Actually, it is so impossible to plan with certainty that all we can do is go forward, plan with uncertainty, and live life.” Go ... live life ... this is what JQ embraced; and with his typical, gentle generosity, this is what he asked Jennifer, Phillip and Sasha to do on the eve of Theo's and Brian's wedding. This is the memory of our colleague, friend, brother-in-law, husband and father that we can carry and cherish and treasure now and in all our days to come.