Mallen Newell: A Remembrance

The first time I heard about Allen Newell was more than 30 years ago when I was a research assistant of Adriaan de Groot, a well known psychology professor in Amsterdam. De Groot was going on a year long trip to the U.S. and the highlight of his journey was a visit to Herb Simon and Allen Newell. I met Allen for the first time when I came for a two semester long visit to Carnegie Mellon University in 1968. This encounter was a distinct factor in my later decision to join the faculty at Carnegie Mellon University.

I interacted with Allen much more closely when I became department head in 1979. He was for me a mentor and a sounding board for ideas I wanted to pursue for computer science at Carnegie Mellon University. I enjoyed working with many good friends on the faculty, but Allen was really special. Many of us will remember him for his evenhanded treatment of all students at the Black Friday meetings. He would never pursue his own agenda, he would always look for the merit of a student's work and not whether the rules were violated. He was a staunch defender of the rule that replaces all rules, which says that the only thing that counts is whether or not the student is making satisfactory progress towards the PhD degree.

In the process of forming the School of Computer Science Allen was not only a helpful supporter, but he became a real friend. He thought through the issues with me, but also helped me as a friend getting through times of tension and stress. His encouragement and understanding was a major factor in keeping me on course. At the same time, his enthusiasm for science was for me an inspiration that stimulated my own research and also gave purpose to my job as department head and dean. The School of Computer Science has blossomed because of the extraordinary lucky start with three great visionaries: Herb Simon, Allen Newell and Alan Perlis. They created a spirit of collaboration, mutual interest and strive for excellence that made CMU/SCS a great place. I miss Allen very much. I am sure that many share this feeling.

- Nico Haberman



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