

In Memoriam: Dr. Robert Woodrow – Contribution by Dr. Kseniya Garaschuk

Remembering Robert Woodrow

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Kseniya Garaschuk (University of the Fraser Valley)

I first joined CMS as an ad-hoc member of the Student Committee. As one of the main organizers of the Canadian Undergraduate Math Conference to be held at SFU in 2007, I came to the CMS Winter meeting in December 2006 to present conference plans, discuss progress and hopefully get answers to some of our questions. For the meeting that was scheduled to span most of the day, I walked into the room of peers... and Robert. In retrospect, what struck me most was the juxtaposition of Robert's undivided attention to Student Committee discussions and his ability to let us work through issues without intervention. First of all, he was fully listening and observing — no phone, computer or a math paper in sight. And secondly, he didn't interject unless prompted or absolutely necessary: he would prevent disasters, but would otherwise let us make our novice mistakes, teaching us the invaluable skill of knowing when to ask for guidance. You felt both supported and capable. He was the perfect safety net that you didn't know was there until it saved you. As a busy faculty member with a bazillion tasks, I still can't fathom how he managed the patience and the commitment as we were going through the growing pains of building up our presence in the Canadian mathematical landscape.



Robert was the first CMS “adult” I got to know well. We saw each other every 6 months for well over a decade and always picked up where we left off: the conversation was engaging, easy, one to always look forward to. Always a twinkle in his eye, he was sarcastic and mischievous in a kind way, optimistic despite being admittedly jaded. We bonded over drinks at banquets, sticking around well after everyone had left to talk about all things CMS, academia, Crux. Speaking of Crux — anyone that knows me will tell you that no CMS conversation I have goes by without me mentioning Crux as being its Editor-in-Chief is my long-standing pet project. With Robert, he has been around for such a long time that I often forget how involved he was in many of the initiatives I hold dear within Crux: editor of the Olympiad Corner from 1987 to 2011 and Editor-in-Chief alongside Bill Sands from 1992 to 1996; creator and editor of the Skoliad from 1995 to 2001. We shared the vision for the journal and the understanding for its importance. But for nearly a decade, every CMS meeting would include a discussion on discontinuation of Crux. It was exhausting to have to make the same arguments over and over again to the Board voting on Crux's “to be or not to be”, knowing full well that the same vicious cycle would repeat in 6 months. In many ways Robert's semi-annual support and exchange of experiences kept me going in the EIC role. Crux now has ongoing funding. It was the work of a village, including Robert, that got us here.

The last time I saw Robert was at the CMS Winter meeting in Montreal. As per tradition, we found each other as the banquet room was clearing out. He introduced me to the lovely Edgar Goodaire (who said Robert gave me a very favourable review before I came up to their table, but I've yet to find out the details of that), we all grabbed the last of the wine and chatted, about math and life. In hindsight, what a fitting last memory of Robert.

I raise a glass to you, Robert — my CMS meetings will never be the same.

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