



This special issue of the CMHSR Newsletter features a collection of stories and memories about our admired friend and colleague Steve Banks.

From the Director's Chair

A word from Chuck...

In the early hours of Friday morning, August 10th, asleep in his hotel room in Florida, our friend and colleague Steve Banks passed away. His passing is an enormous loss to CMHSR, UMass Medical School, and many other research groups at other universities and research centers. Steve was one of the most brilliant people I have ever met. His approach to problems, both quantitative and substantive, was unfailingly creative and insight producing. However, we will miss him even more for his friendship and kindness. Without exception, those of us who had the privilege of working with him felt encouraged and supported by him. He would give his time and attention equally to the newest junior staff members and the most senior among the faculty. We cannot replace him, either personally or professionally, but we will always remember what he meant to us.

Memorial Service Dates and Information

Calling hours 6:00 - 8:00 pm, Friday August 17

Memorial Service 2:00 pm, Saturday, August 18

Palmer & Shaylor Funeral Home, Middleburgh, NY

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Whenever Ken Fletcher expressed an interest in reading about abstract algebra, Steve would light up. His face would light up and he would become very animated. Steve was always very enthusiastic about people learning about these things.

Here's Looking at You!

Reprinted from the June 2005 issue

Each month we will interview someone from CMHSR using a few select, but interesting, questions. We hope this will provide a new way of getting to know your colleagues. This month the spotlight is on Steve Banks.



What do you read for pleasure?

Scientific American—I still read it but preferred it when it had the old format.

What is your most prized possession?

My patent #6,470,298. This patent is on a technology to put together information systems that don't have personal identifiers.

Do you collect anything or belong to any clubs?

I will quote Groucho Marx on this one. "I wouldn't belong to any club that would have me as a member."

Are you or have you been involved in any sports?

I was a jock in high school and was lettered in both football and soccer; nothing since then.

How do you like to spend your free time?

I don't "spend free time", I just experience.

Do you have any pets? What are their names?

I don't have any pets, but my wife has 2 cats named Ambelie and Lela.

What kind of music do you listen/ dance to?

I listen to Dylan, Sonia Dada and also Subdudes.

What is your favorite restaurant?

It's the Inn at Little Washington which is located in Washington, Virginia. (The first city to be named Washington as George Washington was its surveyor and thus the person to lay it out).

Complete this sentence: "If I could, I would...."

Complete this sentence.



Steve is My Mentor

As part of an exercise to evaluate perceptions of staff and faculty regarding the status of mentoring at the Center, all were asked to list the people that they felt were their mentors. Additionally, we were asked to list the people we felt we mentored. A large number of staff and junior faculty listed Steve as their mentor. When asked who he mentored, Steve stated that he did not mentor anyone.

Just for fun, Valerie Williams created and distributed the T-shirts in the above photo to Steve wannabees and friends around the country. Steve's first reaction was one of puzzlement, and after giving it some thought, he said it was creepy and cultish. For the most part, though, we think he got as big a laugh out of it as we did.

When we published details of his second patent in our newsletter, Steve sent me an email saying he was glad to be news worthy. This time, he didn't know the half of it.

During Presentations with Mike Agar, Steve often said, "I wrote a math dissertation without much in the way of either words or numbers in it. Am I qualitative or quantitative?"

I could go on and on about Steve. Perhaps we all can. Here are a few of my memories about Steve:

I remember when I first came to the Center, I was writing a grant and I had some sort of quantitative question that I thought would yield a fairly routine answer. I went to Lorna Simon who was the senior analyst and asked her. She gave me a quick answer but said "I really think you should wait until Steve Banks comes." I said: "I really want to get this resolved now." She just smiled and said: "Wait for Steve." I have repeated that many times.

I really treasured his ability to sit and listen to a discussion and say absolutely nothing for an hour. Finally, he would say "What I think everyone is trying to get at is something like this" and then make the issue clearer than anyone else had been able to do.

Steve was amazingly innovative in the way he approached problems. My favorite example was when we were studying violent incidents and got accounts from both parties involved. We needed to know how different each party's story was. Steve used techniques that had been used for telling whether one song was plagiarized from another. In both cases it was about comparing two sequences of codes.

Steve was amazingly generous. I remember writing something totally incorrect in a draft of a paper and Steve crediting me for "raising an interesting issue". It was an interesting issue but only after he clarified the right answer.

Steve had deep ethical concerns about research. He put himself personally on the line with an analysis of data from a clinical trial on the level of air pressure to use with patients who needed a ventilator in the ICU. NHLBI had endorsed the results of a clinical trial that had used what he felt was an inappropriate method and he was concerned that it would end up injuring patients.

Chuck Lidz

Steve was simply the best statistician I have ever worked with. He had an unparalleled ability to explain statistics to those of us who are fairly mathematically impaired. And despite his stature in his field, he was a humble guy who always saw himself as part of a bigger team. I thought it was a huge coup for us at UMass Medical School when we were able to appoint him to our faculty in the Department of Psychiatry. He will be very much missed.

Paul Appelbaum
Former Chair, Department of Psychiatry,
UMass Medical School

Website

www.thebristolobservatory.com

Steve was a co-founder of the Bristol Observatory.

"The Bristol Observatory was incorporated in 1997 with a purpose of supporting rational data-based decision making in human service organizations at the state and national level by providing valid and reliable measures of the functioning of systems of care. These measures are based, primarily, on analysis of the continually growing wealth of information that are stored in administrative and operational databases."



Steve said that Gina Vincent rolled her own, meaning she chose to do her own statistics.



Steve in Tampa last spring with Jodi, Katie, Maryann, Valerie and Bernice

It was a very special gift to spend time with Steve. I was always amazed at the great amount of things that could transpire in even the shortest time when Steve was there. He offered precise insights and was always patient, accessible, and generous. Steve always took the time and he always treated people with true kindness and acceptance. I found it very special just knowing that Steve, so brilliant and accomplished, treated me with such value. I can't imagine the many lives that he touched with his tremendous gifts or the guidance and friendship he has brought to so many. I am so grateful for the time I had with him and the many insights he shared with me so generously.

Katie Woolsey

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to get to know Steve socially. Professionally, Steve was truly brilliant, and he definitely had a way of making you feel smarter than you were (or felt that you were). I will always remember seeing Steve at the back of the room during a presentation I was giving at a NASMHPD conference years ago, and how relieved I felt when I saw him nodding his head in agreement to what I was talking about -- it was a real confidence boost for me to know that he valued what I had to say. He was as kind and considerate as he was brilliant, and I feel very blessed to have had the opportunity to work with him.

Jonathan Clayfield

Joanne Sax from NDRI always said she was glad that Steve helped her with her propensity envy.

While I never had the opportunity to work closely with Steve, we did cross paths on some projects. He was the most down to earth, friendly intellectual I have ever met. My most prominent memory of Steve is how graciously he assisted me with something un-related our work. I was hired onto the staff at CMHSR a semester before receiving my Bachelor's degree. And as graduation crept closer, my struggles in an advanced algebra class were only getting worse. Without a passing grade I would not graduate. Steve graciously met with me and talked me through the remaining weeks of this course. Somehow making perfect sense out of the mess I could not wrap my brain around alone.

I did graduate and continued to work at CMHSR for almost 5 years. From where I sat, Steve was a devoted team player that everyone respected. He had a wonderfully simple way of expressing his brilliance - It was second nature to him and this was obvious. To have worked with a group that included Steve Banks was truly an honor.

Christina Breault

Like so many here at the Center who knew and admired Steve, I was shocked and saddened to hear the news of his death. I feel extremely fortunate and grateful to have worked with him over the last couple of years. I also want to extend my condolences to Cheryl and Steve's family and friends. Steve was a great teacher who was extremely talented and a wonderful person, and I know that we have all suffered a great loss. I hope that we can find some comfort in our many special memories and the thought of the happy times we shared with him. I will always remember his kindness, generosity, and patience with me and everyone around him. Steve will always remain very much alive in the memories of those who respected and treasured him. He will be missed.

Bernice Gershenson

7 Met Steve Banks in 1985

– 22 years ago, meaning that I’d known him for more than a third of my life! With all due respect to everyone, he was the smartest person I ever met. He was a unique character, a guy with no guile or pretense, and without a trace of narcissism.

Funny stories about Steve abound. For example: As some of you know, Steve was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma about 15 years ago, and underwent a bone marrow transplant. During this time, he also had a front tooth extracted. Very shortly after he was back on his feet, he and I were supposed to be on a panel together at Ron Manderscheid’s NIMH statistics conference, which I assumed he would bail on. But no; totally hairless, with a front tooth missing, pale as a ghost from anemia, wearing his ripped jeans and a sport shirt, (and probably with a pencil behind his ear) he got up and gave a characteristically great talk.

Steve’s rank here was Associate Professor. It’s tough getting promoted around here, but Steve, who, if he’d stayed in one place long enough could have had an endowed chair, remained at that rank because he didn’t care about the rank, and didn’t feel like updating his CV, to track down the hundreds of papers that he’d co-authored but never took time to include on his CV. Obviously a tireless self promoter.

I saw Steve get angry once in 22 years. A young colleague of his at OMH in New York was presenting some of the data she and Steve had worked on. A sort of smarmy guy in the front row decided to show off and criticize the way the analysis was done, not realizing that Steve was sitting behind him. Steve “addressed” the “concern” adroitly, not raising his voice, but clearly and politely making the guy look like an idiot as he “explained” to him how his conception of logistic regression was fundamentally flawed. It was sort of like picking a fight with a kid whose big brother the boxer is lurking around the corner.

There are sides to Steve that some people never saw, his kindness to young people among them. A close friend of mine has a daughter, Emily, who had a brain tumor as a child that left her essentially blind but with enormous intelligence and enthusiasm for math. I introduced her to Steve, who quickly identified and bonded with her as a cancer survivor and math enthusiast. He spent a couple of hours with her and her mother one day while Emily was still in high school, enthusiastically discussing pathways to a career in statistics. He, like all of us, was thrilled when she was accepted to Harvard, where she is a statistics major. He periodically sent her problems to solve and would discuss them with her. She adored him, and cried when she learned that he had passed away.

Over the past weekend I tried to reconstruct the projects I’d worked on with him, all the stuff we had done together. I’m stuck back around the 1990s. Two NIMH grants, countless presentations, something like nine papers, lots of stuff for NASMPD -- Steve was so ubiquitous that I’m not sure any one person knows everything he was involved with. I did realize that 12 years to the day that he died he and I were doing a workshop on survival analysis at the Kennedy School. It was great fun. We were gratified by the fact that one of the attendees went back to Oregon and, following our step by step plan exactly, published a great paper in *Psychiatric Services*. Those were the kinds of things that Steve enjoyed the most, I think.

I feel an enormous sense of personal loss. I regret that I won’t hear him refer to something as being a “reasonable model.” But I’m also grateful for the 22 years of received wisdom and good times. It’s been truly heartwarming to see the outpouring of affection for the guy over this past week from all over the country – he clearly touched so many lives. But once we’re over the shock and personal loss, we as a field will confront the fact that we’ve lost an enormous intellectual force that is simply irreplaceable. He was, for sure, one of a kind. Steve was OUR mentor!

Bill Fisher

STONE SOUP

Steve's Favorite Recipe

Once upon a time, somewhere in Eastern Europe, there was a great famine. People jealously hoarded whatever food they could find, hiding it even from their friends and neighbors. One day a peddler drove his wagon into a village, sold a few of his wares, and began asking questions as if he planned to stay for the night.

"There's not a bite to eat in the whole province," he was told. "Better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled an iron cauldron from his wagon, filled it with water, and built a fire under it. Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a velvet bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing the rumor of food, most of the villagers had come to the square or watched from their windows. As the peddler sniffed the "broth" and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their skepticism.

"Ahh," the peddler said to himself rather loudly, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with CABBAGE -- that's hard to beat."

Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a cabbage he'd retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot. "Capital!" cried the peddler. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king."

The village butcher managed to find some salt beef...and so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for all. The villagers offered the peddler a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell and traveled on the next day. And from that time on, long after the famine had ended, they reminisced about the finest soup they'd ever had.

Recommended Reading by Steve

Steve's favorite book, which he often recommended to friends was *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* was a Pulitzer Prize Winning book by Douglas R. Hofstadter. A profound and entertaining meditation on human thought and creativity, this book looks at the surprising points of contact between the music of Bach, the artwork of Escher, and the mathematics of Gödel.

It also looks at the prospects for computers and artificial intelligence (AI) for mimicking human thought.

Steve also loved to read *The Scientific American* and *The New Yorker*.



Steveisms

Like Steve Always Said...

- You can tell a man from Harvard, but you can't tell him much.
- I think what you're trying to say is...
- How should I put this? (arms crossed)
- Breakfast is the most important meal of the morning.
- yup, ahuh, sure (repeat)
- I don't see why not.
- R2 doesn't matter.
- That seems reasonable.
- I get all of my science from The New Yorker.
- Be lazy like me.
- Work smarter, not harder.
- Do you think life is full of main effects or interaction terms?
- Sure, anytime.

Steve's Obituary from the Times Union in Albany

MIDDLEBURGH, N.Y. Steven M. Banks Ph.D., 51, of Middleburgh, died suddenly Friday, August 10, 2007 in Temple Terrace, Fla. A native of Rockville, Md., Dr. Banks was born on July 15, 1956 in Washington, D.C., a son of Joseph and Charlotte Newman Banks. Dr. Banks held research associate professorships in the department of psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts and the Louis de la Parte Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida. He was a mathematical statistician in the critical care medicine department of the National Institutes of Health. A nationally recognized expert in the field of mental health statistics, Dr. Banks received his doctorate in mathematics from the University at Albany in 1987. He was the chief mathematician of the Bristol Observatory and founding partner of Paradigm Associates. Dr. Banks was the author of hundreds of articles appearing in professional journals and held a U.S. patent for a method of estimating population size. In 1990, he received the Director's Award from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. In 2002, he received the Guttmacher Award for Rethinking Risk Assessment. Steve was a cancer survivor of more than 15 years. He loved thinking about problems and worked tirelessly with scientists in many different fields to solve them. He is survived by his wife, Cheryl McCathran, whom he married on December 30, 1978 and by his parents, Joseph and Charlotte Banks of Rockville; sisters, Amy (Stuart) McIntire of Germantown, Md., Nancy (Joseph) Caley of Columbia, Md. and Beth (Terry) Colvin of Windermere, Fla.; brother, Jeffrey (Barbara) Banks of Rockville; and 14 nieces and nephews. A service will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, August 18, 2007 at the Palmer & Shaylor, Inc. Funeral Home, 134 River St., Middleburgh, N.Y. Calling hours will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, August 17, 2007 at the funeral home. On line condolences may be sent to the family at palmershaylorfuneralhome.com Memorial contributions may be made to the Steven M. Banks Memorial Fund, c/o TD Bank North, 343 Delaware Ave., Delmar, NY 12054 in lieu of flowers.

Editorial

By Al Grudzinskas



Things that Matter

Steve Banks had a doctorate in mathematics, was a research associate professor at two Universities, authored hundreds of journal articles, won a Guttmacher award, held a U.S. patent for a method of estimating population size, and received the Director's award from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. He helped some of the greatest minds of our time, express their profound thoughts in ways that each of us could understand and comprehend. But none of that has anything to do with why he mattered so much to so many people.

Steve loved his wife Cheryl, and he told us about her often. They spent wonderful times together in his life filled with travel and work. He helped us understand that it wasn't the quantity of work or play that you did, it was the quality. He could remember things you told him about the smallest incident in your life, three years later, as if it were yesterday. The things that mattered to you mattered to Steve. He had the time to spend to repeat the things he told you time and time again, just because it took some of us that many times to understand. And, as they say on NPR's Car Talk, "He was not a slave to fashion." That's why Steve Banks mattered so much to so many. We will miss him, because he mattered that much.

Your News & Notes Team:

Katie Woolsey, Sue Phillips, Paul Newton,
Lorna Simon, Al Grudzinskas, & Jim McDonald

Please leave any feedback or suggestions on improving this newsletter in Katie Woolsey's mailbox or send an e-mail to any News & Notes Team member!