EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Sandy Slaughter: Outstanding Scholar, Incredible Human Being

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On the morning of November 3 last year, shock waves went through the IS community, when we received the devastating news of Sandy Slaughter's unexpected death. How could that be? I had just looked at a letter she had written evaluating a tenure candidate in my institution. I had an email correspondence with her just a week before.

Sandy and I were in the same generation of IS academics—those who got their Ph.D.s in the early 1990's. I knew her well professionally and have always had immense respect for her scholarly accomplishments. We participated together in countless panels and organizational committees. Her generosity with her time and her willingness to make things better around her had always struck me. She never said no when I asked for support letters, faculty evaluations, and departmental reviews. Not only did she accept those requests, but she went way beyond any expectation and delivered the most thorough, insightful, and detailed assessments. And I know she was like that with everyone, every request, every committee and editorial assignment.

Ironically, I got to know more of Sandy's personal side after November 3. As the IS community got together to honor her life, through memorial events at both INFORMS and ICIS, I learned so much about Sandy, this amazing, incredible human being. Before starting her Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota, Sandy spent 10 years in the software industry as a developer and an IS analyst. This experience was largely responsible for shaping her main research interest. She wanted to have an impact on what she thought was one of the few genuine IS topics: software development.

Also, before starting her Ph.D. program, Sandy and her husband, Ron, embarked on an incredible journey that took them around the world in 19 months. They rode a tandem bicycle through all continents in a grinding, exhaustive trip that was self-discovering in many ways. Fortunately, for us, this Guinness record experience is told by Sandy in a detailed account she published, *Tandem Times: A Bicycle Journey around the World, Odyssey to the Limits* (Slaughter et al. 1996). This book brings us the personal side of Sandy: compassionate, goal-driven, detail-oriented, open-minded, and resilient—all attributes we have always appreciated and cherished in Sandy the scholar. Here is an excerpt from page 362:

> *Many times during those nineteen months we were asked a single question, "Why?" At the time, the answer was unclear. Now, after reflection, I see an answer that was always there, but clouded by the conditioning of the society. That answer was in the **quest**. To live is to be challenged, to find immense pleasure in small accomplishments under hardship. Too often, daily life becomes the struggle to exist in a world of plastic money… no payments till June, low interest that never goes away, and a life lived from payday to payday.*
>
> *For us, that wasn't enough. Will it ever be?*

Sandy's Research Quest

Ron was Sandy's partner in her tandem bicycle personal journey, but she took many academics on her tandem bicycle of research. Chris Kemerer, Laurie Kirsch, and Soon Ang were among her frequent co-riders, along with many others. She rode with so many

coauthors, colleagues, and Ph.D. students. It was heart-warming to hear from them in the recent memorials, about her passion, discipline, and tremendous execution of the research. After all, research has a lot to do with "small accomplishments under hardship."

Software development was her quest, her odyssey. She carefully explored and made significant contributions to various aspects of the topic: from software complexity and software quality to productivity and firm strategy; from understanding the software workforce motivation to careers in IT; from sourcing to outsourcing to crowdsourcing. Methodologically, she was trained in economics, but embraced behavioral approaches, and frequently utilized a multitude of solution procedures. She understood the goal, the roads, and the quest. And she brought everyone along on the ride.

Sandy's most cited work appeared in *Management Science* (Roberts et al. 2006). In my opinion, this is a very important, seminal work in IS because it was one the first studies to look into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the crowdsourcing environment of open source development. It also is one of the first studies to uncover "social" elements of developer participation such as status.

In *MIS Quarterly* she published three articles, all of which illustrate her breadth in covering different facets of the software development area and her skills with multimethods. In Ang and Slaughter (2001), the work is pioneering because it anticipates the widespread trend of using outside contractors in the software development function. Soon and Sandy employ a multimethod approach anchored in social exchange theories to understand the dynamics that evolve from simultaneously employing contractors and full-time employees on the same project. Back in 2001, they provided guidance to organizations about how to handle this hybrid environment of software development, where different types of workers were treated and compensated differently albeit concurrently working toward the same operational goal.

The 2006 work by Slaughter et al. is innovative for many reasons. First, it brings the concept of strategy–product–process alignment to the field of software development. Second, it uses data from a very turbulent time in software development, when Internet-driven software was exploding in demand. And third, it introduces interesting constructs of concept maps to represent the alignment. Here again, Sandy's versatility and open-mindness are displayed in a very interesting research piece.

The third work she published in *MIS Quarterly* came in 2012 (Joseph et al.). It explores a unique longitudinal dataset reflecting career choices of IT professionals over a period of several years (between 1979 and 2006), both in the primary and secondary IT labor markets. Here again, I was very impressed with the versatility of the methods selection. The work employs computational sequence discovery, matching and clustering techniques to represent individual career paths in a very innovative way. Sandy and her coauthors find that career paths in the IS field are more varied than initially expected. They conclude that career diversity, mobility, and individual profiles contribute to different outcomes of career success. The study expands the lens on IT careers, looks at turnover metrics, and analyzes paths that intermingle IT careers with non-IT careers.

With her open-mindness, versatility of approaches, and relentless pursuit of the topic, Sandy's research on software development and IT labor markets was extraordinary. With close to 90 journal articles and conference proceedings publications, her body of work in these topics is unparalleled. She also recently published a book on the software industry. The quest in her research odyssey unfortunately didn't reach its limits. Sandy left us too soon.

Tandem Times

Her reflections on the tandem times odyssey are very revealing of how she approached life:

> *The world was an inviting, compelling place. It still is, in spite of the many times that we felt like two dirty, ragged hoboes, just looking for a place to stay; defeated more than once by our two worst natural enemies, wind and rain.*

> *We developed a feeling of survival, while realizing that for many people, that's a way of life: get up, work without stopping, feed your family, go to bed and start all over again, next day. That too became our way of life, the goal of surviving that particular day: finding food to eat and making it safely to a place to sleep.*

Nothing was what I imagined it to be, not necessarily worse, but just not what I imagined. We stretched ourselves beyond ordinary endurance; two people making their way through the explored and known world, following the lure of the unknown, deeply appreciating the fact that we had the freedom to try. More than once, our journey became "us" against the world. The challenge was to not give up, an unthinkable choice, when following a dream which had beckoned since childhood.

Angel Guardians

In the book, Sandy makes a few references to "angel guardians." When they were pedaling through endless banana plantations in Central America, hungry and tired, no towns or people to be seen for miles and miles, they came across another cyclist who was towing an ice cream cart. He appeared completely out of the blue. They stopped and bought ice cream and then continued on. Sandy thought the ice cream cyclist was their angel guardian. In another passage, in Mexico's Baja California after dark she and Ron found a place to camp, just to find out a few hours later in the middle of the night that there were bandits engaged in illegal operations very close to the area, and for some lucky reason that she attributes to her angel guardian, their camp site was never spotted by these "bad guys."

While she saw angel guardians in other people, her students, colleagues, and members of the IS community saw her as their angel guardian. She was the one who was generous, always willing to help, liked to have fun, and liked to better the world around her. In academics, we tend to focus on scholarly prowess, and tend to not pay attention to all the other things—little and big—that make an academic community thrive. Sandy was an outstanding scholar who had a tremendous, lasting impact in the field. But she was also an incredible human being who did all these other things. Her generosity was immeasurable. At Georgia Tech she routinely used funds from her own endowed chair to provide internships to students and help Ph.D. students attend conferences to advance their careers. Her will establishes the Sandra Ann and Ronald Gray Slaughter Ph.D. Scholarship at Georgia Tech's Scheller College.

She followed her dreams, lived her life fully, and shone through her journey. We will miss her smile, laughter, generosity, and everything she did for the IS community.

Acknowledgment

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