The Story of My Instructor

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I have had my COBOL 74 NCR 8250 IMOS III Course in Leningrad from 10th of May, 1978 till 26th of May 1978. Fourteen of us, students from Leningrad and Riga, and Heinz Groetsch – an instructor from Augsburg, West Germany. Classes took place at the Educational Centre of the Commercial Seaport of Leningrad. All the instructors, who taught our staff in the former USSR were from West Germany, perhaps because the NCR computers, that we had, were produced at the NCR factory in Augsburg.

The course was an easy one for me, as we already were quite familiar with NCR 8250 IMOS III Operating System and COBOL 74 programming language, because our Computer Center obtained our very own NCR 8250 computer in 1977. From other side it was very interesting to have a second pass of COBOL 74 with instructor to clarify certain nuances, as we studied the language ourselves using NCR IMOS COBOL Student Text, arrived with the computer.

I was a little bit over 25 years old at that time, successful young programmer, having the full World beneath his knees, who knew everything about computers and especially COBOL, and, of course, from time to time tried to help the instructor to teach the Course. Thanks to God, the instructor was clever guy and looked at my attempts to help him politely.

In a few days we became friends and begun to call each other by names, Heinz and Sascha (the short form of my full name Aleksandr). I was very proud showing to Heinz the city of Leningrad and its famous suburbs: Pushkin, Pavlovsk and Petergof. Generally after returning from the excursions we were sitting in a bar of the hotel, where Heinz stayed, discussing various themes, starting from computers and ending with how the life goes on in our countries.

At the end of the Course we obtained Diplomas and made common photo: instructor and students. I was very pleased and surprised when after several weeks I and my colleagues were presented with computer print-out list, having the photo and our names printed on it, made by Heinz. This print-out survived over the passed years and I still have it among my NCR artifacts. We never met each other since those times.

Some things just turn up when you least expect them. One calm February evening of the year 2005 I saw 'Enigma' movie on TV and liked it very much. In a week I've bought a book on which the said movie was based. After reading it I decided to find some more facts about Enigma on the Net. One link - Dayton Codebreakers - lead me to the site of Montgomery County Historical Society where I found that the NCR - The National Cash Register Company - has been involved in the very special project during WWII - Enigma - which played a central role in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Surfing further I discovered that in August 1, 1998 the National Cash Register Corporation and the Montgomery County Historical Society joined in an innovative partnership committed to preserving the NCR Archive. The ends met: NCR, Computers, Leningrad... It was like a greeting from the old friend. Of course I decided to refresh my memory and find something about NCR computers on the Net. Poor me! I've spent a lot of time, trying to find that something, but it gave me too little. So, finally, I decided to apply to the Net audience for help.

I wrote: 'Unbelievable, - no chance to find anything about my first computers on the Net! I started my programming experience in 1976 with NCR 299 and NCR 399. Later there was NCR Century 8250 - an outstanding computer of its time... Because next year there will be 30 years since I became familiar with programming and NCR computers, I decided to collect materials (pictures, technical data) regarding old (2nd half of 20th century) NCR Systems, having in mind to create personal site about them. All my attempts to find the above mentioned materials were unsuccessful. Can you please help me with the materials I am looking for?'

It cost me some weeks to take the right course and one of the first contributors to The Core Memory Project, I named it so, was Peter Blaessing.

On February 21, 2005 I received an email from him, in which he wrote:

Hi,

You finally reached one of those old dinosaurs that are still working for NCR and who is knowing what you are talking of.

Actually I started with 644 (a system that was available just before the 299/399), then the NCR Century series and also with the 8200 (B-Series and IMOS OS). Then I went to the Criterions (85xx, 86xx and 88xx) and finally stopped my pure customer support with the 9800 back in 2001. So a long way along with those so called NCR "Legacy" systems.

I've investigated a little and found some pics you might be interested. Please note that all pics are under copyright of myself, so if you want to use them, please include my name in the description. These are the pics I found so far. Maybe I'll send you more if I stumble over any…

Best   regards
-Peter

We started exchange messages and Peter provided me with a lot of very interesting photos of NCR computers. On September 20, 2005 I wrote to Peter:

Hi, Peter.

Thank you for the kind and informative letter and a significant contribution to the site's Gallery! The pictures are already placed there.

I've never been to Augsburg, but I have heard about the city from my instructors of NCR Germany (they are mentioned on 'My NCR Computers' page). Last month I wrote an email to Augsburg's Magistrate asking them whether they may help me to find any of the instructors who taught me almost 30 years ago. They answered that they will try to do something to it. Absolutely crazy idea of mine, isn't it?...

Kind regards,
Aleksandrs

The answer, which arrived two days later was a real surprise for me:

22.09.2005

Hi Aleksandrs.

Great! I may help you with the instructors, as I personally know two of them:

a) Heinz Groetsch, this is his email address: ....
b) Rolf Ruf, this is his email address: ...

Please note that they both have retired, but they read their emails once in a while. So you might get in contact with them.
Best   regards
-Peter

I replied with following:

23.09.2005
Hi, Peter!

Thank you very much ... especially for the addresses of my former instructors. Wow! Unbelievable! That's GREAT! I've already sent them short messages and now awaiting replies...

Thanks once again.

Sincerely,
Aleksandrs

Too many years passed since the year 1978, so I was very careful and a little bit official while writing to Heinz:

23.09.2005

Dear Mr. Groetsch,

I have this possibility to write to you thanks to the kind help of Peter Blaessing.

Quite a long time ago, in 1978, you was an instructor for the programmer's team in Leningrad, former USSR, teaching them NCR COBOL 74. My name is Aleksandrs Guba and I am one of those programmers. At that time I was working for the Computer Centre of the Container Terminal of the Sea Port of Leningrad…

Because next year there will be 30 years since I became familiar with programming and NCR computers, some month ago I decided to collect materials (pictures, technical data) regarding old (2nd half of 20th century) NCR Systems, having in mind to create personal site about them.

Now it is possible to see the very first version of the site and you are welcome to this unofficial opening: http://www.thecorememory.com where you can find my Diploma signed by you as well as your photo where you are also present with some of your students, including me (My NCR Computers page).

In case you wish to send me some words or have any pictures or texts regarding NCR computers and want to share them with other people, please let me know.

Sincerely,
Aleksandrs Guba

The answer came in a few days:

28.09.2005

Hello Mr. A Guba

I myself was very pleased over your e-mail from 23.9.2005.

I am remembering still of our time in Leningrad and knows, that we have addressed ourselves then with Sascha and Heinz. I think we should remain at this.

Therefore dear Sascha, with large delight have I studied your Internet project "thecorememory". Congratulations to this idea.

I am, like you heard from Peter Blaessing, since 10 years in the retirement. Because at the 19. September 1995, on the way from the NCR to my home, I had a heavy accident. I crashed with my Vespa scooter in a small transport vehicle. Since this moment is paralysed my right body side. I sit thus now the most time in my wheelchair.

Since the 22. August 1978 I am married. We have however no children. I send you in the appendix a photo it is a year old, and shows me with my wife, who helps me always and so is my life also after my accident still pleasant.

Dear Sascha I would be happy, if we would write ourselves furthermore e-mails .

Sincerely
Heinz

We started exchange emails, - it was areal pleasure to find the old friend but at the same time it was a great pity to know that life changed dramatically to my friend. Finally I wrote to Heinz, asking if I may write a short story about us and put it on my site. Heinz answered:

16.02.2006

Dear Sascha,

Please excuse me for not answering so long. Unfortunately I now need more time to do my job than formerly.

Now to your questions you asked me in your last e-mail. I have no stuff which remained from our common work in the NCR. That is, because I was never more in the company. My stay in different clinics took 9 month in totally and meanwhile my colleges put in order my desk.

I am personally yet not able to write a report about our time in St. Petersburg. But I promise I will do it a little time later.

But it would be my pleasure if you would like to put a short story to the site about how we found each other…

Heinz

So did I.

Aleksandrs Guba
19.03.2006