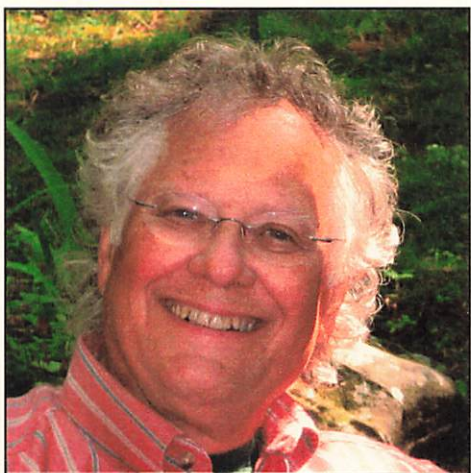




RONALD JAMES GRIFFITH

APRIL 4, 1943—MARCH 12, 2009

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WRITTEN BY RON ON OCTOBER 6, 2008

Ronald James Griffith was born Sunday, April 4, 1943 in Harlan, Iowa to Evea Maxine (Savidge) Griffith and Albert R. Griffith. Shortly after Ron's birth, his family moved to a farm outside Harlan. Life there was difficult on the farm. His father was industrious and highly educated as a farmer having received a bachelor's degree in animal husbandry from Iowa State University. Yet the family was financially strapped. Albert was farming with horses in the early 1940's when many farmers used tractors. The farm was run down and his dad used his knowledge of pest control to rein in a large rat population. Still it was an environment that ill suited his city-raised mother. When Ron was 2 years old the family moved to Cherokee, Iowa where his father became County Extension Director.

Ron lived in Cherokee until graduation from Washington High School in 1960. He recalls his childhood as nearly idyllic - devoted parents, stimulation to learn, support for any and all interests ranging from reading to music to science projects. He was engaged in Cub Scouts, 4-H, Methodist Youth Fellowship, varsity athletics and numerous school-related clubs and activities. He became employed outside the home at age 14 as a clerk in a grocery store. He was employed continuously in a similar capacity or as a manual laborer in farm-related work until graduation from high school.

Ron married Linda Joy Sagness in 1959 at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Cherokee, Iowa. Their daughter Dana Erin Griffith was born May 7, 1960.

Ron entered Iowa State University in the fall of 1960 with the dream of designing nuclear reactors. He was fortunate to have a well-paying part-time job with Northwestern Bell Telephone Company that had been arranged by the manager of his hometown telephone office. During his time at ISU his vocational objective evolved from nuclear engineering to biomedical engineering due to influence of Dr. Don C. Koser, the parent of a close friend - John Koser, and due to the opportunity to work on an engineering project that produced a prototype medical device for which Ron was awarded a patent.

To increase his real-world experience as well as to help fund his education, Ron arranged a cooperative work-study program with Collins Radio Corporation. Brian Andrew Griffith was born on November 10, 1961 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa while Ron was working at Collins.

Ron's studies at ISU included programming the Cyclone digital computer. It was a copy of the first large digital computer - the Illiac. This device was so large it was housed in a separate building and generated so much heat it required a complex air conditioning system dedicated to it. A microwave oven of today must have at least 1000 times as much computing power, yet this computer introduced Ron's generation to computing. He graduated from ISU in September 1963 with a Bachelor of Science degree with major in electrical engineering, an interest in all aspects of engineering, physics, mathematics and science and almost no interest in the liberal arts or humanities, and with membership in numerous honor societies.

Fate intervened again and rather than continue his education in biomedical engineering through a National Science Foundation graduate fellowship as planned, prior to graduation Ron accepted an interview and subsequently a job offer from Bell Telephone Laboratories. Bell Labs was then commonly thought of as the most prestigious private research and development organization in the world. Employment with Bell Labs took Ron and his family to metropolitan New Jersey.

At Bell Labs, Ron conducted research on military topics related to detection and classification of enemy vehicles with complex signatures in very low and signal-to-noise situations. This challenge motivated his graduate studies at Columbia University where he earned the MS and PhD degrees in Electrical Engineering in 1965 and 1969. The title of his dissertation is "An Approach to Pattern Recognition Using Hyperpolytopes." Ron did not continue research in this arena beyond defense of his dissertation nor did he pursue further publication or commercialization. A significant barrier to exploiting this approach was that extensive computer memory space was required. To conduct a small scale demonstration of concept, Ron had to construct prototype operating system extensions to provide an early version of virtual memory management. This was a feature not readily

available in even the largest computers at that time. Today it is in every PC. Ron was pleased by a recent conversation with a professor of computer science who asserted that the computational approach in Ron's dissertation is currently enjoying research interest. Unfortunately this is not likely due to Ron's work being rediscovered. It is probably due to the unrelated discovery of the approach now that sufficient computational resources are readily available.

During this period Ron became involved in community organizing related to the civil rights movement, in local politics and in the United Methodist Church in Morristown, New Jersey. These activities culminated in Ron attending a course titled "The Theological Revolution of the 20th Century." That course proved to be a life-changing experience.

Two other significant forces were becoming evident at the same time. First, Linda and Ron were drifting apart after nearly 12 years of married life begun in their mid-teens. Without prejudice or claim to absolute truth, Ron's view was that his commitment was moving in the direction of "saving the world." While Linda maintained a strong social awareness Ron felt her interests were increasingly typified by a desire for a white picket fence with roses tumbling over it. Second, Ron was promoted to his first management position at Bell Labs.

These factors came to a head when Ron decided to separate from Linda in October 1972 - 13 years to the day after their marriage. They obtained a divorce shortly thereafter.

Ron's commitment to social change through church renewal became the primary focus of his new life. He became a member of the residential staff of the Ecumenical Institute (EI), later the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), residing in New York City and commuting to work in suburban New Jersey. He was a spiritual social revolutionary with a top secret military clearance. His relationship to Dana and Brian became one of Sunday visitation - often in New York City where they memorized the floor plan of the Museum of Natural History.

In 1974 Ron was transferred by Bell Labs to its facility in Naperville,

Illinois. This afforded him an opportunity to change his focus from R&D on military topics to development of telephone-related software. It also provided an opportunity to reside and work in the global headquarters of the EI/ICA. Even more importantly, it set up the circumstances in which Ron met Beret Elizabeth (Brown) Hanson where Beret was working with the ICA. Beret and Ron were married April 28, 1976 – about 4 months after their first casual meeting and three weeks after they first really took notice of each other. When you know, you know. They were married in a civil ceremony performed at the Cook County Courthouse in Chicago, Illinois. Their combined family now totaled five children. In addition to Dana and Brian from Ron's prior marriage, Beret had three children from her previous marriage: Greta Elizabeth Hanson, Chrystina Ellen Hanson, and Benjamin Daniel Hanson.

Beret and Ron resided in Chicago with Brian and Benjamin till 1978 when Ron was transferred back to New Jersey by Bell Labs. With the added responsibility of a promotion, Ron's primary focus became work at Bell Labs. Beret remained actively engaged in various programs and worked with the ICA office in New York City. In time Brian left the household to attend college and returned to New Jersey to establish a new family. Benjamin decided to live with his father's family in Minneapolis for his high school years. Dana lived nearby in New Jersey and visited frequently, including receiving tutoring in Computer Science as she pursued her BS degree. Chrystina lived with Beret and Ron briefly between high school and beginning college in Bronxville, New York. Greta visited occasionally between periods of living in Chicago, Illinois; Bananeros, Brazil; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In 1988 Ron was invited to open a new Bell Labs location in Menlo Park, California. The entire family was excited by the prospect of a new life in California and endorsed the opportunity even though the assignment was "officially" temporary – for the duration of a few years.

The move was fantastic. California proved to be even more exciting than Ron and Beret hoped it would be. The main purpose of the new

office was to build a technical team united in a common project. Some of the members of the team were to be traditional East-coast Bell Labs members reporting to their even more traditional managers back in New Jersey. The other members of the team were employees of one of the most dynamic and pioneering Silicon Valley firms reporting to their risk-taking management. The technical lead of the team was Bill Joy who enjoyed "rock star" status in the computer industry. The project was to be a showcase endeavor. Sadly, the AT&T executive who had championed and sold the project and in so doing had startled the computer industry, left AT&T to become CEO of his former employer. The project foundered and ultimately support from remote AT&T and Bell Labs management in New Jersey diminished. At the same time AT&T changed its pension eligibility rules and added a pension incentive to those who became newly eligible to retire. Ron was one of the beneficiaries of this action so became at age 46 a pensioned retiree, a seasoned software development executive and able to remain in California to seek employment in Silicon Valley. During the time in California we saw Brian occasionally since he often had work in the San Francisco Bay Area. We saw the rest of the children only a few times a year.

Ron's commitment to work increased as he held a series of positions at Silicon Valley firms culminating as a senior executive at a privately-held start-up that filed for an Initial Public Offering (IPO) during Ron's tenure. In the heyday of the Internet bubble this was essentially "winning the lottery." Ron and Beret decided that in the year 2000 it was time to exercise a large number of stock options and to take an open-ended break from 90 hour work weeks by resigning his position. During the time off it became apparent that the IPO was unlikely to be completed because of the Internet bubble having burst. The firm ultimately ceased operations before an IPO was achieved. Ron would need to return to work.

In the fall of 2000 he conducted another job search and was near to being offered a position as Senior Vice-president of Product Development at an exciting start-up when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Instead of accepting that position he entered into treatment for

prostate cancer. After recuperation from surgery, Ron and Beret faced a crossroads — Ron was again being pursued by the start-up which would mean a return to the lifestyle of the past 11 years. In working with dear friends and financial advisors Ron and Beret determined they could enjoy the benefits of financial independence achieved not by cashing in on an IPO but through careful planning for the future. A trip to Minneapolis in 2001 to visit family and a series of fortuitous events led them to Northfield. Over three days they visited Northfield, signed a purchase agreement on a town home and returned to California. On their return to San Carlos, they tested their resolve by enjoying a glass of fine California wine in front of their living room fireplace while gazing on the skylines of San Francisco and Oakland from their picture windows. The decision held and they began to prepare for the move. Retiring to the Midwest would allow them to be near to some of the family, to long-time friends and to simplify their life. They set off across the country with two cats, fell in love again with prairies and clouds and never looked back. Having the lakes, rivers and woods of Minnesota and Wisconsin and Beaver Lake made up for having lived, for many years, twenty-five minutes from the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean.

Northfield has proven to be a wonderful choice. Not only were Ron and Beret in the immediate vicinity of family and friends (including Beret's closest childhood friend who independently moved to Northfield after living on the east coast for over 40 years), they now had easy access to the beloved cabin on Beaver Lake and started spending large amounts of the summer "away from it all." Ron and Beret also enjoyed the cultural opportunities offered by St Olaf and Carleton Colleges and the nearby Twin Cities. Moreover, the weather became a delight. Thunderstorms; summer rains; hot, humid days; snow and cold in winter reminded Ron and Beret of the weather they experienced growing up in the Midwest. Not having faced those weather-related challenges during their working lives, they experienced them as gifts.

Then there was the Co-op. Beret was invited to help facilitate a planning session for a group attempting to organize a natural food retail

cooperative. Ron came along to provide some technical assistance. Both Beret and Ron became totally engaged in the project and worked with an outstanding team of volunteers. Beret worked essentially full time for 2 ½ years and Ron for 4 years. A talented staff opened Just Food: Northfield Community Co-op in December 2004. After the Co-op opened Ron continued as President of the Just Food board and served on the board until the end of 2008. It has been their joy to see Just Food thrive.

As the Co-op matured, Ron felt the tug of other opportunities for engagement in the community. He served on the Planning Commission for 4½ years including the period during which the Commission did much work on the 2008 Northfield Comprehensive Plan.

Toward the end of that period Ron felt another call – responding to the Northfield Energy Task Force he helped organize the Wind Turbine Working Group (WTWG). One purpose of WTWG is to stimulate development of a Community-based wind farm for Northfield. While WTWG has not yet proceeded with the focus and commitment that will ultimately be necessary, it or its successor may yet play a role in such a project.

Ron's love for Northfield was a reawakening of his affection for local community that is rooted in Cherokee, Iowa, had begun to emerge in Morristown, New Jersey, was deepened while working with the ICA in Uptown Chicago and then had been set aside for almost 30 years as he focused on family and career. Indeed he occasionally referred to Northfield as "Morristown." It was Morristown and Northfield, not the company that was once the world's premier R&D organization nor all of Silicon Valley, which allowed him to most deeply experience the truth of one of his favorite sayings:

“Meaning is all we want.
Choices are all we make.
Relationships are all we have.”
Sandor P. Schuman

Perhaps in the end it was “spirit-filled adventurer” and not “engineer” that best describes Ron's essence. Community brought meaning to his life. Engineering is how he made his choices. Relationships are what he most cherished.

Ron was preceded in death by his parents Albert R. Griffith and Evea Maxine (Savidge) Griffith and by his sister JoAnn Marie (Griffith) Woodall.

He is survived by his wife, Beret Elizabeth (Brown) Griffith of Northfield, MN; daughter Dana Erin Griffith and grandchildren Evea Dinorah Kaldas and Andrew Samir Kaldas of Georgia; son Brian Andrew Griffith and daughter-in-law Lani Kian of San Diego, CA; daughter Greta Elizabeth Hanson and son-in-law Rogelio Gaytan Silva and grandchildren Gonzalo Samuel Pirela Hanson and Manola Francesca Silva Hanson of Minneapolis, MN; daughter Chrystina Ellen Hanson of New York City; son Benjamin Daniel Hanson and daughter-in-law Cassandra Miles Hanson and grandchildren Camille Adia Hanson, Isabelle Danielle Hanson, Lillian Margaret Hanson and Gabrielle Rose Hanson of Richfield, MN; mother-in-law Elizabeth Krause Brown of Eau Claire, WI; brother-in-law William John Woodall of Cherokee, IA; nieces Gayle Rae (Woodall) Gustafson and her husband Steven Gustafson and their family; and Gwen Leigh (Woodall) Voss and her husband Hank Albert Voss and their family.

Service Announcement

A memorial service for Ronald James Griffith was held on Saturday, March 28, 2009, at 11:00 a.m. at the United Methodist Church, Northfield. Visitation was held on Friday evening at 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. in the church Reception Room and again at 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. before the service. Pastors Marty Rath and Donna Buell officiated. Internment was at Oaklawn Cemetery, Northfield. Funeral arrangements by the Bierman Funeral Home of Northfield, Minnesota.

In lieu of flowers, memorials to the Ron Griffith Young Leaders Fund were preferred.

MEANING IS ALL WE WANT.
CHOICES ARE ALL WE MAKE.
RELATIONSHIPS ARE ALL WE HAVE.

SANDOR P. SCHUMAN