You meet the nicest people ...

Mimi Burbank

Everett Larguier, s.j.

In late July of 1998, I received an email message, the first line of which said, "Pardon me for bothering you, but yours is the first contact available ...". The gentleman needed some help with some TeX application on his computer, and kindly provided the necessary information regarding what system, and printer he was using.

What caught my attention was the following:

> ...I am an old man scrambling toward the door of the 90th year of my life, using LaTeX and Linux to keep old man Alzheimer from my door.

I thought then that this man *must* be the oldest TeX user and if not, then certainly one of them!

We have now celebrated the first anniversary of this correspondence,[1] and I must say, "You really meet the nicest people by email." Providing assistance to users can often be a strain on your time, resources and temperament! I can cheerfully say that in this particular case, I've learned nearly as much as any help I've provided. One cannot help but want to know more about someone who is 90 years of age, and using TeX! Sebastian Rahtz became involved in this correspondence and his response to the above statement was, "TeX will keep you young..."

In his own words

> I am a member of TUG and have been so since about 1989. Reading TUGboat has not been too easy over the years; most of the articles are beyond my comprehension. Over 50 years ago, I got a Ph.D. from Michigan and pursued my professional life as a mathematician at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, until retirement at age 75. But in being out of the mainstream of mathematical research I have forgotten over these later years much more mathematics than I know now.
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> In the early '80s, I ventured into using a PC and a VAX as a means of fending off old man Alzheimer. It has been reasonably successful. I picked up a copy of ^{pc}TeX along the way, which introduced me to TeX and LaTeX. Subsequently, I joined TUG with the thought that it might be helpful. That's where I stand

right now. I have been using Linux for a few years now, abandoning DOS, Win95 and the VAX for the most part and becoming a Linux nut.

Needless to say the above only led me to ask more questions, and Fr. Larguier kindly supplied me with a biographical document, *Peragente Anno Octogesimo Octavo*, published by Dragonfly Press, Mobile, Alabama in 1997, typeset using LaTeX. The photograph is from an unknown announcement entitled, "Fr. Everett Larguier, SJ, 70 Years a Jesuit". It was very nice to have a "face" to go with the email messages.

Biographical Extracts

Fr. Larguier was born January 26, 1910 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He entered the Jesuits at the age of 19. He attended St. Louis University starting in the fall of 1932, and obtained a Master's Degree in mathematics in 1936. He obtained his doctorate in mathematics from the University of Michigan in 1947, and then served as a faculty member of Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, until his retirement from full-time teaching in 1975. His first publication was in the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics* in 1935, and since that time he has published other mathematical research articles; several books have been published by the Spring Hill College Press.

One of the more humorous moments occurred at the time of his ordination, in June of 1941, at which time it was discovered that his baptism had been recorded to have occurred almost 19 years before his birth!

As we all know, poverty is one of the disciplines of monastic orders, and in reading the biographical material I can only remark that his first job, in 1927, paid $.50 an hour, and he worked about 50 hours a week — surely good preparation for the salary of a Jesuit!

Attendance at mathematical society meetings afforded him the opportunity to meet John von Neumann, one of the most outstanding mathematicians of this century. von Neumann was "impressive by his casual demeanor and lack of pretension. In fact he

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[1] The quotations in this article come from email correspondence as well as from the biographical publication *Peragente Anno Octogesimo Octavo*.

looked more like a small-town banker than a world-famous mathematician. Perhaps in this respect he was following a family tradition; his father was a banker in Hungary."

Advent of computers

In the late 1970s, Fr. Larguier had an "on-campus" terminal connection to the college computing facilities. Following a move of the Jesuit community to an off-site location, and because of advancing years and increasing arthritic problems, ambulatory access was a problem, and terminal access was provided in his residence. This was later followed by microcomputing facilities — a Zenith computer, Epson printer and modem connection to a VAX computer. He began working with TEX in the l980s.

Fr. Larguier's computing facilities have changed over the years, and he has been gaining experience with Unix and Linux. He says that this was "putting a strain on the brain cells. However as long as some progress is being made in gaining experience with Unix-like stuff, I will know that Alzheimer is not hanging around in the entrance-way to take over my brain." I can only say, "More power to you!"

Today

His interest since retirement has largely been in the area of topology, as well as a continued interest in the history of mathematics. These days, Fr. Larguier is learning a lot about setting up a Linux system, and installing the **TEX Live** CD, writing letters, and working on a book on topology.

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