

On this sad occasion I speak to you from several different perspectives. In the beginning, I was a mathematical friend and collaborator: Herb and I proved theorems and wrote papers together. Later, I became his son-in-law. A role that Herb played in my life – to my immense good fortune – was that of a *matchmaker*. As a job classification, this was not one that Herb gravitated toward, or was perhaps naturally suited for. If anyone in this audience has a hard time imagining Herb at a loss for proper words – probably that is all of you! -- it was such an occasion. But he *got the job done*, and I have enjoyed more than 15 years as a member of this wonderful family.

I want to say two things about how I will remember Herb.

(1) He was always doing mathematics. As it turns out, most of the time I spent with Herb was in family gatherings, where the conversation centered on other things. But I cannot recall a single such gathering at which he did not get me aside at some point and say “Consider the power series whose n th coefficient is $p(n)$ divided by ...”, or some such thing. To borrow a metaphor from computer science, Herb’s brain had a parallel math chip that was always running.

(2) He was never doing ONLY mathematics. From flying airplanes to large-format photography to mastering the latest electronic gadgetry, Herb was never standing still, always pushing the envelope, exploring new things and never satisfied unless he was doing them well. Even *within* the realm of mathematics, it was not enough simply to write books and papers and be a terrific teacher – he devoted much *extra* time to being an editor of leading math journals, and in one case (the Electronic Journal of Combinatorics) his efforts even helped reinvent the concept of *what it means* to be a journal.

Finally, I want to say that I feel inadequate to this task. I was always reluctant to commit puns in his presence, because he was a master of that genre, and would usually deliver a return volley letting me know exactly where I stood. Similarly, he was a master of tributes such as this and wrote many of them, with exquisite care and affection. I will close with a story told by my wife Susan – not just on this occasion but on others previously, long before Herb died. She recalls that -- as a somewhat defiant teenager – she challenged him with the question “*What is the purpose of life?*” His response was that one should insure that, by the time one has departed, one has “*added some lasting new threads to the tapestry of life*”. I know that the wisdom of this message has been taken to heart by his children and grandchildren, and that by his own high standards Herb Wilf lived an extraordinary life.

Curtis Greene
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