

Remembering Kirk

There are people and experiences that enormously influence the shape that our lives take and who we become. For me that defining experience occurred as an undergraduate student, when I took Prof. Kirk Smith's graduate course on Renewable Energy. He permitted me to enrol in the course, though I didn't have the pre-requisite courses, and that supportive stance remained throughout my student days. That was his way. He encouraged his students aim higher, to work harder, to keep the big picture in mind, and always, *always* to question their assumptions, to look at data critically. His way of keeping his students on track was to suggest in the mildest possible manner, "You might want to..." Over the years, I learnt to listen carefully to what came after "You might want to..."

I worked as a Research Intern with Kirk for the better part of a decade. Those were the very early years of his work on indoor air pollution. On the grounds of the East-West Centre Kirk put up a garden shed – Kirk was a carpenter / builder too – and transformed it into a 'Simulated Village Hut'. He negotiated with the University of Hawaii College of Agriculture to permit students to visit their farm to collect cow dung and to use one of their sheds to make and dry cow dung cakes. Then he got one of the university labs to allow us to dry the cow dung cakes in their ovens. Kirk was great at problem-solving and Finding A Way.

Along the way, our families got to know each other and over the years, visited each other. Kirk and Joanie's home was always welcoming to students. And Joanie made the best choc chip cookies! I will always be grateful for Joanie and Kirk's loving support when I was diagnosed with cancer. They calmed my panic. Joanie took time off work to accompany me to doctors' appointments and they offered their home in case the treatment was to happen in Hawai'i. Over the years, I think we have all been recipients of this generous loving care and hospitality.

Kirk's breadth (and depth) of knowledge and interests was astonishing. But when I read the notes that friends were writing on 'Caring Bridge', I realised that I didn't know the half of it. I remember meeting him for lunch and by the end of the meal I knew an extraordinary amount about bees and had a jar of honey. I miss Kirk, I miss these impromptu classes on unexpected topics, I miss Kirk's sense of humour and so many other things.

Kirk was the teacher and mentor who had the greatest influence in shaping me. I say that even though our paths diverged after I returned to India, and my professional life took me in another direction altogether. The lessons I learnt from Kirk were life lessons, and were not confined to a particular field of research. They were about developing a work ethic, about perseverance and dedication, about principles, and about developing and sustaining collaborations. They were about keeping your family in the centre of your life, about having fun, about enjoying nature, about cherishing friends and friendship. They were about living life fully, and about making every moment count. Thank you, Kirk.

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