



What a Great Ride It Was!

A Farewell From a Longtime CROSSTALK Staffer

Before I go, I would like everyone to know: my name is Nicole. I started at CROSSTALK in March 2001 as an article coordinator. Just days later, my first stop was a conference in New Orleans.

“Sounds great! But wait, what am I doing again?”

I was lucky: When I started here, current BACKTALK regular Dave Cook worked in our organization. He was tasked with introducing me to people and showing me the ropes. Dave was a lifesaver. I left New Orleans armed with 500 names, an open view of my new co-workers and organization, and a new insight into what software engineering was all about.

I learned quickly that the CROSSTALK staff was a tight-knit family that liked having fun. There was the time we emulated a video of a bunch of cubicle-dwellers hooking their office chairs together and “rowing” around the office. We all grabbed our chairs, linked them together, and started rowing down the hallway. Despite our airtight design, excellent teamwork, and perfect rowing skills, we ran right into our boss, Tony Henderson. Silently looking at all of us and shaking his head (as he always did), he just walked on by. Laughing hysterically, we went back to our desks.

Although a lot of long hours and hard work goes on around here, this certainly wasn't the last time we saw the head shake. Both Tony and our current boss, Brent Baxter, have that move down pat when the CROSSTALK staff is around.

There was the time after a fire safety briefing when we decided to practice the fireman's carry. There have been the “off-topic” CROSSTALK production meeting conversations: Drew Brown (our current managing editor) threatening to send my ancient cell phone to the Smithsonian, a child's science project consisting of Jell-O and a Quaker Oats canister, or Chelene Fortier (the associate editor) asking, for the 4,326th time, for a “dedicated color printer.” There was Chelene and I holding “cute boy” counting contests at the Systems and Software Technology Conference (SSTC). The tally? Nine years, two cute boys (and you both know who you are!). And there was the staff member who we liked so much that we volunteered him to run for Utah governor. We made posters and buttons and, for a brief morning, our building became his campaign headquarters (of sorts). And there are the old favorites that caused beet-red faces and silent screams of laughter: flatulence machines, keyboard letter-switching, and a pair of strategically placed red balloons (Hi, Bruce!).

I often say, “Aww, good times.” But maybe not for the Software Technology Support Center staff (bless their hearts) who sit near us. During my time here, they have all developed nervous ticks and invested in good pairs of earphones. And our poor publisher (Kasey Thompson) and Brent: They come to our area daily, but are no match for our conversational skills. I've heard “I forgot what I came over here for” more times than I can count.

There have also been good times in pursuit of great CROSSTALKS.

There was our November 2002 issue cover <www.stsc.hill.af.mil/crosstalk/2002/11/>. It was August, 95 degrees, and we were bundled up as if it was late autumn. Of course, I got to be the one to climb the tree and sit on the branch ... but what a view!

Every year, I got to play a major role in the SSTC. Meeting attendees, talking with prospective authors, and learning about

cutting-edge issues from our presenters was an amazing experience. What each SSTC lacked in “cute” boys, it made up for in CROSSTALK issue topics and new authors.

And there's the process of working with all the authors: getting to really know them, watching their article go from excellent to exceptional, and seeing the reward and excitement when they publish for the first time. The thing that astonishes me most is that all of these people are striving for the same thing: to make better, faster, more cost-effective software that will benefit the government and industry alike. I've learned a lot over the years and truly respect what everyone in the field is doing.

To our CROSSTALK authors: What can I say? CROSSTALK wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you. I am so thankful you all continue to write for our journal.

To our CROSSTALK Editorial Board: Thank you for reviewing all of those articles! Your hard work makes CROSSTALK the high-quality publication it is today.

To our CROSSTALK sponsors: I can't thank you enough for going to bat for our journal every year, standing up and recognizing that CROSSTALK is a highly valuable and extremely beneficial resource for the software engineering field.

To all of my fabulous co-workers, near and far: You have been with me through the good, the bad, the ugly, and the sweet (of course). You have put up with my silly sense of humor, singing, and G-rated swears.

Again, my name is Nicole. I can't tell you how many times people have called me by my now defunct last name, Kentta (“Dear Kentta,” or “Thanks Kentta”), despite big fonts, gargantuan signature blocks, or my voice mail message that starts off with “You've reached the voice mail of NICOLE Kentta” I still get a chuckle thinking about it.

I also have to thank all the people with the names more confusing than mine. I've worked with two Kents (Bingham, the man of many amazing CROSSTALK covers, and Poorman, the guy we complain to when the AC is not working), a Ken (a former managing editor), a Kase (another former managing editor), and Kasey. And, of course, I'll never forget the good times during the “all-women” days of CROSSTALK: Tracy, Beth, Pam, Chelene, and Janna.

So, as this chapter in my life ends, the next chapter begins across the country at Shaw AFB in South Carolina (the Air Force is relocating my husband). I promise to bring all of my experience and knowledge with me to my next adventure. And if you're ever in the South, don't hesitate to look me up!

I'm now getting on the next ride with new hope and a new last name: French. Or, as Drew likes to call me, Nicole Freedom. I will miss you all!

—Nicole French

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Introducing Marek

We'd like to welcome our new Article Coordinator, Marek Steed. Be nice to her. And remember: her name is MAREK. <marek.steed.CTR@hill.af.mil>