

Obituary



Simon Fitzpatrick
29 July 1953 – 21 August 2004

On Saturday August 21 Simon Fitzpatrick lost his long struggle with cancer. Simon was both a distinguished mathematician and a champion chess player. He was a senior lecturer in the School of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Western Australia since 1991.

Simon was born on July 29, 1953 in Perth, and shortly after his birth went to Dallowallinu in country Western Australia. His family moved to Perth in 1963. As a pre-schooler Simon was taught chess by his mother and bridge by his father. He was immediately attracted to chess and was State Junior Chess Champion each year from age 12 to 17. His distinction in chess may have played some part in earning him a full scholarship to Hale School for his highschool years. In 1974 Simon completed a Bachelor of Science degree with first class Honours at the University of Western Australia winning the Lady James Prize for the most outstanding graduate in Science, Engineering, or Medicine, and the H. C. Levey Prize for the top honours graduate in Mathematics.

Simon left Perth in 1975 to undertake postgraduate study at the University of Washington in Seattle. His PhD supervisor, Professor Robert Phelps, regarded Simon as “one of the brightest graduate students I have encountered in my years at this institution”. During his time in Seattle, Simon met and married Deborah Marie Dace.

After completing his PhD thesis, entitled “The differentiability of distance functions and the GSP in Banach spaces”, in March 1980 Simon returned, with Deborah, to Australia briefly as a Visiting Research Scientist in the Division of Mathematics and Statistics of the CSIRO in Melbourne. Then, in August 1980 he took up a two year Visiting Lectureship in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Illinois. Simon and Deborah returned to Australasia in 1982 when Simon was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Renewed contact was made with mathematicians in Australia during his sabbatical year in 1988, in particular with John Giles at the University of Newcastle. The year 1988 also marked the start of Simon’s fruitful collaboration with Jonathan Borwein, that was to continue up to the time of his death. In 1988 also Simon promoted to Senior Lecturer in Auckland. In 1991 Simon was attracted back to Perth with an offer of a Senior Lectureship at

the University of Western Australia, and he held this position until his death. In July 1992 he organised a mini-conference on Banach Spaces at the University of Western Australia to take place after a workshop on this topic organised by John Giles at the University of Newcastle, and before the annual meeting of the Australian Mathematical Society in Perth. Mathematical Reviews lists around 50 of Simon's research papers. At various times 16 different mathematicians or statisticians have been his coauthors.

At the University of Western Australia, Simon taught undergraduate mathematics courses at all year levels, and in 1992 he convened a committee to review all second year mathematics and statistics courses, to enable the Department to respond to changes in the high school and first year mathematics curriculum. With Grant Keady he shared an interest in the Maple Computer Algebra system and its applications, especially to undergraduate mathematics teaching. Simon gained especial satisfaction from supervising the work of his Masters student Sanka Balasurya, and in seeing Sanka's thesis completed and submitted in June this year.

Simon's concern for high quality mathematics teaching led to his acceptance of the role of Chief Examiner for the TEE (tertiary entrance) Calculus examination for three years 1994-96. The Calculus exam paper in 1994 written under Simon's leadership inspired seven heads of mathematics at senior high schools in Western Australia to write a joint congratulatory letter noting that "the philosophy and intent of the courses was examined as well as the content and objectives (which have in previous years been the focus of the papers)".

Simon's enthusiasm for chess never left him. As Simon got older - and as his health declined - he became more interested in correspondence chess and latterly this was his main sphere of activity. This slow form of the game was particularly suited to Simon's temperament and analytical skills and he soon reached international level as a correspondence player. His success was recognized by the award of the title of International Correspondence Master in 1999 by the International Correspondence Chess Federation based in Switzerland. In the following year Simon was Captain of the Australian correspondence chess team in the CC Olympiad XIV preliminaries, the chess-equivalent of the Olympics and conducted by e-mail.

Simon Fitzpatrick was held in high esteem by his friends and colleagues. He is remembered especially by his siblings Leigh and Julie, and by his friend of many years and partner during his last year, Natalie Casal. Those of us who knew him within Mathematics remember him as a very private and quiet person, an incisive thinker, and someone with enormous courage. As his long battle with cancer progressed we could do little more than stand alongside him with sympathy and admiration. Simon approached this battle as he would a chess match, with the same determination, quietness and perseverance.

Cheryl Praeger

Tributes by Simon's collaborating colleagues R.R. Phelps, B.D. Calvert, J.M. Borwein and J.R. Giles along with a full publication list appear on the web, <https://www.maths.uwa.edu.au/People/fitzpatr>.