

Obituary



Nicholas Michael Dungey
1972–2008

Nicholas Michael Dungey died tragically on 31 May 2008, aged 35 years.

Nick was born in London on 17 July 1972, the first son of Peter and Carol Dungey. He spent a happy childhood at Mt Lofty in the Adelaide Hills, attending Crafers Primary and Heathfield High Schools. After completing his secondary education at Glenunga International High School as dux of the school, he enrolled in the University of Adelaide. His initial interest was in philosophy which he then forsook to study mathematics. Both subjects require logical deduction and an ability to think abstractly. The philosophic community suffered a substantial but unrecognised loss when Nick turned to mathematics. During the undergraduate years at Adelaide university, Nick won the J.H. Michael Prize for second-year mathematics, the E.S. Barnes Prize for third year and also obtained both a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Sciences (Mathematics and Computer Sciences). He was the top student of his Honours year and was awarded a First Class Honours degree. This was followed by the award of the John L. Young Scholarship for Research and a subsequent Master's degree in the mathematical sciences.

In 1997, Nick came to the Australian National University for his PhD program under the supervision of Derek Robinson. He was very successful with his doctoral research being substantially complete in little more than two years on the topic of 'Heat kernels on Lie groups of polynomial growth'. In the remaining period of his doctoral studies he began working independently on related topics that had attracted his attention. The result was that by the end of the canonical three-year doctoral study period he was the author or co-author of four substantial papers that were accepted for publication in international research journals. In three years he had transformed from a gifted undergraduate to a mature mathematical researcher.

Nick's PhD achievements were recognised by the award of an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship on the project 'Asymptotics of heat kernels' for the years 2000 to 2003, which was based at the Australian National University. From 2003 to 2006, Nick was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Mathematics and Statistics of Complex Systems which was located at the University of New South Wales. During the years at UNSW, Nick had some health problems, then he recovered. In 2006, Nick came to Macquarie University as a Research Fellow until his untimely death in May 2008.

Nick's family, friends and colleagues remember him as a gentle and kind person, with a keen sense of humour. He read widely in fiction, philosophy, biography and history. He had eclectic musical tastes too, taking up classical guitar in his teens and favouring the music of Bach and the Beatles. His strong attraction to Asian culture was reflected in the many friendships he made with students and colleagues from Asia. He had planned with his partner, Akiko Kato, to work in Japan one day.

Mathematics was Nick's life passion. He was a fine research mathematician with an impressive publication record of about 30 papers at the age of 35, and a promising career in prospect. In a relatively short period he made a contribution that was deep, original and substantial. The loss of such a young and promising analyst is a serious loss to the Australian and international mathematical communities.

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