

Obituary

Shimon Even

June 15, 1935 – May 1, 2004

On May 1, 2004, the world of theoretical computer science suffered a stunning loss: Shimon Even passed away. Few computer scientists have had such a long, sustained, and influential career as Shimon. As an educator, he played a major role in establishing computer science education in Israel, at (at least) two major institutions: the Weizmann Institute and the Technion. As a researcher, he was a pioneer in the areas of graph algorithms and cryptography; he worked also in such diverse areas as switching and automata theory, coding theory, combinatorial algorithms, and complexity theory. In all of these areas, Shimon produced high-quality, innovative research for more than four decades. As a mentor to aspiring researchers, he was almost without peer, producing numerous doctoral students who went on to have their own successful research careers. (In this last regard, had Shimon stayed on at Harvard in the mid-1960s, I would have been his first doctoral student.)

In a sense, Shimon was the purest of pure theoreticians, following his nose toward research problems that were “the right” ones at the moment, not the faddish ones. Shimon’s standards were impeccable, to the point where he would balk at employing any result whose proof he had not mastered himself. Shimon’s integrity was unimpeachable: he would go to great lengths to defend any principle he believed in.

With all of the above, Shimon was always a friendly, approachable person. Few who interacted with him escaped without hearing at least a few of his seemingly endless supply of stories.

My personal relationship with Shimon began in 1962, his last year of grad school and my first, and it lasted until the very end. My personal sense of loss is immense. Indeed, for all of us whose lives intersected his, Shimon’s memory remains a vivid, lasting inspiration.

Our field has truly lost one of its role models.

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