

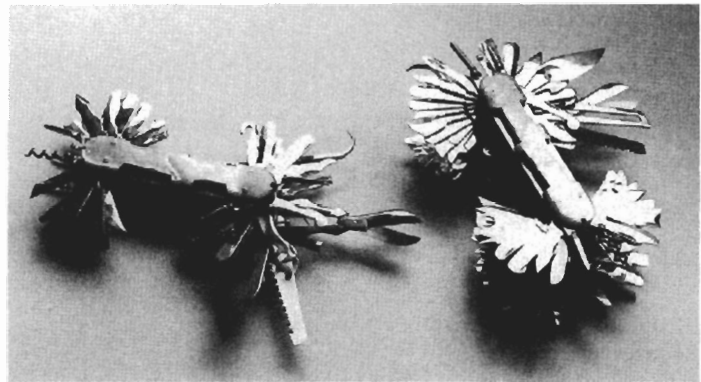
CLAUDE SHANNON (1916 – 2001): PERSONAL MEMORIES

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Much has been written about Claude Shannon since his death in February, including the obituaries that Ken Thompson and Jaap van den Herik contributed to the last issue of the *ICGA Journal*. I would like to add a few personal memories of a simple, brilliant and unassuming man of science and fun. Dr. Shannon was invited by the Board of the ICCA in September of 1980 to be our special guest at the 3rd World Computer Chess Championship in Linz, Austria. The year was the 30th anniversary of his seminal paper: *Programming a computer for playing chess*. In Linz Shannon set the ground rules quickly: "I don't do windows or give talks". That was fine with us since his mere presence, along with his lovely wife Betty, gave us inspiration and pleasure.

Three things stand out in my mind as characteristic of this eclectic genius: juggling, Swiss Army knives and the Sacher torte. Shannon's contributions to the art and theory of juggling have been reported widely. In Linz, he kept several of us enthralled with his scholarly and pragmatic discussions of his efforts to instrument a juggler with wired gloves and electronics to capture raw data that would subsequently enter into his mathematical theory of juggling.



Betty and Claude Shannon, Linz

Much less known is Claude Shannon's fascination with Swiss Army knives and other such "toys." Before arriving in Linz he had stopped in Germany to visit his instrument maker and to pick up two multi-tooled knives and two complex harmonicas. The Shannons invited me up to their room to view their new treasures. Sitting at a small round table, Claude began to unfurl (if that is the right word) these carefully crafted, two-spindled marvels. They opened like exotic flowers. We spent about an hour discussing the various elements, and finally Claude consented to pose for a few photos. I have saved them as unforgettable memories of a man who reveled in invention and in the exotic.

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Now for the Sacher torte. As the tournament was drawing to a close, and BELLE won a playoff with CHAOS to become the World Champion of 1980, Claude Shannon told us that he and Betty would be staying for a few days at the famous Sacher Hotel in Vienna, and he invited a number of us to join them there for dinner when we passed through Vienna on our way back to the States. Upon arriving at our own hotel (of course, numerous stars below the Sacher Hotel) we asked the desk clerk to make a reservation for nine at the Sacher Restaurant. He looked over the band of vagabonds that was checking in, and said in a somewhat haughty tone, “Zi restaurant vill not let you een – you must veer ties und jackets.” For those of you who are familiar with the computer-chess community, you will realize how impossible such a constraint seemed at the moment. But after a quick inventory was made, we determined that, yes, we could all appear properly attired, and the reservation was made.

The dinner was sublime, the company was animated, and before breaking up Claude Shannon said that we must all come up to see their magnificent, 19th century bedroom. The outcome of that invitation became the most famous portrait of the leading pioneers in the field of computer chess (on some of whom one can find two of my jackets and three of my ties!). We can thank Claude Shannon and his wife Betty for giving us the chance to be all together in a such a wonderful setting – and, I seem to recall that we also ate Sacher torte for dessert.



Sacher Hotel, Vienna, September 1980

I personally will never forget the man who provided such solid theoretical structure to all of the computer chess programs that followed his fundamental paper of 1950. But, to tell the truth, I will remember him most as the warm and gracious person who brought such simple humanity to the Linz tournament and to all who met him during his long and fruitful life.