

Speech for Bart ter Haar Romeny

Bram Platel, 1/12/2017

For me, one of the first memories that I have of Bart is around 16 years ago. As a young master student of a new professor, I was invited to a party in the Orangerie in Den Bosch to celebrate Bart's 50th birthday and his inauguration as a professor at the biomedical engineering department of the TU/e. Back then I didn't know anybody at that party. Today there are more than a hundred people here to celebrate Bart's retirement. This time, however, the vast majority of the guests are far from strangers to me, and many of them have become close friends.

How time flies!

In 2001, Bart started as a professor at the TU/e, and almost at the same time, I began my final project as a master student in Bart's newly founded biomedical image analysis group. When I finished my master's project, I continued as a Ph.D. student in the same group. Even after I obtained my doctor's title, I continued to work under Bart's supervision for another four years as a Postdoc and later as an Assistant professor.

I am happy that I can be here to celebrate this special day with you, Bart. As you know, it is not easy for me to actively participate in such an event.

I, unfortunately, preceded Bart in his retirement.

At the end of 2013, I developed some strange neurological symptoms. One year later I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, an incurable, progressive disease, of the central nervous system.

My health started to interfere with my work to such an extent that in 2016 the UWV, the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency, deemed me unable to work, and I was retired.

Unfortunately, the bad luck with my health didn't stop there. At the end of February this year, the doctors found that in addition to MS, I also had what appeared to be brain cancer.

Half a year ago I started with a harsh scheme of chemo treatments, designed to eradicate and cure my brain cancer. I completed the last part of this treatment plan about five weeks ago. Even though I am still weak from the chemo and my MS, I am delighted to be able to join this festive day.

For about one-fourth of my life, I worked in Bart's lab. Most of the times I enjoyed being a member of the group tremendously.

I got to know Bart as a very kind, open-hearted and caring leader, as well as a fantastic teacher.

I am sure that everybody that joined the group's yearly outings to the Ardennes in Belgium remembers them with fondness. The same holds true for the visits to the ECR in Vienna, where almost every year Bart brought a bunch of students. For master and bachelor

students he obtained a sponsorship to make the trip affordable. It was an excellent experience. Bart emphasized that everybody should wear suits, and I remember how he guided the impressed and well-dressed bunch of students through the enormous exhibition halls.

In many cases Bart behaved as a father-figure, as a shepherd, guiding and teaching his flock.

Measurable achievements mainly determine a research's value in academia. Often the things that count most are the amount of funding you collected, the number of papers you have authored and the impact factors of the journals in which these manuscripts have been published.

Even the invitation to Bart's valedictory symposium lists his achievements in a standard academic sense.

It reads:

He supervised 30 Ph.D. theses;
oversaw more than 140 master projects;
published over 220 papers and 12 books and book chapters.

These measures, although heavily weighed by outsiders, did not seem to be the focus of Bart's value system.

After being retired and having had to deal with my situation, I realize now, that numbers are not always the most important.

Professors sometimes retire with far more publications or a more massive amount of supervised Ph.D. students, but this says nothing about the actual contributions or impact that these professors had with their career.

Bart made sure that the atmosphere in the research group was great. His relentless enthusiasm was infectious and motivating. He was a father-figure providing guidance and listening to our life stories. While at the same time advancing our professional career.

The impact that Bart has had far surpasses a list of numbers. To illustrate what I mean, let's take a look at a few of the 30 Ph.D.'s that graduated under Bart.

The first graduate on the 'Ph.D. list' that I found on Bart's home page is Luc Florack, my daily Ph.D. supervisor. Luc joined Bart when he came to the TU/e in 2001 and now holds his own professor chair here at the Mathematics department of the TU/e.

Second on the list is Wiro Niessen, who became a renowned professor at the Erasmus MC and the TU Delft, and he co-founded Quantib, a company in medical imaging.

Next on the list is Bram van Ginneken, who became a professor at the Radboudumc, and co-founded Thirona, another company for medical image analysis.

These are just the first people on the list on Bart's website, let's have a look at some of the others:

Number 15 on the list, Vesna Prckovska, and number 16, Paulo Rodrigues founded their own company after their Ph.D.'s, and only a few years later they employ over 20 people.

Don't forget that all these companies are designed to in the end help patients, improve lives and even save them.

But apart from the many professional success stories, there are personal ones as well. Ellen Brunenberg, number 21 on the list, married Roy van Pelt, number 23 on the list. This year they expanded their family with a wonderful baby boy.

And me, number 8 on the list, met my wife during my Ph.D. in Bart's lab. She came over from the ETH in Switzerland for an internship in our group. We have two amazing kids and having such a great family helped me tremendously to get through what otherwise would have been very tough times.

This short list sums up just a small number of examples to illustrate the enormous impact that Bart's career has had and continues to have.

You have undoubtedly heard of the "butterfly effect," where seemingly small causes can have enormous consequences. Sometimes it is easy to forget this larger scale and focus only on a single, small scale. It should have been clear to me that as a professor teaching about scale-space and looking at all the scales at once, Bart was well aware of this all along.

My situation made me reflect on life.

I would like to end my speech with some of the insights I had.

Time passes incredibly fast, keep in mind that life is short and that it can quickly turn out differently than expected. Therefore, it is essential that you make the most of every day. Focus on the things that you value and try not to get distracted.

Of course, it is impossible to always make the right choices, but when you make decisions based on your view of life, your values, then there is no reason to have any regrets, even when the choices you made turned out not to have been the best.

Lastly, do not unnecessarily postpone decisions; it never seems to be the perfect time for some things.

Keep in mind that time flies.

But even more importantly, remember that you are the pilot!

Thanks for everything Bart!