

Eulogy for Kyril Faenov

Bill Bain

May 30, 2012

Let me first say that our hearts go out to Lauren and the girls, to Kyril's parents, Marina and Anatoly, and to his sister, Ksenya, after this unimaginable tragedy.

I also want to thank Dave Campbell and Robin Paulino at Microsoft for going the extra mile to help Anatoly quickly obtain his visa so that he could be here today.

My last speech about Kyril was at his beautiful wedding. It deeply saddens me to be standing here just a few short years later.

Public speaking isn't easy for me, but of course, Kyril would do this very well. I still can't even say his name properly, but *he* spoke perfect English. In all eulogies, we talk of how special our loved one was, but in this case, it is so completely, obviously true beyond words. Kyril's talents, character, kindness, and humility will always be an enduring memory and inspiration.

I came to know Kyril over the course of 20 years - first as an intern in a start-up company I founded, then as a close friend and colleague. Over that time, he had a profound impact on me, as he did on so many people. But let's first take a moment to review the early days.

The year is 1992. I'm awaiting the arrival of my new summer intern to write test suites for my software company in Beaverton, Oregon. A Chevy Impala beater drives up to my office. Out of the car steps this

huge 18 year old guy with a buzz cut and wraparound sunglasses – he looked like a cross between James Dean and Arnold Schwarzenegger. As I later learned, Kyril was a championship swimmer, and in fact, some of his records still stand.

In any case, I thought he wasn't exactly the computer nerd I'd hired to do test development.

However, I was immediately surprised – shocked actually - with his combination of extraordinary focus, work ethic, intelligence, drive, and good manners. He was clearly a special talent, not to mention well brought-up and sophisticated - quite a contrast to the less cooperative 18 and 19-year-olds I had previously tried to train.

It didn't take long for him to learn everything I could teach him while we suffered through two failed startups together. He planned to get his MS in computational finance and go to Wall Street. I tried to convince him to do a third startup.

One day over lunch, he proposed the core idea of what eventually became NLB for Windows. I thought his idea was too simple and brilliant to be possible. We ran back to the office and prototyped it in a couple of hours. When it worked, we just sat back and laughed. We then decided to create a company and market it. We both put in \$8K and agreed that when the money ran out, Kyril would just go on to Wall Street.

Kyril worked long hours and was extremely focused and dedicated, but had a playful side that made serious work fun. Our official company movie was "The Rock," and Kyril was kind of like our Sean Connery. His skills, energy, and charisma overwhelmed all obstacles.

One evening we were faced with a thorny technical problem, and I gave up and went home. I came in the next morning and there he was saying “I solved it.” I said, “Great – how long did *that* take?” He said he had been there all night. And then he worked another full day.

Kyril’s ability to solve tough problems and think on his feet with sheer intelligence and persistence helped our little start-up get Microsoft’s attention, and we were eventually acquired. During the acquisition discussions, we were negotiating price and I said, “We have a superstar here. You have no idea how rare a talent Kyril is. He is 1 in a million. (And you *know* he was.) He alone will justify this acquisition price.” They mulled that over and didn’t say another word about price. Somehow they also knew.

He even had a way of sounding compelling when he wasn’t quite sure what to say. At a tech due diligence meeting when the acquisition was almost complete, a senior engineer found a problem. I knew we had been blindsided and the whole deal could unwind. I glanced over at Kyril. He stood up and gave a very convincing answer that satisfied everyone. I asked him later what he had said, and he replied that he wasn’t sure, but it had worked. I should note that he fixed this problem immediately after the acquisition.

At this point in August 1998, Kyril was just 24 years old. I vividly remember wondering what a guy who had grown so much in six short years would accomplish in the next ten. He did not disappoint.

After a year at Microsoft, Kyril was looking for new challenges. Late one evening we found a job for him that required making regular presentations to Microsoft’s top executives. “Perfect,” he said. He applied and was accepted. The problem was that they had to make

their next presentation in two weeks. They thought Kyril should wait a few months before presenting. He refused to wait. That took extreme self-confidence and a brilliant mind that could absorb and present strategic ideas to an audience that did not suffer fools. Kyril did superbly, of course, and I think that's when he first *really* got noticed.

Kyril had that highly unusual power of *abstraction* that makes a world class technologist, and he often told me that he felt it was one of his key talents. He had the ability to see the big picture, separate it from the noise, and then predict important trends. He also had a deep curiosity that fed his analytical abilities. He came up with many big ideas – reputation systems, wearable medical monitoring to name a few – before they were widely discussed.

But he took this a step further. He loved to explore religion, metaphysics, and how the mind works. He read voraciously and deeply. We had countless Saturday afternoon conversations over coffee in which Kyril would examine a new idea like a juggler keeping a ball in the air. He would look at all angles, devoid of ego, and speak in a thoughtful and articulate manner. I will sorely miss those conversations.

Kyril usually greeted me with “Hi Cap!” for Captain, showing respect for me, whom he called his mentor. But the student had *long* since become the teacher.

Kyril once told me he was a warrior. He was happiest when he was on a quest, like when he created the Microsoft HPC Server product, formed a team, and delivered incredible technology. I always knew he could be a powerful leader and visionary, and he finally was proving it for all to see. Kyril was like an icebreaker. He figured out the route and then plowed it so that many others could follow. He was always out front,

shouldering the load, providing the vision. He was relentless in the pursuit of his goals.

But perhaps most important of all, Kyril had an uncommonly soft touch and kindness with all his friends and colleagues. He was never an elitist. He was always thoughtful and genuinely concerned about the needs of others. And he was tremendous fun to be around, as I'm sure many of you know better than I.

I deeply regret that I did not recognize his recent issues. Kyril hid his problems well from even his closest friends. He was consistently cheerful, kind, polite, and engaged – never moody. It was a great shock to learn about the demons he was facing. I do not begin to understand why he could not still be with us today, and that may always be an unanswerable question.

I last saw Kyril Saturday a week ago at the opera Madame Butterfly. The opera's tragic plot, then so potent and affecting, now seems hopelessly dwarfed by this terrible real-life tragedy. I fervently wish that his demons had not been able to overwhelm him. Kyril's mind was so capable and yet so sensitive. It's not hard to imagine that he might try to take on the world's problems quietly and alone.

Words cannot capture the loss we feel. However, Kyril's 38 years were thoroughly, vibrantly, passionately lived, and his memory will endure.