November 9, 2004

The Tenure Review Committee for Professor Andrew P. Black
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Post Office Box 751
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Dear Tenure Review Committee,

I was recently awarded a Ph.D. by the Department of Computer Science and Engineering of the OGI School of Science and Engineering at Oregon Health and Science University. Dr. Andrew Black served on my committee, but this fact does not due justice to the impressive degree of support and encouragement he showed me throughout the process.

Dr. Black was initially my major professor. Given the fact that I would be a part-time Ph.D. student with a full-time job, a wife, and three children, and given that the department's prior experience with such students had not been entirely positive, the fact that he was willing to take me on at all speaks volumes for his courage. My initial topic was Read-Copy Update (RCU), which is a concurrency control mechanism, on which I submitted my Research Proficiency (RPE) paper in the Spring of 2000. I was confident that the RPE would not be a problem, since I had been working with RCU for a number of years.

My confidence was severely misplaced, as my presentation proved totally incomprehensible to anyone lacking long experience with parallel computing. Needless to say, I failed to pass.

In the Winter and Spring of 2001, Dr. Black and I spent several months meeting regularly to prepare for the RPE, using the same topic. Thanks to his patient and persistent coaching, my presentation was readily accessible to all attending, and in fact won the second-place award at that year's Student Research Symposium. This paper laid the groundwork for several subsequent papers on implementations and applications of RCU.

Most of the attendees had difficulty believing that my two RPE presentations covered the same topic! This is but one example of Dr. Black's ability and willingness to make a major difference in his students' work. In addition, I am convinced that Dr. Black's contributions to the clarity of my thoughts on RCU were key to its later being accepted into the Linux 2.6 kernel.

Later that year, Dr. Black and I chose a dissertation topic involving Infopipes. This work progressed well, in fact, I later received a commendation from the Department Head, Dr. James Hook, and Dr. Black was able to incorporate portions of my research plan into a successful grant application.
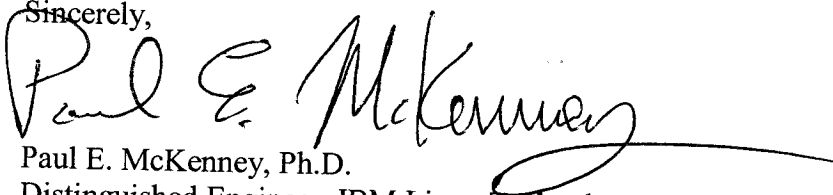
However, my progress on that topic was interrupted by my being named in a high-profile legal action. This litigation is still ongoing, so I am unable to discuss it, however, if you

are interested, voluminous information and commentary may be readily located on the Internet. My involvement with the defense against this litigation made it was impossible for me to make acceptable progress on my dissertation topic.

I could see only two choices: (1) drop out of the program, or (2) switch to a topic more closely related to my job. I found the first choice to be completely unacceptable, so I asked for a meeting with my Student Program Committee to discuss a change of topic. Given that I was turning my back on almost two years of work with Dr. Black on the Infopipes topic, I was prepared for the worst, and therefore approached this meeting with considerable anxiety.

I was pleasantly surprised by the positive reaction of my committee in general and of Dr. Black in particular. By the end of the meeting, we had agreed that I should switch my topic to RCU, and Dr. Black not only offered to continue on my committee, but took it upon himself to locate another professor, Dr. Jonathan Walpole, whose research interests were better aligned with my new topic. The close alignment between my new topic and my day job permitted me to complete my Ph.D. program quite quickly, although I continue to regret the fact that I was unable complete the Infopipes work. Based on my experiences with Dr. Black, I wholeheartedly recommend him to any Ph.D. student looking for an intelligent, empathetic, and supportive Ph.D. advisor.

Sincerely,

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