

My remembrance of Gary Chapman

Gloria C. Duffy

President and CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California

I met Gary Chapman in the early 1980s, when I was the director of Ploughshares Fund in San Francisco. We had attended the same small liberal arts college, Occidental College, in Los Angeles, but had not overlapped. I graduated in 1975 and Gary graduated in 1979. He was a year older than me, but had interrupted his studies to serve as a Green Beret, graduating with a class younger than he was. One of our mutual professors, Larry Caldwell, introduced us.

In the early 1980s, wide public concern arose over the Reagan Administration's policies calling for the US to be able to fight and win a nuclear war – so-called “nuclear war-fighting capabilities” – and the buildup of both offensive and defensive nuclear weapons systems to support this strategy. Many new weapons systems were designed and developed during this period of time - “Star Wars,” for a national missile defense, the MX strategic missile, cruise missiles, even a neutron bomb.

Many people in the US and abroad were alarmed about this strategy for the increased military costs it involved, because it could destabilize the US-Soviet deterrence system and ratchet up the nuclear arms race, and because it could make the arms race more unpredictable and precarious, with the heightened possibility that nuclear weapons might actually be used in conflicts.

People from various professions were concerned from the vantage point of their professional expertise. Doctors were concerned about the statements being made that human beings could survive a nuclear attack, which they knew to be false from a medical standpoint. So they formed Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), to bring their professional expertise to bear on the questions surrounding this new nuclear strategy.

Likewise, a group of computer professionals in Silicon Valley, led by computing pioneer Severo Ornstein, began meeting informally at the Xerox Parc research facility in Palo Alto in 1981 to discuss the issues about the computer systems involved in the new nuclear strategy. They were particularly concerned about how artificial intelligence might be applied to the development of new nuclear weapons systems and their command and control, through a Strategic Computing Initiative DARPA was then developing. How would the applications of new computer technologies affect the ability of humans to adequately control nuclear weapons? How could we make sure that errors in computer programs did not lead to accidental nuclear war or other hazards? In 1983, the group formally incorporated as Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR), and hired Gary, then studying for a political science Ph.D. at Stanford, to be its first executive director.

From his background in the military and his studies in political science, Gary was concerned about the application of technology for military purposes. He was a

visionary who saw that in military affairs, as in so many other areas of society, information technology was developing so rapidly that it outstripped the ability of policymakers and the public to understand the practical, social and ethical effects of these developments until their impact had already occurred. By then, it was often too late to reverse the effects, some of which could be negative for society.

With Gary's leadership, CPSR became an effective voice – the first one - for the increasingly critical computer sciences profession to raise the questions and provide the analysis of how developments in information technology would affect military decisions, healthcare, privacy, education, national and personal security and many other areas. CPSR became an ethical voice for the computer industry, and educated elected officials and the public about these complex issues.

Gary came to us at Ploughshares in 1983-84 for a grant to assist in developing CPSR's first projects, which focused on computer sciences and the military. He made us aware for the first time that among all the groups in the US and abroad who were then raising questions about nuclear war-fighting, computer professionals had a singularly important role and a lot to contribute to an understanding of this subject. Gary tirelessly spoke, wrote articles, and met with leaders across different sectors to educate them about the impact of computing on military programs.

The CPSR agenda gradually broadened to include a number of other questions. Gary laid the groundwork for an organization that still today is an important voice examining issues ranging from socially responsible video games to citizen journalism via the internet.

When I left Ploughshares Fund, I joined the Board of CPSR, and worked closely with Gary and his colleagues on developing the organization. I also started a research institute on arms control and international security issues, Global Outlook, in Palo Alto, and the CPSR office and the Global Outlook office were located around the corner from one another. For several years, Gary and I were lunch pals – we would get together in one of the restaurants along University Avenue, sometimes with others from our offices, especially Greg Dalton, a younger fellow who worked for me who had also attended Occidental College. Gary and I would chat about the issues we were both working on, talk about the development of the organizations we were building, about local and national politics, and occasionally about new loves or episodes in our personal lives. We would confer and often laugh; he was a wonderful friend and a helpful and steady colleague.

He was the essence of cool – with his aviator glasses, and his reserved bearing that marked him as a Green Beret. But he also had a great sense of humor – he once sent a guy in a gorilla suit over to my office as a prank. He had a big, throw-his-head-back laugh that I will always remember.

Gary was extremely insightful about the intersection of technology and social issues. He was two decades ahead of the kinds of discussions we have today about what is right and wrong in the use of technology.

Gary's death is a shock, and I will miss him. I hadn't seen him for a number of years, but we corresponded when I was on a search committee for a new president for

Occidental College a couple of years ago. Gary wrote to nominate a colleague of his at UT for the position, and to catch me up on his life. He wrote of his gratitude to the LBJ School for a place to work for 14 years, and his happiness in his life with Carol and their dogs in their “small little house about 75 yards from Lake Austin”. He was excited about a new project he was launching with former Senator Bill Bradley, to study how to make the federal budget an open, online, transparent data source that citizens and public interest groups could use.

Gary laid a foundation for thinking about how to enhance the positive influences of technology in our society, while minimizing the negative effects. He had a lot of important guidance to give us about this question, which is one of the most crucial issues of our era. It is his thoughtful voice on these issues, applied so wisely through his teaching, speaking and writing to the issues that arose over three decades, that will be missed most deeply.

Dr. Gloria C. Duffy
President and CEO
The Commonwealth Club of California