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What USENIX Means to Me

by Daniel V. Klein, USENIX Board

Thirty-five years ago, I attended my first USENIX conference in Austin, TX. That's a date in the previous century, longer ago than some of my readers have been alive. USENIX had only been around for five years, and Unix itself was less than a decade old. Dennis Ritchie (and either Ken Thompson or Brian Kernighan, I forget which) were in attendance, as were other legendary computer scientists, and I was awed that they were open, approachable, and willing to talk with me, a then-young graduate student with myriad questions.

Dennis is sadly no longer with us, but Ken and Brian now work "with" me at Google. USENIX celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, along with the version of Unix I started with: V5. The longevity of the Unix OS is amazing, but even more amazing is that the CLI looks very similar to (but a lot snazzier and faster than) that early version. But if you think that the remainder of this article is going to consist of reminiscences, you're wrong. This article is about the future.

The past is as dust and the future is not yet born, and the present is all we can change. So really what I want to get you to think about is the promise of the future, based on the history I have personally witnessed, and circle back to why my present day continues to include The USENIX Association, even after 35 years. It all boils down to this:

Magic, wonder, and play.

Let's face it, computers are magic. The phone in my pocket is what we used to refer to as a supercomputer (except my phone is substantially more powerful than a Cray Y-MP). In my graduate student days, we had dreams and visions of systems that would

recognize and parse connected speech, see and analyze images, drive cars, and sift through vast amounts of data, and today we have them. We got them through incremental hard work and information sharing, with USENIX providing the medium for sharing. What is yet to come is more magic, more dreams and visions, and when you attend USENIX conferences, you get to share those dreams and hear about the visions that others have. And you get it first, because among other things, USENIX is known for firsts. This is why, at every conference I attend, for every proceedings I read, for every invited talks track I watch, I have a renewed sense of wonder. I am seeing a hint of the future with the newest magic for today.

When people ask me what I do for a living, I often tell them that I am paid to play. Sure, sometimes the work is hard, the hours long, but creating software is a game to me. I often ask myself, "Do they really pay me to do this?" because that daily sense of wonder and magic makes my job fun! The more I contribute, the more I get to appreciate the work of others, because we share the benefits of each other's work. And much of that sharing is facilitated by USENIX, by mechanisms pioneered by USENIX and its members.

Which brings me to the question of "Why USENIX, and why for 35 years?" Because we (the Association, its board, staff and members, the authors and attendees) make the magic, we share the wonder, and we play well together. USENIX is not simply about "open source"; that is only part of the equation. We are, and in my opinion always have been, about "open access." USENIX is about making everyone's job easier and more productive, because we don't hide our magic, we show it and share it. Our vast archive of (often groundbreaking) technical papers is free and open to the public. Our conferences reveal new and innovative technologies, irrespective of corporate, political, or OS bias. And perhaps most importantly, the luminaries are still open, approachable, and willing to talk.

USENIX doesn't just talk the talk; USENIX walks the walk. And the Association's mission statement is and always has been my mission statement: foster technical excellence and innovation; support and disseminate research with a practical bias; provide a neutral forum for discussion of technical issues; and encourage computing outreach into the community at large. USENIX is something I believe in, whether as an attendee, an author, a speaker, as staff, or as a board member. It's been 35 years and it's still fun because I can't wait to see what the future will bring. And I know that I'll see a lot of that future at a USENIX conference.

Refocusing the LISA Community
by Casey Henderson, USENIX Executive Director

For 24 years, the LISA Special Interest Group for Sysadmins (LISA SIG, formerly known as SAGE) has been a resource and virtual meeting ground for the sysadmin community at USENIX. Despite its sometimes tumultuous history, dedicated members have provided content for Short Topics books, shared insight with colleagues via mailing lists, and helped advance the state of the profession via the creation of the System Administrators' Code of Ethics, contributions to salary surveys, postings to colleagues via the Jobs Board, and nominations for the Outstanding Achievement Award.

With full recognition of this history and value of the LISA SIG, USENIX has made the decision to retire it at the end of 2016. In recent years, our efforts to serve the sysadmin community have focused on reengineering and revitalizing the annual LISA conference to ensure its relevance and long-term sustainability, as well as creating and nurturing SREcon for the emerging, related field of site reliability engineering. These ongoing efforts have been successful and well received by the community, so this is where we are going to focus our energies to help support the sysadmin community.

The USENIX Board of Directors and staff did not make this decision lightly. To inform our deliberation, we convened a committee comprised of community members to explore the possible future paths of the SIG. The committee surveyed SIG members, analyzed the results, and presented their recommendations to us. After weighing all the factors, we determined that the best path forward is to continue building community through the LISA conference itself.

LISA SIG resources, including the Short Topics books and Code of Ethics, will continue to be available on the USENIX Web site. All active memberships will continue to receive the current slate of benefits, including the LISA conference discount, through the end of the year.

We look forward to continuing to serve this community that continues to be an integral part of USENIX, and hope to see you at LISA16 in Boston, December 4–9, 2016.