

Pascal

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From 2013 to 2019 I lived in a small town, thirty minutes north of Zürich by train, called Schaffhausen. Where I lived, our neighbors organised every year a gathering, with traditional food and drinks, and where everybody talked to me in Swiss German. Even if I did not always get what was going on, they were so friendly I could not stop smiling.

Smiling is the key for happiness and to have a nice relationship with your neighbors.

So it turns out that after a few years in Schaffhausen my German skills were improving, in spite of all my efforts for that not to happen, and in one of those gatherings I had a nice conversation – at least that was my impression – with one of my neighbors.

They all knew that I “worked with computers”, whatever that meant, and I helped some of them reinstall the occasional printer driver here or there. This is part of our Karma.

So during this conversation with this neighbor, I was told he knew a professor from ETHZ, the Zurich Federal Polytechnic Institute where Einstein studied.

He told me that they went together to primary school in a city between Schaffhausen and Zurich called Winterthur.

He told me that they met every so often for dinner, and that next time he would gladly introduce him to me.

He tells me that I might know his name.

He tells me his friend’s name is Niklaus Wirth.

You can imagine my reaction.

Pascal was the second programming language I learnt, back in 1993. My best friend in high school, Bertrand, was an Amiga wizard who taught me a lot about computers in the beginning.

(Speaking about Amiga wizards, I enjoy watching Graham and Steve talking about the Amiga on Twitch.)

Following Bertrand's tips, I first learnt Turbo Pascal, then Object Pascal, then Delphi, and I also tried to play with Oberon but without much success. Pascal is a very, very Swiss language. Everything has its place. Everything is defined, typed, and very easy to understand. Everything is verbose.

Bertrand passed away almost five years ago. I miss him a lot.

As for my neighbor, well, I never met Dr. Wirth, at least not so far. I would love to.