

# My Portrait of PJ Zima

John Gaffney  
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First, I offer an apology for using a script. Just count your blessings that I'm not doing a PowerPoint presentation.

Each of us played a part in PJ's life, and each of us has memories and probably stories to tell about him. What I'd like to do now is paint a fuzzy portrait of PJ's life since 1967 when I first met him – a portrait that we can fill in and share together here today.

I actually met PJ through my former wife. She was working as a consultant in the University of Illinois computer center helping students with their programs, and all I heard about her day at work was PJ this... and PJ that... It turned out that PJ was another consultant who was making a big impression on not only my wife, but also a lot of other people in the Department of Computer Science.

So who was this guy? What kind of person draws that much attention, especially from women? I'm not sure what I was expecting, but whatever it was, I was wrong. PJ was a gentle, unassuming soul who had a terrific sense of humor and knew how to have a good time. And he was smart. He was just fun to be around.

And thus our friendship began. Our favorite pastime was tinkering with our Volvos on weekends, usually assisted by ample quantities of Busch beer. I envied PJ's racing green P1800 sports car. Mine was a sedate sedan, but PJ, the eternal nice guy, never made fun of it.

PJ had many friends. Carol was his shy significant-other whom he married in 1970 – on Halloween, no less. Does that sound like PJ, or what...?

I recruited PJ to join the Illiac IV project – a super-computer designed at Illinois. When it was announced that the Illiac would be installed at

Ames Research Center in California, we jumped at the chance to go with it.

PJ and I and our wives caravanned our Volvos to California in the fall of '71. Christie Barton, Michael Kelley, and Wendy Eimstad came out, too.

Once in California, we joined other people assigned to the Illiac project, including John Warnock. I had already heard about John in 1969 while I was a graduate student back at Illinois. John made a name for himself by writing a short but elegant Ph.D. thesis at the University of Utah that solved a previously unsolved problem in computer graphics.

So here we were in Silicon Valley – before it was called that – working on a high-powered computer with high-powered people. Those were exciting times.

Our offsite offices were near the intersection of 101 and Lawrence Expressway and looked out over a cornfield in one direction and an orchard in another. Work on the project took on the aura of what was to become commonplace in Silicon Valley. Long hours. Hard work. And deadlines.

Not surprisingly, our new California lifestyle took its toll on relationships. Most of us ended up splitting up with our wives and significant-others. PJ, Michael Kelley, and I were no exceptions. But one couple was an exception: John Warnock and his wife Marva. They were one of the few couples that survived the social craziness of those days.

In 1974 John Warnock recruited PJ, Christy Barton, and myself to join Evans & Sutherland to do a really neat computer graphics project. We opened up a 4-person office in Los Altos and later Mountain View – a fair schlep from Los Gatos in either case -- so PJ and I often commuted together. In fact, we made a tradition of going out for breakfast on Friday mornings before going to work – a tradition we maintained for nearly 20 years.

The four of us built a computer model of New York Harbor and all the supporting software in a little over a year. Looking back on it, we were often amazed at that accomplishment.

After the harbor project, PJ worked on a Space Shuttle training simulator for NASA and spent hands-on time at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. He also implemented parts of a graphics language that later evolved into Adobe Systems' PostScript page description language.

In the 80s our lives went separate directions. I married Jackie Seymour, whom both PJ and I knew through the Illiac project. PJ became an independent consultant, specializing in software for high-performance computer image display systems -- primarily at DeAnza Systems and then Gould.

The consulting lifestyle appealed to him. He worked a lot and traveled a lot, and he saved up enough to buy a second home, the one in the Santa Cruz Mountains so many of us have visited. In spite of our separate career paths, PJ and I kept in touch by continuing to meet every Friday morning for breakfast.

For Jackie and me, the holidays became extra special because PJ almost always joined us. Our two children, Jessica and Ian, were born in the early '80s, and they loved PJ's company -- especially little Jessica, who would swoon over his arrival. There's that female attraction again -- even for a one-year-old.

In 1984 I joined Adobe Systems, which had been founded by John Warnock and Chuck Geschke a couple of years earlier. I spent the next six years trying to convince PJ to give up his consulting career and come to work for Adobe. No dice. Having too much fun.

In 1991, I partly succeeded. PJ agreed to come to work for Adobe -- but only as a consultant. It wasn't until '93 that the attractions of a fast-growing Adobe convinced him to convert to a full-time employee. We had come full circle -- working again for the same company. And working again, at least indirectly, for John Warnock.

In August of 1994, PJ, Jackie and I attended Joan Rondell's wedding to Joel Sperans. PJ took a liking to Denie Albert, Joan's friend who was also at the wedding. It wasn't long before PJ and Denie were a couple. We welcomed Denie into our extended family and continued the tradition of spending holidays together. PJ and Denie were married on May 6, 1999 on an island in the Caribbean. David Brown and his wife Linda, both close friends of PJ since the early 80s, hosted a fabulous cruise aboard a 110-foot private yacht especially for the occasion.

But a dark cloud hung over that happy event. PJ had been diagnosed the previous summer with a form of anemia that could potentially develop into leukemia. A combination of Chinese traditional medicine and Western medicine kept things under control until September 10, 2001 when he was admitted to UCSF Medical Center with acute leukemia. That was the day before 9/11.

Thanks in part to his unwavering positive attitude and incredible support from Denie, PJ breezed through a month of chemo, or at least so it seemed. PJ never complained about what was happening to him.

Things were stable until last summer when a relapse sent him back to UCSF for another round of chemo. After that, PJ's condition gradually worsened until he quietly passed away on Wednesday.

The past few weeks have brought a few of us much closer together: Denie, her sister Bethel, PJ's brother George, PJ's close friend David Brown, my wife Jackie, who thankfully used to be an RN, and myself.

I've left lots of holes in PJ's life story. Please feel free now to tell your own story, your own memory.