
Thomas Koch, 1964–2014

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A little more than a year has passed since Thomas Koch, former president of DANTE e.V. from 1998–2002, died suddenly and unexpectedly on July 24, 2014.

I don't remember exactly when we first met. I think it was at the Karlsruhe TUG conference in 1989, but it may also have happened at DANTE's autumn conference in Eichstätt, in the same year. What I do remember very vividly, as if it had happened yesterday, is this first evening we spent together.

Thomas was a very unusual person. He had already finished a full master's degree study in theology, went to the seminary to get his ordination to (Catholic) priesthood, and abandoned that goal to start studying computer science instead. He consistently evinced two main traits: he was interested in all kinds of people, and he was interested in talking about all kinds of topics, without limits. This first evening, we talked about books and typography—of course, it was a T_EX conference—jumped from there to critical editions, meandered through medieval library attitudes, sprang to baroque music, compared that to contemporary modern music and free jazz, went on about electronics' usage in music and ended up discussing the future of IT data centers. There may have been even more topics, but these I still remember after 26 years.

You could throw any and all topics at him; he was always interested and willing to talk. Curiosity, like a child, always willing to be taken by surprise, was one of his main traits. Thomas was new to the T_EX community at this time. Nevertheless, he immediately started to engage himself. Eventually, he became the DANTE coordinator for OS/2 in 1995—these were the times when T_EX communities existed mostly to help folks get a T_EX system up and running at all. In that capacity, he helped many people in the German T_EX community and made himself a name as a sturdy guy whom you can rely upon.

His special background, having studied both a humanist and a scientific subject at a master's degree level, together with his broad interest in topics and people, made him well known and fully accepted by all parts of the German T_EX community. When differences about the future course of DANTE led to internal frictions, he stood up, was voted in as



president in 1998, and took our organization's helm to steer us back to calmer waters. He succeeded in scaling back animosities, calmed down controversies, and brought quarreling factions back to the same table. Sometimes having been a priest-in-training seems to help, after all. In his presidential term, he was instrumental in guiding DANTE to focus on delivering better services to both its user group members and the larger T_EX community as a whole. His term as president resulted in major investments by DANTE into the T_EX Live CD, CTAN CD, ProText CD, and other developments that were not on the front burner before. Investments that are very visible until this day—I just received this year's T_EX Collection disc from TUG this week.

His career at T-Systems, where he was responsible for the enterprise and cloud architecture of this major German IT outfit, didn't leave him much time, though, so he stepped down from his president's job in 2002 and passed that to Volker RW Schaa. Of course, he was still involved in the German T_EX community, and sought after for his experience as former president—and besides, all his work also didn't prevent him being our best man at Christine's and my wedding in 2007. In 2014, we saw each other quite often; the last time, we discussed his plans for his 50th birthday, soon to come.

That phone call on a Friday, a year ago, when his partner Dorothea called us to say that he died unexpectedly and without any known cause, destroyed an important part of my life. It needed a year before I was able to write this commemoration . . . please bear with me if it got too personal. RIP, Thomas, we miss you. I miss you.