

# Randy Pausch - If You Remember Me

Dan Hardison

Jim Metcalf writes in a poem, "I hope if you remember me at all, / it will be for what I was, / not for what / you would have had me be, / or what others thought." If we were to leave a legacy when our time here has ended, would we not want to be remembered fondly for who we were and how we lived our life? And if you unexpectedly were told that you have only a few months left to live, what would you do to be remembered for "what I was?"

Randy Pausch was an award-winning Professor of Computer Science specializing in virtual reality research at Carnegie Mellon University and previously at the University of Virginia. He also worked with Adobe, Google, Electronic Arts (EA), and Walt Disney Imagineering, as well as pioneering the educational software tool the Alice project. He was married with three young children when in August 2007 he was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. Randy Pausch was forty-seven.

Each year at Carnegie Mellon, a faculty member is asked to deliver what would be hypothetically a final speech to their students before dying known as "The Last Lecture." It is a chance for both the speaker and listeners to reflect upon what matters most in life. Pausch had been asked to deliver the lecture in 2007 and by the time the speech was given in September, it would ironically be his last lecture. Under the circumstances, he could easily have canceled the lecture. However, since the lecture would be videotaped, Pausch wanted the lecture to be a way for his children to later, "understand who I was and what I cared about." It would be a "message in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children."

The lecture was called "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams." It was about living a full and meaningful life, the importance of overcoming obstacles, and seizing every moment. It was not about dying.

The lecture was given as scheduled before a packed auditorium and was a sensation. The subsequent video has been

viewed by millions and can still be seen. Pausch went on to write the best selling book titled "The Last Lecture" with Jeffrey Zaslow, a columnist for "The Wall Street Journal." As Pausch explained, "A book allows me to cover many, many more stories from my life and the attendant lessons I hope my kids can take from them. Also, much of my lecture at Carnegie Mellon focused on the professional side of my life - my students, colleagues and career. The book is a far more personal look at my childhood dreams and all the lessons I've learned."

The book is also available as an audio book read by Erik Singer who invokes Randy Pausch's wit, intellect, and inspirational storytelling as if Pausch were actually right there telling you his story.

*A Quiet Place*  
New Hanover County Arboretum  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
Photo by Dan Hardison

On July 25, 2008, Randy Pausch died. In his final months, he had wanted to leave a message for his children - an accumulation of everything he had come to believe about life. What he left was a remembrance from which we can all learn and a legacy for all to treasure.

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."  
—Randy Pausch

