Ray Favre

Jim Nagel

Ray Favre, one of Archive's most prolific writers over the years and the maintainer of the Dr Wimp programming software, died on May 26 after a two-year battle with bone-marrow cancer. He was 71.

His standing in the RISC OS world came as a surprise to his family, when they received dozens of emails from people who had never met him personally but knew and admired his work.

Raymond Albert Favre, 1938–2010

At the funeral Ray's brother, David, said Ray was "like a giant jigsaw puzzle": they knew the part in the middle – he lived at the same address in west London for 40 years and was happily married to Iris for just short of 50 – but he was a modest, private and independent man, and people who shared one of the outer edges of his life were unlikely to know anything about his other edges. "I doubt if any of us has the complete picture on the outside of the box."

Did you know, for instance, that he was a qualified glider pilot, had a passion for building meticulous model aircraft and was editor of *Aero Modeller* magazine?

That he was a big fan of traditional jazz all his life and taught himself trombone? He and Iris regularly went to concerts up till about a year ago.

Did any RISC OS reader know that he was one of the top two senior engineers with the Civil Aviation Authority?

And who outside it knew that for 25 years Ray was hon.secretary of "an exclusive gentlemen's club"? He and three friends from student days met regularly to play bridge; Ray kept formal minutes, awarded annual trophies, produced a club magazine called *Under the Table*, and hired a chateau in France to play their 200th game. "He was more an enthusiastic bridge player than a good bridge player," his brother said.

In the mid-1980s Ray offered a prize for a club member to come up with something useful on a computer for playing bridge. David, as a BBC Micro buff, won with *Bridge Mentor.* They eventually sold several thousand copies. *(And I find the software is still available online from Beeb retro sites such as www.stairwaytohell.com. —Ed.)*

RISC OS career

In the wake of that, Ray got involved with BBC Basic and then RISC OS. David said: "It was all done very privately; he never said much about it."

In 1995 Ray reckoned that no suitable book existed for beginners wanting to learn Basic programming on RISC OS machines (whereas at least 20 had existed for the BBC Micro a dozen years earlier), so he wrote *Starting Basic*, a series that started in *Archive 8:12* and ran for 21 instalments.

His next series, *Doctoring the Wimp*,

investigated how to write desktop applications (as opposed to plain Basic programs, which monopolize the computer). Its eight parts began in *Archive 10:5* in 1997. Ray used the tools provided by *Dr Wimp*, which the Arm Club had published only months before – a public-domain suite written by Andrew Ayre as an electrical-engineering student at Hull; Eddie Lord reviewed it in *Archive 10:1*. Ray himself took over support and distribution of Dr Wimp in May 1999, from version 3.53 on.

His *Learner's Column* ran in all but two issues of Archive between 1997 and 2007. His opening words in the first instalment will strike a chord with other writers:

> During the almost two years that I was writing the monthly series *Starting Basic*, I received feedback from no more than about a dozen people – despite my regular pleas. Yet, as soon as the series ended, I started to hear from many more who had clearly followed the series quite avidly, but in silence. Pleasing and frustrating at the same time! In this new venture, I will try to learn from this lesson in human nature.

He started *Dr Wimp's Casebook* as an additional series in 1999. He did not promise an instalment every month but in fact skipped only seven issues in nearly eight years. The series ran until issue 20:7 in 2007.

He revised and republished two of these series in book form. *Starting Basic* and *Dr Wimp's Surgery* are both now in second editions. He sold them at £16 each, complete with a disc, and everything after printing and postage costs he donated to charity, mainly the Norfolk and Norwich Children's Fund. The effort so far raised more than £3,000 for charity. Sample chapters are on Ray's website.
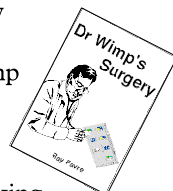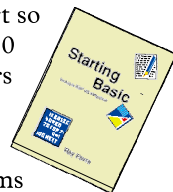
The Dr Wimp application plus a collection of programs made by its users are freely downloadable from *www.rayfavre.me.uk*. Dr Wimp is now at version 5.00 with an updated manual. Among the programs are Ray's own Calibre (for making calendars), Labella (for printing labels), CSVamp (for shuffling CSV and TSV files) and Meddle (for converting Ovation Pro DDL files to web pages).

Calibre, his latest baby, came out in 2007 – an application for producing calendars in many formats (*Archive 21:1, 21:10*).

Degree and rank

Ray was born in 1938 on November 15. After Kilburn Grammar School, his first job was at Dollis Hill research station for the Post Office, which led to Northampton Engineering College in London (now City University) and an honours degree in electrical engineering. He joined the Department of Transport and was a founder member of the Civil Aviation Authority when it was formed out of the DoT in 1972. Its base at RAF West Drayton controlled air traffic all over southern England. Ray worked "24-7" on the base and was given an honorary rank in the RAF to entitle him to join the officers' mess. The base closed in the early 1990s and Ray took early retirement about then. Yet "he never talked much about his work," his brother said.

The illness set in in 2009, and Ray spent several periods in hospital. Back home, he was unable for some months to get upstairs to his beloved Acorn RiscPC. He rallied earlier this year until the latest bout of chemotherapy.

He is survived by Iris, their daughter Susan Martin and two grandchildren as well as his younger brother David.

Ray's books through Archive

Ray left notes for his daughter as executor, one saying he would like Archive to be offered the copyright and master copy of his books, *Starting Basic* and *Dr Wimp's Surgery*. Archive is happy to take them on so that they continue to be available and continue to support his charity.

We'll keep to the same price at which Ray sold them, £16 inc p&p, and review when the next reprint is necessary. Obviously, email Archive rather than the address on Ray's website till we can update it.

We'll look out for a volunteer to keep Ray's content up to date, and for someone willing to step into the breach as maintainer of Dr Wimp.

Ray Favre at the 2008 Wakefield show, the last one he attended. The photo is by Colin Sutton, who wrote Archive's PD column and had many dealings with Ray, as he regularly updated his software. Likewise Steve Fryatt, who took over the column: "I invariably found Ray knowledgeable, courteous and helpful."