

FOREGROUND

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

Since they print my picture with this column, I have little hope of concealing my age, so I'll just come out and say that I remember Ronald Reagan's first year in office in 1981 – in fact, I was already a young adult at that time and was living in Reagan's home state of California, working my first professional job after college. Reagan became known as "the great communicator" for the hypnotic optimism with which he could render his own point of view. In a speech somewhere around that time, the new president made a comment that was something like "We have come a long way since before we knew we had a problem with racism."

I vividly remember speaking with an elderly African American co-worker the next day, who mentioned, "Maybe he didn't know we had a problem with racism, but I knew it."

By nature, our society fixes issues that are in the foreground of the public awareness, and if a problem isn't in the foreground, it is invisible to the larger public consciousness, even though many people might suffer from leaving the problem unresolved.

The recent anniversary of Alan Turing's birth was occasion to remember the war hero and pioneering computer scientist, who, unfortunately, lived before the British government "knew it had a problem" with showing respect and compassion for its gay citizens.

People around the world believe in the promise of equality, but the human instinct for sorting, categorizing, and forming tribal identities often leaves that promise unrealized. One part of the problem might drift in and out of the viewfinder, but the big picture is hardly ever in focus. The thing is: Diversity means *everybody* is equal. You can't just pick and choose a portfolio of groups you are willing to support based on the safety of your social setting or political interests.

The spirit of Linux is about showing up and pitching in – as you are, without the need for a lot of the rules and stereotypes that inform opinions in the rest of the world. And yet, the rest of the world is still present, because that's where we all came from. We have pulled down a lot of barriers, even within my own lifetime, but much work is still ahead.

Although I'm sure some readers can think of exceptions, in general, it seems that the ultra-international Open Source movement is at least aware of the need for an understanding of ethnic diversity issues. Linux developers reside on all continents, as do readers (and authors) of this magazine. On the other hand, it seems that gender diversity issues crop up fairly frequently in the FOSS community. These issues often take the form of sexual or otherwise inappropriate "bro-grammer" humor (which typically isn't very funny) and brash, condescending ads or forum posts. I'm quite sure that the people

who respond positively to such things are only a small fraction of the community, but the background noise is loud enough to have an effect on the climate of the community.

The tragic case of Alan Turing informs us that respect for diversity in sexual orientation was an issue for a computer scientist of his time, just as it was for the rest of the culture. Some signs indicate that the situation is improving. Still, if Turing were alive today, I have a feeling he would say we are still working on cracking the code for true and meaningful respect for diversity. And though it seems like it shouldn't be necessary, the best hope for progress is to keep the issue in the foreground.

Jon 'maddog' Hall is someone who has been pitching in for Linux and the Free Software movement almost as long as it has existed, and he still travels the world as an ambassador for Linux. maddog's moving and very meaningful post at the Linux Pro Online website on the occasion of Alan Turing's 100th birthday is one of the most popular and highly commented pages in the history of this magazine. I'm proud that Linux Pro could play host to maddog's essay, and I salute the courageous way he takes on the topic of diversity.

<http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/In-Honor-of-Alan-Turing-A-message-from-the-sponsor-UPDATED-for-Independence-Day>

Thanks, maddog.

Joe

Joe Casad,
Editor in Chief

