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He Was Allen Gast 1.0

A reminder that life, like technology, only goes in one direction.

TECHNOLOGY SPARES no room for pity. Ask anyone with a freshly outmoded iPod how far a receipt will get you. *Receipt? Technology doesn't do receipts, pal.*

Life doesn't either, I'm reminded. All purchases are final.

A coworker, Allen Gast, died the other day. He was in the accounting department—and he wasn't too happy about it. He told me that he was a journalist once. "Like you," he said. He would then ask, "Did I ever tell you that before?" I'd say no because I wanted to hear him tell me again.

The first time I met Allen I asked him why on earth he was in accounting. He ought to be in radio, where that grainy baritone of his would be golden. Oh, he was in radio, he said, a long time ago. "In Bakersfield. Did I ever tell you that before?"

Bakersfield? No, I don't think you ever told me that before.

He pointed out that it wasn't just a voice for radio that he had, but a face, too. That was right in my sweet spot: "No argument here," I answered.

So it went between us, the incidental office banter—those rubber-tipped digs that never break the skin. They don't add up to anything at all, except a day's work.

On the same day that I heard Allen died, I worked, drove to my uncle's to look at a file cabinet he was unloading, watched a basketball game, and posted pictures to my Facebook page. Why are we so able to compartmentalize like that, to put sorrow in one pocket, necessity in another, leisure in a third? It would seem on such a day, we should be occupied by just the one task: grieving. Perhaps I just wasn't ready to give the heart its full portion.



I was surprised to learn he was only 64. There was a kind of slouching resignation in his walk. He was Allen Gast 1.0 and he feared what that meant. "They tried to get rid of me once, you know," he said. I have one e-mail from him. He made a crack about not showing up at an office party because his wife and son weren't up for it. "I had intended to go until they all did me in," he wrote. Grumbling, beleaguered, put-upon Allen Gast, crustier than a pot pie.

Not a chance. I heard him many times go on about his son the college baseball player and his wife the beauty, so I knew it was all a con.

Borrowing the column like this may seem self-indulgent or off topic, but it's worth barging in for a moment to say that Allen Gast was a darn good guy. Did I ever tell him that before? You know, I don't think I ever did. THE

—Jeff Weinstock, Executive Editor