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DENNIS RITCHIE

1997 Fellow

For his co-creation, with Ken Thompson, of the UNIX operating system, and for development of the C programming language.

Dennis Ritchie was born in Bronxville, New York, in 1941. He graduated from Harvard University with degrees in physics and applied mathematics and with a Ph.D. in mathematics (1968). His contributions to computing span four decades and have had global impact. While at Bell Labs' Computing Sciences Research Center in the early 1970s, he created the C programming language and co-developed (with Ken Thompson) the UNIX operating system-both of which are foundations of our modern digital world.

The C programming language and its descendants continue to be used to write the software that makes digital devices and networks work, while UNIX and UNIX-like operating systems run on a vast range of computing systems.

Ritchie's early work laid the foundations for much of the technical infrastructure of our modern digital world. He enjoyed traveling and reading, but his main passion was his work, and he stayed with Bell Labs until his retirement in 2007. With Ken Thompson, he was awarded the ACM Turing Award (1983), the U.S. National Medal of Technology (1999), and the Japan Prize (2011). He passed away in 2011.

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