SUMMARY: Collecting debugging stories for analysis+archive. Please send yours!

We are collecting anecdotes describing memorable debugging experiences, with the aim of analysing them and building an archive to assist programmers in the future. We will gratefully accept any stories describing very thorny software bugs, ideally (but not exclusively) involving large software projects and expert programmers. A brief stream-of-consciousness reply right now would be much better than a detailed story that becomes too time-consuming for you to finish. We can get back to you with further questions if necessary. Thanks.

That's it! Next are OPTIONAL headings & FTP/email ways to access our study.
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SUGGESTED OPTIONAL HEADINGS to facilitate later analysis & retrieval are supplied below. Please ignore these if they stifle your motivation, otherwise copy/paste :HEADING: labels into your reply. 1-liners (except STORY) are ideal.

:DISTRIBUTION: UNRESTRICTED | anyBBS | Internet-only | private
:ANONYMITY: keep-author-anonymous | use-name-only | use-name-&-email
:EXPERIENCE: e.g. (at time of incident) 7 years industrial C programmer
:HARDWARE: e.g. 486
:OS: e.g. DOS 5 + Windows 3.1
:LANGUAGE: e.g. M'Soft Visual C++
:LIBRARIES: e.g. Microsoft Foundation Class
:TASK: e.g. writing disk-cacheing software
:SYMPTOM: e.g. machine crashed after 40,000 iterations
:HOW-NOTICED: e.g. end-user reported it | obvious | Q.A. spotted it | etc.
:WHY-HARD: (one or more of...) intermittent | inconsistent | infrequent |
        too-many-degrees-of-freedom | cause-far-from-effect |
        bug-consumed-evidence | Heisenbug-ran-OK-with-debugger |
        tedious-to-replicate | context-precluded-debugger-usage |
        unstructured-code | thought-<X>-was-<Y> | misdirected-blame |
        faulty-assumption | <other>
:HOW-SOLVED: (one or more of...) single-step | wrap-in-profiling-code |
        print-statements | dump-data-study-diffs | conditional-breaks |
        special-tool | gestation-meditation | explain-to-friend |
        expert-advice | controlled-experiment | <other>
:ROOT-CAUSE: (one or more of...) memory-clobbered | fault-of-vendor |
        faulty-design-logic | bad-init-or-type-decl | wrong-var-or-op |
        lexical-or-parsing-or-typo | language-semantics-misunderstood |
        subtle-end-user-behavior | still-unsolved | <other>
:HEADLINE: e.g. MSC disk-cache crash after 40K steps, array index err*
:STORY: <as lengthy as you have the patience to write!>

:MORAL: e.g. don't use pointers without comments

*The :HEADLINE: is a one-line overview of the story which will be CRUCIAL
for helping others pick it out from among thousands listed in a directory,
and therefore should concisely convey the key gist of the story. The
categories for :WHY-HARD:, :HOW-SOLVED:, and :ROOT-CAUSE: have proved
effective in the past, but they are just there to jog your memory. Your own
words (or a combination of the suggested categories plus your own words)
may be best.

DATA/ANALYSES/MOTIVATION VIA FTP OR EMAIL:
If you are interested in data from the previous 'trawls', or our conclusions
drawn from them, or a detailed discussion of the motivation for this study,
the relevant documents can be obtained by anonymous FTP from hcrl.open.ac.uk
(in the directory /pub/bugtales).   We will also be setting up an email
list-server facility to deal with correspondence. In the meantime, comments,
suggestions, and requests for emailed publications can be directed to
M.Eisenstadt@open.ac.uk. Stories should be sent to Bugtales@open.ac.uk.

Incidentally, since we introduced the 'suggested headings' (e.g. :SYMTPOM:,
:ROOT-CAUSE:, etc.) most of the respondents have in fact been using them, which
is a great help to us. Many thanks for your time and interest!
Finally, thanks to Dan LaLiberte for suggesting the :HOW-NOTICED: category,
and to Simon Masterton for assisting with data collection and analysis.

-Marc Eisenstadt (Personal email: M.Eisenstadt@open.ac.uk)

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  _/   _/ _/_/_/ _/_/_/ _/   Human Cognition Research Lab
 _/   _/ _/      _/   _/ _/    The Open University
 _/_/_/ _/      _/_/_/ _/     Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, U.K.
 _/   _/ _/      _/ _/   _/     Tel: +44 908 65-3800  Fax: -3169
_/   _/ _/_/_/ _/   _/ _/_/_/ Internet: Bugtales@open.ac.uk
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