



Bill Sundermeier Oral History Interview, December 12, 2014

Title

“A Computer Scientist Reflects on Life in Weatherford Hall”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Sundermeier makes note of his upbringing in Forest Grove and his decision to attend OSU. From there, he provides a detailed description of his three years living in Weatherford Hall, a time period during which the building suffered from decades of deferred maintenance and found itself in mounting disrepair. In recalling his living experience, Sundermeier makes note of the renovations that he and his roommate carried out themselves to make their room more liveable, discusses social life in the dorm, and reflects broadly on the shabby charm of the building during his undergraduate years.

Sundermeier likewise shares his memories of campus culture during the early 1980s, touches upon classes and professors who were particularly noteworthy, and describes the computing infrastructure then available to Computer Science students at OSU.

The remainder of the session is primarily devoted to Sundermeier's professional activities. In looking back on his career, Sundermeier outlines his work at Northwest Instrument Systems, his co-founding of Quality Check Software, and his two decades as a manager and executive at FLIR Systems. The interview concludes with notes on family and advice that Sundermeier would give to students of today.

Interviewee

Bill Sundermeier

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/sundermeier/>

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Well, today is December 12th, 2014, a Friday. And we're at the OSU Valley Library to interview a member of the class of 1985, Bill Sundermeier. He is here with his son Alex, and we're going to find out a little bit about life in Weatherford Hall.

We like to start with a little bit about your early days to give us a brief biographical sketch of your childhood – where you born, when, that type of thing.

Bill Sundermeier: Sure. I was born November 12th, 1963, in Hillsboro, Oregon. My folks lived out in Forest Grove, Oregon and I was the third generation to graduate from Forest Grove High School. My junior and senior year at Forest Grove High School, I interned at Tektronix in Beaverton and that kind of gave me my early start in computer science. And I decided to go to Oregon State my senior year in school and that was a great introduction to the world of computer science.

MD: So this is early in computer science, relatively early. When you were working at Tektronix, what were your internship duties?

BS: My internship duties were both electrical as well as computer science, so I had a chance to learn how to solder and build circuit boards and work on early systems. And then they starting teaching me assembly language and then high-level languages. At Tektronix they have a fantastic adult education program and I was fortunate that I was also in high school and I took lots of different courses, and that translated really well to getting into Oregon State. They kept me on through the summers and I was really fortunate to be able to pay my own way through college.

And then they set me up in my old dorm room – which we'll talk about – with a 4051. I'll never forget it, it was a single computer; a personal computer back then was three feet long by two feet high, and just gigantic. Phosphor screen. And so I would do projects for them, for consulting, to earn my way through school. But this was back, right as punch cards were starting to end and screens were coming on, it was very early on.

MD: So you entered OSU in 1981?

BS: Yeah, at the end of '81.

MD: Did you have your eye on OSU because of their program? Or was it because you were a legacy? Why OSU?

BS: Actually, I was the first Sundermeier this side of the Rockies to go to college. So Oregon State has – still has – a fantastic engineering program and science program, and so it was a great place for me to go. And paying my own way through school and being a Tektronix – I was not really getting as much as I could have from the college life, because on quite a few weekends I would drive back to the Portland area and turn in my projects for Tektronix on the weekends, and work there on the weekends so that I could afford my way through school.

MD: That's interesting, during that period, especially with the costs of tuition at that time. One of the other things I always like to know is your family life, that type of thing, as a kid.

BS: I'm an only child, so I really had a great growing up period. I lived out towards Hagg Lake, which is outside of Forest Grove, so I spent a lot of time sailing on Hagg Lake as I was growing up. So a great childhood, but really my folks instilled a lot of work ethic in me. So a lot of farm labor when I was younger, from berries to hoeing onions and pulling rotten onions out of onion fields. And I guess all of that helped me absolutely decide that I want to go to college and get a desk job, versus working in the farm.

MD: Well let's arrive at OSU. So you were assigned to Weatherford Hall. Weatherford Hall, at the time, was on its way down as far as being in condition. It was almost to the point of being condemned at that point, and it was kind of a special place, I understand. It was one of the most iconic buildings on campus. So what were your first impressions of walking up to the face of this building?

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BS: Absolutely. Back then it was more of a lottery, so you picked a roommate and you just kind of got assigned. You didn't get to pick where you wanted to go, as far as I can recall, like, I think, they can today. So we just got assigned this room in this Weatherford Hall, and I don't even know if I had visited campus beforehand to even know what Weatherford was. So we showed up and the building is absolutely gorgeous – still is today, they've done some great things to it – it is the icon of the campus. Back then the beauty from the outside was certainly [laughs] very misleading compared to inside Weatherford Hall. I thought it was condemned and it probably should have been. Because as two – my roommate Brian Harmonback came down together, and it was very scary. But the front side of the building was like, "wow, this is like the Taj Mahal of campus," and beautiful. But then when we walked inside, it was a whole different story.

MD: During this period of time, students were allowed, within reason, to create their own living spaces. There is an actual document that we have that is basically the rules of what you could do. So where was your room located and what was its story?

BS: [laughs] I have to say, I remember the rules, and I can't remember reading them back then too well. And the funny part was, it wasn't about what you couldn't do, it was almost what you needed to do, when you received a room. There's many points in my life that I can remember, and I will never ever forget the first day that I went to my room at Weatherford Hall. So it was on the corner – Weatherford First West – it was on the corner that's right by Buxton. There used to be a cafeteria there where that big beautiful grass space is now. I think the luckiest part is that we had two windows – one that faced Buxton and one that faced the cafeteria, so we had plenty of light. That was the nicest thing about the room.

The room number, I won't forget, was twelve-squared, it was 144. It's now a classroom, so I think they encompassed several different rooms to make up that classroom. But as we walked down the hallway – which used to be big huge high ceilings, I'm sure they've lowered the ceilings to be able to provide equipment now – big high ceilings, interesting graffiti on the wall, and we walked down the hallway and put the key in the door and it wouldn't work. And we tried several different times, and I think it was my roommate who said, well, they were panel doors, so there was all of these different panel holes, and you could see daylight through one of them, so he just kind of barely pushed on it and the panel fell into the room, and we reached in around and unlocked the door, and opened the door. The thing was barely on the hinges; I'm not going to exaggerate any of this in any way.

And I opened the door and there is a loft in this room, but it's empty and the whole room has been sprayed flat black. Every square inch – not the desks, there were two desks in there – but everything else was flat black. So the loft, the ceiling, the floors, the walls: flat black. I thought I was entering a dungeon. It was absolutely scary.

And to add insult to injury, the restroom was right next door – this was all a boy's dorm back then – and the pipes in the wall had enough humidity – the showers were right there – and the sheetrock and the plaster had started to bow out from the sweating. It literally bowed out at least six to eight inches, and some of it was starting to chip off and fall into the room. So that's when I say, I thought it was condemned and it was not about what you could do but what you had to do.

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So, I'm guilty, I think I went back and read, "you have to do permission to this and do that," and I don't think we asked permission to do anything. But I was lucky that my roommate was a construction major and had helped to build houses and things like that before, and so, boy, that first night, we slept on our mattresses and kind of came up with what we were going to do. We drove all the way back to Portland, got my dad's Datsun pick-up truck that had a rack on it – because we knew we needed lumber and everything else – and drove it back down here, and went to the lumber store. And we proceeded to – well, we got some wood from my dad, which was tongue-in-groove cedar, because he had it kind of lying around – and we took out the wall between us and the bathroom, because it was about ready to fall down anyway. We took out the plaster that was still left behind it. But then we put up cedar siding on the wall, and that gave us a nice solid wall.

We also used the cedar siding to side both sides of the door. The panel were all falling out and we didn't want to get a new door, and we wanted a little extra insulation from people. Because the emergency door – it's been bricked over now – but there was an emergency door with a push bar on it, and people would run down the hallway and whack that emergency

door and fly out the fire escape. So it was really nice to have a door that was almost six inches thick, because it got pretty noisy.

And then we repainted everything, got carpet put on the floor, and brought my twenty-gallon fish tank in – I don't even know if they can have pets anymore – and a couch. By the time we were done, which took us the whole first week of school, it was kind of like an apartment, and it was really, really nice. And then we got to know lots of neighbors, lots of creative ideas were used throughout the place. But I really enjoyed it; I stayed there through my junior year. My roommate moved out after the first year and went to the fire station – it was really good, he stayed for the rest of school at the fire station, being a volunteer firefighter, and he didn't have to pay for room and board at the fire house. So I kept it as a double as a single, because it was just a great apartment spot.

MD: There's a lot that's been written – we've got some oral histories of life in Weatherford – and it was kind of a different place from the other dorms, from what I understand. It was kind of a community and it was just like a commune, a different sort of living arrangement. What are your memories of the craziness of Weatherford?

BS: It was absolutely crazy. We kind of renamed our floor – we had to have a mascot and somebody named it Yaks, because they're better than sheep, that was the story. So we painted a mural of a yak above the drinking fountain in the center part. It was good camaraderie; guys from all over the country and from Alaska, city boys, country boys. And every evening after dinner we would all meet in the center of the hallway and sit around and talk before we went off and did our studies. A different world. At the end they had – I think now they're dorm rooms – little family rooms kind of situations. I won't forget the advent of the VCR and none of us could afford a VCR, but we would all chip in and someone would go down and rent one and bring it back and a whole bunch of movies. So from Friday night until Sunday night they would run movies and just be going all night long, basically for forty hours, playing these movies and produce a schedule.

It was a crazy place. When I was there, there were pipe bombs exploded across the way and kids got busted for making their own, like, handmade grenades. All sorts of interesting things went on.

MD: Must have been Engineering students.

BS: Must have been Engineering students. So it was very fascinating. It was definitely an eclectic mix of folks that got together, but they really clicked.

MD: I read that this was basically the first time that they had almost a LAN network, because all the guys would hook their personal computers up and run their own lines. And the actual Computer Center on campus got the idea and did it in other dorms. Was that during your era?

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BS: I think it was a little bit after ours, because not many folks had personal computers back then.

MD: You were cutting edge with that.

BS: Yeah, we were just in the programmable HP calculators, was about the sophistication that we had there.

MD: We think now a days, you have a cellphone on you and you don't even think about that, not having a telephone. Was it like one phone on the floor that everybody shared?

BS: Yeah, there was one phone that was close to the drinking fountain, and it was even smaller than a telephone booth. And it would ring and somebody would answer it, and you would ask, and someone would scream down the hallway for you or somebody. And, of course, if you wanted to call your parents or your girlfriend, you got on the phone and somebody was always standing outside the door, waiting to use the phone. You could – it was very expensive – have a private phone in your room, but I didn't know anybody who had one.

MD: Yeah, it's pretty early.

BS: Yeah. And there was cable t.v. that came in towards my junior year. But again, that was kind of pricy for a student to take. People spliced into it – there was a crawlspace between the floors and they could get in and splice into it. But then the cable company figured it out on power draw and then they could find the splice, and that stopped a few people. [laughs]

MD: There's also urban legends about Weatherford and people living in there. Did you ever hear the legend of the huge snake that lived in Weatherford?

BS: No, but it wouldn't surprise me.

MD: Apparently there was a boa constrictor that lived in the bowels of Weatherford Hall and ate the rats. Were there other wildlife living in Weatherford along with the students?

BS: [laughs] There definitely was because, back then, one of the classes was – well, we called it "rat lab." So it was operant condition of rats. And if you didn't want your rat euthanized at the end of class, you could take your rat. They didn't tend to ask what you were going to do with your rat. So I had a rat named Max and he lived in my garbage can; we just got a piece of chicken wire and put it over the top. But Max didn't stay at Weatherford forever, he went off campus after a couple of terms, after the RA busted me for having him. But it wouldn't surprise me that there were quite a few rats from rat lab in Weatherford at the time.

MD: You talked a little bit about the conditions of the building. When you lived in it in '85 it was on its way out; it was finally condemned and closed in '94 and then, from that point on, is when the restoration came about the turn of 2000. Give us an idea of just how deteriorated this beautiful building from 1928-29 was by the time you guys were there.

BS: It was really far gone. There was lots of sheet rock that was coming off, the carpets were just – you nearly had dirt floors, they were pretty worn through. I would just say, from kids doing renovations as well, structurally everything was – they said, no nailing to walls, but that happened constantly, people doing stuff like that. And the old heat system, oh my, you were lucky if it would turn on. It was flaky, the boiler would go out. I remember going off to get an electrical heater so, in case the power went out, we would at least have some kind of back-up. But it was very dilapidated, really old. The interior was a little dingy, the lighting wasn't that decent. As compared to the amenities now, it was pretty poor.

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MD: So it was cold in the winter and hot in the summer.

BS: Cold in the winter, hot in the summer; just boiling hot. We had to leave our windows open and fans, if you could get one.

MD: So this is the middle '80s and let's switch gears a little bit and talk about campus life during the early 1980s. It was a different time. We had already gone through the turbulent '60s and '70s, and society had changed, and that's usually reflected on a college campus. What was general campus life like?

BS: I'd say it was really good. We didn't have much to complain about in the '80s – there weren't any wars or any protests that really registered much on campus. So it was pretty easy-going, campus life. We enjoyed a lot of weekend activities – there was a lot of movies on campus, it was great to go to. Intramural sports were a blast. The intramural fields that were behind Weatherford were good old grass fields and playing flag football was always muddy. I think they took some of the fun out of it – it's beautiful now, but we used to have fun playing mud football all winter long. Sports were a bid deal; so intramural sports were extremely popular.

They probably don't do it anymore, but a big event – probably around Halloween time – but there was always a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* in the basement of the MU; that was complete devastation of the ballroom of the MU, with toast and rice and people dressing up. Just a lot of social interaction; it was a good time to be on campus.

MD: It was good college years. Now your major was Computer Science, is that what they called it then?

BS: Yes. It was part of the College of Science back then, and switched to Engineering a few years later.

MD: What were your life goals as far as computer science? Obviously Intel had a lot to do with this.

BS: Tektronix.

MD: Er, yeah, Tektronix.

BS: I really enjoyed being a computer programmer, and my life goals were someday to be a vice president of engineering at some high tech business. And it was really exciting times, because you knew that if you could graduate with a Computer Science degree, you were going to have a job. Because those jobs were just booming back then, in the '80s, and all these spin-outs happening from Intel, from Tektronix, from HP. It was just a great time to be an electrical engineer or a computer scientist.

MD: It was not necessarily in its infancy in the middle-'80s – 1982, say – but close to it. So you're saying that we transferred from punch cards to actually being able to do programming. What was your first programming language? BASIC?

BS: Well, I had learned C and Pascal and some other languages before coming, but the first class we had to take was Fortran, on campus, and that was required for both CS and electrical engineers. And that class was punch cards. So we would all go down to the Computer Center [laughs], which I'm not sure even exists anymore. They had a Cyber-2000 in there, and we would sit down at the terminal and type in everything, and then we'd get our punch card deck and go run the program, and then determine the output, basically, on paper. There was no electronic, "email my program results," so we would print it out and then we would turn it in. But back then they were teaching Fortran, Pascal. We did a lot in C. They had courses in funny languages like Lisp and things that are completely gone now.

MD: So my chronology is a little fuzzy – this is pre-Microsoft? Or is it just at the very cusp.

BS: Just right – DOS is just starting to come out on IBM-type computers. We're in that era.

MD: So Bill Gates wasn't rich yet.

BS: He was on his way. Not anywhere close to where he is now.

MD: Where were most of your classes held? Were they across campus in-

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BS: Yeah, in Batcheller, Dearborn; that's where the primary Engineering courses were.

MD: And the Computer Center, Milne, was the Computer Center of campus.

BS: Oh yeah.

MD: And so a lot of interaction with Milne.

BS: The Milne terminals there, to work on, went from punch cards to memory. It was a great warm place to be – the Cybers were very warm machines, so you would make sure you went to the Computer Center to stay warm. [laughs]

MD: How advanced was the equipment and computers and everything at Oregon State? Were we cutting edge?

BS: Yeah, I would say from the mainframe perspective, what was nice for me was that it was the same mainframe that was at Tektronix, and so I knew it well. And while I was there, there was a big transition to go to personal computers, and I think by the time of my junior year, we were doing CAD-like programs on some pretty sophisticated work stations. So things really evolved quickly there, from '81 to '85.

MD: That's kind of the thing – the industry, every six months...

BS: Bam, something new.

MD: So you're at the beginning of this meteoric boom. That lends the question: you've been in the industry for nigh unto thirty years, what was it then as compared to where we are now? And where we will be in, say, another five years down the road?

BS: From a technology perspective?

MD: Yeah.

BS: Unless we get into some new phase of computer science, the '80s were just so exciting in how technology changes, as you mentioned, every six months, I don't think kids today can understand how excited we were when we could have 64k of RAM. Not 64 meg or 64 gig, 64k of RAM. And that that even existed. And then they went from k's to megabytes to processors that were just unbelievably fast. Of course, Moore's Law is out there and every so often – Intel just announced they're getting down to some new level of tiny chip, tiny transistor – but I'd really like to see new forms of technology take off in artificial intelligence, and we just really haven't focused.

I think we're going to continue to focus on making things cheaper or faster for consumers, and putting computers on more and more things. Back then, we were talking about microprocessors, someday, would be in cars. And now they're all over your cars, and planes fly by wire instead of by mechanical. So that whole period of '80s and '90s was just a monster revolution of computers being inserted everywhere. Now they're kind of commonplace. So what's the next wave? I don't know. We'll see.

MD: So specifically, your degree was in Computer Science, but was it hardware or software?

BS: My degree is in software, but I had a large emphasis on hardware. So I had just designed lots of computers at Tektronix prior to getting into Oregon State, and that's what I did in the summers as well, was doing microprocesses for architectures. So I know both sides of the coin, which was very valuable back then and probably still is today, where you have a programmer who still knows how the hardware operates. And so, when I left Oregon State, my focus was mostly on embedded systems design; so, how do you control cars and things like that, with embedded microprocessors.

MD: They always say an architect should build houses for a summer.

BS: Yeah.

MD: It seems like Tektronix was cultivating these whiz kids to come back and be part of the computer future.

BS: Yeah. What was crazy was they had kind of cultivated all of that, and in 1985, Tektronix started downsizing. And so, they didn't have a job for me, because they were trying to keep the people that they had, and every two weeks they'd have a Friday shutdown. Which I thought was really crazy, because there were spin-outs happening all the time, everywhere, and I think it was probably some of those spin-outs that was eating away at their business model.

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So when I left, I joined a Tektronix spin-out. It was called Northwest Instrument Systems, and they were building logic analyzers and scopes that plugged into PC's and Apple II's. So it was the perfect time to get into that space, and the VP of Tektronix had left and joined this company, and it was a fantastic company. I was there for eight years.

MD: Let's shift gears a little bit and talk about career and family life. So you come out of commencement and I suppose that most of the Computer Science people were heavily recruited through their senior year, "where do I pick?" That type of thing. Students today would die for that.

BS: Yeah, we were very lucky. I did go through the Career Placement Center here, which was fantastic – I'm sure it still is today – great opportunity to interview and do mock interviews, things like that. But part of what was cool was we just got flown all around. So we flew down to California and Washington to visit companies and be in these big group interviews. You would fly down to California and you were there for a morning, hitting two or three interviews, and then they'd fly you back home. It was a very exciting time because we were, like you said, heavily recruited.

And with my background, being at Tektronix for four years and actually working as well as having a college education – and this spin-out, Northwest Instrument Systems, was just kind of right up my alley, so that's why I chose to go there. And crazy as it was, back then there was like a two-week break before commencement, and they said, "actually, we can't start you until after you graduate," and so I went up there and worked for two weeks for free, just so that I could get my wheels spinning, so I could hit the ground running. Because it was just an exciting time to be a part of all of that.

So I spent eight years at Northwest Instrument Systems, and as things go back then, there were lots of acquisitions and things moving around. They merged with a company called Cadre Technologies that did CASE software – computer-aided software engineering – tools, and then they decided to close down the Portland operation and move it to Providence, Rhode Island. And I'm a west coaster, so I said, "no thank you."

And two of the engineers that were there and myself, we started a company called Quality Check Software, because we were very focused on how do you test software that is in a missile or in an airplane, in this invented world, to make sure that it's not going to fail. The more and more you know about computer science, the less and less you want to know about how people really test things to make sure that they work. I think if we all know if Windows sits there and fails and hangs and whatever, how does an airplane not just hang? What happens when an airplane navigation system hangs? Do they reboot the plane? So that kind of stuff – cars and planes and missiles – it's got to work, it can run like Windows works and choke and hang and you have to reboot it. That kind of stuff doesn't work.

So that was very fascinating. I did that for three years and sometime around then a company called FLIR Systems approached me. And FLIR has infrared night vision technology; very very fascinating technology. Obviously it gives great demo; when you get a chance to play with an infrared night vision camera, they're just fun, everybody likes it. And so I started there as a product manager in 1994, and stayed there for twenty years, and worked from product manager to general manager and then president of the entire government portion of the business.

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MD: So the government portion of the business, I know, is involved with night vision, the tracking for missiles. Now was this in Portland or Salem?

BS: Portland.

MD: Because FLIR Industries is just huge. So that's interesting. What were some of your major accomplishments within that sphere?

BS: Probably the two major programs – when Desert Storm happened, we loaned the Marine Corps a couple of night vision systems, and they just loved them. Of course, it gives you the unfair advantage at night, and they came back and started a program with FLIR that still continues to this day. And the Marine Corps holds a special place in my heart; just an outstanding group of folks that are so committed to taking care of our country. And seeing them and hearing stories from them about how they have used the technology over the years is just, it really makes your whole life's effort worthwhile.

And on top of that, the biggest contract that we won was to provide night vision camera security systems for all of the forward operating bases in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2008-2009. So it was great to have all of our systems over there, watching for enemy around the forward operating bases. Those are two huge programs but, as I told people as they were coming into FLIR, there's no better job, in my mind. You can do something that's really really cool technology and something that saves lives. And I've had people – I was wearing a FLIR shirt walking through the airport in D.C. or Detroit – and I had somebody come up to me, it's happened on more than one occasion, hug me out of the blue. And just say, "thanks for what you guys do, because you saved my life."

MD: There's civilian applications for search and rescue...

BS: Oh yeah, Telstar [?] was our customer. Search and rescue all over the world uses our products. And then commercial applications was not my side of the business, but it's used all over for looking at homes for energy audits, looking at power substations. The innovations that have happened since the early '90s to now; we were talking about early '90s was four-pixels to today we're full HD capability in infrared, so the technology has just rapidly progressed.

MD: Obviously it's a fulfilling career. Going back to college, how do you feel that your experience here at Oregon State prepared you for where you are today?

BS: There was so much that I learned, certainly in my major, about where I wanted to go from and engineering perspective. But the number one thing that, I think, helped me the most in college – because honestly, Tektronix, I was doing programming languages, I was working on hardware, some of the same stuff that I did, compilers, in my senior year – it was the other courses. I really just wanted to kind of get through and get to my job. And professors kept on saying, "you need to be a more well-rounded individual; you need to learn how to learn." And those things really did happen to me. I really learned how to learn, I became a much more well-rounded individual.

So I honestly started out as an engineer saying I was going to be a v.p. of engineering, and literally three years out of college, they said, "you know, you're an engineer that can talk to customers. We're going to put you out in the field and spend time with customers." And honestly, if it wasn't for me learning how to be a more well-rounded individual, I still might be in a cubicle someplace. And then business aspects and other things that I learned here, helped me. Math, English, philosophy all helped me. I wouldn't have been able to attain the president of an \$800 million business without having that well-rounded background.

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So I really owe it to Oregon State, to not just teach me – I came here saying, "teach me a vocation, I'm out of here and I'm in the job world." And if it was just teaching me computer science, I don't think I could have expanded into the rest of the areas that I went to, to go be a general manager or learn about finance. To become a president. To be able to be go into the Pentagon and spend time with generals and Senators on the hill, and be able to communicate well with those kinds of folks.

MD: That brings me also to, when you're at college, you have influential professors, administrators – is there anybody that stands out within the program that was a mentor that made a difference in how you are today?

BS: Two come to mind: Professor Schwartz and Professor Cook. Schwartz was in a class, you had to learn about combinations and permutations in Turing Machines in computer science. And I remember I had one class with him and I really really struggled, but I spent time with him, and I learned a lot. And a year later I took another course and he was like, "you're the same guy that really had a hard time and you're getting this," and it really was because he spent time with me and helped me get over a mental barrier that I was having, and move forward. He was a tough professor but I'm glad that I hung out with him.

Professor Cook taught compilers. He was pretty old when I was there, I'm not sure if he's even alive. But he was a really smart guy and taught me a lot about compilers. It was great to get into a senior-level course and you could tell that somebody cared about what they were doing and that really wanted to teach and teach to the students. Not just get up there and regurgitate the information and then you were on your own. So he was an inspiration, to see somebody who had obviously been here for a while but still was very good at what he did.

MD: That's the thing I always like to hear is these names, and certain names come up on a regular basis. It's always rewarding to have a professor that makes a difference; they've been in this organization, for 150 years we've had this. I'd like to know a little also about your family. What happened after you graduated – family, kids, family life?

BS: Yeah, I met my wife Ronda at Northwest Instrument Systems, which had become Cadre Technologies. She was an accountant. And that turned out to be really good, because when I became a general manager later on, I didn't have much of an accounting background, so she helped me through all that. And she's fantastic. Raised our son, Alex, our only child, who is now a freshman who just finished his first term at Oregon State. And Ronda is a competitive 100-mile mountain racer, so she has completed over twenty-seven 100-mile mountain footraces, some of them winning and holding course records. So I'm very proud of what she's accomplished. And Alex is majoring in Sociology and a minor in History, and I'm excited that he's enjoying his first term.

MD: You guys basically settled in Portland?

BS: Settled in Portland and are in the process of moving to Bend. I am fortunate that I'm kind of pseudo-retired, so I'm going to stop doing the nine to five. I'm on some boards and am doing some consulting. So I have that to thank Oregon State – to be able to retire at fifty-one years old is not a bad gig.

[0:45:11]

MD: Not a bad gig. Well this has been very enlightening. This whole life in Weatherford is a great story for our program and your life in computers for thirty years is another great story for us to capture like this. Are there any other memories, thoughts that you would like to impart to Beaver Nation?

BS: I think probably one of the best things that I enjoyed outside of the academic life was, there were just so many clubs and so many things that you could be involved with. And the community that's here is fantastic. For the Experimental College, I taught sailing for two or three years, and we travelled all around, and I got the chance to letter here, racing sailboats. So I'm actually an Oregon State letterman in something like sailing. So for somebody thinks it can just be football or basketball or something like that, that was a very cool part of the era that I was in. I don't know if they still do that, but I highly recommend, if they still encourage kids to do – whether it was fencing or sailing or some of these other alternate sporting activities – to still stay engaged there.

It's great to be re-engaged with Oregon State, with Alex coming here. I get to see what an unbelievable place it's become. Being able to walk around campus and seeing the cafeterias and what Weatherford has become and the buildings that they're building and the facilities, and here we are in the Valley Library, which used to be the Kerr Library, and all the amenities that are here. It makes me want to come back to school. [laughs]

MD: Take some classes. When you were here, did you spend much time in the Kerr Library?

BS: Absolutely. Weatherford was the rat trap, so even though I had a single room by myself for sophomore and junior year, you still wanted to get away to someplace where it wasn't noisy and it was far away, on the fifth and sixth floors – maybe fifth was the only floor then, I can't remember. But the higher the better and go find some corner to go study in.

MD: Now the facility, as an academic library, was it well-stocked in your field? Or did you have to go elsewhere?

BS: No, it was all here. It was very well-done, in the field as well as outside of the field. I didn't feel like I needed to go anywhere else.

MD: It has changed to so much – it's not like you could Google it.

BS: Yeah, you had to come to the library. It wasn't a choice back then.

MD: One of the other things, when you mentioned other activities, in the '80s it was different from the '50s and the '40s and the '20s – what activities and clubs were you a member of?

BS: Primarily I did sailing, because it took up a lot of my time. And then I just did lots of intramural football, basketball. And probably one of the roughest jobs I've ever had in my life was being an intramural ref for basketball. You want to talk about brutal. Refing some fraternity games, it was like, "get out, I can't manage." Oh man, that's a tough job. That was the toughest job for the least amount of pay I think I've ever had in my life.

MD: Well this has been quite enlightening on an era that we're kind of underrepresented in as far as our collection of oral histories, and so learning about the beginning of the decade of the '80s has been quite a story. We really appreciate you being involved with the Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, and we look forward to interviewing Alex twenty years down the road.

BS: That would be awesome.

MD: We appreciate you very much.

BS: Thank you.

[0:49:48]