



Geoff Squire

Interviewed by

Richard Sharpe

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Via Zoom

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Archives of IT

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology where we capture the past and inspire the future and it's Wednesday, April the 7th 2021, I'm Richard Sharpe, and I've been covering the IT industry since the early 1970s, but before me, is the man who is going to make his contribution to the archives today. Very few people have done so much in such a very adventurous career in the IT industry, as formally, we shall call him, Geoffrey William Squire, although he is known as Geoff Squire. Geoff, you were born in Gloucester and you were educated in Gloucester, erm, your father was a post office clerical engineer.

[00:00:49]

That's correct.

[00:00:51]

What type of background did that family have? Your grandfather, your paternal grandfather was a quarryman and a mason, and your maternal grandfather was a head gardener and estate manager.

[00:01:04]

Yes, he had a very interesting career, and because he wasn't just a head gardener, he was head gardener at Warwick Castle, which is, erm, and I still have, erm papers that my mother left me of him writing very, very enthusiastically to the then curator of Kew Gardens in London about various plants and usually disagreeing with either the sources or the description of such plants. So, I, er, although sadly, he died when I was about 11 months old, so, I never got to meet him although he had met me, and that is a very interesting background, and that love of, erm, the countryside has basically stayed with me ever since.

[00:02:07]

So, both your grandparents had a very strong craft basis, they wouldn't have had formal education, but they would have been steeped in these English crafts of stonemasonry and gardening?

[00:02:21]

That's right, yes, there is, er, in fact, none of my parents had, erm, a formal education past the age of 14 or 15. Erm, mainly because it was those times, that one had to go out to work or look after the family at home.

[00:02:46]

You would have had board education then, and the 3 R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic?

[00:02:52]

That's right.

[00:02:53]

And that would have been it?

[00:02:54]

And, and that was it, as far as I was concerned. In fact, erm, my wife always teases me because she's got a wonderful education with lots of languages and I tell her how many O Levels I got and she says, "Yeah, 2 were English and 3 were maths."

[laughter]

[00:03:13]

Now, you're a relatively late child because erm, you were born in 1947 in Gloucester.

[00:03:21]

Correct.

[00:03:22]

And your father was by then, 48?

[00:03:26]

Yes.

[00:03:27]

Yeah?

[00:03:28]

Yeah.

[00:03:29]

And your... and erm, your mother was about 10 years younger than he was?

[00:03:33]

Er, that's right, it was a second marriage, erm, very sadly and I've met people in Gloucester who say, when they arrived, the first thing they saw was a double funeral, which was, erm, my father's first wife and the baby daughter.

[00:03:53]

Oh.

[00:03:56]

Who was about 6. And erm, they died within 3 days of each other. So, he had a very sad life. Erm, he was too young to go to the first World War and too old to go to the second World War so, he was holding the fort at the Gloucester Post Office. Erm, this sad incident happened, I believe in, it was either 1933 or 1936. Erm, and so, and he... my, my mum had, erm, moved to work in the post office, she was previously a governess. In fact, one of the people who she taught was Gerald Bentall, of the... you know, the Kingston Department, Bentall's?

[00:04:48]

Yeah, yeah.

[00:04:49]

So, she was, er, she lived in at the Bentall... Bentall family, as governess to the children there and looked after them, taught them how to be proper people, how to use a knife and fork and all those good things.

[00:05:09]

Which is where you got your skills of eating from?

[laughter]

[00:05:14]

You had one sister?

[00:05:16]

Yeah.

[00:05:17]

And nearly 5 years younger than you?

[00:05:22]

No, she's 5 years older than me.

[00:05:23]

Older than you, sorry, yeah.

[00:05:25]

Or 3 and a half years older than me and she was very, very good at school. I think she picked up about 14 O Levels by the time she had finished, including Russian.

[00:05:36]

Oh, crikey.

[00:05:36]

Which was quite unusual in those days, so... and she's, erm, stayed in Gloucester all her life, very, very happily married, a great family and, erm, you know, has a lovely time and still going.

[00:05:55]

You went to Calton Road Primary school in Gloucester.

[00:05:59]

Yeah.

[00:05:59]

In 52 to 58. Did you enjoy school?

[00:06:03]

Loved it, absolutely loved it.

[00:06:06]

Why?

[00:06:08]

It was, erm, great fun, I met lots of people, played in all the sports teams and, erm, you know, did singing and all sorts of things, so, you know, I loved, erm, I loved my time at both schools actually. The primary school and the grammar school.

[00:06:29]

You must have passed then, your 11 plus?

[00:06:31]

I did, quite easily. In fact, I-I don't think I knew there such a thing other than an A stream.

[laughter]

I never knew what the others did, and God knows what they did in the schools underneath a grammar school.

[00:06:47]

And you went to the Crypt Grammar School which I understand is one of the oldest schools in England?

[00:06:52]

Yes, 1539, so, yeah, so, it was an old church school, hence the name. And there was a church in Gloucester called St Mary De Crypt, and erm, it was a very, erm, prestigious, erm school and, erm, very well respected. I was very lucky to go there and had some wonderful teachers.

[00:07:18]

Who particularly inspired you there?

[00:07:21]

There was an English teacher called Charles Lepper who was a chap who used to be a professional actor at the Royal Shakespeare Company, erm, and sadly, he went deaf. So, he went into teaching, er, he only ever taught the A streams, and he went on to Bradfield College after that, and erm, died, not very long ago, aged 90 something, and so, he was a very good teacher. And I had, erm, a couple of wonderful maths masters as well, who, erm, helped me and got me to, erm, where I was mathematically.

[00:08:10]

What-what is it about mathematics that entices you and excites you?

[00:08:16]

Well, I think it is arithmetic, not maths. I... my father was a very interesting character, erm, he... because he worked in the post office, he used to bring all his work home with him at night and I used to practice adding up pounds, shillings, and pence and trying to race him, upside down when I was about 4, 5, and 6. So, [laughs] and, erm, he was also the Gloucester chess champion, so, I used to play him at chess every single—I didn't win until I was about 11, [laughs]. So, he used to make it slightly... he'd... when I was 4 and 5, he played me without his queen, or without a queen or a rook and then build me up to, erm, and that was a lot of fun as well. So, I had a very, very good home life, we used to play whist and bridge at home, the 4 of us because in those days, in the early '50s, there was nothing else to do.

[00:09:16]

Yeah.

[00:09:17]

So, and I was in the church choir and spent a lot of time, erm, doing church work and raising funds and running school fetes and being in the dramatic society, Gloucester grand opera group singing, so, all sorts of things. So, you know, a very, very, very, er, fulfilling childhood.

[00:09:43]

And also, rugby. You've told us that you... you were in a team that has never lost a match in 5 years?

[00:09:51]

That's right.

[00:09:52]

What position did you play?

[00:09:55]

Well, it was one of those transitional things. When I first went to the school, I said I wanted to play scrum-half and they pointed out that in my year was also the brother of the Gloucester scrum-half at the time, who also wanted to play scrum-half; so, that didn't work. And so, they put me at side wing forward, and er, a flanker, Number 7 in these days. And I played there for the whole of my school career and then they changed to rules, erm, when I was about 16 or 17, so, I thought cha-chasing after all these fast people without an advantage of being able to crawl up after them and grab their bootlaces because they made you pat-down at the back instead of at the front. So, I thought so, sod this for a game of soldiers, so, I switched back to centre and fly-half.

[00:10:55]

Right.

[00:10:58]

So, the whole of my adult career I played, erm, in the midfield.

[00:11:04]

Did your parents aspire you to go to university?

[00:11:09]

It was never even discussed, and it wasn't discussed at school in those days either.

We're talking about 1958.

[00:11:16]

Yeah.

[00:11:17]

So, it was just never discussed at school. The idea of going to university, as far as I was concerned, you know, I had to go out and get a job and that is exactly what I did. And it was quite interesting because my, er, father had arranged for me to go and be a chartered accountant, erm, with a local firm. And I saw an advertisement in the Gloucester Citizen for what looked like the same job, at Gloucester County Council and the difference was, they would pay me, at, after passing intermediate, they would pay me £895 a year, as opposed to £125 a year, which the chartered accountants were going to pay. So, I persuaded my father that being in local government wasn't that lowly a life as the post office and the civil service and therefore, he allowed me to go there. And that then, when I was 17, that then changed my life because I remember it would probably have only been about my 10th or 11th payday of my life. And in the envelope, it said, "The council are thinking of buying a computer, they will need a programmer, anyone interested?" And applied for aptitude test, and those aptitude tests at the time were run by ICT, and erm, which was the forerunner of ICL, the forerunner of Jujitsu, obviously. And I still remember the result because no one believed it. Because it was marked strangely out of 140 and I scored 131 and the average was 90 to get into ICT, you had to get 90. And the real superstars got about 100. And I got 131 in this test so, [laughs] I thought, maybe this is something I can do.

[00:13:35]

So, you met your first computer, what was it?

[00:13:38]

An ICT 1301 being programmed in machine code.

[00:13:44]

Oh.

[00:13:45]

There weren't any compilers in those days.

[00:13:47]

Right.

[00:13:48]

So, I went there, and it only had 1200 words of memory to play with, that's 12-character words and you had... so, basically, you had that number of pigeonholes to put things in. And I still remember that if I wanted to read something from a pigeonhole, the instruction was 37 and then a 4-digit number and if wanted to write it away, it was 64 and a same-- So, you had to remember where you actually stuck the numbers, so, you had to almost to keep a memory map of everything you were using.

[00:14:32]

Were you e-e-employed directly by the council?

[00:14:36]

I was, yes, I was.

[00:14:37]

Yeah.

[00:14:38]

As a trainee accountant. I was on day-release to go and do my IMTA exams. Funnily enough, I... although I never took the exam because I moved into computer programming, erm, what I learned there held me in great stead to be CEO of major public companies [laughs], because I could read balance sheets and you know, do all the financial things. So, it was good fun.

[00:15:09]

What were the applications?

[00:15:13]

In those days...

[00:15:13]

Mm-hmm.

[00:15:14]

My first one was, I wrote expenditure analysis, so, I had to analyse every single bill that, erm, came into the council, so, education, health, police, all of that and I still remember... I remember crying because a print run that took about 10 hours didn't print the total out.

[00:15:38]

Oh.

[00:15:40]

[laughs] I broke down and the chap who was my boss, a data processing manager, a chap called Gwilym James, he said to me, "Come here" he put his arm around me, I was only 17, he—"It'll be in there, do a store dump" and there was the 29 million, fortunately, I didn't have to convert it from binary, but it was there, 290—or whatever the number was. But that is all the council spent in those days, 29 million, and that would have been probably either a month, yeah.

[00:16:11]

And did they have the computer physically on their site?

[00:16:15]

Oh, yes, absolutely, a giant thing, a giant room with a huge drum on it, erm, all punch cards, and I learned how to populate punch cards by using my thumb to put the mistakes back in to re... put the chads back into the holes to save repunching them. So, it was er, it was a very... a-a lot of fun in those days.

[00:16:46]

But you were the only programmer?

[00:16:49]

I was—I joined a t—I joined a small team. There were, erm, there was one systems analyst and one other prog... programmer and that was it. So, erm, and there was a—

[00:17:07]

How long did you—

[00:17:08]

Sorry, go on.

[00:17:10]

How long did you stay at the council?

[00:17:13]

Erm, I joined there in September '63 and I left in April '66.

[00:17:24]

Right.

[00:17:25]

I think that's right, yes, it was '66, so, that's whatever that is, it's either 2 and a bit years or 3 and a bit years.

[00:17:31]

Yeah, yeah.

[00:17:32]

All of '64, all of '65, yeah, 2 and three-quarter years, I guess.

[00:17:38]

When, where did you move to then?

[00:17:40]

I moved up to Newall Engineering in Peterborough, which was a tiny company, but they happened to have just taken delivery of one of the first 1900 series from ICT at the time and that was basically a competitor to the IBM 1401, I guess in those days.

[00:18:01]

Yeah.

[00:18:02]

So, and that was a word machine, it had overlay programming, so, I was really following technology even though I was only how old—19. So, I thought it was important to get a newer machine onto my CV. I was only there a year, but I had a lot of fun playing rugby for Peterborough and we were coached funnily enough, by... in the backs by Dickie Jeeps--

[00:18:33]

Oh, yeah.

[00:18:33]

And the forwards by, by Ron Jacobs, because Peterborough were one of the feeder clubs, so we were very, very lucky to have those guys with all that experience.

[00:18:45]

And again, what were the applications?

[00:18:49]

There, it was stock control. They were a competitor to Herbert's, the machine tool company and they were working on some very, very advanced erm, technology, working ten-thousandths of an inch or something like that, in terms of what it was. And I was building erm, stock control systems for their part... their, er, part systems for them.

[00:19:23]

In erm, 1965, there were 29,600 computers in the world, that's all, 29,600 computers in the world.

[00:19:36]

Yes.

[00:19:36]

And you were working on one of them.

[00:19:39]

Yes, I'm amazed there are that many because there weren't many... there weren't that many in England.

[00:19:45]

No, no there weren't. Erm, in '76, sorry, in '67, there 2,000 computers in the UK.

[00:19:54]

Okay, yeah.

[00:19:55]

Mostly US-made.

[00:19:58]

Erm.

[00:20:00]

Erm, 2... 252.

[00:20:01]

Yeah, okay.

[00:20:03]

So, you moved from there after about a year, this was your first time of living away from home?

[00:20:09]

It was indeed. And er, I lived in a grotty little flat next to the office, a bedsit. My landlady made me the most revolting food, which I threw in the bin and went across to the chip shop and down to the pub.

[laughter]

So, yeah, er, I moved home basically, because Wall's Ice Cream, which was then part of Unilever, it may still be part of Unilever for all I know, it's now called Birds Eye Wall's, so, it definitely is. And they bought a 1900 and so, I was immediately, er, qualified to go there and the thing they did to me, which really, really surprised me, because I was 19 or was I just 20, and they gave me a management position, of which one of my employees was a chap who was the chief programmer at Gloucester County Council, who was 10 years older than me, so, he had to work for me. And also, there was, er, and this just shows what man-management was like in Gloucester in 1967. There was some chap who was 47, he'd had a mental breakdown as an accountant, so, they thought it would be good to get him back into work by making him work for a 20-year-old as a computer programmer.

[00:21:30]

Oh, crikey.

[laughter]

[00:21:33]

So, that.. so, that was quite an interesting, but I learned a lot from him, all sorts of things, erm.

[00:21:41]

How would you describe the Squire management technique?

[00:21:52]

Erm, I could... it's interesting because management techniques are an interesting thing, I have studied over my career, but at that stage, because I was the best programmer, it didn't really matter. So, what my staff usually did was cut the first... you know, have the first go at things and then I would finish them off. So, erm, it was probably a hands-on assistance, so, hand out the work and then help them when they got into trouble and so, it was good. Erm, some interesting things that, erm, I did learn at, er, Wall's, which really were very interesting in my career. Erm, they had a... quite a bright chap, because they had a 1500 as well, which was another old, erm, ICT machine and one of the er... they had a very bright chief programmer, called Barry Thomson and he had invented what these days you would call contented addressable files. Because we only had a thousand products at Wall's, and 1900 was a word machine meant that you could actually use the product number as a direct address in memory to a thousand-word table, which sat in the memory. So, you effectively had direct addressing, so, while everybody else, and IBM and things were trying to... having to get all this data back from disc, we were pulling it out of memory at, you know, speeds of light.

[00:23:40]

Mm-hmm.

[00:23:41]

So, I got used to that, you know 30 years later we invented such a thing, this content-addressable in-memory database, that is a relatively new concept. So, that, erm, and then somebody got at the product file and started using it for something different. And suddenly it had 30,000 rows so, it meant it didn't work, so, we had to use disc.

So, my beautiful little programme which used to run in 10 minutes, was still going 10 hours later.

[00:24:17]

Oh.

[00:24:19]

So, fortunately, I found a chap who I had previously only ever engaged with through rugby because he was about 20 stone and I was talking to his wife one day and she said, "How do you stay fit?" people laugh at me these days, and I said, "Well, I play rugby" and she said, "Well, will you take John down?" So, I took this big lump down to Gloucester to put him in the front row to see if he could get fit. Anyway, it happened that he'd got some degree in nuclear physics and one of the things he'd learned was an advanced technique called B-Tree Indexing and he taught me how to write a B-Tree index. Bearing in mind, this would have been in 1968 maybe, which is 11, 10, 9 years before Larry Ellison started Oracle, I was writing a B-Tree Index, which was the base of the whole relational database industry, just to solve a problem I had and get my beautiful 10-minute programme back to 11 minutes as opposed to 10 hours. So, that is just one of these weird coincidences that helped with my career, I guess.

[00:25:42]

You rather enjoy cracking these technical issues, don't you?

[00:25:47]

Oh, very much so, I, I still do. Every Sunday, I still do all the Sudoku's, the killer Sudoku, the prize ones, and all this stuff, yeah, I still do them all.

[00:26:02]

You moved from Wall's, where did you go then?

[00:26:06]

Erm, I went to Datalogic. I'd been married for about 5 days, the first time, and I didn't even think of it as a risk to join Brian Tan at Nash's 7-man company called

Datalogic um, and erm, and giving up my list 1 manager's position at Unilever, which was a pretty safe job. But erm, I trusted my own ability and, erm, the first project they gave me was Forward Trust, and... which was... and that was in 1970 and it was when they changed the rules on higher purchase accounting to pay gross instead of net. So, I had to go and set up the whole project and their whole file. So, I had to learn about paper tape and learn about IBM computers and all sorts of stuff but managed it. I was lucky enough to have a good mentor there because when I pointed out that this was a 14-month-project and the average age of an HP agreement was 11 months, so, why didn't they just do nothing and wait? And the chap said, "Because we wouldn't get any fees." So, fine.

[laughter]

[00:27:51]

So, you went from word-orientated ICT... ICL machines, now, to byte-orientated IBM, what did they have?

[00:28:01]

Erm, I can't remember 'cause we never put anything on a machine 'cause the project ended before there was anything to put on the machine.

[00:28:08]

Okay, and what were you...

[00:28:10]

I can't remember what they had.

[00:28:12]

What were you coding in?

[00:28:15]

I was more of a project manager.

[00:28:16]

Okay.

[00:28:17]

Shuffling... shuffling bits of paper tape, so, it was... it was basically, it was more logistics.

[00:28:25]

Right.

[00:28:26]

And it was an odd project, but it served me well because, there was, er, I did one other, erm, project which was Book Club Associates and when I give sort of after-dinner speeches, I often say to everybody in the room, I'll buy them all a drink because I bet my... what I've programmed in my life has touched everything that you all ever do. And I always start by... and I'll come onto it in a minute... how many of you have ever had a Midland Bank bank account? And they all sit down. How many have ever taken a book out of Book Club Associates, Literary Guild, or World Books, any of those? They all sit down. Is there anyone standing, I say, "Okay, who's had a Wall's ice cream?" which saves me the money.

[laughter]

And erm, so, Book club Associates, great project, back to the 1900 again and fixed price 56 weeks and wrote a complete set of programmes, with a team and it went live, you know, dead on time, perfect and implemented, you know, a very advanced retail system. Erm, you know, very, very efficiently written, some interesting technology because they had spools of tape coming in from all of their areas. If you've ever loaded a tape, it takes about 2 or 3 minutes to put a tape up and get it to rewind and start again in the right position. So, I wrote a bit of code for that, erm, basically, fooled the operating system to make all of these disparate tapes look as if they were a continuous multi-reel. So, you could load up 12 tapes and it would go, [sounds] and you could just about get the first one unloaded and number 13 set up and, you know... and the whole job again, ran in, you know, a handful of minutes rather than hours.

And erm, a funny story is that much later in my career, when I was Worldwide Marketing Manager for New Range at ICL, erm, I looked at the WH Smith benchmark and in it, was, as the test for acceptance of the ICL New Range machine, so, there's some 10 years later was this damn programme I'd written, which was absolutely impossible to do in VME, you could never fool the M8 to do what you could with a 1900 Executive. So... and I don't think Mike Baker's ever forgiven of that... of that because, eh, [laughs] my name was on it and he rang me up and he said, "Hey, your name is on this programme we've been given, how does it work?" And I was then Worldwide Marketing Manager at ICL, so, anyway, so, erm. But going back to Forward Trust, they liked me so much that when the big downturn came in 1972, I guess, everybody got—was it '72 everyone got fired and there was no... that was one of the first big collapse of the industry if I remember rightly. I think it was '72.

[00:31:57]

Yeah.

[00:31:58]

Yeah, erm, the one big project Datalogic had going was Midland Bank.

[00:32:04]

Right.

[00:32:04]

And so, I was on a large team, erm, I was doing the backside and Alex D'Agapeyeff or whatever his name is from CAP was doing the online, and together we built the Midland Bank Branch Accounting System, 2200 branches on a Burroughs B6700. Erm, and that was a great project and, erm, from that, that probably helped me on my career in ICL afterwards, 'cause ICL's New Range or 2900 as it became, was actually a rip off of the Burroughs B6700, which was a reverse Polish notation stack machine.

[00:32:53]

Stack machine.

[00:32:55]

Which is exactly what ICL's 2900 Range was.

[00:33:00]

Right.

[00:33:01]

So, I could... at the... it's quite a deep technical level, I could talk about how this beautiful machine worked and everyone else was still scratching their heads working it out. But I'd actually worked on one for 18 months.

[00:33:16]

Burroughs had, erm, quite a reputation for good quality technology, didn't it?

[00:33:23]

Yes, very much so, terminals and then they obviously had this, erm, good mainframe as well, no, they were pretty good at the time, yeah, it was—

[00:33:35]

When did you... when did you move to ICL?

[00:33:38]

Erm, 1973.

[00:33:41]

Right.

[00:33:43]

And Larry Ellison still laughs at me because my title was New Range Data Management Consultant.

[00:33:50]

Right.

[00:33:52]

And I was er, in Oracle, I was the least qualified to be a data management consultant because there were only a dozen people at the time, all absolute wizards, and here was me with this title. So, I joined ICL, erm, because erm, Mike Wagg at the time had set up retail and had built... decided because retail were going to be one the lead recipients of 2900, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Smiths, and so on, Burtons. So, he decided he needed a team, so, he put together a 4-person team, one for data management, one for data comms, one for operational research, I've forgot what the other one did. And erm, I turned up, and it still bugs me, because I gave up my position in the Potteries Cup Final 'cause I was playing for Crewe and Nantwich and we'd reached the finals and this was a big match and I'd got this new job at ICL and I joined on the Monday, and the match was on the Wednesday evening. So, I had to... give up my place and drop out and I arrived down and they, erm, the man I was supposed to be working for had been fired, they'd disbanded the whole team and I was brand new. So, I talked to the great Mr Wagg and I still remember he said because I told him what I could do and he said, "Interesting, but at the end day, I think it would... I hear what you say, but at the end of the day, go work in Manchester."

[00:35:43]

Right.

[00:35:45]

I thought, oh, I could have been playing in the match because I got send back on the Tuesday. And then they sent me up to Kidsborough... no to Dalkeith in Scotland to project manage a System 4 computer, which I didn't know what it was. It was the other range from English Electric Leo-Marconi, it was that... came at that size, because by then, the ICL merger was happening.

[00:36:09]

Yeah.

[00:36:10]

And erm, anyway.

[00:36:11]

It was, it was 360 compatible, wasn't it?

[00:36:15]

That was 360 compatible.

[00:36:16]

From the RCA design?

[00:36:19]

Yeah, I still can remember the advert in the Sunday Times for programmers from 1968 and you should write it down because you could do it later on. It was EE-L-M, that was the top line, offers, OFFERS, and then a line underneath, and then System 4.

[00:36:48]

Laughs.

[00:36:51]

And from that, you had to calculate what was the E... what the E's where and what the sum was, and it actually did work. So... but I often still give that to people as a test if I'm bored.

[laughter]

[00:37:09]

So, you moved to Scotland and you were...

[00:37:13]

I, I basically did... did a project and then, erm, they found me a job in the Manchester Office as regional customer support. So, I worked in a team that, erm, was run by Mike Pollitt, a couple of sales managers and I had... well, the whole region only had 7 customers, which were Woolworths, Co-op, Festrick, which is now part of Glaxo, er, Burton, Grattan Mail Order, Tootle Ties, and another one, it began with an F, I can't remember [laughs], but we had those 7 customers to look after. And erm, so, my job was to basically make sure they were well-supported, write the proposals,

make sure there wasn't any trouble in the sites and there was trouble in one of the sites and I found out about it in a pub. I was in the Brown Bull pub in Salford, and I heard a couple of likely lads from the south of England boasting about what a mess the technology in... was in, at the New Woolco site in Kirkby. And you know, they were sort of from marketing and technology and head office about how this disaster would never work, but it doesn't matter, we'll be back in Putney tomorrow.

[00:38:49]

[laughs]

[00:38:50]

And so, I wandered across to them and I said, "Just in overhearing what you're saying, I think I may be responsible for this disaster you're talking about." And er, they said... they said, "Who are you?" I said, "Well, I'm the support manager for Woolworths, for ICL, and I guess from your chatting loudly in the pub, you work for ICL as well" which they did. And erm, anyway, so, I got involved and, erm, for my sins, ended up as the project manager of ICL's first-ever foray into Point-of-Sale systems.

[00:39:29]

Uh-huh.

[00:39:31]

And this was before they bought Singer. So, somebody had thought systems integration was a great idea, and they bought an HP Deck, a tape deck, a DiIt processor from Germany. Some odd Point of Sale equipment, I had to make all this lot work, and, you know, with a deadline because they had to open the store, and... [00:40:00] opening live. I still remember the CIO of Woolworths said, "Well, if this doesn't work you might as well have a plastic bucket" in other words just ask the people as they walk out of the store with the goods to chuck money in a plastic bucket, 'cause you won't have any tills, you won't have any checkouts, 'cause everything would have to work on this system.

Anyway, we got it to work, yeah, lots of 20-hour days. I remember going to the meeting and 40 people turned up, you know, at ICL, at the headquarters. And I thought, why do we need 40 people? I got it down to 7, so, I... "What do you do?" "Oh, I'm head of strategy for Point of Sale.", well, piss off back to ICL House then—"What do you do?" "I designed the system", "Stay" and so on. So, I ended up with a systems analyst, 3 programmers, and somebody who knew a bit about Point of Sale, and that was it, and we got it working.

[00:41:02]

Wasn't---

[00:41:03]

And then they said... go on.

[00:41:05]

Wasn't this causing tension between Putney and Manchester?

[00:41:09]

I think there was tension between Putney and everywhere in those days [laughs] yeah. It's nice to drive past... I drive past that old IC, it's now a block of flats, the old ICL House. Erm, it's ... yes, good memories. Erm, but what that ... the next stage in my ICL career was, they said, well, because they were then ... you know, the 2900 was starting to be delivered and everyone had a dedicated budget manager. So, they said to ... well, if you can put that heap of junk in, in Liverpool I guess you can put this heap of junk in, in Leeds. So, I moved to Leeds to be the Burtons project manager and that was the second commercial, they had a couple of government ones and that was the one after Smiths, which is the famous one that went in, erm, down in Swindon. And so, they gave me that, but Burtons ran into trouble and in the Halpern days, and so, that project finished. So, they had this rather expensive project manager living in Leeds and they also had a project that absolutely nobody in Putney would touch with a barge pole because it was sales... is a piece of technology to compete with Edmac's New Range.

[00:42:36]

Oh.

[00:42:37]

‘Cause all the salespeople realised New Range didn’t have a cat in hell’s chance of converting the base across to ... from 1900, or System 4 for that matter and made every single natural upgrade into a competitive sale, they were effectively inviting IBM in ... you remember all this stuff. And, of course, they needed ... there was this thing called DME, which was effectively making a 1900 work ... 1900 software work on, erm, 2900 hardware, through Microcode. And no one would touch that because it was a political dynamite, to actually compete with all the resources of Edmac, Braylo, Heron, or Hero no brainers, his anagram is [laughs] Rob Bracewell for all of the others, so, they needed somebody who was a bit thick and from the sticks to do it; and that was me. And it made my name because erm ...

[00:43:41]

Who-who was running ICL at the time?

[00:43:43]

It was Geoff Cross, ah, was just on his way out, and they double-promoted Chris Wilson over Peter Ellis, erm, at the time and nobody ... they weren’t bright enough to notice the only reason he’d beaten his number was because of South Africa and exchange rate. If you actually looked at what he did, he didn’t do any growth at all [laughs] but he was in a monopoly market because IBM had pulled out of South Africa at the time. So, he benefitted from that, so, he had no competition in his market, and also, he also had a great exchange rate to work with. So, suddenly, he hit ... doubled his quotas, so, that’s an obvious reason to give the bloke [laughs] the managing directors job if all you knew about was a number; they were accountants and didn’t know anything else. So, erm, some interesting times there.

And erm, so, anyway, built DME, effectively saved the company, delivered 29 systems, and built the whole project and from a... er, sales and marketing point of view, gave all the presentations to all the customers and, erm, Terry Ward, there was a chap called, er, Tony Layzelle at the time, who was working as head of marketing and

he has just left to join David Fairbairn ... do you remember David went off to join Thorn EMI?

[00:45:16]

Oh, yeah.

[00:45:17]

Er, TEI, yeah, David ... it was this, erm, what was it called, it was some posh technology, I think it might have been medical technology, like MRI scanners or something they were building. Anyway, David was headhunted, he took Tony, which left a gap and Terry Ward just said, "Well, as you seem to be ... know the product completely and give all the presentations on it, would you like to be a worldwide marketing manager?" I said, "Oh, yeah, okay, well, that'll do." And I got a-an hour ... no, no, half a day's training from Arnold Druridge, who was head of marketing. And then, an intensive one-week course with Meyer Feldberg, who was on the board of ICL, but then became Dean of Columbia University. And I still stay in touch with him because what he taught me in that intensive week, I still use today, amazing, what I learned about marketing in that pure marketing.

[00:46:26]

Give me 3 key things that you learned in that ses ... in those sessions: 3 key things?

[00:46:34]

The first one was that marketing is the first stage of development not the first stage of distribution, sales is the first stage. So, marketing starts by identifying the market you should be in. The second thing I learned was the concept of s-curves, where you must always have a new product with your spending the ... so, you have an s-curve, you start by spending money, you spend more money, build it, get it to market, and then your job is to then keep the upwards curve and the cashco fat, erm, flatlining as much as you can and always be spending the money on the development to feed subsequent s-curves, so, you've always got products for the future. And I suppose, the third thing was 4 P's, which was the marketing mix, is Product, Promotion, Price, and Place, place meaning distribution. And if you draw the, erm, axis across that you've actually got a product development, er, value axi-axis, and you've got a product distribution

axis. And you can ... and that applies to every industry of every product. So, those, off the top of my head were the top 3 that I learned.

[00:48:03]

Excellent, excellent. What, erm, that must have been quite a brutal time, trying to see 2900 internationally.

[00:48:12]

Erm, it was, although we had 2 products. One was, it was really a very fast cost-effective upgrade from the 1904's, which were already there, because it did go much faster because it was a better piece of kit and the microcode was ... you know, it was the same speed. I'll always, always Keith Crook, who was ... who ran 1900's saying, "I hope this benchmark isn't true because if it is, it means we've been building 1900 wrong for around fucking 20 years."

[laughter]

So, and they had [laughs]. So, erm, because we were beating the 1900 on benchmarks, so much so, we had to slow it down, otherwise, it would have churned the base too quickly.

[00:49:06]

Yeah.

[00:49:08]

'Cause, I, er, I remember saying to the ... 'cause I was then running marketing, I said to the developers, I said, "Could you make this thing go slower?" "Sure, how slow do you want it to go?" [laughs]. And I said, so, we effectively built-in, you know, a microcoded version of the golden bias, which you built into all the hardware machines, where you just snipped something, and the machine doubled in pace for the next generation of the market to compete with IBM.

[00:49:37]

Erm, also, erm, Geoff Cross came up with the 2903, didn't he, which wasn't particularly compatible?

[00:49:43]

Yes.

[00:49:44]

Were you involved in that?

[00:49:46]

That wasn't involved, that was Keith Bull, erm, and Roger Hill. No, I didn't, erm, that wasn't mine. I did do a crossover, we rebadged the 2950 which was the bottom of my range, erm, into a 2905. And I always remember, we took it to Hanover Fair and everybody else had these sleek desktop things, and we had this bloody great cabinet [laughs]. So, I looked at it and I said, "Can we get some staging?" and they said, yeah. So, what we did was effectively build a platform stage so that our cabinet looked like a desktop [laughs] and all the punters walked around when all the computer power was underneath the floor.

[laughter]

[00:50:40]

This is as I was learning about marketing.

[00:50:41]

Yeah. What were your successes in international marketing for the 2900?

[00:50:50]

Oh, it was, erm, ICL at the time were having ... that was one of their purple patches because when we launched the 2966, which was the peak of the system. We'd invented a, er, a product called CME which was Concurrent Machine Environment, which meant that ... it's a great marketing trick because you sold the benefits of VME with all the historical benefits and compatibility, and CME was like a dial because it

had enough compute power so, you could give it the equivalent of a 1904A, and still leave a bit to do VME development. The chap who built it said, oh, I can't imagine, er, the DME... CME blokes said, "I can't imagine why anyone would want to do that, but if that's what you guys want then I'll build it for you." Which was again, a very simple thing so we split the, erm, the machine into two, all in one box and we also had some good superstructure products. We had just done a deal with, erm, Cullinet to market IDMSX and ... or IDMS, and then Richard Barker and his team built IDMSX to make it even ... so, we had the fastest codicil database in the world. Erm, we had some other good, erm, good tools, so, we had a very, very competitive offering, this is in the back-end of the '70s. And erm, so, it was, it was a very successful ... we sold all the computers we could make. ICL at the time were manufacturing limited.

[00:52:30]

Right.

[00:52:31]

I did once write a paper suggesting that we shut down the 2903 and build everything on 2950 technology and shut Stevenage. That went, went ... down well [laughs]. I didn't know that much about trade unions although I did learn, they were about ... I remember we needed all these computers to come out and I went to West Court with my boss, Terry and I said, "I know nothing about trade unions" he said, "Can you drink, and can you keep your mouth shut?" I said, "These are something I've been trained for." So, anyway, I went there, and I listened to Terry saying to these guys, "How long do you think you can keep this workforce out for?" We were on about, I don't know, early September, and the trade union official said, "Why?" he said, "Because we get ... we all get paid bonuses on inventory and if we keep the inventory down, then our bonuses go sky high." They went back to work that afternoon, all I'd done was drink 8 pints [laughs] that was my contribution. So, many ways of skinning a cat.

[00:54:04]

You left in '81, was that right?

[00:54:07]

Er, end of '80, start of '81, yeah.

[00:54:10]

Yeah, why did you leave?

[00:54:14]

'Cause there was only one chap to, er, drink with at Camberly Rugby Club very late one night and ... and he was a front-row forward, and I didn't usually talk to front row forwards because they were usually pretty thick erm, but as he was the only person there, he started wittering on about this management consultancy, which had a new concept based entirely around data management. And I thought, [sound] why am I talking to a tight end prop about data management, at 10 o'clock in Camberly Rugby Club bar. And he's tried to ... he said, "You're in IT, aren't you?" I told him what I did. He said, "What if I made you an offer of more than you're earning now, a company car, run your own business." So, I thought mmhmm ... mmhmm, yeah. I thought maybe I'll think about this when I'm sober and he's sober. Anyway, he introduced me to this wonderful company called CACI, who were being well-known in the data world and also the market research world, erm. And erm, so, I sort of decided I would join as a venture manager. Venture manager means you run your own business and there was another chap joined at the same time, a chap called Ray Jordan, who joined from ... Nolan Norton... or is that a law firm, or is it, Nolan, something? There is a ... I can't remember, anyway, he was ex-IBM and they told us how to do it. They said, "Well, you ring all your ... everyone you've ever respected technically and see if they'll come and work for you and then ring everybody you've ever done a good job for and see if they'll hire you." By 11 o'clock Ray and I were in the pub, so, we've done that [laughs], we didn't get an order, what do we do now?

So, erm, basically, it was, a, erm, it wasn't quite a Ponzi scheme because it was very successful in the States, but erm, it was a ... I looked at their model ... I was there for a few weeks and I looked at their model and I found they had a business model that worked perfectly in America and hadn't got a cat in hell's chance in Europe. So, they had---

[00:56:52]

Why was that?

[00:56:54]

Oh, sorry, why was that? Because in America, people are on 14 days' notice, so, you can pitch somebody to a client and say he's ready to start on October the 1st. You don't... you write your contingency off to the employee, so, if you don't get the contract, you don't have to hire him, he doesn't ha-hasn't had to give his notice in. So, he's still in employment but knows he's got a job on a nice, exciting project if you win it, and so, you can move ... move people into...

[00:57:32]

Yeah.

[00:57:32]

Paid jobs so you get no dead time. In Europe, people who ... if they work for a 1 year, they were on a year's ... a so a month's notice, if they worked for 2 years, 2 months, 3 years 3 months. So, the perpetual model says, perfection if you get them billing for all their time except their month's holiday, you break even.

[00:57:52]

Mm-hmm.

[00:57:53]

And that doesn't happen in the consulting world [laughs] so, the model didn't work. So, they needed a different model and the model they needed was product. So, I erm, I was, erm, had a project to find, erm ... they gave me a project, an internal project, which was to find a relational database because they thought if they built their MIS system as a database consultancy, it ought to be a relational system because that was the popular thing in the early '80s as opposed to a conventional codicil system. And erm, we did some analysis, erm, and came up with this product and the only problem was it didn't have any representation in the, er, UK. And so, Chris Ellis, who did the work for me, he said, "We can't do that, we can't take an unsupported product." So, I said, hmm, let's see if this could be an opportunity, so, I rang up Barry Ellison and asked him if he'd like a distributor in the UK. I said I was the largest ... well, we

both said...the most important relational database company, there was 12 of them, and in my division of CACI, there were 3 of us and I said, "We're the largest database consultancy in Europe, that's me, Chris, and Ray [laughs]. And he said, "Okay" and he was giving stickers out... like bubble-gum stickers in those days. And fortunately, I had the CACI balance sheet behind me and it was November or October 1981, and he couldn't pay his payroll because he was struggling. So, I effectively lent him 100,000 dollars to pay his October '81 payroll. It was a pre-pay on the first 2 licences.

[01:00:02]

Right.

[01:00:05]

And that's how it start ... that's how Oracle came in and when I pointed out that because you had a difference... you hired people and then they sold stuff that was more... because profit is more profitable in products than it is in, erm, consulting. And, so, that is how Oracle started in the UK.

[01:00:28]

You were up against Ingres, were you?

[01:00:31]

They came in later, yeah. Oh, no, they actually probably were there first, but that was the time, yeah. And erm, I always remember the year it was all over because Oracle, erm, they were doubling every year, and the nearest, erm, I think in... I'm trying to remember which year it would have been, erm... I think it was probably about '85, '86, then Ingres were about 11 million and Oracle were 12 ish, or 13 maybe. And the next year Oracle were 23 and Ingres got to 19, so, we'd sort of started to flip. The year after, Ingres went from 19 to 26, Oracle went from 23 to 55 and it was all over, so, we were then twice their size. And I think one year later, Oracle UK were bigger than Ingres worldwide, so, er, a... and that was the end of it.

[01:01:49]

Oracle ... Oracle was renowned for very heavy sales techniques.

[01:01:57]

I think they had a better product.

[01:01:59]

Ingres did, you say.

[01:02:01]

Yeah, an, and as I was running worldwide sa...yeah, well, it's good to keep your feet on the ground, I always remember Mike Evans saying to me, "Let's not forget we have a good product as we're blowing every number." Because it was winning all the benchmarks and erm, it was a very, very good product. In the UK specifically, we filled out the product range and I ran a series of seminars in the UK which we called the 4th Generation Environment. So, I remember drawing a dog kennel for Larry Ellison on a beer mat in California, I said, "This is our product strategy going forward, this is what we're going to do in the UK, I think it might work for you in America, not just yet ..." Because America is very technology biased, so, they were everything, was being sold on do you do Ted Codd's how to join, how does referential integrity work, and if we're buying software whether referential integrity worked or not. And we were saying, "How about us getting you a system working for your business in 2 months, rather than 2 years" using COBOL and IMS or whatever the competitor were.

So, we were selling rapid application development based on the best technology in the world, which is relational database and the dog kennel consisted of DBMS if you think of a pyramid, DBMS, tools, the case products we built ourselves, and then end-user products like the portrouters. And then the back of the dog kennel was support, training, and consultancy. So, we had a full-service offering in the UK, and I ran 105 seminars, I ran them all personally, which is a 4-hour lecture including industrial theatre as well, running in and out, getting 2 guys running the product live. Everything people said you shouldn't do, never ... never run a demo live, it might go wrong and upset the audience. We used to do it. They all said, "Don't take questions from the audience, it can destroy" I used to take questions from any of 200 people.

We used to fill the Mayfair Theatre, and that's what ... that's what built Oracle UK, it was just that. So, sales, I would ... maybe good marketing rather than good sales, but sales helped as well.

[01:04:50]

What's Larry Ellison like to work with?

[01:04:53]

I used to find him a lot of fun, you know, he was, er, very, very, clever, very intellectual, erm ... I think we respected each other, we had different skills. I had sort of system skills and management skills, accounting skills, so, at one stage, erm, by... in the end, there were 7,000 people in Oracle, I had 6,000 of them working for me, and he had the other 1,000, which were mainly developers and lawyers. [laughs], so, erm...

[01:05:31]

And he needed lawyers, because, in 1990, the whole thing nearly came apart, did it not?

[01:05:36]

Well, that's why I went over there. I always remember the conversation, erm, he rang me up and he said, "Geoff, we're in a mess, I want you to take over international." Which effectively meant, erm, adding 10% to my revenue and about 300% to my workload because it meant visiting Venezuela, Vietnam, Australia, Japan, starting... fixing Japan, all these sorts of things. I said to him, "That's not where you need my skills, you need me to run America, so, let's do it the other way around, I'll run America and Europe, and you run international." "I'll think about it." He rang me back about an hour later, "Have the lot" he said.

[laughter]

So, I then became President of Worldwide Operations and, erm, which was good. The first thing I did was basically fix America and change all their ratios, you know, I did a major cull and, erm... and then I... and the other thing I did, which Larry

actually thinks is my finest achievement was build Japan and that had never been done before. There had never been an American company successful in Japan and I managed to get Japan, erm, up, you know, motivate them, we built a new university. I let all the Japanese management do it their way and, erm, just gave them guidance and, and decentralised it completely. And put a Japanese person... they'd got an American guy running it, who... well, I didn't give a job to anyway, even in the American sales force as a junior rep, and they'd got him running Japan. And so, I, er, shut down their distributorship, went direct, and erm, I got lucky with the CEO because he'd just been passed over by IBM. He was, he was ... erm, Head of IBM, China, and it looked as if that was his staging post to be the CEO of the company in Japan. And they overlooked him for somebody 10 years younger than him, and of course, in Japan, that means you're over.

[01:08:19]

Yeah.

[01:08:20]

And erm, the most interesting thing that he then did, which against everything I would ever do in my life, so, I grit my teeth and backed him. If you were going to hire, have your first hire in Japan, having been hired as CEO and there is no one in the company, what would be the function you would hire?

[01:08:42]

I don't know, tell me?

[01:08:44]

Think about it.

[01:08:46]

I do ... I really don't know.

[01:08:48]

HR.

[01:08:49]

Oh, really? [laughs]

[01:08:53]

And then he ... after I had come down off the ceiling [laughs], he then, very calmly, told me why. He said, “You-you’re thinking now of the 1990s in Japan, if you were an experienced person, you had lifelong employment, you never left anyone, no one would ever leave ...

[01:09:15]

No.

[01:09:15]

Mitsubishi or anyone like that to go and join somebody. If you were a student, your first choice would be all the famous names, Namura, Panasonic, those sorts of people, if you weren’t quite good enough to get into those, your next choice would be BP Japan, Shell Japan, IBM Japan. Who’s going to work for a little start-up? So, we had to create something completely different, so, he set up a university, inside, called the Oracle Japan University, gave them specialist training in some quite nifty things, like databases and AI and stuff like that. He built an office, none of the desks were square, they were all amoeboid shape, so, people could sit in a relaxed environment. They had goldfish and dogs, there was a dog in the room, parrots, and all sorts of things. So, he created a fun environment that young people coming out of university might want to... might see as a bit different than sitting in 44 square feet of IBM office. And we hired some of the most amazing talent and trained our own.

And that was a, erm, that’s where all the technical people came from, they got development work, and they had all the translation work to do, we translated all the ... all the, erm, product into Japanese, nobody else could do that; even IBM hadn’t done that. And erm, I remember we did, erm ... we were growing 60% per year which was slower than Oracle going generally, erm, but we were going 60% per year, and in the first few years we got up to 10 billion Yen, which is ... I don’t know, lots, 100 million dollars or something.

[01:11:35]

Mm-hmm.

[01:11:36]

And erm, I-I-I used to-to- I used to measure all of the countries as a percentage of GDP. And I spotted this anomaly when the US operation did 570 million one year and it just happened that the US economy was 5.7 trillion.

[01:12:08]

Laughs.

[01:12:10]

It was a pure fluke, so, as ... because I've got a weird mind, I decided to put... use that as its benchmark and do the same measure against all 43 countries that worked for me, and stats them. And it was interesting that, erm, Japan, so, I put that as 1, Japan, at the time, was something like .05, and we got 'em up to, erm, up to 1. So, we actually got them up to the right level. Funnily enough, the-the highest was Holland at 1.3.

[01:12:50]

Hmm.

[01:12:53]

And probably, because they have some very, very big companies and also digital were very strong in Holland and so, we had a monopoly on VAX computers at the time, and before Unix came out and so, but Holland... and they'd got people like Shell and Un-Unilever, and Phillips that used to spend money like water on, erm, technology, so it was absolutely...

[01:13:17]

Are you surprised that the relational technology has remained so successful for so long?

[01:13:26]

No, not really, erm, it was a natural... it was a natural phenomenon, I mean, the fact that... at Wall's, people who were inventing it as in a way of doing stuff rather than use a load of silly indexes, it was a good way of organisation, its only problem was performance.

[01:13:49]

Yes.

[01:13:50]

So, when you put it into memory and memory got bigger, I mean, the latest big hit is this Snowflake thing that's happening in America. That is just an in-memory relational database.

[01:14:04]

Mm-hmm.

[01:14:04]

That's all there is, in the cloud, just moved it, and moved it, and moved it. So, no, it was always going to be the right way to do things, but you needed res... it takes a lot of resource to do.

[01:14:17]

Yeah, the first IBM implementation on a small machine, the System 38, was terribly underpowered for a relational database, wasn't it?

[01:14:28]

It was indeed.

[01:14:29]

But it became a successful system when they put some more into it and especially successful when they relaunched it as the AS400.

[01:14:37]

That's right, no, and that's still, you know, people... well, a lot of the world like Oracle, lots of people forget, you know, they talk about market share, but nobody counts the AS400 because they've got much more market share than any of the Unix systems.

[01:14:54]

True.

[01:14:55]

Yeah.

[01:14:55]

Now, you left in 1994, is that right?

[01:15:00]

'93, yeah, the end of '93.

[01:15:03]

Why?

[01:15:04]

I think Larry wanted his company back, simple as that.

[01:15:09]

He wanted his toys back, did he?

[01:15:12]

Yeah. I think he thought there was too much English power. We had an English Head of Support, an English Head of this, an English Head of that.

[01:15:21]

Right.

[01:15:22]

He probably thought, hang on a moment, and he was getting a lot of pressure from his American team, erm, and he'd, erm, yeah, he, he wanted the company back.

[01:15:37]

Was that a ...?

[01:15:38]

If you read in his book it says ... if you read his book *Softwar*, one of the-the-the sub-comments "The stupidest thing I ever did."

[laughter]

[01:15:49]

What, letting you in?

[01:15:52]

Letting me go.

[01:15:53]

Oh, letting you go?

[01:15:54]

Yeah.

[01:15:56]

Right. Erm, and was than an acrimonious discussion?

[01:16:00]

He's had... he's had-he's had some very good successes. Mark Hurd is ... is a good guy, and Safra is good.

[01:16:09]

Was that an acrimonious discussion or did you realise it was coming?

[01:16:14]

No, I had no idea it was coming, not a clue, I'd just launched all the new products in Australia, and I was too busy working, making him money, a complete surprise. And erm, yeah, and all the staff, you know, the salespeople said, "Oh, but what if he takes this company, what if he takes that...?" I mean, my settlement, they gave me half a million dollars for every company I wouldn't work for. I promised not to work for.

[01:16:49]

[Laughs]

[01:16:51]

In the end, Larry was saying stop, he can't have all of them [laughs]. So, they gave me 6, I think.

[01:16:59]

So, you went to Open Vision?

[01:17:02]

Yes, erm, Open Vision was interesting. Mike Fields who worked for me as President of Oracle USA, had actually been fired through me by Larry. So, I probably should have spotted, he's firing my people without asking me, I probably should have guessed there was something going on. Erm, and he didn't like him, I mean, he hired him 'cause he was black and, erm, I always remember sitting in Manor Park Company Club, one of the, erm, other board of directors just said, "Why did you hire him?" and Larry said, "Cause he's black, you know we can't be criticised if he's black."

[01:17:46]

Right.

[01:17:46]

[sound]... Right, he also happened to be a very good sales manager and good salesman, but that... he wasn't an intellect and erm, Larry didn't like it. Because I liked him because he did exactly as I told him to do, so, I was... I was very happy, he could work my model perfectly, yeah. If I said "jump" he'd say, "how high?" which was very good.

[01:18:12]

So, what was the position ... what was the position of Open Vision?

[01:18:16]

It was a Warburg Pincus start-up.

[01:18:19]

Right.

[01:18:21]

The way I pi ... the way I pitched it at the IPO, was if you look at the whole of the client-server movements, you have had large IBM mainframes, being replaced by low-cost powerful units, hardware at a tenth of the cost. You've had large clumsy databases, like IDMS and IMS being replaced by modern slinky systems like Oracle or Sybase, etc. You've got big clunky applications like SAP, and MSA and all that stuff being replaced by client-server applications. All the new start-ups like [unclear 01:19:19] the only one that crossed the bridge was SAP themselves. Nobody has re-engineered what was the domain of computer associates, backups, security, operations, all the boring stuff. Nobody had done that, so, you build these beautiful systems, and you can't do a backup.

So, Mike Fields persuaded Warburg Pincus to do a series of 21 acquisitions of technology, to cover what was called OPSS, which was operations, performance, security, and systems, and those were the ones that we had to do. And so, we built lots and lots of different technology and the idea was to put them all together as a competitor to CA's Unicenter. And that, erm, I think Warburg's were about 73 million down Mike's drain before they noticed, that sitting quietly in England, managing 6 people very, very happily [laughs], 3 in Germany and 3 in the UK, was me. And so, Bill Janeway came across and he said erm, "Do you fancy doing a bit more for the company?" I said, "What do you want me to do?" he said, "Run it" and I said, "Okay," I said "wh-what about Mike?" huh, he said, "I don't care, you can keep him as chairman if you like, 'cause he's a good figurehead, erm, but he can't do any of the operational things."

So, after I'd been there a few months, erm, they gave me the job as, erm, CEO. The first thing I did was a downsize, I went from 308 people to 163 in... you know, a couple of days using a relational database technique which row delete anyone called Senior Vice-President and anyone called Strategic Guidance of... God, we'd got an infrastructure that could have run IBM, you know, textbook. So, basically, I went back to Larry Ellison's basic rule, which was, if you don't sell and you don't programme, tell me real slow what you do? One of Larry's classic lines.

So, I became CEO and made it profitable, did an IPO, and erm, in '96 and then a year... we'd been public a year and we were approached by Veritas to do a merger. So, it broke every rule in the book, everybody said don't do mergers of equal people and we said well, why not? Because you lose all your talent and, erm, the wrong people get the jobs and, etc., etc. And I said, "That's just management." So, I sort of effectively fell on my sword, I decided it wasn't worth arguing who was the best CEO, erm, I said, "I am prepared to be Vice-Chairman" or joint Chairman actually and I'll run the operation.

[01:23:03]

Yeah.

[01:23:04]

I don't want development, I'll run worldwide sales, support, cust... anything to do with customers and anything to do with finance, which is basically the job I had at Oracle. I said to Mark Leslie, you just sit back, you'll get ... I mean they were a one put... a one cut... a one-office company and some very interesting things, like, you get emails and all texts in the middle of the night saying, "Have you let-left your lights on in the car park?" So, [unclear 01:23:39] huh, who are these people? People in Japan saying, "No, is it good, I could go and switch mine on, it's 3 in the morning?" So, we had a lot of HR issues.

[01:23:53]

We're coming up to a contentious time now, I want to press on a little bit faster.

[01:23:58]

Yeah.

[01:23:59]

We're coming up to Y2K.

[01:24:02]

Yeah.

[01:24:03]

Your thoughts on that, a nice big scam for the consultants or essential?

[01:24:10]

Erm, it was a good scam for the consultants I think, erm, and for all the software houses. I actually fell foul of it.

[01:24:19]

You fell ...

[01:24:21]

I was living ... I was living in Guernsey, I was the only one, working for a backup company, I was the only one who ran a batch of software and I was the only one whose computer didn't work on the 1st on the January... the 1st of January. [laughs]. And Lynsey Armstrong was not impressed when she had to send her top technical person off a pre-sales course and mend my computer in Guernsey. [laughs]. So, erm, it was an interesting time, it was very, very, erm... I-I'll tell you a funny story about the end of Y2K. Erm, it was Veritas's vet-best ever year, we had just become the 3rd most valuable company in the software world behind Microsoft and Oracle. We were valued at 60 times revenue... times revenue. We had a 1.2 billion market, er, market... 1.2 billion revenue and 75 billion market cap.

[01:25:39]

Oh.

[01:25:41]

Which was good [laughs], we couldn't sell quick enough. Erm, but I remember in September, it was... a restaurant in New York, which happened to be called Veritas and just for fun, I went there with the guy who ran the New York region, a lovely Italian man called Al Della Russo, I don't know what he did in a previous career, but ... and head of worldwide sales, Paul [unclear 01:26:12] Green, and head of erm, US sales. And the 4 of us went there and the wine list was about this fat, and Al was going through the list saying, "Look at this, look at the price of this bottle of wine" and I said, "Al, you hit 50 million..." his quota was about 36 million. I said, "Al, you hit 50 million this quarter and I'll buy you that" not the company, I personally will buy you that. But of course, the 2 guys who knew... what would my stock be worth if he beat his number by 14 million or something, it was sky-high. Anyway, erm, he rang me up, just before the end of the company year and said, "Geoff, I'm on 48 million, I've rung the restaurant to reserve the bottle, but they want a guarantee because if they're ever going to sell this bottle, it's going to be on December 31st 1999." And it was an imperial of 1959 Chateau Latour.

[01:27:30]

[laughs] how much did that cost you?

[01:27:35]

\$21,000.

[01:27:38]

[laughs] well, well worth it.

[01:27:41]

Well worth it.

[01:27:43]

You seem to be able to...

[01:27:43]

And we all went ...

[01:27:45]

Go on.

[01:27:47]

Well, er, Fiona, er, that wasn't the most expensive, it's... the Concord ticket to go across to drink the bloody thing [laughs] from England. Erm, my wife wouldn't come.

[01:27:59]

No?

[01:28:00]

She just said, "I am not spending..." you know, whatever it was, 10,000 quid on a Concord ticket just to drink my share of a bottle of wine, so...

[01:28:12]

You seem to enjoy yourself a lot.

[01:28:15]

All the time.

[01:28:16]

All the time.

[01:28:17]

I love it, I still do.

[01:28:19]

Tell me, what is the biggest mistake you've made in your career, and what did you learn from it?

[No speech 01:28:26 to 01:28:38]

[01:28:38]

I was saved from the biggest mistake by somebody else. I nearly left Gloucester County Council for a few hundred a year more money and I nearly took a job as the only person at Shipton RDC, Royal Development Council in the middle of Oxfordshire. If I hadn't got out of the big time, and the chap said, "I'm not going to take you out, you're too good... yeah, to come and waste your life with me" which was very kind, yeah, that... very kind. It was nearly the biggest mistake. And the biggest mistake I've made, erm, I think probably investing in my private equity world, throwing good money after bad, not recognising when something has run its course and turning down offers that... or not shutting companies down when I should have done.

[01:29:49]

But you are... you're quite a ruthless man, are you not?

[01:29:55]

Erm, I certainly have that reputation. Certainly, at Veritas people used to walk behind me making chainsaw noises.

[laughter]

I think that was after the 308 to 163 down. I also remember soon after that, erm, we were at a Quota Club somewhere in Las Vegas or somewhere, say, and I saw the ... one of the regional managers. I was just happened to be playing the piano and as he walked past, I played [sound] which they thought was a little bit cruel.

[laughter]

[01:30:46]

Well, Geoff Squire, it has been an absolute delight to open the doors of the archive for you to make your contribution, thank you so much.

[01:30:56]

Really enjoyed it, thanks, okay, bye-bye.

[01:31:00]

Goodbye.

End of interview