

# Computing Educators Oral History Project

## An Interview with *Gordon Davies*

Conducted Tuesday, June 26, 2007

In Dundee, Scotland

Interview conducted by Barbara Boucher Owens

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1 [0:00]

2 **Barbara Owens: This is an interview with Gordon Davies, retired from the Open**  
3 **University, conducted by Barbara Boucher Owens. This interview is being recorded on**  
4 **the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 2007 at Dundee, Scotland. It is part of the Computing Educators Oral**  
5 **History Project.**

6  
7 **Did we give and pronounce your name correctly?**

8  
9 Gordon Davies: Well, we always ... in England it's just "Davis".

10  
11 **B: OK, thank you. All right. We're going to start way back when, talk about your parents.**  
12 **Did they have college degrees?**

13  
14 G: No, I think it's probably fair to say my parents had absolutely no influence on my academic  
15 career at all.

16  
17 **B: That combined two questions in one. [laughter]**

18

19 G: I mean, as much as you have a great deal of love and respect for your parents, they were not  
20 influential in any way, explicitly. Obviously, implicitly they were, but explicitly in deciding  
21 what I did academically from the age of ... about nine or ten, I suspect. I mean, I just plowed  
22 my own furrow because I don't think they really knew what to do with me. And I was the  
23 first person in the family that went to grammar school, if you know what that means. You  
24 know, past the 11<sup>th</sup> — in England, if you pass the 11<sup>th</sup> plus [exam], that separated you into  
25 grammar schools and secondary modern. It's been abolished mainly now. But I took it a year  
26 early, so I actually went to grammar school at the age of ten. So I was considered to be a bit  
27 different. I don't think my parents really knew quite what this meant. So I went to grammar  
28 school. So I began at university at 17, a year early as well.

29  
30 **B: Did you have siblings?**

31  
32 G: Yes, I had a brother who was seven years older. He is still alive, and I still see him regularly.  
33 He left school at 15 and that was the end of his education. He went to work in a factory in the  
34 railway works in Crewe, where I came from. He mainly was a factory worker all his life until  
35 he retired. So there were limited choices [for him].

36  
37 **B: So nobody was into mathematics, computer science, science, nothing like that?**

38  
39 G: Nothing like that at all. I was a bit of a freak, actually.

40  
41 **B: Well, were there shaping influences, like teachers that said, "Gordon, you are really  
42 smart"?**

43  
44 G: Well, eventually, yes.

45  
46 **B: But that transition to grammar school. How did that happen?**

47  
48 G: Well, you take these three tests: arithmetic, English, and intelligence. And if you pass them  
49 you go to one set of schools; if you fail them you go to another set of schools. [...] So, at the  
50 age of ten you go off and then you're with all like-minded children, supposedly the top 20%  
51 intelligence-wise, I suppose. And the first two or three years nothing really spectacular. But  
52 then, I suppose, you start to show a few bits of ability. My maths ability was pretty good.  
53 Actually, interesting, my maths ability even in primary school, when I was 7 or 8, was  
54 different. Like, the teachers knew there was something different about me; that my  
55 mathematical — well, it was more arithmetic then, you wouldn't do algebra, certainly more  
56 arithmetic. I was happy with numbers at the age of 7 or 8. I mean I stood out. That's why  
57 they put me into these exams a year early. And then I suppose that you carried on. I was  
58 hopeless at anything except maths and physics, I felt. So eventually I concentrated on that.  
59 And yes, a couple of teachers did inspire me in maths and physics, certainly.

60  
61 **B: How did they do that?**

62  
63 G: Well, I think because they, apart from being good teachers, they made you feel that you were  
64 capable or a bit special and that you could do more. And certainly in maths and physics that

65 was the case. My maths teacher I still see periodically and he always tells me how he used to  
66 fight (I was a bit of a rebel at school and the headmaster wanted to throw me out, basically)  
67 and he fought to keep me in the school and wanted me. Because I was a year younger than  
68 everybody else in my year, he wanted me to stay on an extra year and try to get in to Oxford  
69 or Cambridge. Because I was stupid youth, I said, “No, I am not going to stay on another  
70 year at school.” And he always complained about me because he reckoned I could have gone  
71 to Oxford and done maths at Oxford. But I was too arrogant to take note of him. So I just  
72 went to the local university. And every time I see him he reminds me of this big mistake I  
73 made. Or he reminds me of how he defended me against this headmaster. I was a bit of a  
74 rogue.

75

76 **B: Were you playing football while you were at university?**

77

78 G: No, it wasn't that. I was just pretty rude. I was just generally a bit of a loud mouth, actually.  
79 And you might say things haven't changed very much. But — at least then you could get in  
80 trouble for it. [laughter]

81 [5:00]

82 I was school football captain, you see. I was in high school, but I wasn't bad. I was school  
83 football captain. In fact, I played football for another 20-odd years.

84

85 **B: Huh! I didn't know that.**

86

87 I'm a fan, too. So I went to Liverpool, and did physics, and did miserably, did badly. Got a  
88 degree and not a very good degree. And started school teaching, teaching maths and physics.

89

90 **B: In what kind of school?**

91

92 G: In a secondary school, in Manchester. In fact it was an independent school, private school in  
93 a sense, fee paying. It's rather odd, isn't it, now. One of the reasons is that I couldn't really  
94 get a job teaching maths or physics. There were no vacancies. It's incredible. 1963 and I  
95 struggled to get a job. That's why I went to the independent sector. And I stayed there three  
96 years and I went to a technical college and taught higher level maths.

97

98 **B: What technical college was that?**

99

100 G: In Crewe, my hometown. I come from there. Crewe is a relatively small town in Cheshire.  
101 It's about 30 miles south of Manchester. And it's very much because of its railways. Six  
102 railway lines converge there, so it's probably the busiest railway junction — well, probably  
103 in Victorian times — in the world, probably not so much now. It's a big railway town.

104

105 So I went back to Crewe and worked in a technical college, teaching maths at an even higher  
106 level. Then in 1965 they decided computing was quite important. So they said, “Would you  
107 like to do a Master's degree in computing?” Sorry, I got the dates wrong. 1963 to 1966 I was  
108 in Manchester. 1966 I went back to Crewe; it was the year England won the World Cup,  
109 1966. So 1968 I left Crewe and went to London to do a MSc in computer science. I'd been

110 on odd courses at English Electric in Kinch Grove, which is nearby. KDF9 was the first real  
111 computer I programmed, KDF9 in about 1965.

112  
113 And actually something else I just remembered. I went to North Staffordshire College of  
114 Technology in summer holidays to do a course in computing. That would have been in 1966-  
115 1967. And that's where ... the oldest machine I ever saw, which was the English Electric  
116 Deuce, where it had a cathode ray tube rigged to the memory. You could see the dots on the  
117 cathode ray screen, which was in main memory. It was all paper tape. And you could walk  
118 inside the machine. It was a huge monster. ACE was the NPL machine.

119  
120 **B: I've heard of it.**

121  
122 G: Deuce came after ACE. Makes sense! Deuce was produced by a commercial company,  
123 English Electric.

124  
125 **B: So while you were taking these courses were you still teaching at the technical school?**

126  
127 G: Yes, except when I did the Master's degree. The Master's degree was a year off. They paid  
128 my salary while I lived in London for a year and did a Master's degree. And then at the end  
129 of that, the university (it was University of London) and they ... it is interesting. The guy  
130 who supervised my Master's dissertation, who left, a guy called Dick Housden he was  
131 probably quite an inspiring figure to me at the time — in fact, he crops up later again — he  
132 was a lecturer at this place. It was called the Institute of Computer Science and at that time it  
133 was the only place you could really do computer science in London. Things hadn't moved on  
134 yet and all they offered was a Master's degree. So I did this Master's degree. Dick Housden  
135 supervised my dissertation. He then left to go to the University of East Anglia. And so a job  
136 came up and another person (I forget his name) suggested I apply, so I applied for the job and  
137 got the job. So I immediately went from almost nothing to a university lecturer in about 12  
138 months. You could do that in those days. [laughter]

139 [9:21]

140 So I have a Master's degree now, and that's it. That's all I have. So I started teaching at  
141 University of London at this postgraduate institute. All it did was teach one degree in math, a  
142 master's degree, and it had about 50 students a year, maybe. That's it. Not surprising, really.  
143 The colleges in University of London then started taking an interest in computer science and  
144 University College, Imperial College, Queen Mary College, University College, which were  
145 all more or less autonomous, although the degrees they awarded were University of London  
146 degrees, they teach independently. And they then started teaching computer science. And  
147 more or less said, "What's the point of having this one institution doing computer science?  
148 We could all do computer science. Why waste money doing that." So the university closed it  
149 down. They closed it down and the staff — there must have been about 25, 30 staff, maybe  
150 like 20 academic staff — were all offered posts. They could decide where they wanted to go.  
151 It was great opportunity. I could have become a lecturer at Imperial College, or University  
152 College, wherever. They just said, "We can't fire you!" But you had permanent  
153 appointments, almost immediately in those days. And so I chose University College. And the  
154 reason was because it was near a train station, it was about public transport, simple as that.  
155 Imperial College is down in Kensington near the BMA, the museum area, and it's been

156 logical to get to by the underground. About three or four people went there. And the biggest  
157 group that went to UCL and started the department of computer science. Started teaching the  
158 first undergraduate students at UCL in 1971, 1972, 1973, something like that.

159  
160 What led to this connection with ACM was shortly after I met Tony Ralston. Tony Ralston  
161 used to go on sabbatical to this place that I was a student and then a member of staff. I used  
162 to play a lot of squash with Tony Ralston. In that year, about 1972, he became president of  
163 ACM, so I didn't see him much that year, he was flying across the Atlantic every other ...  
164 And I sort of kept in touch with him over the years (I mean, this was 30 and a half years ago).  
165 I met him, interestingly, after a long gap, at ITiCSE when it was in Kent in 2001, I think. I  
166 hadn't seen him for about 15 years, so it was quite nice to renew our friendship. Because he  
167 was quite a big star at that time, Tony Ralston. It was quite a privilege, I always thought, to  
168 have met him.

169  
170 And then, UCL, I stayed there for a long time and developed the undergraduate program. My  
171 main job there, eventually, was to run the Master's degree in computer science.

172  
173 **B: When you began teaching in the classroom, did you enjoy classroom teaching?**

174  
175 G: Oh, yes, I enjoyed teaching but that was right from when I left university in 1963. And I  
176 enjoyed being in the classroom. I had taught from the age of 11 upwards. Funny, I remember  
177 — my memory is a bit vague about when it was — I remember going back to my primary  
178 school, which was 7 years to 11 years old, and there was a particular teacher there that  
179 inspired me and always looked after me, from 1950 when I was under her care. And I used to  
180 go back there quite regularly and she used to let me do a little teaching, teaching 7 year olds.  
181 I wouldn't know what to do with them now, but at that time it I supposed it was easier, she  
182 was pleased to see me and it was very nice. I don't know happened to her; I eventually lost  
183 touch. And the headmaster at my grammar school was one that was always very helpful.  
184 He's the one that brought me in for the exam a year early. And I used to go back and see him  
185 quite regularly. I think I've got this strength or weakness, but I do keep in touch with people  
186 over the years.

187  
188 **B: And how about the students that you have had over the years? Have you kept in touch  
189 with them?**

190  
191 G: Well, the ... I can't remember many of the bachelor's students from UCL. I remember more  
192 of the Master's students, because I interviewed all Master's students and selected them. And  
193 this one that I kept in touch with — because I eventually interviewed her at the Open  
194 University and employed her there — that was Helen Sharpe. I think she is still there; she is  
195 probably a full professor at the OU by now. If she isn't, then she certainly will be. And she  
196 was a Master's student at the UCL. And I think I had some influence, because I interviewed  
197 her about three times off and on, as a student and for jobs. And she's had a very successful  
198 career.

199 [14:28]

200 **B: Then how did you move from UCL to the Open University?**

201

202 G: Prior to that, I've just realized there's another interesting story. When I was at this Institute of  
203 Computer Science that I taught at, from 1969 onwards, there wasn't much competition at the  
204 time for Master's degrees, maybe three or four of them. And jumping ahead, I do a lot of  
205 accreditation now. And about 6 months ago I went to Cardiff and chaired an accreditation  
206 panel at Cardiff. And this was quite interesting, because on the accreditation panel was an  
207 industrial assessor who I taught at this first place in 1970-1971. The head of department at  
208 Cardiff, who we were assessing, I taught in 1970. And the external examiner, who is at  
209 Glasgow University, I taught in about 1971-1972 and supervised his Master's dissertation.  
210 So, in this one visit, there were three ex-students that were involved in some way with this  
211 department and I was chair of the panel of assessors. And I think that was quite unique. I  
212 mean, the chances of that happening were a bit small. But they all knew each other and that  
213 was really quite nice. The head of department, of course, I had not seen for 25, 30 years, but  
214 we both knew each other. And the guy who was the industrial assessor, I don't even  
215 remember teaching. And he said, "Oh yeah, I was in your lectures in 1975." So yes, there are  
216 students that are around.

217

218 **B: Were you doing research while you were doing this teaching?**

219

220 G: No, not a lot. I mean, I started out when I was at UCL doing research with a particular guy.  
221 One of my professors was in mathematics of sorting, searching. And we plowed away and  
222 plowed away, eventually not getting anywhere. The supervisor was not the best, I don't  
223 think. But he was a good friend and we remained in touch. He became a professor at  
224 University College and he came over to University College with us, a great guy. He retired  
225 many years ago and he died about 3 years ago, I think. And I still exchange Christmas cards  
226 with his wife. [...] He was the first, probably, to die of the people that you were, you know  
227 ...

228

229 **B: Did you go on for a Ph.D.?**

230

231 G: No. As I said, this guy who died was a supervisor and it didn't work out. I don't know. I just  
232 didn't have time. I probably didn't have the motivation to do a doctorate. And I think it  
233 probably was a bad mistake. That's probably one of the mistakes— academic mistakes — I  
234 made. I should have done. I might never have completed it. I was too interested in other  
235 things. It just didn't work out. And at that time, in the 1960s and 1970s, it wasn't so crucial.  
236 It just didn't matter. I think that was the problem. There was no real incentive. But it was a  
237 bad mistake

238

239 **B: So tell me about the transition between UCL and Open University.**

240

241 G: Well, because of the lack of Ph.D., I think, but also maybe a lack of research direction —  
242 UCL was a strong research-oriented university, it's probably the fourth best in the UK:  
243 you've got Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, and UCL. Imperial and UCL compete with each  
244 other for number three. UCL is better in medicine, bio-medical. Imperial's computing  
245 department is much stronger. But they compete with each other. So it was and still is at this  
246 third or fourth ranking university in the country, research was a prime measure of success. So  
247 I wasn't quite meeting the criteria. And I remember this, there was some bid to get me

248 promoted. This was about 1982-1983, so it's been twenty-five years ago. And it failed and I  
249 think this is one of the reasons, so I thought Tssk! OK.

250  
251 And then the job at Open University came up. And why it was interesting is because Dick  
252 Housden, the guy I mentioned earlier who supervised my master's degree, was now at the  
253 Open University as head of department. And I knew he had a lot of time for teaching and was  
254 interested in teaching. And so I thought, "Well, this would be great to go back to work with  
255 him!", because I liked him. So that's what I did. I applied for the job in July 1984 and Dick  
256 Housden head of department and it was really very nice. So I started there and had a great  
257 time for 22 years or so.

258 [19:27]

259 **B: One of the hallmarks of your career has been your enormous activity in professional**  
260 **societies. You had said the seed was planted early with your relationship with Tony**  
261 **Ralston. Do you want to talk about that?**

262  
263 G: It is interesting. In 1968-1969 the BCS existed, but I don't remember people took it too  
264 seriously. ACM was the really important computing society, even in England, even in 1968,  
265 1969. In 1969 I was reading *Communications of the ACM* and using it quite regularly. And  
266 then I joined in about 1974, I think. Once I — and I can't remember why — but I think by  
267 1974 I joined ACM as a member; it may be a bit later I joined the BCS. But ACM was  
268 always the prime, you know, way up ahead. The BCS had very small publications. And  
269 ACM, I think we all valued its publications because at that time textbooks were few and far  
270 between.

271  
272 I remember Don Knuth's volume *Art of Computer Programming* coming out — what a  
273 goldmine that was! I mean, those books, the *Volume 1* and the *Fundamental Data Structures*  
274 one, *Information Structures*, and then the *Sorting and Searching* books, they were like manna  
275 from heaven because they had everything you needed to know for lecturing, because there  
276 wasn't much around at that time. You spoke about the guy from New York and his books had  
277 only just come out, FORTRAN, Dan McCracken's book; they were exciting books in that  
278 time. Well, in fact, Don Knuth's books were just off the planet; *Sorting and Searching* is still  
279 a wonderful book, one of the greatest computing books ever written. So that's when I started  
280 getting to know about ACM.

281  
282 Even at that time, ACM and the United States were like another planet. You grew up in  
283 England, with America being a completely different world. In your early years and teens, the  
284 idea of that you might get to travel to America was just not possible, you couldn't possibly  
285 do that sort of thing. Shows you how much things have changed. It was like going to the  
286 moon as far as I was concerned, to go to the US. So ACM and the US were this golden thing,  
287 far away. And so I joined them. Then 1979 was my first real involvement. I submitted a  
288 paper to SIGCSE, and I think it was 1979 I went to a SIGCSE conference and gave a paper  
289 about one of the computer management courses I had taught. That's when I first sort of met  
290 people and thought, "There is nothing like this in the UK at all." Few people who were  
291 interested in teaching. That is when my real interest started from — I must have been  
292 interested in it before then, because I knew about it, but 1979 in Kansas City, I think it was,  
293 was my first SIGCSE. And — well, after that it sort of developed. I think the probably more

294 significant ones there — I went to one or two, then there was a gap. And then I started again  
295 early 1980s I think.

296  
297 It must have been 1982, 1983, 1984 when I met Boots [Cassel]. And I used to harass her  
298 about the fact [SIGCSE] was too US-oriented. And it was time they did something in Europe.  
299 And so we ended up with ITiCSE. And that is how ITiCSE was created. I mean, I think she  
300 had the idea independently. But I like to think it was my going after her which, I think she  
301 would say this as well, but she and I probably started it off. It was how the first ITiCSE in  
302 Barcelona came about. I was involved with the first three, I think: Barcelona, Uppsala, and  
303 Dublin. I think she and I were quite actively involved in organizing those. It took off. It was  
304 nice to get those started. What was the question? [laughter]

305  
306 **B: How did your involvement in BCS come about?**

307  
308 G: I was much more involved in ACM than BCS for a long time. Well, it started with ACM,  
309 then SIGCSE because it was teaching, then it was a personal involvement by attending the  
310 conference, and then just keeping going and eventually going back to the conference and  
311 meeting people and ....

312  
313 BCS — I'd been a member of BCS for probably about the same amount of time, but I didn't  
314 actually do very much until maybe about ten, twelve years ago, when I started getting  
315 involved with accreditation. And it's largely accreditation, BCS. They're two very different  
316 organizations. So, there is nothing like SIGCSE in BCS. Nothing at all. So my involvement  
317 in BCS has been accreditation, because it was originally a one year; I was one of the panel of  
318 assessors. Then I joined the ... I was nominated to join the committee. I think the procedure  
319 in the US is very similar, you see. So you join the committee, so you have a particular role.  
320 And then you're expected to chair visiting panels, so I do quite a few of those.

321 [25:09]

322 **B: So you are actively involved?**

323  
324 G: I've done 3 in the last six months.

325  
326 **B: Oh yeah, yeah. So saying that you retired, you retired from the Open University, but  
327 you're certainly not retired.**

328  
329 G: No, not at all.

330  
331 **B: Is this a paid position or is this a volunteer position?**

332  
333 G: It is all volunteer. Yeah, it's like ACM in that it is volunteer.

334  
335 **B: Were there ... you talked about some of the challenges you had, partially because the  
336 Ph.D. would have made different choices possible. But were there challenges handling  
337 family and the career that were important.**

338



339 G: I wouldn't say there were challenges, but I would say there were mistakes made because of  
340 that. I remember when I went to the Open University in 1984, that was okay to start with. But  
341 in about 1986 I started on a course and I led the course team. And leading a course team is a  
342 very serious job. And for two years, that was my life and I neglected loads of things at that  
343 time. It isn't like a traditional university, in that deadlines really do matter, because you're  
344 going into print, you're making TV, and all sorts of things like that. And therefore, you're not  
345 like you are in a conventional university, where you're almost on your own in front of the  
346 class. At the OU you're not, you are part of a much bigger team, a bigger organization. You  
347 screw up, it has a knock-on effect. If you're late, others things happen. So I think it's the first  
348 time I ever came across the idea that you've got to really work as part of a team and you have  
349 responsibilities. Academic life at that time certainly was very much an isolated activity, in  
350 the sense that you could of sort of do what you liked, within reason obviously. But you didn't  
351 have to depend on other people and other people didn't depend on you. Curriculum  
352 development was largely unknown in the 1960s and 1970s, and there wasn't ACM  
353 curriculum guidelines yet.

354  
355 So, going to the OU meant you were part of a group. You worked with people who were not  
356 academics. These were editors, BBC television people, quite a different environment. And  
357 that's what made it so exciting. I mean, to go to the OU — and I think I must have made  
358 about twenty different television programs all together, all over the world. Quite often in the  
359 studios and that type of space. So that was great fun. That really was exciting. And I have  
360 recently, in fact, put all of my TV tapes on DVD. They're all getting a bit old now. And some  
361 of them really are quite entertaining. Television programs I made 20 years ago on XXX. And  
362 on NASA, about the space shuttle, made in 1986-1987. Some historically quite interesting to  
363 a certain small group of people, I'd have say. But, you know, they are quite interesting look  
364 ... snapshot of what people were teaching at the time, as well as being a case of what was  
365 current in computing outside the academic world at that time. So I wouldn't say they're  
366 brilliant entertaining programs, but as a source, they're interesting source at that time.

367  
368 **B: Do you have any outside interests that would help us understand you a little bit better**  
369 **or that have affected your career? One of them would have to be playing squash.**

370  
371 G: Well, I used to play squash. I used to play a lot of squash. That's the point I was saying about  
372 the compromises. When I went to the OU, I more or less gave up squash. I didn't have time, I  
373 was working too hard on this course. And that course, you see, made my career at OU  
374 because it replaced a course which had, let's see, a thousand students, maybe. This course  
375 had three and a half thousand students every year. It was the largest course in the Open  
376 University for three or four years, and I produced it. So I had all the glory. It was the first  
377 course that required students to have a personal computer. We had never done anything like  
378 this before. So you were expecting students who didn't know what a computer was, and we  
379 were expecting them to buy one and use it to run Pascal programs. Internet didn't exist. So  
380 it's difficult to think what the problems were. Plus now, everything we just take for granted.  
381 Then, we used go to great lengths to help students to switch on a machine and put in a floppy  
382 disk — tell them all about these sorts of things — because they had never done ... didn't  
383 know how to do this. And there was no network. We had to post everything [using regular  
384 postal mail]. We had to post floppy disks. Different world.

385 [30:13]

386 And, in fact, it's rather ironic, because up to that point the Open University had one large  
387 central computer and it had a network — it was a DEC 20 I think — and it used to have  
388 terminals in what we called “study centers” all over the country. We used to have study  
389 centers. So students, if they were doing a computer course, had to go to a study center to do  
390 their computing and book time on this one, maybe two, terminals in the study center. They  
391 might have to travel miles to do this. And then the PC came along and, OK, it meant they  
392 could work in their own home, but they lost the communications medium. So we couldn't  
393 communicate with students electronically anymore because they were at home. Then, of  
394 course, things started changing and the networks came around, but at that time, this was 1998  
395 — it's not that long, twenty years ago — students would have a PC and often they wouldn't  
396 know what on earth this thing was that they were buying. And they were buying it because  
397 the OU said, “You have to have this to do the course.” And they were buying it. Not a very  
398 good reason. We used to go to great lengths — in fact, one of the big achievements at the  
399 time by a colleague at a high level was that we received a huge grant, at least it was a huge  
400 grant at that time, to buy ... I think it was about 3000 Amstrad machines. And we bought  
401 these Amstrad machines.

402

403 **B: I don't know the word.**

404

405 G: Amstrad is the company. Amstrad is the company. Three thousand PCs. And we used to rent  
406 them to students because students couldn't afford to buy the machines, so we ran a rental  
407 pool. Just because the OU was always very good about disadvantaged students, to make sure  
408 students had access. So we bought these machines and then rented them out every year. And  
409 this machine would arrive in the post, basically. And at the end they would have to box it up  
410 and send it back. That was how it worked in 1988; it just seems incredible now.

411

412 So I had to write a course, produce a course, which not only academically had to be okay, it  
413 was basically like ... CS1, CS2 combined in one course. So it was a very big course. It was  
414 essentially equivalent to half a year's work in one course. We had to do that, but at the same  
415 time we had to accommodate this new technology — the fact that students were having PCs.  
416 So everything had to change to fit on the PC. We used the UCSD-Pascal system at that time,  
417 which was a bad mistake, though for good reasons: we were familiar with it. It is better the  
418 devil you know. 'Cause Turbo Pascal came in 'round about a year after we had finished this  
419 work, just the wrong time slot. If we had produced the course 18 months later, we would  
420 have gone to Turbo. And then, of course, that died. Of course, things just move on. But I  
421 found it exciting.

422

423 **B: But what you got off track here was we were talking about outside interests, because**  
424 **you couldn't play squash.**

425

426 G: Because I couldn't play squash!! Yes, that was it.

427

428 **B: And now do you have other ...**

429

430 G: My outside interests now are all fairly standard. Theater, music, traveling. I don't think I  
431 have any ... railways.

432

433 **B: You are going back to your roots.**

434

435 G: Exactly. My father was an engine driver in Crewe and so I've always had this interest in  
436 railways. It's diminished over the last 20 years, but it's coming to the surface again. The  
437 great excitement I had in the last ten years is I went on a one-day course to learn how to drive  
438 a steam engine. So I actually drove a great, full-sized steam engine and drove it. That was  
439 exciting.

440

441 **B: If you had advice to somebody starting out. Well, I'll ask you another question first,  
442 because part of the emphasis of this series is on women in computing. And have you  
443 seen, are there ... anything you have seen about your students, difference among  
444 colleagues, that you would like to comment on before we close here? More women now,  
445 fewer women, ... ?**

446

447 G: My impression, I guess it is probably wrong, but I think the OU is a bit different. Overall in  
448 academic life, there are more women across all disciplines than in other universities. I think it  
449 is just a feature of the area. It is a very liberated institution in some ways. In computing there,  
450 we certainly have a number, but I suspect it is still one of the lowest and perhaps the  
451 engineering people are even lower, but it wasn't that good. And they were all very good. Do  
452 you know Jenny Preece?

453 [35:24]

454 **B: I don't know her.**

455

456 G: She is now at Maryland. She used to be at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. She  
457 was head of Information Systems there. I think now she's got the same job at College Park.  
458 And she was my live-in partner for several years. She was quite an accomplished woman.  
459 She has done incredibly well for herself. She and Helen Sharpe are buddies and think ...  
460 expect still are. So I think the OU is quite good at producing, helping, women along the way.  
461 I think that it is more open-minded than most places.

462

463 **B: As a closing question then, what advice would you give to young people starting out?**

464

465 G: Get a doctorate.

466

467 **B: Get a doctorate.**

468

469 G: Unfortunately, I think it is essential.

470

471 **B: So one of the other questions, is that if you have one piece of advice it would be ...**

472

473 G: Get a doctorate, yes.

474

475 **B: And if there is one thing you regret?**

476

477 G: [laughs] If you ask me just to remind you about that nice story of the lady I did teach who  
478 was very grateful to me. I think this ... it is very nice for me that this was a girl I interviewed  
479 at the UCL and on to the Master's course. She got a bachelors degree at Oxford. And I didn't  
480 realize at the time that I had this influence, but I obviously made computing seem more  
481 attractive than it perhaps it was. Anyway, she came on a course at UCL and was successful.  
482 And I saw her name crop up at various universities. And eventually I went on this  
483 accreditation visit at a university west of London and she was now the departmental head,  
484 had a professor's title, and had really got on. And, of course, fortunately she remembered me.  
485 We had a long chat at lunchtime. And she told me it was this year at UCL that really shaped  
486 her future and she was very grateful I had persuaded her to take the NSC course and she was  
487 very grateful. And at the end of the accreditation when you normally shake hands and  
488 everybody says farewell, she just leaned over and said, "Thank you!" and kissed me on the  
489 cheek. And that doesn't often happen at an accreditation visit, fortunately. And so she was  
490 obviously very grateful and XX that me feel very good. I think she and Helen Sharpe, the girl  
491 who is at OU now, are two of the successes, I think. And so that's it.

492

493 **B: Wonderful.**

494

495 G: OK?

496

497 **B: All right. Thank you very much. Thank you.**

498 [38:12]