

# Computing Educators Oral History Project

## An Interview with *Alison Young*

Conducted Tuesday, February 28, 2006

In Houston, Texas, USA

Interview conducted by Barbara Boucher Owens

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[Context for the interview: To be supplied.]

- 1 [0:00]  
2 **Barbara Boucher Owens: This is an interview with Alison Young from Unitec New**  
3 **Zealand conducted by Barbara Owens. The interview is being recorded on February**  
4 **28th, 2006, in Houston, Texas. It's part of the Computing Educators Oral History**  
5 **series. Did we give your name and pronounce it correctly?**  
6  
7 Alison Young: Yes, you did.  
8  
9 **B: OK. Hi, Alison. How are you?**  
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11 A: I'm very good, thank you, Barbara.  
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13 **B: And you've just come off a half a world around trip.**  
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15 A: Yep! New Zealand to Singapore to Germany to Italy.  
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17 **B: And then clearly Italy to Texas.**

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A: And then Italy to Texas.

**B: All right. We're going to start way back when. Way back when. Did your parents have college degrees?**

A: My dad, yes, but not my mum. And that was not by her choosing. She was not allowed to.

**B: I see. Would you like to expand on that a little bit more?**

A: Expand on that? OK! Yep, sure. My mum — we're going back to the 1930s here — my mum was born in 1923, and her parents ... she was an only child and her parents were separated. But in the 1930s you didn't separate or get divorced. It was very, very socially unacceptable. So my dad ... my Granddad, her dad, stayed at home until she was twenty one [years old] because she was his responsibility until she was twenty one. So even though she said she lived in a house where her Mum and Dad didn't speak, but he was just living there because she was his responsibility. The day she turned fifteen, which is the age you can legally leave school, he said, "You're not going to school anymore. I've got you a job." And she had to go and have a job. And she always in her life wanted to be a nurse, but she wasn't allowed to stay at school and be a nurse, she had to work. I mean, they didn't have much money but ... and my grandmother worked, too, when ... it wasn't the days when wives and mothers worked [outside the home]. So, she went to the job. That was it.

**B: Well, were either of your parents interested in any kind of computing-related, mathematical-related fields?**

A: Not really. My dad ... on my dad's side both parents, both his parents, were school teachers. It just seems like in our family that you go into education or health, because everybody does education or health. And I can — we'll probably come onto that later, I can tell you how everybody is in those fields.

**B: So which was your father?**

A: He's a doctor. But when he ... my dad — and I have other theories on the children of two teachers — but he went to school too early because his parents were teachers in a country school, so he just went to school with them. And he had actually finished what you would call grade school when he was ten [years old]. So they held him back a year because he couldn't really go to high school then. And then he won a scholarship to an important high school and had finished high school at sixteen. And went to university and he has said ... he now tells us that he was far too young at sixteen to know what to do. So he went to university to do a double degree in Latin, so in the arts and in languages, and in maths. He at the same time became a school teacher. And he was one paper off finishing his double degree and was teaching school at the same time and thought, "I don't want to do this for the rest of my life," so went to medical school.

So, no, no, they don't. They have a ... yes, he has a mathematical bent of some sort, because

64 he was doing his degree in maths, his first degree. And my mum never did anything from the  
65 time she left high school at fifteen. But my mom and dad were both champion — New  
66 Zealand champion — bridge players. And the days before computers you had to do all the  
67 bridge scoring by hand and bridge scoring is adding up rows and rows of numbers and then  
68 cross-checking them; we used to help Mom and Dad do it when we were kids. And my  
69 mother could add columns of figures in her head quicker than anybody.

70 [5:09]

71 **B: Hmm. Hmm. Let's talk about you. Were you a good student in your early years of**  
72 **school?**

73  
74 A: Yes, because I had to be because I couldn't let my father down.

75  
76 **B: Did you take courses in math and science?**

77  
78 A: Yes, that's all I took, maths and science. At our high schools for the first three years you  
79 have to take — I was in the top class (it was all streams), so the top class took maths and  
80 science and languages, so yes, I took Latin and French for the first three years. And the  
81 fourth year you could specialize, so went to biology, chemistry, physics, maths. So I was a  
82 maths-science student.

83  
84 **B: You started to allude to the family educational theory that you had. Do you have**  
85 **brothers and sisters who went on to college and a professional career?**

86  
87 A: Absolutely. I have only one sister and she is two-and-a-half years younger than me and she  
88 did math and science as well. But — no buts. She's extra clever. Even though she's two-and-  
89 a-half years younger than me, she was always better than me at everything. Sports, music —  
90 and she's got her letters in the piano and the violin. I learnt music for five years and I can't  
91 play a note. [both laugh]

92  
93 **B: She hits her head after that one!**

94  
95 A: Yeah. And all I ever wanted to do was dance and I was never sent to dancing.

96  
97 **B: Tell me about your parental support of your education? Did they treat you differently?**  
98 **Or did they support you?**

99  
100 A: Not at all. My father was absolutely brilliant. We were too scared not to succeed because Dad  
101 wanted us to. My mother put my father on a pedestal and we had to live up to his  
102 expectations. But he gave us the most amazing support. And he was able to identify very  
103 early our strengths, and guided us into those sorts of things. For example, my sister was a  
104 great sports person — we did a lot of sports. My dad was a great sportsperson too. He  
105 represented several different provinces in New Zealand at tennis, rugby, cricket, [surf  
106 lifesaving,] and — when I was being born two weeks early — he was away playing in the  
107 final of the New Zealand badminton championships. He was a great sportsperson and my  
108 sister's very good. I was certainly well above average at sport. I won the senior year physical  
109 education prize at high school. And yes, I was certainly above average at sport. But my father

110 must have seen some sort of ... I'll call it leadership ability early on in me, or maybe we just  
111 call it bossiness, and so when I didn't make the top netball team (read basketball here), he  
112 actually guided me into refereeing and I became the youngest New Zealand referee for  
113 women's netball at sixteen [years old].

114

115 **B: I see. I see. Was there a teacher or somebody else early in life who helped inspire you to**  
116 **pursue a degree in computing or math or science?**

117

118 A: No, I think our inspiration was our father. And our mother. She always used to say things  
119 like, "You don't have to help with the dishes, because I can't help you with your homework.  
120 So my best help will be to do those sorts of things so you can go away and do your  
121 homework." Homework in our house was a thing that you did and you didn't do anything  
122 else until it was completed, every night.

123

124 **B: Let's go on and get you out of elementary and into high school ...**

125

126 A: OK. That's all right.

127

128 **B: Was there a favorite subject in high school?**

129

130 A: Maths. Absolutely.

131

132 **B: Any particular math that was more interesting?**

133

134 A: No. Maths. Absolutely. Algebra probably. Yes, algebra.

135

136 **B: OK. So you got out of high school. And why did you choose — did you go to directly to**  
137 **school? And why did you choose the undergraduate institution that you did?**

138 [9:49]

139 A: OK. We're right back in the mid-1960s here and in New Zealand there are no com ... sorry,  
140 there's five computers, maybe six in the whole country. And obviously going to boom. And  
141 there were no computer personnel. Programmers. There just weren't any. And there were no  
142 college or university courses for them to do. So we didn't have degrees in computer science.  
143 We didn't have degrees in computer anything. So the people from Auckland Technical  
144 Institute ... the emerging new computer industry in New Zealand went to the Auckland  
145 Technical Institute and said, "We desperately need people trained in computer programming.  
146 Quick! Like yesterday!" And the industry in Auckland said that they'd put money into  
147 training these people by giving them scholarships.

148

149 And of course, I was always going to be a physiotherapist, physical therapist, or something in  
150 the health sector. I also never thought I was good enough, intelligent enough, to be a doctor.

151 That was what my sister was going to do because she was clever. In hindsight, looking back

152 50 years ago, if I had my life again I now know I was wrong ... So I went to the careers

153 advisor, who said, "Ah! You're doing maths and science. You could be a computer

154 programmer." It was a visiting careers advisor from Auckland, who had come to our country  
155 school.

156  
157 And so I went home and I told my dad, “Oh, you know, I don’t know what I want to be!”  
158 And I was too young to go to physiotherapy school at Otago University to become a physical  
159 therapist. And I really should have had another year at high school (it is slightly different  
160 high school than they do in the States; because normally if you were going to go to university  
161 you’d go to high school for five years, not four, and then do a three-year degree; so you’ve  
162 got the eight years, you just do it slightly different). And I’d only been at high school for four  
163 years, so if I was going to go to university I’d have to go back to school for a fifth year and  
164 for various stupid teenage reasons I didn’t want to stay at high school.

165  
166 And I also wanted to travel a lot, which is a very New Zealand thing — that all young people  
167 in New Zealand travel when they finish their education. And I saw this as a quicker means to  
168 travel. So my dad went to ICT in Auckland. (When I say ICT, most people correct me and  
169 say ICL [International Computers, Limited]. And it didn’t become ICL until 1968. This was  
170 1966 and it was still International Computers and Tabulators.) Anyway he went to that  
171 company and he got all the brochures about what being a computer programmer means. And  
172 they said if I’d like to apply to join this new course that was coming up the next year at  
173 Auckland Technical Institute I could, but to do that I had to go and sit an aptitude test.

174  
175 Now, where we lived was 35 miles from the big city. Even though our high school was one  
176 of the biggest in the whole of the country, because it was out of Auckland, out of the big city,  
177 going to Auckland to the big city in the 1960s was a big deal. And my mother was the  
178 greatest shopper ever. And I loved shopping and I loved going shopping with Mum. So here I  
179 am, sixteen years old ... seventeen years old, just turned seventeen, and I got the opportunity  
180 of going to the big city shopping with my mother for a day. I would sit any aptitude test or  
181 any stupid test that they want me to sit if I can go shopping, take a day off school and go  
182 shopping with my mother. So I said, “Yep! I’ll sit your silly test for you!” So Mum and I  
183 drove into Auckland that morning and I sat the test and I did it as quickly as I could because I  
184 didn’t want to lose any shopping time. Well, I must have done very well on this test because  
185 by the time we got home they had rung up and said, “Quick, we want you. You’ve topped  
186 this test and we want you for this course.” So it gave me a whole lot of things. It gave me the  
187 opportunity to leave high school. It gave me the opportunity of a career that was going to  
188 earn me lots of money so I could travel, so I could get there quicker than if I went and did  
189 five years at medical school or something. And I got my day’s shopping with my mother.

190 [14:54]

191 Who else would have a silly story like that? But anyway, I mean, I was thinking then, “OK, if  
192 I’ve done really well on this test, it must mean that I’m suited to do this computer  
193 programming thing. So I’m not going to find it enormously difficult or beyond anything that  
194 I want do.” And it was all too new. I mean, we had hand card punch machines without any  
195 things on the buttons, so you had to remember them. We ... our first programs we wrote, we  
196 had to convert to binary and punch in binary on your cards, nine-edge leading. We wrote in a  
197 very, very basic — with a little B — basic assembler language. And the very first machine  
198 that we ever programmed, we also had the huge big plug panels where you load the piece of  
199 paper across and you had to plug the panels and then load your program in. And between the  
200 two of them it would do something. And I still have the cards and the printout from that  
201 program.

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**B: Hmm! I see. This didn't lead to a university degree?**

A: No, no. There were no university degrees to do in those ... back then. When I finished this course — I came third in the class — I said, “OK, what do I do now? A university degree?” “No, there aren't any. Go and do a maths degree.” I said, “I don't want to do a maths degree. I want to do a computer programming degree.” We'd already learnt three languages by that stage. Four languages. But ... then there's also the fact that every student in that course was sponsored by a company, so we didn't have to pay ... all our fees were paid. We had living scholarships. And also they were desperate to employ us, so they gave us good money when we left.

**B: I've been looking at your resume, trying to figure out how you went from industry into education. I see you started out after you got your ...**

A: OK, yeah. So after I finished this course, we graduated and then I worked in industry for five years. And I had met through hobbies — and the hobby at that stage was motor racing ... oh, I was also still refereeing netball and playing basketball — I met ... Hang on, no, I have to back up a bit here. It was somebody I met through work. The head programmer at one of the big companies I worked for. Yeah, we all got together in motor racing. And then I shifted to another company, because in those days people were head-hunting you all the time. And he had been doing some part-time teaching at Auckland Technical Institute. And I wasn't that overly happy with my ... the company I was working for, I was a systems analyst for this company. I wasn't overly happy with the company or the work we were doing.

And I had met Peter one day and he said, “Oh, I'm resigning from my teaching position. You'd make a good teacher. Why don't you apply for it, seeing I know that you're unhappy where you are?” So I did. I just applied for the job five years later. And I got it. But then this bossiness streak must have come out, or this natural teaching ability that runs in the family must have come out.

**B: I see. This is ...**

A: So I got the job with no teaching qualification, no undergraduate degree at that stage, although I was qualified in New Zealand's eyes because we have a different educational system that was, while not equivalent to a degree, it was certainly more than anybody that had a degree had, in terms of the fact that I had a computer programming qualification, as opposed to a math degree or something else. So they said, “Yes, please! Lots of experience, industry experience.” And I don't know where they picked up the teaching ability. Or maybe there weren't enough applicants for the job, who knows? Actually, that's something I never asked, did I? Maybe I was the only applicant for the job.

**B: So you seem to ...**

A: So I started teaching in 1972 at ATI, Auckland Technical Institute. And had two classes at that stage.

248

249 **B: Were you still working full-time?**

250

251 A: No, I totally stopped working and totally went into teaching in 1972. And then got very  
252 active in 1973 and 1974 on a national scale because by this stage computer programming  
253 courses were popping up all over the country. And we decided to try and coordinate it  
254 nationally and set up the very first New Zealand-wide certificate in data processing. We had  
255 to change the name later, of course, but in those days it was data processing. Keeping going?  
256

256

257 **B: Mm hmm.**

258 [20:12]

259 A: OK, so 1972 to 1974 I worked full-time at Auckland Technical Institute. At the end of 1974 I  
260 had my first baby, beautifully planned, oh, she wasn't that beautifully planned. But I really  
261 wanted her to be born in February, got pregnant a couple of months before I thought I would  
262 and she was born on the 30th of November. And they actually put me in hospital two weeks  
263 into November because of high blood pressure. So I thought, "Well, stuff you!" so I took all  
264 my marking [grading] into hospital because I was still teaching. So I took it all to hospital,  
265 did the marking. And they said, "OK, so you can go again," so went back to work. But that's  
266 the end of our semester, the end of our academic year, mid-November. So she ... when the  
267 academic year finished a week later, I had her and then went back to work in the February,  
268 teaching again. I taught all through 1975 part-time, I wasn't teaching full-time at that stage.  
269

270

270 And then at the beginning of 1976, I was almost teaching full-time in about May, May 1970  
271 ... sorry, try that again, Barbara, sorry. I was teaching part-time until up until May 1976. And  
272 in May 1976, they said, "Won't you please, please come back full-time?" but I realized I was  
273 pregnant again, so I said, "No." But still taught all part-time through all of 1976. And had my  
274 second child in January of 1977, which is in the middle of our big summer vacation. And ...  
275 did I go back in the beginning of 1977? Sometime in 1977 I went back (I don't know whether  
276 it was at start of the semester in February or not) and then taught right through to August  
277 1978. And we weren't on semesters then, we were on three terms. So we had a May break  
278 and an August break. And my third baby was due on the Saturday, the August break. We  
279 went on August vacation on the Friday and he was due on the Saturday. And I had a class at  
280 9 o'clock, two Mondays later, because it was a two-week break. And he was born at half past  
281 10 that Monday. He was two weeks late. So he was supposed to be planned for — he was  
282 supposed to be due in the holidays so I could go back, but I didn't. So that was the first time I  
283 had stopped teaching, was September 1978. And I didn't go back again until 1982 for family  
284 reasons — well, I had three children in three-and-a-half years. And my husband had just  
285 bought a business, so I helped him in the business until 1982.  
286

286

287 And in 1982, my next-door-neighbor was somebody that I had taught with at Auckland  
288 Technical University. He wasn't in computing, but I had taught with him. And he said, "Oh,  
289 we've just opened this new polytechnic and they've just started a computing course here.  
290 And the two people that they've got in have been sent away on training, teacher training."  
291 Everybody had to do a compulsory six weeks of teacher training if you'd come from  
292 industry. "Would you be interested in coming back just to cover for these twelve weeks while  
293 each of them goes away for this six-weeks training?" I said, "OK." It was a wee bit early for

294 me. I didn't really want to go back when my son was three-and-a-half [years old], I would  
295 really have liked to have waited until he was five years old and went to school. But the  
296 opportunity arose and at the time money was a huge issue. So I could see twelve weeks of  
297 good salary. So I went back to work and I went back for six weeks and stayed six years.  
298 Absolutely loved it.

299  
300 How much do you want me to go into non-professional stuff?

301  
302 **B: Well, mostly professional stuff. The interest, I think, in people looking at how, in part,**  
303 **how you're balancing things that is important. What other kind of things were taking**  
304 **your time and your interests. One of the things that would be interesting to people is**  
305 **that you didn't have the typical college degree that people had ...**

306  
307 A: No.

308  
309 **B: ... and yet you have ... when I look at your resume now, you've got a lot of research**  
310 **publications. You're a prime mover, and you'll address that in a while. But what I'm**  
311 **really interested in is how did you get from there to where you are now? Can you share**  
312 **sort of that path, because it's got to be terrifically interesting, how you ...**

313 [25:20]

314 A: Yeah. Well, I spent ... when I went back to work in 1982 the two oldest were at school and it  
315 was just my three-and-a-half year old that I had to get daycare for. But it wasn't too difficult,  
316 in that we had a garage, we sold petrol and did car repairs. And so some of the time [my son]  
317 Mark could spend at the garage with his dad. Although when he went to school I then got  
318 after-school care, somebody would come. The kids walked to school and walked home again.  
319 When they got home, somebody would come in after school to look after them. Plus, I also  
320 organized my — by this time I was doing the timetable — so I organized my own lecture  
321 time so that I had one day off a week. One day non-teaching a week. So you'd do your  
322 preparation and grading at home. So I'd work Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.  
323 Wednesdays would be an at-home day for me.

324  
325 I was also at this stage moving up the ranks as a basketball referee to ... actually, I was  
326 playing! I was ... I still represented our ... played in a representative team. And started to  
327 referee then and was starting to move up the ranks, probably a bit too quickly. Not quickly  
328 enough for me at the time, but looking back, probably a bit too quickly. When they see  
329 somebody coming along who can control a men's national league game, you tended to be  
330 promoted and pushed a bit, so that was good.

331  
332 And also a marriage that I wanted to get out of very quickly. But it took me seven years to  
333 get out of it. When I went back to work I was totally ... I'm searching for the right word here  
334 ... my ex-husband, or my first husband, had totally taken away any self-esteem or self-belief  
335 that I had, so I went back to work totally amazed that people believed things that I said,  
336 because I had absolutely no belief in my own ability at that stage. He had taken that all away  
337 from me. I have to add in here at some stage, because that's an enormous part of my growing  
338 up during that stage, for years and years and years he called me fat, dumb, and ugly, and I  
339 believed him. So when you're told something like that for so long. you actually believe it. I



340 really believed I was really dumb and I had nothing to offer. And I went back to work and all  
341 my colleagues would ask me questions and I'd answer them because I knew the answers.  
342 And they would say "Thank you" and walk away. And I'd be standing there open-mouthed  
343 that they believed me.

344  
345 So how did I get where I am today? Well, I ... in 1988 I finally got rid of that first husband  
346 and found another one and shifted to another town. I was ... I suppose it would be the  
347 equivalent of the chair of the department by the time I left in 1987. And in 1988 I went to a  
348 new school just as a lecturer, an academic staff member, as faculty. And I absolutely loved  
349 going back into the classroom. I absolutely adored it. And I loved the students. I was getting  
350 huge success from my students. They were topping national exams and international exams,  
351 so I was having great success with my teaching. And then a couple of years later I was made  
352 chair of the department. But I was also very — still active, or became active, from 1986 — in  
353 creating a new nationwide qualification in computing. And I chaired that national committee  
354 from 1990 to 2002. I was on it from 1986 to 2000, and from 2000 — sorry, 1986 to 1990 —  
355 and from 1990 to 2002, I chaired the national committee.

356 [29:49]

357 **B: Would you explain a little bit about this qualification and ... to people who would be**  
358 **looking at that and wouldn't quite understand what that education is about?**

359  
360 A: OK. In New Zealand we have two types of tertiary education, the polytechnic sector and the  
361 university sector. The polytechnic sector is more geared to vocational, it's more industry-  
362 driven, than the pureness of the university sector. Now, twenty years later, they're merging a  
363 lot more. So the polytechnic sector can give degrees. And in New Zealand, you have five  
364 years of secondary school and a three-year degree, five years of high school and a three-year  
365 degree. So you still get your eight years but you do it in five-and-three rather than four-and-  
366 four. And the ... we know what the equivalents are, because there's some ... there are  
367 international comparison journals printed. So that when we're trying to do cross-credits of  
368 American students coming to New Zealand or English students, we know what the  
369 equivalents are. So the last year in high school is the equivalent of the US first year at  
370 college.

371  
372 So what we did nationally is we set up a three-year national diploma in business computing.  
373 Now, we debated the name. We didn't want to call it computer science. We ... I don't know  
374 why the word "business" got in there, but it did. And we set it up so that all of the twenty  
375 polytechnics in the country would be teaching the same curriculum. And as a national body,  
376 we looked after the curriculum and kept it up-to-date. But you could then very easily move  
377 between schools because you were doing all the same curriculum. And that national body,  
378 called the National ... (NACCQ) ... the National Advisory Committee on Computing  
379 Qualifications is still going today. And it still looks after the content. We do a lot of  
380 moderation between institutes. So you would send, every year, you'd send in the ... all your  
381 assessment items, and they're looked at to make sure that the levels are exactly correct so  
382 that we're not ... one school is not teaching way above or way below the rest of the country.  
383 So all the levels are correct.

384  
385 And it's at that national body that we have set up big research programs. Because if we are

386 teaching in the degree area, then we must be doing research in that area. So from 1990  
387 onwards, when I was very active in the national association, seeking out and implementing  
388 the qualifications — because we had to do it one year at a time — we also started to set up  
389 research. Now, I also ran the national conference for ... too many years — I chaired it for 12  
390 years. And at that stage I saw it evolve and found ... and looked internationally at what was  
391 happening in computing education throughout the world and tried to put that into our national  
392 conference. Now that sounds like I'm behind the rest of the world, and I'd actually debate  
393 now and argue that that national conference is as good — if not leading, in a lot of areas —  
394 education conferences throughout the rest of the world.

395  
396 So during the mid-1990s I started to introduce a whole lot of new things into the conference.  
397 Now, I didn't have a huge conference committee and I persuaded them anyway to put the  
398 things I wanted to into it. Because none of them were looking beyond their own schools  
399 enough, I felt. So I had a huge national overview, because I was chairing the national  
400 committee. And I knew all the chairs of departments throughout the whole country. I could  
401 probably name most of the faculty in every school throughout the country as well. Because  
402 this was all new, they were looking to people for advice. So two or three times a week I'd get  
403 a telephone call from some school in the country saying, "Oh! How do you teach such and  
404 such?" or "I'm having trouble assessing such and such. How do you do it?" And I'd know  
405 somebody that was doing it. And I'd be able to put them on or guide them in how to teach,  
406 how to moderate, or what little of the assessment that they should be using. And if I couldn't  
407 do it, I would certainly know somebody that was doing it.

408  
409 I was also very active and led the curriculum development of each of these three years of the  
410 qualification. Wrote a lot of the curriculum myself. And then thought, "Right, we've got that  
411 in place, now we have to look at the research as well." So started myself writing ... writing  
412 up what we'd been doing in computing education. At that stage I introduced the very first  
413 degree program into my own school ... the very first degree program in computing in the  
414 country outside the traditional university sector. And I introduced that very first one into my  
415 own school. So once we had that in place, we had to start building the research that supported  
416 that degree teaching. So I myself started doing research, started publishing, and then thought,  
417 "Gosh, I can't just do this myself. I have to have my own faculty and my own school doing  
418 it. And I also have to have the whole country doing it. Because it's no good just us doing it.  
419 The whole country has to do it!" Bossy old me again. So I said, "Right-o, this is what you're  
420 going to do. Now how are we going to do this? And we're going to do this properly!"

421 [35:35]

422 And at this stage I had met this absolutely wonderful colleague called Tony Clear and who  
423 had come through a very different path. He had Master's degrees in Latin and Old English  
424 and Icelandic and languages, but had done a heap of research. He'd got into computing as a  
425 second career, but was able to adapt the research that he had done for his classics career into  
426 computing. Plus I had my own colleagues. So we got together and thought, "OK, if we're  
427 doing this — and we can do this — we've got to get the rest of the country doing this as  
428 well!" So we set up "Getting started in research" workshops. And we ran our first one —  
429 national one — in 1998, a two-day workshop. We got everybody in the country to come  
430 together in Wellington. We ran this two-day workshop on getting started in research. We still  
431 run them now. I don't know if we'll run any in 2006, but we certainly ran them in 2005. And

432 we've run them anything from two days — two-day ones and one-day ones that we've run.  
433 And then we've run part two of getting started in research, you know: how to publish, where  
434 to publish, how to write, how to get your own faculty motivated to do research.  
435

436 And we've actually increased the research output. We had to create our own journal, there  
437 were no journals in New Zealand in computing. There was ... the computer society had one,  
438 but it was ... it seems to have faded away. And it was not very good anyway; I didn't even  
439 like what they published. So we created our own one. And we publish at least twice a year  
440 and have done for six years. And we have also ... the conference itself has evolved. It has  
441 evolved from eighteen years ago, when we discussed curriculum and how we teach, to now,  
442 fully refereed research papers. We've had fully refereed research papers for the last six years.  
443 Prior to that we might have accepted on abstract and they weren't fully refereed. But about  
444 1999 we decided, "Right, they're going to be fully referred papers now, double-blind  
445 refereed," and we've had papers like that ever since. And each year we've raise the bar and  
446 we've raised it again for 2006. I always keep my fingers crossed that on last submission date,  
447 the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, everything will be ... we will know if we raised the bar too high. Wide  
448 variety of research papers. Much wider — I've just been at the ITiCSE planning meeting —  
449 much wider than the ITiCSE papers. Twenty-four of their forty papers are all on CS1 and  
450 CS2. Ours are much wider variety than that. So we've got our journal. We've got our  
451 national conference. We have international speakers at our conference every year, some  
452 absolutely fabulous speakers we've had in the past, keynote speakers. Hopefully this year  
453 will be just as good.  
454

455 And along all of that, in 1997 I changed jobs again and I left that other town that I was in, in  
456 that school, to go back to where I was in 1982 — to Unitec. It had changed its name in that  
457 time, but Unitec in New Zealand was always seen as the leading, the most proactive, the  
458 most leading-edge and innovative school in the country. And I got to be the chair of  
459 department. In New Zealand it's [the chair's position] not a ... cyclic? In the States it can  
460 change every three years or however many years. In New Zealand, it's a permanent [tenured]  
461 position that you go to. And it's one that is highly sought after. And I got the Unitec chair in  
462 1997. Very, very excited.  
463

464 **B: I see. Could you ... tell me a little bit ...**

465  
466 A: Would you like me to explain?  
467

468 **B: Yeah, that's fascinating. I'm sure that ... we'd kind of like to know something about**  
469 **your attitude toward research. I mean, we know you value it. Your own research. Are**  
470 **you finding that exciting, are you engaged in it now? And are you still teaching?**

471 [40:06]

472 A: OK. I haven't taught for the last two years. Prior to that I taught on the Master's program in  
473 instructional design and interactive learning, because in the ... while I was doing all this, I  
474 also got very involved in multimedia in the mid ... in the early 1990s, when it was just  
475 emerging. And it was something that, all of a sudden, after years and years of cutting code,  
476 something that really inspired me again. And I did a post-graduate diploma in computer-  
477 based learning at that stage. First time I had done educational psychology-type papers.

478

479 Sorry, I've lost my track, Barbara.

480

481 **B: We were talking about whether you were still teaching and ...**

482

483 A: Was I still teaching. Two years ago was the last time I actually taught a class and it was in  
484 the Master's program in instructional design and interactive learning. And I haven't ... I've  
485 done, I've supervised our capstone projects. Our undergraduate degree ends with a capstone  
486 project, and so I've supervised those. But last year, in the 2005 academic year and the 2006  
487 academic year, I won't be teaching though.

488

489 Now, I was a very prolific researcher and publisher up until 2005 and I had a slow year last  
490 year. And I'm going to get started again. All inspired to do research again this year. I think  
491 one of the things as the chair is that you should lead by example. And I'd certainly led by  
492 example up until 2005. And pulled along people, faculty with me, who can now take over  
493 that mentoring role for younger faculty.

494

495 **B: I see. I noticed on your resume that you have an honorary Ph.D. Do you have any plan  
496 of getting a true Ph.D.? You do all this research ...**

497

498 A: It was certainly been on the back burner for the last year. Maybe I might get inspired again,  
499 but nothing will happen until June when ... I won't even think about it until June of this year.

500

501 **B: I see. One of the things you have alluded to: you've created professional organizations  
502 almost, it sounds like. Is that right?**

503

504 A: Yep.

505

506 **B: Professional organizations seem to mean a lot to you and to your career.**

507

508 A: Yes.

509

510 **B: Do you want to ...**

511

512 A: Yes they do. The national organization where we had a national curriculum, where we made  
513 sure that everybody was teaching to the same standard and level was very, very important.  
514 And we created an enormously supportive structure through all the schools in the country  
515 where this could happen without any of them feeling bad about it. So we know if you  
516 graduate with this qualification from this school, it's exactly the same as graduating from  
517 Unitec.

518

519 **B: But you're now involved internationally.**

520

521 A: And now involved internationally. Yes. And that's important to me, too. To make sure that  
522 we can have that standard nationally and we know that it's the same as an international  
523 standard. New Zealand are two tiny islands at the bottom of the Pacific. We're very, very

524 isolated. And I want to make sure that any graduate coming out of New Zealand can hold  
525 their heads up and be held to an equivalent or better standard than the rest of the world.  
526

527 **B: I see. Can you think ... you've talked about challenges that you had with your own**  
528 **personal life, and handling a career, and juggling those kind of things. And you also**  
529 **mentioned something that is one of our wrap-up questions, actually. Is if you had to do**  
530 **everything over again, is there one choice you made that you would have done**  
531 **differently, either academic or career-wise?**

532

533 A: If I had my whole life over again?

534

535 **B: Mmm hmm.**

536

537 A: Very easy to look back and say ... oh yes, yes, I'd have gone into medicine.

538

539 **B: We would probably have lost a lot had you done it, but ...**

540

541 A: Well ...

542

543 **B: ... I can understand.**

544

545 A: Yes, that's what I would have done.

546

547 **B: You also talked about some outside interests. That you were interested in basketball —**  
548 **netball — and motor car racing and ... Are there ... do you currently have some**  
549 **outside interests that ... ?**

550 [44:47]

551 A: No, sorry. Just to tell the tape there was lots and lots of smiling happening then. And that's  
552 because I've been so involved in my career in the last few years that my father told me I get  
553 stressed because I don't have a hobby. And it just made me laugh when I think of all that  
554 stress that I went through last year and he says, "Your problem is you don't have a hobby." A  
555 few years ago I got injured and I have a permanent knee injury. And that's when I had to stop  
556 refereeing immediately. Now, I was at the end of my career when I got the knee injury, so it  
557 wasn't like it was starting out and I'd have to ... I had surgery on it and they said, "No, give  
558 it all away." I wasn't ready to give it away in my head, and it took my head a long time to get  
559 over that.

560

561 So do I still have hobbies? I'm still involved in watching my son-in-law referee at an  
562 international level. He was my first protégé referee and now he's my son-in-law. So, while I  
563 don't actually have or I'm putting ... I'm only involved in basketball as a spectator now  
564 when he referees. I had a ... my youngest, my younger son was a national basketball player,  
565 spent two years in the States, playing at high school level. He also has exactly the same knee  
566 injury now and he can't play again — oh, at a professional level, he had to give up at that  
567 level.

568

569 So really the last eight years, six years has been really dedicated to my career and building

570 that. And yes, the Ph.D. — well, a professional doctorate — was on the list then, but Tony’s  
571 has taken priority. And that is, in my head, a good excuse not to have to do it.

572

573 **B: I see. One of the questions that never came up except in your early expectations of what**  
574 **a woman does in terms of your mother. Have you felt any ... how have you felt as a**  
575 **woman going through these career steps, has it been any different from what you**  
576 **perceive men going through the same career steps might have had?**

577

578 A: Absolutely. I had three children in three-and-a-half years. The first two were ... I had to go to  
579 the infertility clinic, so they were both with the aid of fertility drugs. The third one was a  
580 huge surprise from nowhere. He’s my Immaculate Conception baby. But I had three children  
581 in three-and-a-half years. I had a career as a teacher that I absolutely loved, because I got  
582 such huge satisfaction out of it and my students did so well on national exams. Remember  
583 the one year that the student won the international exam, I was just over the moon because I  
584 thought, “Yep, that’s what the satisfaction’s all about, isn’t it?” To actually to see the penny  
585 drop, particularly when you’re teaching introductory programming and all of a sudden you  
586 see, “Oh, wow, I’ve got this!” and off they go. That just gives me enormous satisfaction as a  
587 teacher.

588

589 Now I had that, I had three children in three-and-a-half years, I had a failing marriage, and a  
590 business that could have been good but my ex-husband decided that sailing was much more  
591 important than running the business and let it fade away. And I had to juggle it. I got no  
592 support at home with child care. I got no support at home with bringing up the children. My  
593 children were very active. My daughter was a national gymnast, rhythmic gymnast, and  
594 played netball. My sons played rugby and went to all their activities as well — that’s before  
595 they started playing basketball. And I thought ... I didn’t want them to not have the things  
596 that — or the parental support — to do their things. So I would take them to all of their  
597 activities that they went to. My daughter went to ballet as well and I took her to all those  
598 things. Took my sons to all of their things with no other parental help, because he was off  
599 doing his own thing. No wonder I left him.

600

601 So yes, I did find it difficult because my other colleagues were just able to go and do ... and  
602 keep their career going. They didn’t have to worry about, “Oh, we have to go to Wellington  
603 all day on the plane.” You know, it’s a plane ride away, to a national meeting. Who’s going  
604 to look after the children after school? So I’d have to organize after-school care because I  
605 knew I wouldn’t be home until 7 o’clock that night, when the plane got back in and I drove  
606 back through the traffic. Very lucky, of course, that being in education I had the school  
607 holidays off, sort of. You’d still have work to do, but at least you could do it at home.

608 [50:00]

609 **B: Well, as we wrap this up, is there advice you would give to a young woman thinking**  
610 **about a career in computing and especially computing education? Any words of**  
611 **wisdom looking back on your career for that young woman?**

612

613 A: Go for it. Go for it because it’s enormously satisfying. Especially in education, too, if you are  
614 having a family you have the opportunity of vacation time the same time as the children have  
615 off school, especially over the summer. I think education is enormously satisfying and it does

616 suit a family life more than a career in the industry, where you don't have that vacation time,  
617 you know, the time with the children. I also think it is important that I did go back to work to  
618 show my children how important education was. And they all have degrees now. Two of  
619 them looking at post-graduate. But it also showed them that having an education was  
620 enormously important and that I was dedicated to their education. So my advice is go for it.  
621

622 **B: Go for it. I see. Is there one story you would like to leave us with? Any story you can**  
623 **think of that you can tell so that ... ?**

624  
625 A: I'd like to think about that and leave you with something absolutely amazingly brilliant, but I  
626 can't think of it at the moment. What I don't want to lose is those early years in the 1960s  
627 when we were writing in assembler. I don't want to lose in my memory those panels that I  
628 plugged all those years ago. And the hand punches that we used. Somehow I'd like that  
629 preserved. It's not a story, but it's something I'd like preserved. I also ... the thing I'm  
630 probably most proud of, so this could be a story, is making sure that New Zealand at the  
631 bottom of the Pacific is actually as good as anywhere in the world because of the national  
632 things that we've set up to make sure that we do compare. And we're continually ...  
633 continuously comparing and making sure that we are as good as the rest of the world.  
634

635 **B: Well. I thank you very much for sharing today. Thank you Alison. And this has been a**  
636 **pleasure. I've learned a lot ...**

637  
638 A: Have you? Oh cool.

639  
640 **B: ... and I'm sure that the people listening will also thank you.**

641 **[52:38]**