



David Tebbutt

Interviewed by

Jane Bird

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Via Zoom

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology where we capture the past and inspire the future. It's Wednesday 20th April 2022 and we're talking on Zoom as has become customary during the coronavirus pandemic. I'm Jane Bird and I've reported on technology and the IT and telecoms industries for newspapers such as The Sunday Times and the Financial Times since the early 1980s. Our contributor today is David Tebbutt, a freelance business and technology writer who joined the IT industry in 1965 and has been writing about it since the late 1970s. David began as a programmer, going on to become an analyst, then trainer, then rose through the ranks of management hierarchy in data processing and project management roles. In the late 1970s he moved onto business and technology writing, becoming editor of Personal Computer World magazine where he chronicled the launches of the IBM PC and the Osborne 1. Among the many topics David has written about in addition to IT are the environment, green energy, ageing, leisure and happiness. He is currently writing a book about the future. He has also run his own company, focussed on PC business productivity tools and has been a consultant to the Science Museum.

David, welcome. I'm very much looking forward to hearing more about your experiences and insights into the world of technology and where we're heading.

Thank you for the glowing introduction. [laughs] Makes me sound like more than I am, but it's all true!

Great. Well, if we could start at the beginning. You were born in Woolwich, I think, in November...

I'm afraid so.

... '43. So how were your early years? Did you have a happy childhood?

I had a strange childhood. I would say it was largely happy, yes. But, God, what can I say? I mean my very early years were in Bomb Alley, you know, we were next to the Woolwich Arsenal where we lived so Hitler was always throwing bombs at us and they used to miss the Arsenal but hit the houses, so my parents lost the house, a bomb landed in their front garden, a V-2 rocket landed a street over and showered my cot

with glass. But we were out, fortunately. So that was prior to my memory, but then we moved to Bexleyheath, which then was in Kent, and moved into a little chalet bungalow, which was jolly nice, and life was good, the schools were good fun, I enjoyed school at that time. And the downside at that time was my mum was taken ill several times and she'd disappear for months on end, you know, nine months or whatever. So each time she came back, I can remember three times, and that probably was all it was, but I kept thinking that she was somebody different. So in that sense I had a bit of a sort of fractured childhood where I went to stay – I can't remember who I stayed with – two times, cannot, I've got no memory of it at all, but the third time I stayed with my cousin and her family and that was glorious, because I liked my uncle and auntie. And my uncle used to play the piano on Sunday mornings, classical music, and I lay in bed and I can't think of any happier time in my childhood than when I was listening to that music downstairs, and then I had my cousins to play with when I got up. So, is that enough about my childhood?

Yes. I mean we'd like to hear about your schooling as well, because you were state educated.

I was.

But you, so you did go to grammar school, so...

I did.

... how was that? It sounds like you had a bit of a mixed experience there.

Yeah. Okay, well first of all I went to nursery and all I can remember about that is playing with Shippam paste bottles and bowls of water, I enjoyed that, and sleeping on camp beds in the open air. So that was like my pre-school nursery experience and I remember that to a certain extent. My junior school was lovely, I used to just, you know, I used to do well in everything, you know. And it was a nice school, we spent, I think we spent two years at a place called Bedonwell Road and then we had to go out to a place called Bedwell, which was in Belvedere in Kent, for one year and then we came back. And then the next step was doing the scholarship, as it was called

then, the eleven-plus now, in Middlesex anyway. And I turfed up at home at playtime and my mum said, well, you're supposed to be doing your scholarship. I said, I've done it. And she said, you can't have done. I said, yeah, I have. So then they're on tenterhooks wondering what's going to happen. And course I got the scholarship and went to Dartford Grammar, which was a boys' school, all-boys school, probably its most famous pupil is Mick Jagger. He was, his birthday's in July and mine's in November so he was in the year above me. I never met him, never had anything to do with him. So, and it had cadets, you know, like they had a cadet...

[00:05:56]

Yeah.

... thing where they all polished guns at breaktimes and pulled bits of string – no, not string – well, string with cloth attached, oiled cloth through the barrels and I thought, who wants to do that sort of thing? And some of the teachers were a bit sort of ex-army and they'd strut around and insist on being called Major this and Major that, and it was all not to my liking at all, I'd been used to a mixed school up to that point and I just detested it. However, I did love English and I loved maths. I didn't do very well at maths, that's for sure, but I didn't like the teacher. But anyway, I ended up, if I didn't leave I was probably going to get thrown out, because I used to get negative marks in exams for bad writing, so it was not a happy year. But then we moved to Middlesex, my dad's work took him to work in central London, opposite BBC in Portland Place, I can't remember what it's called. So we moved to Middlesex, so I entered the school system, the grammar school system there, and because in Kent we took the scholarship at nine and started grammar school at ten, in Middlesex they started at eleven. So I arrived, full of these useless marks from Dartford Grammar, and I did the first year again. [laughs] Which was rather good, because it made up for all the things that I'd cocked up at Dartford Grammar. And it was a mixed school, which added to the pleasure. So I had a jolly good time at that school. Unfortunately my jolly good time didn't stretch to homework and stuff so I only came out with a clutch of five GCEs. But, you know, they were English and maths, as you might expect, and a couple of other subjects. Well, French included, just in case we end up getting on to that. And then I went out to work. Well, in fact, what I did, I took my

French GCSE in the morning while I was doing A levels, but I didn't carry on with the A levels, I did my French GCSE in the morning and I went up to the headmaster at lunchtime and I said, well, I'll be off then. He said, what? I said, well, you know, I've just done my last exam, there's no point staying. You know, this was June 28th 1961, and I said, there's no point staying, you know, I've done all I'm going to do. But you've got to stay till the end of... I said, I'm not going to. Anyway, I start a job in a couple of hours, and off I went to get the job - I'd already got the job - as an ice-cream man. So off I went and that was the start of my working life, the afternoon of the day I took my last exam I started work as an ice-cream man.

So how did your parents feel about that, because they were not highly educated themselves, were they, and had sort of tried to put pressure on you to do well academically, or where do, how was it?

Er well... I think they just gave up and let me do whatever I wanted to do, would be the best way to describe it. They probably didn't hold, I mean they liked the fact that their son went to a grammar school and he was obviously intelligent, but I don't think, well, it was either going to be war between us or keep the peace, and I suspect they opted for keeping the peace.

Right, yeah.

And, you know, there were other things I was interested in, I was in the scouts, I liked cycling, running, swimming, you know, I mean lots of things that I did as a human being, really, probably compensated for all the things I didn't do as an academic. God, I've never said that before.

[00:10:18]

So, what, and you had an adopted sister, is that right?

Yeah, my uncle managed to produce a child while he was stationed in Italy, well, in Sicily actually, and the mother was a bit of a ne'er do well [laughs], so they talked about it and they decided that the child would have a better life in England. So he

came home carting this baby with him and so she went to stay with the Smith family, who had a daughter called Jacqueline, and Jacqueline loved having a little sister, she thought it was the most wonderful thing. But for reasons that I don't know and I never enquired, they- oh, I know, he wanted her back into his family and my parents had offered to adopt her legally. So this child, who was called Emma Robe, that was her birthname, became Rita Tebbutt – God knows why. Well, I know why the Tebbutt bit, but not the Rita bit, and she stayed with us until her dad got married again. So that was, I think she was probably eight then, so she'd been with us since she was one until she was eight, and then she went and lived with them and the new, the stepmother beat her and so she took refuge with my nan and that all got a bit much for my nan because she ended up being with her much more than she was with the stepmother, because she was avoiding her at all costs. So my parents said, okay, well, she can come back to us. So she came back to us and she was a teenager before she decided – oh, and her father had split up with this woman – so she decided that she'd go back and try living with her dad, but she ended up living with my nan for a little while and then she got work and then she bought – she didn't buy a flat – she rented a flat in Highgate and she started a completely independent life then, much later. We kept in touch all through her life, she died a few years ago. And she actually ended up, she found Jackie, you know, the one that she lived with when she was a baby, and Jackie by then had moved to America, and so Emma went to America, she worked in America, Jackie went to Canada, so Emma went to Canada and there she stayed until...

I thought you said she was called Rita?

Sorry?

I thought you said she was called Rita, or she...

Oh yeah, yeah. She got her birthname back while she was in America or in Canada, one of them. Sorry, I should have explained. But you're quite right, well done. [laughs] Yeah, so she ended up Emma. I mean everybody, I don't know what was up with everybody, they... nobody really gave her the time of day, which I think is cruel. Because she wasn't particularly bright, my parents especially, they looked down on

her and her, I mean she achieved things, but to their mind they weren't real achievements, they were pretend achievements, which sort of gives you an idea of the situation, let's put it that way.

[00:14:11]

So at this stage in your life then, have you had any – you've left school, you've just taken your French GCSE – I mean have there been any influential sort of mentors that have really kind of guided you in a particular direction, or are you just kind of following your own path?

No, okay. Well, let's just clear out the first few years, because I was an ice-cream man, a bread van salesman, a trainee quantity surveyor, a cardboard box specification clerk and then designer. So all of that, get that out the way. So you could say that was drifting, really. So then I went to, I decided I'd go round the world. So I had no plan, but I just took off. And the first stop was Paris, and I quite liked it there and I was also, after a little while, confident enough with my French to actually start speaking French all day every day, which was quite nice. I ended up with a job as a receptionist in a hospital there, so that was my sort of French period, that was about five months, or just under. And I came back to England, I thought, well, I'll go back to France after Christmas – I came back late November – and again, I hated being out of work, so I got a job in Bentall's, which is a department store, selling menswear. And I didn't have a lot of money so I used to walk home sometimes from Ealing to Greenford, which is not that far, it's a few miles. And this particular day I was walking through Greenford and the heavens opened, it absolutely tipped down. So I went into a building, office building, and sat down, and the receptionist said, you can't sit there. I said, why not? She said, well, you just can't. And I said, well, can I sit here till the rain stops? And she said no. And I said, well, I don't want to go out in the rain, would you want to go out in the rain? She said, no. I said, okay, I'm going to sit here then. And she said no, I'm going to have to get the commissionaire. So this bloke with all buttons and epaulettes and everything tried to throw me out and I repeated the process with him. And then he said, I'm going to have to get a manager. And I said okay, get a manager then. So this guy came down, his name was Philip Maylor, and he said, well, you know, you just can't stay here, you know, you've been

asked politely, he said, well, I'm not going to be impolite, he said, but you really must go. I said, well, what do you do here anyway? And he said, oh, we make adding machines, accounting machines, cash registers and computers. Ah, I said, what's a computer? He said, no, come on, he said, you're just playing for time. I said, no I'm not, I'm really interested. Tell me about computers. He said, do you really want to know? And I said, yeah. He said, come back tomorrow, he said, at 11 o'clock. So I did, I went back and he gave me an aptitude test, he said, this is a programmer's aptitude test. Oh, he'd explained about computers a bit. This is a programmer's aptitude test, do you want to take it? I said, yeah. So he sat me down, he said, you've got ninety minutes, I'll bring in a cup of tea or coffee or whatever you want at half-time, see how you're getting on. So that was that. Half-time came, I'd already done the test, checked my answers, folded it up and left it on the desk. And he said, oh, what's gone wrong? I said, nothing. I said, I've finished. You can't have finished. I said, I did, yeah, I finished. Well, if I take this away there's no going back, you know. I said, that's alright, you take it away. He said, have you checked your answers? I said, yes. So off he went and he came back and his face was the colour of my shirt, the one I've got on now, beetroot. And I said, what's wrong? He said, you got a hundred per cent. So that was the start, that was my first influencer in IT, was Philip Maylor, and then they realised, they asked me about my background and it was so shambolic, they were terrified of taking me on. So the next important man was Basil Garsed. He was another big boss at NCR in Greenford, and he decided to take a risk on me, and they roped in all sorts of other people for other interviews. Anyway, after eleven interviews I got the job. So...

It was NCR, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. So I started as a programmer 3rd January 1966. And so that was the start. So then...

Hang on. So yeah, you literally had not encountered any kind of computer before that? Well, you wouldn't have done then, I suppose, because there were no home computers at that stage.

Well, my company, my cardboard box factory, they had ordered one just before I left, but somebody else had got the job of being in charge, not that I was ever up for it. So I thought, well, I don't know what it's all about, but it's not for me, and off I went.

[00:19:33]

So how were those early years then...

Brilliant.

... working your way up through programming and...

It was absolutely totally brilliant, I loved it. And my first proper bit of programming was writing the demonstration suite for their main showroom for the computer, so what I didn't realise, I'd written a control program, or an operating system or whatever you call it, but at a very low level, but it would fire up different peripherals at the console operator's request. They'd press a button and up would go the printer or the tape drive or the punch card thing, and do stuff and it would all appear on the, either printed out on the console or on the printer, or if you were clever you could read the control panel lights on the front of the machine. So it was a way of demonstrating all the different functions of the machine to anybody that was interested in buying one. So...

And this had only 2.4k bytes of memory, is that right?

It did indeed, yeah. It had 400 12-digit, let's call them cells, or words, call them words, and each word had all the elements of an instruction or data, and they were all sort of interchangeable how you used those 400 cells. And so, because it was twelve digits, each digit was only half a byte, because you could get nought to nine in half a byte. So that's where the 2,400 comes from. And yeah, it was great. And then I joined a department which sold computers into businesses, so each time they sold a computer they'd send me in for six months, so I don't know what the computer cost. I mean my salary was £900 a year, so it cost them £450 to put me in for six months, well, plus overheads, and the machines at the time I think were, machines themselves,

were about 15,000. So it was a sort of minor additional cost to get me to write payrolls, sales accounting, stock control, whatever was needed, I'd write every program from scratch. Never occurred to me to reuse what I'd written previously. So it was all highly bespoke to each company, so I did a few of those and then I did, well, yeah, that was the end of that period. It was just huge fun, massive amounts of learning. In terms of people who inspired me, Tom Day was the only one I can remember, he was one of the tutors at Greenford. Because we went through quite a few courses to learn how to do all these things...

Which company was this that you were...

It's all NCR so far.

Oh, it's still NCR.

All NCR all the way. I stayed with NCR... oh, I don't know how many years. 1966, probably... no, can't remember. It'll become clear later when I actually escaped...

You went over to Fabergé and Danasco and...

Yeah, yeah. They were post-NCR. So well, there we go, we can work it out now, can't we, thank you. My first child was born in 1971 so I left NCR in 1970, there you go. So that was all '66 to '70, but I put in three, three systems and I couldn't... can I tell you who they were? Fabergé was one, DER was another one. That was the TV rental company. Oh, I know, Conduit Bureau. Conduit Bureau was my first one, that was a bureau, you know, agency, staff agency thing, based in York House in Wembley. And the reason I mention that is many years later my daughter was working in York House, Wembley on the same floor as I installed the two computers, and she met her husband there, her future husband, in that office, on that floor.

Amazing.

Astonishing, yeah. Also, Conduit Bureau got me back freelance while I was still at NCR and I had thirteen people working for me doing their accounts out of hours and

we saved up enough in three months to buy a house, or to put a deposit on a house. So York House has a lot to answer for in my life. Because I had Sylvie operating one computer and me operating the other one and then if one of them went wrong, or if hers went wrong, I switched over and looked after hers while she switched over and carried on working on mine, so we just kept the whole thing going. And we saved Conduit Bureau from a lot of trouble. They were so far behind with their invoicing and therefore a lot of money, that's what we were all in there for. The other eleven were all operating either punch card machines or – it might have been punch card, it might have been punch paper tape, can't remember – or they were filing and un-filing magnetic ledger cards. So... so that was NCR.

[00:26:03]

So since 1970 I left NCR, I went into Fabergé because their DP manager left and I think I probably thought this was a career move, but it clearly wasn't because this was the first time I encountered stress at a high level. I reported to the financial director who wanted me to do certain things. He reported to the managing director, in my mind anyway, so if the managing director came and asked me to do something, I figured that trumped the financial director. And I would try and do what the managing director asked, and then the financial director'd come in and say what are you doing? I'd say, well I'm doing this for the managing director. Well, you stop doing that and start doing this for me. So I start doing that and then the managing director'd come in and say, why aren't you doing my job? Stress. And I don't remember this, but Sylvie, my wife, she said you were banging your head against the wall, literally, to try and, you know, unstress yourself. But she said in the end she called a doctor, a locum, and he prescribed Valium. And I said no, I'm not going to take Valium, I'm going to resign, so I quit. And my salesman at NCR said ah, I've got another company here needs an installation, and that was Danasco. So – oh, Phil Murphy, there you go, there's another influencer. Phil was my salesman throughout all the commercial sales and my subsequent first two freelancing. So there was Fabergé, which I did, I got out straightaway, and then Danasco, that was fine, that was great, I just installed a complete system for them. And while I was doing that, I applied for a job at Givaudan and I got it. So that was, that was the start of a decent few years as a data processing manager, as they were called then. And that was what

you'd expect. It was accounts, it was payroll, it was stock control, yeah, all the usual bits and bobs.

Yeah, yeah.

So, then what happened? Ah, then we had the three-day week, we had the oil, I think it was called the oil crisis, wasn't it?

Yeah.

And the rise of the environmental things, I joined the Soil Association, I joined the Intermediate Technology Development Group, that was Ernst Schumacher's outfit. He was the guy who wrote *Small is Beautiful*. There was John and Sally Seymour who wrote the living... *Self-sufficiency*, that was the book. All these things interested me and our company relied on oil as its raw material, so I was getting a bit agitated generally about nuclear power and all that sort of stuff was all sort of a bit questionable. And I read a book called *The Spoilt Earth* and all these things got me thinking that I really ought to dedicate my life to spreading the word about what is now called environmentalism and when I think...

Sorry, when you say your company relied on oil, which company are we talking about now?

[00:29:59]

Givaudan.

Givaudan.

Yeah. Its raw material was oil, it turned it into flavours, perfumes, colours, industrial chemicals, whatever. And so I thought, but I can't go out spreading the word unless I learn how to communicate, so I thought I'd better get a job as a teacher or as a trainer and use that as a way of learning to teach. So the first one was a company, Allied Business Systems, in Mitcham. So I turfed up on the first day and the boss, the bloke

who'd hired me, he'd fallen off his motorbike and he'd injured his ankle and he was in hospital and we didn't know what work was scheduled or anything, so we got somebody, one of the mechanics at the company to break into his desk. And there were two things in there, one is a schedule which said that we were starting a programming, a course, it was a, I don't know what it... I don't know if it was an operator's course or a programmer's course, can't remember. It was called DOS, bit ahead of its time, Disk Operating System, so it was to teach people that. Neither of us, there were two trainers, one had joined a few weeks before me, and we're looking at this and we're saying, bloody hell, you know, this course is scheduled for next Monday, who's going to run it? He said, I'm not. I said, alright, I'll do it. So...

Why were you so worried, because you didn't know what DOS was or...?

No, because I'd never taught before.

Because you'd never taught. So you knew the content, you just didn't know teaching?

I didn't know the content for that machine, but I figured I could learn that in the week. As long as I was a day or two ahead of the students I'd get away with it. So anyway, that was the first bit of paper out, so we'd agreed that I was going to do it. Next bit of paper was one from the boss boss saying, do not hire David Tebbutt.

Really?

Yeah, it was an internal memo that had gone to the bloke who fell off his motorbike, and he hadn't acted on it. And I said, oh, we'll just ignore that. So I ran a course for Thorn EMI, or Thorn Electrical – it was one of the Thorns anyway – based in Enfield, and I ran this course and every time I got stuck – it was programming, actually, I just remembered – every time I got stuck or they got stuck and said, well, how do you do this, I'd say, I'll tell you what, let's go down to the machine and try it out, shall we? And so that's how I got through the course and at the end of the course they said, best course we've ever been on, and all I'd done was hide my ignorance by taking them down and doing it practically, which by accident was a great thing to do. But I realised that, you know, with the background to that, I wasn't going to last at ABS, so

I started scratching around and then I ended with offers from NCR, Univac and ICL for a job as a trainer and I think NCR and Univac were technical training, and I didn't really want to do that. But ICL was project management and team leading skills and I thought that's much more up my street, so I joined ICL. And that was fantastic.

Major influencer number one, proper major influencer was my boss there, Ann Simm, she was just the best manager I'd ever had and, as it turned out, ever did have in the rest of my life. She was just wonderful, she was professional, she was organised, she was considerate, she was brave. I mean she sent me off to teach in Trinidad and Lagos and Poland. I mean, you know, for somebody that only been with them for a little while – I'd done my training course, teacher training, so influencers number two is... come on brain. Okay, let's just leave the name, because it's so familiar to me it's going to come back. But she was the teacher training person at ICL. Sue Knight. I said it'd come back. Sue Knight. Sue Knight is now quite well known internationally for her work with psychology stuff and NLP, I think, is a big deal now. But at the time I knew her she was big in transactional analysis as well. So anyway, she essentially taught me to teach and that was a totally brilliant course, totally brilliant tutor, and again, very nice person as well.

[00:35:34]

And you were, at this stage you were not just teaching programming, you were teaching more management skills, was it?

Yeah. I'd stopped programming teaching when I left Allied Business Systems and started programming team leading and project management skills. Sometimes I was doing what I'd done in ABS, you know, when I went to Poland it was because the tutor that was supposed to go, or the trainer that was supposed to go, was taken ill and nobody else knew how to run her course, so they shoved all the materials in my hand and said, off you go to Poland, good luck. So I was doing what I did in ABS, I was just a day ahead of the students all the time. We got through the course by midday Friday, I'd got some horrible – this was behind the Iron Curtain's days – I'd got some black market money that I couldn't spend, because there's nothing to spend it on, so I said right, we're going out on me until the money runs out. So we finished the course with a jolly marvellous party that went on into the early hours of the evening from

lunchtime, so everybody ended up happy, in more ways than one. So anyway, so we got Ann Simm, we got Sue Knight, and then the next big influencer, after I'd been training for a while I was put on a behavioural psychology course, and it was only a short one, but it introduced me, well, first of all the guy, Peter Honey, that's his name, he's still alive, just about, I think, so Peter Honey introduced me to all sorts of behavioural skills stuff, but the one that really clicked and stuck with me was transaction... transactual... tranaction... transactional... oh, sod it, TA [laughs], transactional analysis. There you are, I've spat it out at last. And that was all about managing people's behaviour by changing your own behaviour and that was such an eye-opener for me. So that governed an awful lot of how I managed going forward, how I taught. So it was only two and a half years I was teaching, but by then I was anxious to get back into the business, but also find out if the theory that I'd been teaching actually worked in real life. So I then put in three systems, I think it was, yeah, three systems for, still with ICL, and I was called a project manager then for those three systems, and I had staff and, you know, I quite often found myself working with the clients' programmers and analysts, the third party software house programmers and analysts, the ICL legal department. You know, I had to co-ordinate everything and make sure it all flowed okay. And so that's what I did for a few years and the training that I'd been doing was absolutely fantastic for helping me be a better project manager. So that was all rather good.

So you trained yourself as well as training everybody else.

Yeah, I suppose so. But I mean Sue, I owe Sue so much from that point of view. It was a very intense, it was only two weeks, but it was very, very intense and it went on into the evening and there was homework and all sorts of stuff, it was the most crammed two weeks of my life. And we had to keep getting up and doing presentations and practice training sessions and suchlike. It was excellent.

[00:40:00]

That was during, that was when she had two weeks with you, that's what you were saying was one of your seminal experiences then, in learning...

Yeah, yes.

And that would have been, what, in the early 1970s?

Er... it was mid-seventies. It was about 1975.

Okay, great.

So '75 was learning and doing UK-based courses, '76 was Poland, Nigeria and Trinidad, and then '77 is when I went back into the field. '79 was when I ran my, or I escaped from my last project. So we're getting on to the publishing bit. By now...

Just before we get on to publishing, I mean that international experience in Africa and in Eastern Europe, in the Caribbean, that's just extraordinary, isn't it? I mean that must have been fascinating for you.

It was.

What struck you about going to those places?

Trinidad, how intelligent the people were, how lovely they were, and of course because I was there for two weeks they'd take me under their wing and we'd go scooting off to the beach and stuff. So it was a great social and practical experience and taught me about, a lot about attitude. I mean the one thing I took away from Trinidad more than anything else was an attitude of 'no problem'. You know, throw whatever you like at me, no problem. And that was their general reaction to anything, but I also learnt about the mix of cultures which, you know, when you're outside you don't understand, you can't understand, but you know, within one group of people, and I can't remember how many there were, but it was probably six or eight, something like that, we had black Caribbean people, we had Asian Caribbean people, we had the original Indian, the Carib people, and then we had mixtures. And they, when they were under pressure their cultural differences or their national differences came out and they would have a go at each other. I mean they all worked in harmony most of the time, but if they got under pressure then they'd start calling each other

racial names, which we wouldn't, we wouldn't dare do in Britain, but they didn't hold back over there. I'm not going to repeat any of the names because they're totally politically incorrect. And that was interesting. I mean it wasn't a big deal, it didn't change anything, but it just enlightened me to, you know, you think Trinidad, one culture, but actually, there are these subcultures as well. I went [to Africa] fully prepared... And they were hugely bright and intelligent and, you know, willing to learn and, you know, everything about them was pretty good actually. ...So I went to Africa, rather naively, thinking that I'd better get prepared for, you know, the same sort of experience but in Africa, and it was the complete opposite. I mean it was shambolic, not to put too fine a point on it. The people didn't want to be there. They moaned about the heat. I mean, for goodness' sake, they live in it. If anyone was going to moan about the heat it was going to be me. So they moaned about the heat. I'd get in there in the morning, I'd get in early to set everything up, I'd set it all up so the overhead projector was working and everything else, I'd go to the loo, make sure I'm comfortable, and 8 o'clock comes, everything stopped working. The lights went out, the loos stopped flushing, because the demand, the electricity supply wasn't enough to fulfil the demand of all these offices all over Lagos suddenly switching on their lights. And we had a few experiences with power, power failures and substations blowing up and what have you, and only because they couldn't cope with demand. So, and it was quite unsafe there and I had to be sort of escorted, certainly for the first three or four days, wherever I went, I had to be shut into my bedroom at night in case people came in. Yeah, lots of stuff. I could tell you lots of stories about Lagos, but it's nothing to do with what we're talking about.

[00:45:32]

Yeah.

Oh, and Poland, that was behind the Iron Curtain so again, that was a very interesting experience. To see the queues for anything: bread, meat, the queues were enormous. You had to be very patient to be a Pole. And then there was the contrast with the dollar shops, and you'd have all these Polish people looking – the dollar shop is where, if you had hard currency you could go and buy stuff - but most Polish people

didn't have hard currency. But the shop windows had all this Western stuff on display.

Did they?

And so the poor Poles, who couldn't afford it, all they could do was look. And they did, they stood outside the dollar shop, looking. And if they thought you were English they might try and tap you for some money, have you got any pounds. So my feeling about Poland was it was pretty run down and pretty sad. There were some good bits, there was a lovely park.

Was this Warsaw you were in?

No, it wasn't, it was Katowice. I did stay in Warsaw and I have taught in Warsaw since a couple of times, since it's gone West, but at that time it was Katowice which is a mining town, quite near the German border, quite near Auschwitz, I think it was, concentration camp. Not far from Kraków, which is supposed to be beautiful, but I never got there. The, so the parks, the parks were lovely, so that's good. You know, if you're a Pole without much money you can still go to the park and enjoy a swimming pool with waves and, you know. So there were some things that were good, there were a lot of things that were bad and poverty was probably the overriding sense of what it was like to live there.

So, then you started your career in writing?

Yeah. I'm afraid I took my eye off the environmental ball completely. I was having such a good time. And so I was in Calor Gas where the programmers were working and one of them had a magazine out in front of him called *Personal Computer World*. I said to him, what's that then? Oh no, they were talking about micros. I said, what are micros? You don't know what micros are? Da-da-da-da-da. And they told me all about micros and then he waved this magazine at me, he said, this is the, this is the magazine to get. And I said, oh, okay. So I went down the local newsagents and they had three copies, three issues of *PCW*. I didn't realise at the time they were actually the first three issues of *PCW*. And I bought them and I went home and I studied them

and a lot of it was complete gibberish to me, but on the other hand I could see it was something that was going to happen, so I decided I'd try and find- oh, I'd always wanted to write. One of the things you asked me ages ago was about parents, and one of the things I didn't mention was that I wanted to be a writer when I left school, that's all I wanted to do. And I went to the English teacher and I said, I want to be a writer. And he said, oh, I'm not sure about that, David. I went to the careers master and said I want to be a writer, and he said, oh no, I wouldn't recommend that. I went to my parents and said, I want to be a writer, and they said, oh no, don't do that. I had an uncle who was a writer and he became an alcoholic and I think that was on their minds, my dad's brother. He was, I think he was editor of *Engineering*, something *Engineering*. It might have just been called *Engineering*, I'm not sure. Brilliant writer, but you know, he used to go out and get completely sloshed at press conferences, and that was my parents' view of writers. So everybody tried to turn me off, so now here I was in 1979, well, I still want to be a writer. Then in one of those issues of *Personal Computer World* there was an advert asking if you were interested in computers, or in micros and you are dynamic and something else and something else. I've got a copy of the ad, actually, somewhere. Then why don't you contact us, we're looking for – I don't know what they were looking for, I don't think they said, but it was a publishing company anyway. And I wrote to them, I said, well, I'm this, that and the other, blah, blah, blah. They said how much do you earn, and I told them. They said, oh no, you're too expensive for us. I said, well hang on, hang on, you know, we don't need to stop there, let's keep talking. Anyway, it turned out it was Felix Dennis, one of his people. And so...

[00:50:42]

Ah, so it wasn't Felix that you met the first time then?

No. I met a guy called Bruce Sawford, he came to my house to see if I was real. He also happened to come from the same part of London that I came from, so he was going back in time. Felix actually went to the same school as two of my kids. So, you know, they are both – and Felix actually lived in Ickenham where I live now, for a little while. So, anyway. Yeah, so Bruce came round. So I nicked a small computer, it wasn't a microcomputer by any means, but it was a small computer, from

the office and I took it home and I got the Game of Life playing on it. So I didn't tell Bruce I'd got this and we just talked and I said, oh, there's my typewriter over there. I actually had an electric typewriter, by good chance, I can't remember why I bought it. And, d'you want to see my computer? And he said, yeah, yeah. So I took him in, showed him this machine, showed him what it could do, and I got the job. No, I didn't get the job, he said oh well, I've got to talk to Felix. I said, okay. Week went by, two weeks went by and I got very ratty with him. He said, look, he said, my wife's having a baby. I said, look, your wife might be having a baby, but you know, I've got a career here. Can I just talk to Felix, if I talk to Felix then we can sort this out, finish it or not finish it, as the case may be. Oh, oh. Anyway, eventually he let me meet Felix, the birth didn't go as well as it should have done and he realised he was going to be out of action for longer. So I went and met Felix and we got on just fine. The money was a problem, I agreed to a drop, and that was it. So I joined as technical editor. Bruce, who was supposed to be editor, was off doing other things, mainly. He was editing *Skateboard Magazine*, I think it was called, and I know he made a record and [laughs], I won't go into details of Bruce's life, but anyway, it wasn't entirely compatible with trying to edit a magazine, so most of the work fell on my shoulders. So I decided that I'd like to make Bruce executive editor, I thought the title would appeal to him, and I'd elevate myself to editor. And we had somebody else on board by then and he was just a writer, but we wanted to make him deputy editor. That was Peter...

Rodwell?

Thank you. Peter Rodwell. So we all moved up a notch once we'd said to Bruce, look Bruce, we think, you know, your role is such that you'd be better executive editor. Oh yes, he said, that sounds, that sounds good, yes. I said, so can I put it on the masthead, executive editor? Yes, yes. We'd already prepared the masthead: executive editor, editor and deputy editor. So that all happened, went to print, Bruce picked up the copy of the magazine, turned to the masthead, and he said, what exactly is an executive editor? [laughs] Job done. So, yeah, so that's how it started with Felix. Oh, and we started, Bruce and I started by creating a concept for a personal computer magazine, largely based on *Creative Computing* in America.

[00:54:37]

So you wanted to change, so the first few issues of PCW, you were not happy with, you wanted to do something different.

At this point, sorry, Felix wasn't running *PCW*. Another man, called Angelo Zgorelec owned *PCW*, okay? So Bruce and I are sitting there, plugging away on this thing, Felix walks in and he said, David, Bruce, I have just done something that affects what you're doing. And we said, oh yeah, what's that then? He said, I've just bought *PCW*. [laughs] So we tipped all of our thoughts about the computer magazine into *PCW*, then did it with what *PCW* had been doing and in a few weeks we got a new, rather vile looking *PCW* out, not vile, I mean the cover was vile looking, not the magazine. And so that's how it all began and yeah, so if you, all those early issues, maybe even the issues that you were doing, you'd see Angelo Zgorelec, founder, on the flannel panel of every issue. And Angelo and I have kept in touch over the years. He's been very, very – well, he said I was very kind to him and I always claimed that he was very kind to me, so we're a mutual fan club. We don't have anything to do with each other for two years, three years, and then something'll put us in touch with each other again. So yeah, so they were the *PCW* years. Great fun, learnt lots and I got the chance to start exercising my writing skills that had been long dormant. So when I left, then there were lots of offers for work, which was lovely.

So, but you left to set up Caxton Software, didn't you?

Oh yeah, I forgot about that. [laughs] Yes. Yeah. I left to set up Caxton Software. The urge to get my feet and my hands dirty again was quite large, but I wasn't going to give up my writing and, or, as it turned out, I was going to be retained as an editorial consultant as well on *PCW*, so, so I sort of had a foot in both camps and, yeah, what happened? I went to a press conference and I saw a chap there who I thought I knew and I went up to him, I said, are you Mike Kusmirak? He said, no, I'm Alan Wood. I said, oh, I'm very sorry. Anyway, we started talking and he said, so what's it like working at *PCW*, editing and all the rest of it? I said, well, it's fine, I said, but I really miss, I really miss the industry. And he said, hm, he said, how would you feel about starting a software company? So that was it. He was running a thing

called Digitus, which was a computer consultancy, and he had a program that he thought he could sell, called Optimiser. I say a program, well yeah, it was a program, but it wasn't a packaged program, it was just a program. And so he said, well, you know, and the first product will be Optimiser, but I need somebody to find other products and to do all the sort of, you know, editorial and tarting up side of it. So I joined as editorial... was I? No, I was technical director. Was I technical director? I might be getting my technical editor and my technical director mixed up. I was either editorial director or technical director of Caxton Software. And so then we decided to make this Optimiser into something that looked a bit more micro-ish, you know, like, I don't know if it was CP/M at the time or PC DOS, but it sort of didn't look very good as a product that you'd buy off the shelf. So we tarted it up and we made a very lovely package, but it was a very difficult thing to sell, so we didn't actually sell very many. But while that was all going on, I found Cardbox, which was, you know, it kind of put Caxton on the map. This chap came to me to ask me if I'd be interested in buying a thing that made the screen look pretty, regardless of what screen or what program, his software would sit in between and make the screen look pretty. And I said, I don't think we're going to publish that sort of thing, but what are you demonstrating it with? And he said, oh, my dad's library. And I said, and what program are you using? Oh, just – he used to talk a bit posh – it's a program called Cardbox, I wrote it. And I said, well, d'you know, I wouldn't mind publishing that. Oh, really? And that was that.

[01:00:17]

We started with Cardbox, quite by accident really, you know, the guy had come in with one thing and he'd actually delivered something far better, and Cardbox took off and, yeah. Then I think we did a typing tutor called Touch 'n' Go, which we supplied in a, like a CD case – no, not a CD case – a floppy disk case. And that did alright, that did alright. That was a couple of BT engineers who'd come in with that one. And then the guys, we were scratching around thinking about what to publish next and they said, well, what's that program you use all the time? And I said, oh, it's BrainStorm. Well, why don't we publish that? I'd written BrainStorm tail end of PCW. Yeah, tail end of PCW, to help me to manage everything, you know, PCW, writers, all the rest of it. And I'd written it in Assembler, 8080 Assembler, so we got

the same bloke on that did the Optimiser transformation, we got him onto my program, BrainStorm. And, well, as you know, you were editor of *PCW* at the time, and that's when BrainStorm hit the market. And a lot of those were sold and it's still being sold, believe it or not. They only sold one last year, but you know, they have to... I sold it to an American company about twelve years ago and their website is the same as the website that I created millennia ago. No, it wasn't millennia, but it must have been fifteen, twenty years ago.

Amazing. So, and then sort of since then you've really focussed mainly on writing, have you?

Yeah, writing and editing. So I've edited a few magazines and I've written for, I don't know how many titles. I know it's over forty, I counted them once.

So what was your highlight of some of the really kind of big stories or big important issues that you've been involved in, or sort of seminal moments?

Well, my first controversial one was finding *The Last One*, which was supposedly the last program ever written. It wasn't, as you know. [laughs] That ended up as a cover story on *PCW*. The IBM thing, we set it all up while I was editor, but I actually went and did the work after I'd left. I think I left on the Sunday, flew to Boca Raton on the Monday. No, well, I either flew on the Monday or the Sunday, I can't remember, and I met the famous Don Estridge, his real name's Philip Estridge, but he was always called Don, and he was the guy, he was the mastermind behind the IBM PC project. And so I know, you could say it's just a PC, but it did set all sorts of wheels in motion, not least Microsoft's ascendancy, because they had MS DOS. They had MS DOS, I don't know if it was bundled or if it was thirty quid, it was something weird, and the CP/M guy, Gary Kildall, he up till then had ruled the roost with CP/M and he said to IBM, well yeah, you can have it, you put it out at £200 a pop, or \$200 a pop, - and that was \$30 for MS DOS, by the way, not £30. Yeah, and so IBM put it into their prospectus, but of course nobody bought it. Why would you? And...

I thought it was all to do with the CP/M guys not being prepared to get on an aeroplane or something?

There was that as well. He was up in an aeroplane, he said, no – because he had a plane and he wanted to fly his plane rather than go to IBM. So it wasn't so much that he wouldn't get in an aeroplane, he would, but it was his own. [laughs]

I knew there was aviation in there somewhere.

Yeah, that's right, that's right.

[01:05:00]

So, but I mean I guess it was hard to foresee, perhaps we should have all foreseen how important the IBM PC was, but because at that time of course, Apple, there were much better PCs built by other companies, weren't there, particularly Apple?

Yeah. Yeah. I don't know where Apple was at that time. I don't think it was... yeah, they were quite pretty, weren't they? Yeah, that was the key...

It was before they launched, it was before they launched the graphical user interface.

Yeah, that came when we were in New York together. Wasn't that when the Apple... yeah, it was.

It must have been.

We met in New York for some kind of meeting for, oh, I know Felix was there, and I know the publisher of *PCW* was there, you were there. Well, you and I were in adjacent hotel rooms. And that's... and we were there the week after the...

The Macintosh, wasn't it?

The Mac was launched.

Yeah, the Mac.

So after that, I was on my way to New Orleans when I went to that meeting. I'd diverted just to spend a day or two there, and I went down to New Orleans and I went to the loo and I couldn't find my way back. And we were in the Astrodome, great big huge auditorium type place, well not auditorium, yeah, exhibition hall thing, and I couldn't find my way back and I'm walking around the outside of this auditorium thing and I'm thinking, well, how do I get in? I could hear the main hall, I could hear the noise, so I knew where it was geographically, but I couldn't figure out how to get in. I thought, oh, sod it, and I pushed open a couple of double doors and I walked into a room full of Macs. It was absolutely all on rows with seats, so every seat had an Apple Mac, and I thought, this is interesting. So people started to come in, so I just mingled, and I sat down at one of these Macs. I was treated to a most amazing demonstration of a Mac and what it could do. It was a dealer meeting, it was a US dealer meeting that I'd stumbled into, and it was just absolutely astonishing. I mean I actually wrote an article at the time to say how I fell in love with a Mac. I don't know if that's how I ended up writing for *MacUser* and *Macworld*, but I did. But that was astonishing, so I ended up actually having to run, I had PC on one side of my desk and Mac on the other, because I had a software company that was PC software, by then I think I'd moved on from Caxton and I'd got the rights back and I was running BrainStorm as a company, I had the Mac stuff over here, because from preference I kept all my databases on the Mac and from, I had to run BrainStorm on something, so I was running that over there. It was all completely mad. All completely mad. So, big moments, that was a big moment. That was sort of semi in my writing career, but I was actually there on business with Caxton, but I couldn't resist writing about it. I met Steve Jobs when the Apple III was launched, he was in the one of the poncy Park Lane hotels, the traditional, one of the traditional ones – can you remember the names of the traditional ones? There's not many. There's...

There's The Dorchester.

It might have been The Dorchester. I think it probably was The Dorchester, well done. So, I've gone to this room where Jobs is, he's doing one-on-ones, and then it's my turn, I've gone in and he's shown me this Apple III and I wasn't actually very impressed at all. And I said, look, you know, that's, I understand what you've done

there, I said, I can see how you did that graphic stuff, it's not exactly complicated, it's not rocket science. And I said, you know, there's other things wrong with the machine, you know, the way you've conceived it. And he said, shall we go and have lunch? I said, yeah, alright then. He didn't mention the Apple III again. So I actually, that was a very clever move because I got zero out of him about the Apple III, so...

So that was pre, that was pre-Macintosh then?

That was pre-Macintosh, yeah. That's a year or two before.

[01:09:55]

But it already had a graphical user interface, did it?

Yeah. Well, no, not really. I mean it could do graphics. He had a horse running...

Right, but it didn't have...

It was in a little box in the middle of the screen, so he obviously didn't have the processor grunts to do a full screen, you know, it was ridiculous. I think he was there under duress, really. He knew the Mac was coming, he just knew that was round the corner.

Right. Because that had the, it was from Xerox PARC wasn't it, that they took all the...

Yeah.

... the graphical user interface.

It was. It was. And that was, yeah, that was... that was a terrible time.

That was very different from Amstrad, of course, which was also beginning to, well, you might remember, so what do you remember about...

About Amstrad?

... the death of Amstrad?

I just remember what a grumpy old sod Alan Sugar was. He was just rude to the extreme. He didn't like journalists, we didn't like him very much. I don't know if he's changed now, but he didn't really help his cause, but his cause was good enough. I mean he took all the CPM stuff that had been around for years, made it affordable, had a huge legacy of programs and, you know, he just made, he just did a classic Sugar thing of do something that lots of other people do, do it as cheaply as possible. Oh, wasn't he the one that wouldn't have an on/off switch because it would cost him a penny, or something, or two pennies?

Well, he, yeah, I'm not sure. He mainly had one plug, I mean that was one of the revolutionary things about the- and of course he kind of launched it as word processor, the £400 word processor in, I think, 1984, probably. So yeah, I can't... it had one plug, I don't remember whether there... there must have been an on/off switch, I suppose, but whether there was a separate one...

Yeah. There was something weird that he wouldn't pay the extra penny for, or tuppence for, which was fair enough. It was classic, classic Sugar. And he did very well.

So other big moments that stick out? I mean more recently, I mean you've, for example, you've become quite involved with the Science Museum, haven't you?

I did, yeah. We had a massive, or they had a massive project for environmental sustainability. Hurrah, I thought. I'm only like forty years late. This was 2003. When did I first get the bug? 1973. Okay, thirty years later. They phoned me up and they said, could you come to a meeting, because we've got a project at the Science Museum you might be interested in. This was a guy called Matthew Pudney, you may

have met him, used to be a PR man. I said, alright. So I went along, thinking they're going to ask me to do something to do with computers. And when I got there they said, well, no, what we've got is this project, this environmental project, and we need somebody who can write a pitch to the trustees, are you interested? And I said, well, I am, yeah. Because it was all about, it was about living, it was about accommodation, hotels, it was about factories, it was about education. I mean there were lots of areas that were going to be covered and ways of making them environmentally sustainable and the whole project was going to be created in an airfield in Wiltshire, a place called Wroughton. It was an old World War Two airfield. So, and they'd pitched the year before to the trustees and they'd done a kind of semi-scientific pitch, it was a bit, you know, it was a bit difficult to understand if you weren't a scientist, and they rejected it. So I wrote it as a book, as a vision of what it would be, I actually took people on a tour round it. Okay, this is the book. The cover's not that good, probably, but if you go inside you can see that we've illustrated it with pictures, you know, there's a monorail. Monorail, I don't know what the thing up there is. But, you know, all the way through, it's not just text, but it's pictures of how it could be. So it brought it to life for the trustees. The other thing was, I knew Greg Dyke when he was a little boy, I've known him for a long time, and he was one of the trustees. And I knew exactly what Greg was like and how influential he was likely to be, so I wrote the whole thing – without telling him of course – for Greg Dyke. Because I thought, well if he likes it...

Yeah.

... that'll work. So, and it did. Unfortunately, before the project could get going the main instigator, the head of the museum... was obliged to resign. I've got to be so careful, you know, you'd have to look it up if you wanted to look it up, but he was obliged to resign and then they pointed the finger at all sorts of things, pet projects and stuff, and if it had his name on it, then it was tainted. And I think this environmental thing became one of the tainted things that fell by the wayside.

[01:16:31]

So, any other – we've been chatting for quite a long time – so...

Oh, sorry.

Not at all, it's been fascinating. Are there any other sort of, big sort of influences in your life or sort of standout moments that you might, you think might be of interest to future generations?

I should have prepared for this, shouldn't I? I knew it. You see, I don't think any of this is of interest for future generations, really. I mean it's...

Well, what would your advice be to a young person today if they were thinking about setting out, or you know, they're thinking about their career and what to do, they've left school or they're planning what to do at university or they're thinking, if they're thinking about tech, what would you say?

Well, I'd say go for it. I'll give an example. I've got, two of my grandsons have been to university, well no, two of my grandsons became of university age a couple of years ago and one of them said, no, I don't really see why I should go to university for three years and then try and enter a job market. If I enter the job market now as an apprentice in the area that I want to work, then I will actually end up further ahead, you know, after that same three years, definitely, than I would be if I just did the university degree and then went out looking for work. And the other one said, oh, well I'm going to do a degree, blah, blah, blah. So they went their separate ways and they're now on the other end of that. One of them's earning, well, I won't say how much he's earning because it might get back, but, you know, he's earning more than me, a lot more than me, and I do alright, and the other one is earning zero. So it kind of...

And, well are you going to tell us which is which? The one who went to university I assume is earning zero, is that the situation?

Yeah, that's right. So the one, what he did, he got an apprenticeship running computer systems for a company and they liked him so much that they gave him more and more responsibility and then another company headhunted him and da-da-da-da-da. So, you know, he took that route. And the other one, he did very well, he got a

first, so he's still not found his niche, let's say, or he's not figured out how to exploit his education. He's written hundreds of applications for jobs, but, you know, the answer is generally not very good. So I think if, if you go to university and you study exactly what you want to do with your life, if you study that diligently for three years or you go on and do further degrees, that's great. I mean our eldest – no, not our eldest – our youngest son, he went to Warwick, he chose Warwick, he got a first class honours when he was twenty and he'd already applied to the company that he wanted to work for, they were taking six out of 3,000 applicants and he was one of them. His company, his department, the company got renamed after the department he worked in and he was head of... he was like the tech guru in the company, so you've got first level support, second level support and I suppose he would be third level. So if the support teams couldn't solve a problem they'd go to him and he'd fix it. And this was consistently for twenty years what he's been doing, but he's had a department grow up underneath him as well. But he knew what he wanted, he did computer science and he got into, he got into the sort of company he wanted to get into, he proved his worth, I'm sure the university degree did him a lot of good.

[01:21:06]

So it's about focus, if you say oh, I'm going to go to university to get a degree, if you're going to get a degree in history and then want to go and work in accountancy or something, you've sort of wasted three years. So if you get the right degree, then I'd say go for it. And especially if the course itself, the course itself has got to be modern, you know, it's no good, you know, I don't know what universities are like today, I really don't, and I only know vicariously through my children what it was like then – I've got another son who's got three degrees – but if they're in any way, you know, you'd have to go to Cambridge, I would have thought, or Warwick, or you've got to go to a decent university and you've got to do exactly the subject you want to do and it's got to relate to your life ambitions and don't do it just because you can get a degree. You're going to end up in debt and you're going to end up frustrated because the degree doesn't match, you know, where you really want to go. I mean this is just common sense, isn't it, it's nothing special. I've given talks at local schools to the, you know, the end of the sixth form just before they, or at the time they're deciding about university and somebody asked me, somebody said, I want to

be a photojournalist, should I go to university or should I try and get into journalism somehow. And I looked at the teacher who was sitting in the corner, who wanted me to say, go to university, and I said, well, to be honest, I said the experience, three years' experience of being a photojournalist is going to do you far more good. So, I never got invited back. [laughs]

So would there be anything you would do differently if you were to have your time again?

My life? I wouldn't change anything. Not really. I mean, I know I've been a bit of a nomad and sort of followed my own path, without knowing what that path was in advance. Well, you know, I had basic ideas, I wanted to write, I enjoyed maths and I wanted to do something about environmental stuff. So, if you like, they were, they were drivers. I did read a book that was quite influential, called *Stupid White Men*. That was immediately before the Science Museum called me. I was on holiday and I'd read this book, *Stupid White Men*, which made me incredibly angry about, well, more about all the time that I'd wasted not doing the environmental stuff, because... So I'm on holiday, I'm angry, and I'm thinking I shouldn't be angry, I'm on this lovely beach holiday, why don't you just write down – this is me talking to me – write down all the things that have really got up your nose about the book, about your life, about everything, yeah? And then write a conclusion, put it in the suitcase and look at it when you come home. That's what I did. The conclusion, I wrote, 'Join the Green movement in an official and paid capacity'. I wrote that down, probably a fortnight before the Science Museum called me. And those sort of things happen a lot in my life.

Yeah.

[01:25:03]

That something, some bee gets in my bonnet and the next thing you know... well, it's like Felix, the *Personal Computer World*, the bee got in my bonnet, these magazines are crap, I want to do something about it, next thing I'm the person who's chosen – I don't know if they spoke to anybody else, but...

So your book, you're writing a book about the future, perhaps that's a good place for us to finish, really. What can you tell us about the future that you're writing in your book?

Well, the book is, it's a ghost-writing thing, so I'm doing it on behalf of a, let's call him an industrialist, but he is a scientist, he's a scientist, an engineer, electronics engineer, computer engineer. You know, he's all these things, he's very, very bright. He's got a company, an international company that sells, as far as I know, in forty-five countries, and we've all got a huge transition to go through and I think we're all going to go through it at different speeds, but we're going to transition to a life where a lot of things are going to be automated – and this is no surprise to you, I'm absolutely sure – a lot of things going to be automated, but then a lot of human things aren't. So there's going to be a kind of shift in working patterns, there's going to be a shift in, well, there's a lot of work that can be done, in theory, by AI and data, you know, huge data resources, and which will outstrip – this is the... I shouldn't mention singularity because I don't believe there's a singularity coming any time soon. Singularity is where AI takes over everything and humans become irrelevant and if they get it wrong then the AI could decide to get rid of humans because it would make life better for them. I don't actually believe that, but that's kind of an exaggeration of what singularity is. But we will be in a position where we will – okay, there's another thing that's got to come into this and that is if the amount of work available is being done automatically, then that is very low cost, or almost cost-free once you've got the equipment. So a lot of the goods and services that we're going to get are going to be provided at, I presume, a lower cost. Either that or the companies are going to make lots more money, I'm not sure. But the end result is going to be that there's not going to be enough work around for everybody, yeah? So we've got two choices: we can put loads of people out of work or we can reduce the working hours. And if we reduce the working hours that gives people more free time to do more interesting things, but then they need money. You come into where are the individuals going to get their money from, and so there's a call for a universal basic income, and you can see that already in different places where it's being talked about and debated. So the future may be a future in which technology takes over huge, huge amounts of work, humans do a lot of human stuff, you know, like looking after people, that kind of

thing, although there's going to be robots doing that as well. But there are like human things that people can do, if they're not doing it in their work, they will be doing it in their own time. So there will be a massive growth of, say, theatre or music or all sorts of things. It could – this is me talking, not the book – it could be a new Renaissance where people actually have the time to exercise their talents and skills to a much greater extent. So that- but we've got to get from where we are now to where we are then, and that's going to create all sorts of creaks and groans in society. I'm assuming we're not going to get blown up or gas ourselves to death through climate change, you know, these are all issues that have got to be addressed on the way there. Ah, there you go.

Thank you very much. Well, David, it's been great talking to you and good luck with the book and with all your other activities.

[01:30:01 end of recording]