

ALAN GUIBORD

ORAL HISTORY

**COMPUTERWORLD HONORS
FOUNDATON
INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES**

**Transcript of a Video History Interview with
Alan R. Guibord
President & CEO, Computerworld Inc.**

Interviewer: Daniel S. Morrow
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Foundation

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DSM: Today is April the 18th, 2001. I'm Dan Morrow the Executive Director of Computerworld Honors, a program established 1988-89 by Patrick McGovern of International Data Group, Computerworld, a committee comprising the Chairmen and CEOs of the world's leading information technology companies and Roger Kennedy, then Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History.

We are interviewing today Alan Guibord, President and CEO of Computerworld Incorporated. This interview is taking place at Computerworld Headquarters in Framingham, Massachusetts, just west of Boston. It's made possible the Computerworld Honors Program as part of a series of video biographies of the leaders of the technology revolution. This interview is being recorded for the Computerworld Honors Archives on-line and for distribution to more than 140 museums, universities, national archives and research institutions in more than 40 countries on six continents around the world. Without objection, the complete video, audio and transcripts of this interview will become part of these research collections, and made available in edited form on the World Wide Web. This discussion however is private, and should any participant want to withhold from the public record all or part of these recordings that request will be honored for a period not to exceed 25 years. All present in this room are honor bound to respect such a request and by remaining here, accept personal and professional and legal responsibility to abide by these agreements. These terms are agreeable to all present, and I notice no mass exodus from the room, it is my great pleasure to begin.

DSM: I'm just going to ask you to state your name and tell us where and when you were born.

ARG: Sure, my name is Alan R. Guibord and I was born April 8, 1947, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. I was actually a resident of the town of Salem, New Hampshire but we had no hospital there. Lawrence had the nearest hospital.

DSM: So you grew up in Salem. What was it like? Can you tell us a little about your parents and your family?

ARG: I grew up in the small town of Salem, New Hampshire. The bulk of the industry in the town when I grew up was farming. The town of Salem was sort of like the TV series "Happy Days," I guess you could say. I grew up with my sister. I had one sister who was six years older than I am. My parents were together until I was in high school, and then they were divorced. So up until then we were one family.

DSM: Did you know your grandparents?

ARG: Not all of them. With the exception of my grandmother, all of my grandparents had passed away by the time I was about 10 or 11 years old. They died young. My father's father died young. My mother's mother had died young, and her father I never knew. So the one I really knew was my grandmother who was around until I was about 14,15 years old.

DSM: What was it like growing up in Salem, what kind of town was it?

ARG: I think it was great. I tell a lot of people it was a blue-collar town. There really weren't a lot of people with a lot of money in our town. I didn't appreciate it until later on in the years of my life, but nobody really cared about what religion people were, nobody really cared about what people had or didn't have. We were all kind of the same thing together.

We grew up in a small, three-bedroom house that was very tiny. My wife and I talk about it a lot because we both grew up the same way, and you never know what you don't have. We were very happy as kids growing up. We thought we had wonderful places to live.

It was a very content town. It was a place where everybody knew everybody. I knew every car that drove by. I knew who was driving it. Everybody that walked by on the sidewalk, I knew them. That could be an advantage or a disadvantage though, because there would be times I would be walking down the sidewalk at eight o'clock at night and my mother would get called and they'd say, "Do you know where Alan is?" (laughs) It had its ups and downs.

DSM: Where did you start grammar school?

ARG: I started grammar school at Number 6 School in Salem, New Hampshire. It was four houses down the street from my house. I walked to school everyday. I went there for my first four years of school and then they built another new school, which was right across the street from my house. So all through grammar school I was in the neighborhood school where you went home for lunch. If you lived nearby you could walk home for lunch or you could bring your lunch with you. What was unique was, most of the kids I started first grade with, I graduated high school with. So we went through all 12 years together. I didn't leave Salem until I was 35 years old, so aside from four years in the Army I lived there for my entire life.

DSM: Really is home, deep, deep roots.

ARG: It is, but not so much today because it's changed a lot. The thing that changed Salem was back in the 1960's they put the interstate through. And as soon as they put the interstate highway through, we were only 30 miles from Boston. So then it became a bedroom community, and then the housing developments started. I think today Salem has somewhere in the vicinity of 60,000 people as opposed to like 5,000 when I was younger. So it's changed a lot. I have trouble now finding people that I know when I go back there. But it's still neat to go back. My mother still lives there. My mother lives in the same place she's lived for the last 40 years I guess. She's never moved.

DSM: You're a couple years younger than me but I didn't start school until I was 7, didn't learn to read until I was 7 and a half, 8. Did you learn to read in school or how did you learn before you went?

ARG: I learned in school. I think back then people didn't do that before you went to school. People waited until you got to school before you did any of that. Before I started school it was more playing and having a good time and enjoying yourself.

DSM: Do you remember any of your grammar school teachers in particular?

ARG: Yes. I remember my first grade teacher was Mrs. LaFrance. Of course you always picture them as being old then, but they were probably 25 years old. I remember most of them as a matter of fact. The daughters of my third and fourth grade teachers were friends with my sister and they lived nearby. Mrs. Gordon lived two doors down the street from me. Mrs. Clark, she lived just around the around the corner from me and she used to walk to school everyday by our house. So I knew them both.

DSM: Oh, and they probably taught your sister before because she was six years older than you.

ARG: That had its ups and downs because, depending on the relationship she had with the teachers there's a little carry over you know. I must say that I probably was the more mischievous of the two.

DSM: I had a sister six years younger than me, is it better having an older sister, did that help?

ARG: No. (laughs) Because she was the pipeline to my parents so there were no secrets. I think it was hard on both of us. There was enough age difference between us that she always had to baby-sit me. And because of that I think your relationship isn't as close or as cordial because she was always reporting the bad results of my behavior. I think that's tempered now, later in life, we're much closer now. But growing up it was a little strained.

DSM: My sister may think the same of me. Well, one of the questions I like to ask is stories that are told about you when you were a little kid, were there any early signs that you can remember that you were going to do what you're doing now?

ARG: Well there were a lot of early signs that I was different I think from the rest. We had a dirt sidewalk in front of our house and I used to go out there and dig holes in the sidewalk, and when people would walk by they had to sort of traverse the holes. I can remember my sister telling me about chasing all her friends away with these metal spoons that I would use. I still enjoy humor and I still enjoy lightheartedness and I think I did that even when I was little. I used to like to not clown around so much, but have fun and do things light heartedly. I think that started at a really young age.

DSM: So we're talking about 1953 to 61' I guess, 61', 62' when you're in grammar school?

ARG: Yes because I started high school in 1961.

DSM: So this is basically the Eisenhower era. Do you remember any of the things that you watch on TV?

ARG: Oh yes, I remember in 1953 or 54', my parents built a new house and they built a bomb shelter in the basement because that's what everybody did. It probably wouldn't have saved us from the bomb, but it was a cement room with a heavy door on it. Back then it was the Cold War and we never knew whether we were going to be bombed or not, so we built a bomb shelter in the basement.

DSM: Well, you were only 30 miles from Boston...

ARG: Yes, and the other thing I remember about that house is that when we built it, Hurricane Caroline came through New England. Three huge trees blew down on the roof of our house. We hadn't moved in yet.

I remember going up the street with my parents and looking at the house, and one of the builders had a brand new Chevrolet and all three trees were across his car and laying on our house. I remember the look on my parents' faces. Fortunately there wasn't a lot of damage but it definitely was a scary experience.

DSM: I know what you mean. I remember that storm. You started high school in 60', 61'?

ARG: 1961, I graduated in 1965, so I attended from 61'to 65'.

DSM: The Kennedy era.

ARG: Yes, yes, I remember the day that President got shot. I was in Art class and I remember it coming over the speaker that the president has been shot.

I remember that afternoon being downtown. I used to work at a local grocery store downtown packing groceries, and next-door was Peever's Drug Store. That was the place everybody sort of hung out after school. You had to get your cherry cokes and all those things that everybody did back then. Well, that afternoon I remember I was in Peever's Drug Store when they announced the president died, and I remember the fellow that ran the drug store started crying. Everybody in the room was sort of, "What does this mean to us, to the country? Are we now going to be invaded?" It had a profound impact on me because I remember this grown man behind the counter with tears just going down his cheeks like, "How could someone kill the president?"

DSM: We forget, adults didn't cry in those days.

ARG: Yes, it was so unusual and I've always remembered that. There are certain events in your life you remember where you were when that happened, and that was really a profound experience.

DSM: What was the name of the high school?

ARG: It was Woodbury High School. It was interesting; I was the last class to graduate from that. It's now an elementary school.

DSM: What sort of things were you doing in high school?

ARG: I was in the college course in high school. They put me in this accelerated program in junior high school where you get eligible for French in junior high, which back then was a big deal. When I went to high school I was taking the business and science courses. It was just a normal set of courses back then. I took some art courses but my focus back then - I was a grease monkey. My whole life was around cars, automobiles. I worked through my high school years in a local garage pumping gas and all I ever wanted to be in life was around automobiles or doing something like that. Then I developed an affinity for aeronautical engineering. I don't know how I went from cars to aeronautical engineering but I decided I was going to be an aeronautical engineer.

DSM: Of course there was Kennedy and the whole space program.

ARG: Yes the space program! You know that's probably true. I never thought about it that way but you're probably right. So I started researching engineering schools, but I still had this love for cars.

DSM: Yes I heard a story about a 1962 Chevy Super Sport.

ARG: Yes, yes, yes, you've been talking to someone who knows me! That was my pride and joy when I was in high school. I had a 62' Chevy Super Sport. I used to wash it every day because I worked in the garage and we had a car wash place, and I used to wash that car every day.

DSM: Now here's a question I ask everybody, it's about their first car; describe this thing, what does it look like?

ARG: Well it was turquoise in color. It had the same color interior as exterior. It had two antennas. Everybody had the twin antennas back then. That was the hot thing to have, the twin antennas. And I had 63' Super Sport hub cabs though because they were better looking. And I had the big race engine in it. I had a full race 327 engine in it with a four speed. I mean back then as a kid, that was your whole life. It was a great car.

DSM: We'll talk more later, you're still very interested in cars, we'll talk about that later. I also understand that some time back in the 7th, 8th grade you met a young lady whose Dad wouldn't let her date you.

ARG: (Laughs) Yes, my wife. She was in the 8th grade and I was a freshman in high school, when my wife and I met. An interesting story about that though, my wife and her sister were only 15 months apart in age, and I actually went out with my wife's sister before I went out with my wife. That's was a bone of contention for a few years after that. It was just an interesting experience. It didn't work out for us. We decided after one time together that we weren't made for each other.

DSM: It worked out well.

ARG: It worked out well for my wife anyway.

DSM: The same person who told me about the 62' Chevy also told me about a Bob Groundry.

ARG: Oh Bob Groundry....

DSM: He was an advisor to your Methodist Youth group.

ARG: Yes, I grew up in the Methodist church and we had a group called the MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship, and he was one of the leaders there. He's a very, very important force in my life. Believe or not, Bob was the local undertaker, but he also ran the ambulance service for the town, because we didn't have a town ambulance. So he had an ambulance, and whenever anyone needed one they called on him. And when I was a young kid I used to go on ambulance calls with him. He was a very, he was a spiritual man. He was also just a real good person I guess for lack of a better word. He taught me a lot of good values. He taught me a lot about people, a lot about life, and he listened. He was a very good listener, and he would never give you bad advice. He was a real good guy. He just passed away about a year ago.

DSM: Other people in sort of, before you go into the Army, other people that sort of made a difference in your life?

ARG: Yes, oddly enough the fellow that owned the gas station that I worked for, Alfred Hahnenstein. Alfred was German. He came over from Germany and he was a character. He was very stern. There were two or three of us kids who worked there, but he used to treat me like I was his son. He used to make sure I was doing the right thing, and he used to discipline me and teach me. He would talk to me about the old country and about hard work and the work ethic.

He was very, very good about that, being honest and being fair. He taught me a lot of good values at that time. He was difficult to work for. He expected a lot out of you and I think that was probably one of the first times in my life when I really felt that in order to be successful you got to do that one extra step. I remember at his service station we used to take soap and water and wash the islands down and wash the gas pumps down. It was something that no one else did but it was just the way he ran his business. Everything was to be better than everyone else.

DSM: Now how old were you when he hired you?

ARG: I was 16.

DSM: So this is sort of your first real responsible job or?

ARG: My first real job was when I was 13. I worked at the local grocery store. I actually wasn't legally old enough to work; it was supposed to be 14. So they kept me in the back room. I used to take 50 pound bags of potatoes and put them into 5-pound bags of potatoes and weigh them and tag them. That was my biggest job of the day was regrouping these vegetables. Then on Saturdays I would clean the meat cases, and I would clean the brines because they used to make corned beef, and they used to have to remake the saltwater brines every week. You had to throw out the old and create the new. So that was my first job.

DSM: I grew up in a small town as well and there were always sort of best friends and rivals in high school. Guys you were always trying to beat or friends who were always trying to help you along. Are there folks like that that you remember?

ARG: From high school, yes. We were a small school. I'm trying to think of the number of kids in my class. I think there were just about over 100 kids in my class. Everybody in high school knew everybody. I competed in sports when I was younger in school. I played football and basketball and baseball. I remember a couple of kids that were like my rivals in sports. There was one kid Bill Smith, he was a good football player and he and I were always battling for positions a lot there. And there a couple of other kids I remember growing up that I was sort of rivaling with from a sports perspective.

And then when we got into automobiles, we had a car club called "The Scorpions". I don't know why we named ourselves that way but...

DSM: You never raced this car on the street did you?

ARG: No, no, no, we would never, ever do that. I'll tell you an interesting about that. I had my 62' Chevrolet and back then the State Police had 62' Chevrolets as cruisers. They had just built the interstate through town and it wasn't opened yet. I remember this one State Trooper, Bill Thompson his name was. I used to wash their cars and put gas in them and service the State Troopers, and they were always kidding me about my car. I remember one day he said, "I bet that car isn't as fast as my cruiser." I said, "Yes it is." And he said, "Well let's try it out." So we went up on the interstate before it was open and I raced the State Trooper with my car.

DSM: Who won?

ARG: I blew the doors off him! (Laughs) But it was like the typical, right out of "Happy Days." Here we were racing the State Police trooper.

DSM: What a great guy to do that!

ARG: Yeah, he had that kind of rapport with the kids. It was an interesting experience.

DSM: Talking about being in the middle of the Cold War and remembering where you were when Kennedy was killed, I mean it wasn't too long before that, speaking of bomb shelters that the whole Bay of Pigs thing, not the Bay of Pigs, but the Cuban Missile Crisis, and everybody was really concerned that they were going to have to use that bomb shelter. So you're about 19 years old, Cold War is at its height. You're finishing high school....

ARG: The Vietnam War was at its height.

DSM: Yes, and Vietnam as well. So this is 65' about and you go into the Army.

ARG: Well, college was out of the question for me because I came from a broken home, and it was just out of the question. I graduated from high school and then I worked as a carpenter. I worked as a carpenter for less than a year before I got drafted. Interesting story, I took my mother out to dinner up in Salem, New Hampshire, just three weeks ago and we're sitting in the restaurant, and during dinner I looked across the street and a building that I had built was across the street. And I said to my mother, "I built that building." You know it's kind of a neat thing to see this building still standing that I had built back then.

I remember getting drafted, but I remember even more importantly that when I was a senior in high school it was a foregone conclusion that if you didn't go to college you were going to get drafted into the Army. I look at the world today where our kids are growing up and I look back at when I grew up, and I think kids have a lot of pressures today, but I think it was a lot scarier back then. I remember when I was a senior in high school, going to the funeral of one of the kids I grew up with. He was a door-gunner in Vietnam and he got killed. That was just before I went into the military. It was a very scary time then.

DSM: Everybody I knew, adult had been in the Army as well, World War Two, was your dad?

ARG: My father was in World War II, and my father-in-law also. One was in the Pacific Theater and one was in the European Theater. I remember one fellow, Tom Holroid. He was a lot older than I was, but I remember he was standing on the corner with his bags. He was being picked up to go to the Korean War. And I remember that vividly to this day; him standing and waiting for the bus to take him to the Army station because they were going over to the Korean War. So really in our lifetime there were a lot of wars early on, a lot of tensions.

DSM: The adult conversations going on, I remember guys talking about the military. Where did you do basic training?

ARG: I did basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. It was the only place they would say, that you could be knee-deep in mud and get sand in your eyes. I remember that vividly, my first 12-week basic was done there.

DSM: Do you remember your drill instructor at all?

ARG: Oh yes, I remember even a funnier story. I got drafted. So rather than be drafted I decided I was going to enlist so that I could enlist in an area that I wanted to be in. Rather than just carrying a rifle and laying in rice paddies, I actually joined the Army Security Agency, which was a division of the National Security Agency, NSA. But before I get into that, I remember the day I got into the Army they took all the enlistees and put them on one side of the room. They took all the draftees and put them on the other side of the room. Then all of a sudden, this Marine Sergeant walked into the room and he picked about a dozen of the draftees. He goes, "You, you, you, you! Congratulations you're now Marines." And I thought those guys were going to die, because back then the Marines were drafting as well as the Army. The looks on these guys' faces! And I was standing on the other side saying, "Thank God I enlisted."

DSM: Right because the Marines are the first guys in and...

ARG: Right and I would rather be the second one in than the first one in.

DSM: So they put you through basic like any other infantry?

ARG: All the same in basic training.

DSM: Tell me a about choosing Army security, MOS. This was really a great choice for you right?

ARG: It worked out well for me. I was actually a Morse intercept operator in the military. I used to copy the Morse code from other countries, allies as well as adversaries, and we used to break their codes. They used to call them cryptographic analysis. We used to be able to break their codes and monitor their transmissions.

DSM: So you sat there with earphones on and keyboarded?

ARG: Actually you wore the earphones on your temples because if you wore them over your ears they would blow your eardrums out because of the different sounds. So you actually wore them on your temples and we had a typewriter in front of us. Back then we used to hand-type everything we received. Then they would tear it off and bring it back to the traffic guys. They would monitor, read the traffic and decrypt it. So while we were copying them we would also signal the radio direction finding people. And they would shoot what they called a triangulation, and find out where they were, find out if there was any movement. We were copying if he was here last week or there the next week. So it was a combination, and then we would be linked back to Washington D.C., to the NSA and they used to take all our information back to them.

DSM: So after basic I gather your first station was at like Fort Devens?

ARG: Yes, Fort Devens, Massachusetts was where I went to my school. We used to call it ditty-bopper school. They used to call us Ditty-boppers and we learned how to copy Morse code. You had to get up to 15 words a minute before you could graduate. Once you did that you went on to your assignment. I was fortunate. I actually was picked to go to Germany. Half of my class went to Germany; half my class went to Shemya, Alaska. Shemya, Alaska was a little island up in the Aleutian chains in Alaska.

DSM: Germany is better.

ARG: I'm saying, I think I did okay. Germany or Alaska, I'll take Germany.

DSM: Do you remember the code now? I mean it's been a long time.

ARG: Yes you do. It's funny, when you learn that stuff it's reactionary. There are a lot of places where you'll hear Morse code, even sometimes on television. They still use it for a lot of things, and I still can remember what is 'e.' You just know the different codes.

DSM: Speaking of other people in the IT industry who do this, Max Hopper did this as well, and one of the questions I asked him was, you hear legends of being able to identify the senders of the code by, what are they called, the 'fist?'

ARG: We used to call it their 'fist.'

DSM: Did you get to that point?

ARG: Oh yes, you knew who you were talking to because certain guys would, "dit-dot-dot," they would have rhythms to the way they would hit it and you could tell. They used to have a device that they put on their hip, and that's how they used to transmit. They would develop a rhythm. And what happened was when you were copying people, they would change frequencies all the time so you'd have to search for them, and that's how you picked them up. You'd search for them and as soon as you heard them, you knew who it was. You could tell by two things; the rhythm of the way they transmitted, and the sound of their transmitter, because different transmitters made different sounds.

DSM: How many hours a day were you on?

ARG: I was over in Germany at an interesting time. I was over there during the first Israeli War, and I was over there when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. So during both of those wars we were on 12 and 12. We were 12 on, 12 off, because we were monitoring the movement of Russian troops into Czechoslovakia as well as monitoring the events in Israel.

As a matter of fact some of my guys that were in Germany were on that ship, The Liberty, that got hit and some of them got killed. Actually it was the Israelis who put a missile into that ship. We had that going on as well as Vietnam of course, but in Europe at that time it a big deal.

DSM: I was going to ask if there were any stories you could tell about being in the interceptor business.

ARG: There's one funny one that comes to mind. As much as you think you know you're listening to everybody else, they're listening to you. I can remember one particular night when I was doing my thing and I looked down and I actually saw my name being transmitted back to me. They actually knew who we were as well as we knew who they were. So you watch me, and I watch you. I think that's still going on today.

DSM: Like the Chinese pilot and his email address.

ARG: Yes, exactly. There's a lot of that. It was an interesting time over there because we were still in the occupational force. My post was actually at the end of the American sector, and it went over into the British sector. If you went out the end of our post it was a British sector. And boy it was interesting to watch how the British and the Germans really disliked each other back then. It was still the tension from World War Two, and of course we also had the East German, West German thing. We were 15 miles from East Germany.

DSM: You were in Hesse

ARG: Uba- Hesse they called it, it was actually a city called Kastle, and I lived in a little city outside of town called Sandershausen. We were only 15 miles from the border, and the Russian Migs would actually fly reconnaissance missions over our house because they always knew what was going on at our base. There was a British Army base called Paderborn and they used to rally and, they used to watch the Brits come out and push the Russian Migs back over the border again. Similar to what the Chinese just did to us last week I guess.

DSM: Amazing. Now you were married during this time, Donna was in Germany?

ARG: We got married just before I went over. I went over by myself for about three to four months and then Donna came over with me. Then while we were in Germany my daughter was born. My daughter Sandra was born in; they call it the Staad Krunken House, which was a German hospital. They didn't have an American hospital up there so she was actually born in a civilian hospital. She was actually a dual national until I think she was 18 years of age.

DSM: Did the family like Germany? I know sometimes it can be hard.

ARG: Well one thing, we were so poor over there, being in the military...

DSM: What did an enlisted man make in those days?

ARG: I remember as a PFC I made \$121.80 a month. When I was living over there with my family, we were living on less than \$200 a month on the economy. My apartment was I think \$65 or \$70 a month. So you know you really lived on...

DSM: Less than \$200 a month.

ARG: Yes, yes. I think because of that and the way that my wife and I started out is why I appreciate so much more what I have today. Because we started with nothing and you get to the point today where you do better, I think you appreciate it more.

DSM: Do you ever go back?

ARG: To Germany?

DSM: To Germany.

ARG: Yes we went back. It's funny; we went back about four or five years ago. First time we had been there in twenty-some years, and we couldn't find the hotel we were looking for. So I stopped by the police station, and I walked in the station and as soon as I started to hear the dialect I could converse with them. So I told them about how I had been stationed in the Army there so many years ago, and long story short, we ended up getting a police escort to the hotel. They said just follow us and they put the police cruiser out front and escorted us to the hotel. They were so warm and so friendly to us. I still want to bring my daughter back and show her where she was born. She's never been back to see the place where she was born. She's 34 years old now, and she would like to see where she's from. So I'm going to take her back.

DSM: That would be a great experience. So in the Army you go through the Arab-Israeli War in 1967. You go through Prague Spring in 1968, and of course the United States was in turmoil during that time, Martin Luther King was killed, did that have any impact on your unit?

ARG: Martin Luther King?

DSM: Martin Luther King was killed in 1968.

ARG: Actually no. When we were stationed overseas we were kind of distant from all the events that were happening in the United States. We used to call it the world of round doorknobs, because in Europe all they had was latches.

I would say that the activities in Vietnam had more of an impact on us. I remember one time in particular, I actually got levied to go to Vietnam when I was in Germany, and my wife was there and my daughter was born at the time. I remember this one man. His name was John Thornbeck. I've never been able to track him down since, but he volunteered to go in my place because I had a wife and a child. He was from Ohio, and I went to the wall last time I was in D.C. to see if his name was on the wall and it wasn't. So I know he survived the war. But I remember him volunteering to do that for me because I had a wife and child and he was single at the time.

DSM: Talk about search for new heroes.

ARG: Yes, yes. The military is interesting. You build relationships in the military that last a lifetime. Even if you don't see a person for 15 or 20 years, when you do see them there's still that bond, that camaraderie. I don't know if it's the danger, or just that we were so close. We shared our lives so closely together. We had such a common existence.

DSM: Never thought of staying in the Army?

ARG: I did for a while, but the reason I didn't was because the last year I was in the Army I was at Fort Devens again, and I was an instructor. That was how I really got to get into computers. They came to me and said, "Hey we're we've got this experimental program. Would you be interested in trying it? We're going to start using computer to teach Morse code to students." When I learned Morse code they had magnetic tapes, and they used to run the tapes and then correct you. So they were starting a CDC1700 computer. I'll never forget it. It was the first experiment using computers to teach Morse code and to grade students. And that's actually how I got into computers. The more I worked with it, the more interested I became with it, the more intrigued by it.

DSM: I was going to ask you to describe this; this was your first real computer then?

ARG: Yes, it was a beast. It was probably 15 feet long, and about 7 or 8 feet high, with lots of flashing lights and a lot of cabinets. It probably had about one-tenth the power of a PC today, but back then it was *the* thing. It was a hot box. We used to have to hand program in octal instructions to get the computer to read the paper tape to load the operating system. So we learned how to do that, and stuck the instructions in, and then load the operating system in, and then it would bring it up and running. Then it would crash and you would do the thing all over again, and it would take you probably about an hour to bring the computer up.

DSM: So you're about what, 23, 24?

ARG: I was 21 I think, 21, 22 when I first...

DSM: Went to Devens?

ARG: Yes, I liked computers so much that last year in the Army that I actually started going to night school at a place called Control Data Institute. It was in Burlington, Massachusetts. I used to drive from Fort Devens to there almost every night. That's where I learned programming, what they called assembly language programming. I learned Fortran and I learned Cobol. By the time I was just about ready to graduate from Control Data was when I was due to get out of the Army. And that's when I really thought I wanted to get into this profession because I really was intrigued by computers and technology. It was very interesting to me. I also thought that you can make a lot of money in this too. Being married and having kids, I wanted to look for a profession where I could make some money too. I didn't have a college degree so I wanted to get into something that I could make a decent living at.

DSM: I was going to ask you, going to night school at Control Data, is this where you began the habit of going to night school?

ARG: Yes, that started a 12-year stretch of night school.

DSM: I was going to say, you're now on the board of the University of Illinois in Chicago, the Center for Research Technology, and you lecture at University and you lecture at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business. Tell us about getting your degree. You have a degree from Merrimack College. Tell us about getting that degree and what that meant.

ARG: Well it was important to me because no one in my family had ever had a college degree. In fact there were very few in my town who did. I kind of figured out that I wanted to be successful. I had a very big motivation to be successful, and I think that started when I was younger. I realized at that time that if you had a college degree it opened up a lot more doors to you. So what I started to do is going to school nights. And I was lucky, I had the G.I. Bill because I was in during the Vietnam War. So I actually got paid to go to school. It was almost like a job for me to be able to go to school nights and workdays.

So I finished at Control Data Institute and I was able to migrate a lot of those credits over to Merrimack. Then I continued my education, and went all through my Associates and Bachelor's Degree at Merrimack.

DSM: So what was your first job in the world of round doorknobs?

ARG: I was a computer operator at a company called Nashua Corporation at Nashua, New Hampshire. I was a second shift operator. I can remember that you run the computer, and while you were running the computer you were sorting cards in the back room. They used to have what was called a deckolator, where you were separating reports and carbon paper was flying everywhere. So you would be running like three or four machines at a time and running all around and keeping these going. I remember I used to see it as a competition with myself. I used to see every night if I could get these jobs to run faster, and to get more done in less time. It was a fun thing to do at that time.

DSM: So who hired you, do you remember?

ARG: Al Karon was the name of the fellow who hired me there. He hired me as a computer operator out of the Army. Very good guy; he was a mild-mannered, one of the better managers I ever worked for that really would sit down and would talk to me. He would ask me what I wanted to do, and really cared about developing you as individual. He really helped me along. I worked my way up under Al to where I became Data Center manager within two years. Then I really wanted to get into programming because that's what I had been studying, and he actually helped me transfer over to the programming department.

There was a fellow named Nick Retza who was the head of programming. He was a retired Marine and he was tough to work for. He had a couple of retired Marines that worked for him as well over there. It was sort of a unique environment, but being from the military I think I had an advantage over the other guys because I knew how to deal with these people you know.

DSM: Because you were in the Army.

ARG: Yes, I was in the Army.

DSM: Your career has always, at least from what I read, has always had a heavy focus on the importance of training and coaching. You think you got this in the Army? I mean you taught when you were in the Army, where did this come from?

ARG: I think where it came from was the fact that I didn't have the opportunity to go to college. I wanted to and couldn't go there, and I think that that's probably what sort of motivated me to want to be able to help people, maybe make it easier on them than it was for me. That's why for instance I have been involved for several years with a local community college in Connecticut. I've been on their foundation for four years now. I like the school because the kids are there because they want to learn. These are the kids who work all day and go to school at night, or go to school all day and work all night to pay for schooling. These kids they come from multiple disciplines, backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, but they have one common desire, the desire to succeed. I think I have a soft spot in my heart for people like that, and maybe it's because of my background as well.

DSM: Now how long did you stay with the folks at Nashua? Did you go from there to Gould?

ARG: No. I was at Nashua for three years and then I went from there to Hood Milk in Boston, HP Hood, a large dairy company. It was in Charlestown, Massachusetts and I remember bringing my daughter in when she was little. She used to ask me where the cows were. There was milk there but not any cows. That used to blow her mind. I worked for Hood Milk for, I think two or three years. And then I went from there to a company called Standex International, which was in Salem, New Hampshire. I worked there for five years before I went to Florida, that's when I actually moved from there to Florida.

DSM: In all these positions were you always in the position of being the guy who was introducing new stuff.

ARG: I actually was the guy that would always take the challenge to fix the program that no one else would fix. I liked that. I remember there was this one program at Hood, IC210SD, which was the ice cream and milk merge program. This was a program that was plagued with bugs for years and I took it as a personal challenge to fix that program. So I enjoyed doing this

DSM: What particular program were you using?

ARG: That was Cobol. I did most of my programming in Fortran and Cobol. I really loved the challenge of trying to fix things that were broken, I don't know why. I remember one time when I was in another company, I couldn't get a program to work. It was an index, back when they called them indexes. And this index was always one off for the table, and I couldn't figure it out. I couldn't figure it out. I got in my car and started driving home and halfway home I figured it out. So I turned around and went back to work. I fixed it and it ran, and it was such a thrill. I mean I used to get such a thrill out of fixing things and seeing it run like that.

DSM: Is it like, you were talking about hearing the code in you head and it never goes away. You've done enough programming, does it sort of just flow through your head?

ARG: Yes I think it does. It's like anything else. The more you do it - you know a lot of programming is repetitive. A lot of the things that you do are repetitive, but I think what being a programmer did for me, even today, was it taught me how to attack problems, attack situations. It gave me more of an organized approach to the way that I think, and the way that I look at business situations, or even family situations. I think that you of course can be too analytical, but I think programming gave me the ability to look at things with more of an analytical eye.

DSM: The story you tell about the idea coming to you in the car, it's interesting, I've heard a couple of variations on that theme with a pretty elite group of folks that are part of the Program. Which leads me to another one of the questions that I always ask which is, where do you think innovation comes from? Some people say you know, it's a bolt out of the blue, like it comes to you in the car. Others guys say well, you know there's a problem and you just keep working on it and working on it and working on it, and you know eventually you know somebody will come up with an answer to it.

Other folks say well, innovation really comes from having a great group of people around you to bounce ideas off of them and an idea bounces back. Do you have any thoughts about innovation?

ARG: Yes, I think it comes in various ways. I can remember once when I was a programmer specifically at Hood Milk, when they call you at two in the morning and the system was down and there were 500 trucks that weren't going to get loaded, and there were 300 people that weren't going to be able to do their jobs until you fixed the system. And every five minutes they would be calling you and asking, "Is it ready yet? Is it ready yet?" And I think under those kinds of pressures you have to draw from within yourself. You have to continue to have an open mind and be able to fix this thing. So that's a form of innovation.

I think though that most of innovation comes to me in relaxed environments. The shower I think is one area that you get a lot of things. I think when I'm driving in my car; driving up here today, or yesterday, I had a couple of business issues I had to deal with and I just sat there and just sort of thought it through as I was going up in the car. And what I have learned over the years is to not react with your first feeling. You sort of let it come back again and work your way through it, and I find I do that in a lot of relaxing areas. I think that people do some of their best thinking outside of the work environment. I can never, for some reason I don't know why and it may be a stigma for me, but I can't sit behind a desk and be creative. I have to wander around the hallway. I have to talk to people. I have to have other things, other thoughts in my mind to be really creative.

DSM: You've been characterized as an IT guru, listed in one prominent biography. I mean it's a long road from being a 19-year-old kid in the Army to where you are now. Is there any place in your career, or people in your career that indicated to you, you know I really maybe really good at this?

ARG: I guess do you mean was there any time in my life when I thought I was going to be good at what I do?

DSM: Well, not that you thought that you were going to be good because it seems that you have always been solving problems, you've always been competitive, but was there any point in your career when you realized, I made the right decision, I'm in the right place?

ARG: Well I think there have been several of them through the years. I remember when I was at one job I actually wrote an accounts receivable system from scratch. I conceived it and I designed it around a control card, and you really didn't know until the end if everything was going to come together.

You kind of hoped, and you kind of thought it did. When that really worked and we deployed it throughout multiple companies throughout the corporation, and it suddenly became a boilerplate type of system that everyone used, and we deployed in multiple countries and everything, that's when I really started to feel like this was a profession I was really getting good at. I was feeling comfortable at it, that it was the right thing for me.

But I also, even as early as when I was a computer operator, it just seemed comfortable for me. I was in a zone where I was able to pick it up. I was able to learn it. I'm the type of person that I need to understand something completely before I'm comfortable. So I take a lot of time to make sure I totally understand and get to that comfort zone. And back then, once I learned how to read JCL cards, then the next challenge for me was how do I make them more efficient, and how do I make a sort card more efficient? And how do I make the stream of jobs run better? So I keep trying to learn it and keep trying to learn it and trying to gain proficiency at it all the time.

DSM: Do you tie this back to your experience with cars?

ARG: Yes I think working on cars is more of an exact science I think than computers. I don't know where the linkage would be for that. I think the most linkage I have is the competitiveness. You know when I was working in a gas station I used to try to beat my record every Saturday morning for washing the most cars. Number one because I would get more tips and also too because you wanted to try to do things. I've always had this self-competitiveness with myself. I've always wanted to try, whatever I do, to try to see if I could do it better, or if there are ways that I could do it more efficiently. It wasn't so much for recognition from other people, it was more this thing I had going on inside of myself.

DSM: Which leads me to another questions I was going to ask you. We're the Computerworld Honors Foundation, and the whole notion of what honor is and where it comes from and how you lose it and how you gain it is, I think in this particular time in the industry is, is very interesting. Some people say you behave in an honorable way because you owe it to somebody, somebody you respect, your friends, you family, or somebody you love. Some people say it's something you are born with and it's yours until you lose it. Where do you think you got your sense of honor? Were there heroes, people you looked up to that you said, you know, this is the kind of guy I want to be like, or said, these are people that expect this of me and I would never let them down?

ARG: I think there are a lot of experiences through your life where you develop those kinds of feelings. I can remember back when I was a kid I had a fellow, his name was Uncle Ralph, he was my uncle. This guy could do anything. He could fix anything. You know whenever something went wrong you could call him to the house and he would fix it, but more importantly, he was like a lot of people that I grew up with. He drove a tractor-trailer truck and he also worked in a lumberyard, but he was a "what you see is what you get" kind of person. You always knew where you stood with him. You knew whatever he told you, he told you the truth. And I think that's where a lot of my background came from. I came from a blue-collar town, and my wife and I are still very close friends with our first neighbors from 30 years ago. They've grown up as a blue-collar family. None of their children have gone to college. One of them has her own hairdressing company. I mean they've all done well, but these are people that are good, hard-working, honest people. And I think that's where my roots come from. I'm proud of that. These are the people that make America what it is today. They're the honest, hard-working people. And whenever I get involved in corporate situations and corporate politics, as you know they do exist, I always kind of try to go back to my roots and say I'm going to tell it like it is. I'm going to be honest and I'm going to be fair. And if that's not good enough then so be it. That's what I am. I really think it comes from my upbringing and again, from the town I grew up in and the people I associated with.

I was very fortunate to grow up in a town, in a time, and with a group of people that were just good honest, hard-working people. The church that I went to was a poor church, Methodist church in the town. We didn't have a lot of money. Most of the people that belonged there ran the dairy farms in town or were the working people in town. And I think those people gave me a real solid foundation for where I am today. Their values, they were very big on family. They were very big on community. They all felt that we were in this together and we all had to work together as a team. I think those are the kind of values that I brought with me today in corporate life. I treat people the way I want to be treated, with respect.

I think that was probably one of the biggest lessons that I learned as a kid growing up is, treat everybody with respect. It doesn't matter how much money they have, how little money they have. It doesn't matter what they do, whether they have a degree or not. They are a person first and they deserve to be treated with respect. So I think that's kind of where most of my upbringing has come from, is that environment.

DSM: Tell the Oracle story.

ARG: Well Oracle is an interesting relationship. You know through the years you deal with a lot of vendors, and I was Oracle's first MVS customer. I think it was back in the mid 80's, can't remember the exact date, 83', 84', somewhere in that timeframe. I was working for a company in New Jersey called Timeplex at the time, and it didn't work; it clearly didn't work. The more we tried to make it work the less it worked. I remember Larry Ellison coming in and visiting with me and having some rather heated discussions about the fact that it didn't work. And I dealt extensively at that time with a fellow named Danny Turano. Danny was my sales representative and Danny ran most of the sales for Oracle at that time. Danny was the one that kept me with Oracle through those times because he was sort of the liaison and dealt with me honestly. I think that that really helped me develop a path-forward relationship with Oracle because it wasn't too many years after that that Ray Lane joined Oracle. By then, I was at PictureTel, and we were looking to pick Oracle again, and I was skeptical about picking Oracle. I met with Oracle and I met with Ray Lane and I found that specifically in Ray, that the company was now being run by a businessman, a person who understood customers and customer service. I really at that point felt that Oracle was ready for prime time so to speak in business, and had matured into a company that I would feel comfortable dealing with. It was being led by a person I felt who knew the requirements of the customer, knew what the customers needs were.

So I basically met with them, decided to go with Oracle and at that point in time, that's when Ray Lane and I started to establish our relationship. And Ray asked me to join his advisory board. At that time he had started a small group of CIO type advisors to help him work on, how to make Oracle better. That's when I think my relationship with Oracle really turned around, really became a solid relationship. And Ray and I worked together on that advisory board for I think six or seven years. We turned what started out to be a really rocky relationship to a real good one.

To this day I still have a good relationship with Oracle, and I attribute it I think to his leadership, to some of the early fellows I dealt with, the Danny Turano's of the world who sort of stuck with me through thick and thin and gave me good honest feedback and also gave the leaders at Oracle honest feedback.

The biggest thing that helped my relationship with Oracle was once I became more involved with Oracle, especially on the advisory board, they really listened. They listened not only to me but they listened to the other members of the advisory board and they sincerely wanted to make their company a better company. And I think they really used it to their advantage and they really listened to us. And I think that really cemented a lot of our relationships. And again, I think the leadership that Ray brought to Oracle was significant. Oracle was a typical high-tech company that was really product oriented and developing and getting product out the door, and you reach a certain maturity in those kinds of companies where you now have to be more customer oriented. He brought that perspective to them.

DSM: Speaking of TimePlex, I gather you joined TimePlex about 1985 as Vice-President of MIS and there weren't that many vice-presidents of MIS then?

ARG: Well that's true. The Chairman of TimePlex at the time was sort of a visionary in that respect. He not only recruited me as a Vice-President of information technology, but he also had me report directly to him. Of course back then, in the mid-80's, there were very few head of IT jobs that reported directly to the Chairmen. I was also on the executive committee of the company.

DSM: So you in a sense were a prototype CIO?

ARG: Of the future, yes.

DSM: You were at TimePlex from about 85' to when?

ARG: I'm trying to think. I left TimePlex when we actually sold the company to Unisys. It was the first purchase by the Unisys, it was the first acquisition they made, TimePlex.

DSM: Then you went to PictureTel, why the change?

ARG: Well, PictureTel was an intriguing company to me. It was a small company at that time. It was an interesting technology. Again, coming from the technology business I really saw this as a technology that was destined for greatness. You could see the people flying around the world on planes and videoconferencing. When I was at Gould in Florida, even before I went to TimePlex, many, many years ago, back in the early 80's, 80', 81', I remember going to conferences on video conferencing. And it was very, very klugie back then, but I remember saying, boy this could be nice if it could get to be more refined. That's why I thought PictureTel was a great, great opportunity.

DSM: So who hired you at PictureTel and what were your responsibilities?

ARG: I was hired by Norm Gaut, who was then the Chairman and CEO of PictureTel. I reported directly to a man named Jeff Shaw. Jeff Shaw ran all of operations for PictureTel and my job there was to run all of IT, all the networks plus all the factory automation. It was a good experience. What was nice about PictureTel and TimePlex was that those were two situations where I was really put into high growth situations. Building an IT infrastructure and building a set of IT systems and staff to position companies for high growth. Which is different than a lot of companies.

DSM: High growth and interesting technologies and early in the curve. I mean we're talking video conferencing in the days before World Wide Web.

ARG: Yes absolutely. If you go back even further, to when I worked at Gould in Florida, we were the manufacturers of the first 32-bit mini-computer. We were also one of the first ones to experiment with Unix. We were working with the Bell and Berkeley forms of Unix. We were developing products under Unix back then.

The other thing we were heavily involved in was the G-map, which was the first attempt at standardizing local area networks and manufacturing facilities. I was on the team that worked with General Motors and the rest of the people involved in the G-map project at the time. So it's been kind of interesting throughout my career to have been involved with some of these new emerging technologies.

I can tell you a funny story. Through the years you make good decisions and bad decisions too. I remember when I was at Nashua corporation, I had just hired on as a programmer, just got transferred over and a friend of mine came up to me and said, "I'm leaving. I'm going to go to this small company and they're looking for good people. Would you like to come with me?" He explained about the company, and I said, "I don't think they're ever going to make it." It was a little, small computer company called Digital. He was in the first 100 employees of Digital Equipment Corporation. So I guess you don't always make good decisions in your lifetime.

DSM: Sometimes you lose. Mid 1990's you go to a really legendary company, but not one that's traditionally related to the computer field, over to...

ARG: R.R. Donnelly and Sons.

DSM: Tell me about that transition, did you find them or they find you?

ARG: They recruited me for the job. What they were looking for was an information technology leader that had a strong technology background but also a business acumen, and had been involved in business. Throughout my career I have always tried to engage IT with the business, because too many IT departments were kept separate from the business. So my goal was to develop relationships and a mainstream connection between IT and the business. They liked that. What was intriguing about Donnelly was two things; I went from, PictureTel was I think then about a 200 million dollar company, to a 4.5 billion dollar company.

DSM: For people 300 years from now who won't know these people, these were the, I guess still are, the largest commercial printers...

ARG: They still are the largest commercial printer in the world I believe. It was a unique company, still controlled by family. At the time I worked there it was still 30% owned by the Donnelly family. I remember Jim Donnelly used to say to me on a regular basis, "Remember every decision you make, 30 cents of that is my family's money." So it was rather unique. It was a large company but it was still a family run company.

What intrigued me there was number one, being able to work in a large organization which I hadn't done before, but also too that was a company that needed reinvention. They were really starting to look at how they could reinvent the company for the future. How they could automate the processes that they had to continue to make them competitive. And they were starting to recognize the fact that content was really the key in the future. That people who controlled content were the people who were going to be successful in the future. So those are the reasons they brought me on board. We wound up building; I believe it was either the second or third largest data network in the world. We instituted projects back then called "computer-to-plate," where instead of doing a lot of manual pre-press work, we were able to take *Time* magazine and some of the other major publications and transmit them directly to the facility. We would burn them right onto the off-set press and go with it. So we were experimenting with a lot of those technologies at that time.

DSM: But you were not only doing the manufacturing end of the technology, you were also digitizing what, finance and customer service, and integrated all of that?

ARG: Yes we were, but also at that time we experimented with digital books. It didn't really work out at the time. But we built this facility in Nashville, Tennessee because it was where Fed-Ex was, and we built it on the other side of the airport. Our objective was to be able to custom print books on demand, in other words, take a chapter from this book and a chapter from that book and create a customized book and ship it overnight.

DSM: For textbooks or...

ARG: For textbooks, business books and even more into it, back then we were printing a lot of the financial statements for companies when they were doing public offerings or whatever, and they needed to have quick turn-around. So we developed a whole set of digital presses that were able to do everything electronically. We networked this place. We had more fiber-optic cable in that building than you would believe. It actually didn't work out, but you're starting now to see those types of things coming back. I think we were a little ahead of our time.

DSM: Like PictureTel, just a little early.

ARG: Just a little ahead of our time. One of the other things we did at Donnelly that was interesting was fulfillment programs. We created an automatic fulfillment facility in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where we would be able to fulfill orders to bookstores overnight. They could enter their order via the Web. It was actually one of the very first Web applications. We worked with Oracle on this. We had a team from Oracle come in. We created a Web site where bookstores could come in, they would have their own, bring up them on the Web, they could order whatever they wanted to order, submit the order, send it to us and we would overnight ship it back to them. The reason we did that was there was almost 40% returns in books from bookstores. There was a huge, huge amount of return and everything in bookstores was on consignment. The print business would consign all of this and they have all this inventory. So we decided to have this system and to take that excess out of the system and be able to improve in profitability, and it worked pretty well.

DSM: I was going to ask you, how much did you cut down on that?

ARG: I don't remember the number specifically but it was significant. It cut out a lot of the warehousing and the middlemen. We were really trying to get to the point where we could print on demand, because our large book printing facilities, you know when a new title would come out, they would print several hundred thousand copies of this in hopes that it would take off. Sometimes it would, sometimes it wouldn't. What we were able to now do was to be able to print in smaller quantities. So we could forecast the demand better and reduce the quantities of books that people were printing.

DSM: I also gather that Donnelly had been growing by acquisition during this period and there were a lot of acquisitions outside the United States that were, is that true?

ARG: They were growing internationally. We had a substantially large international organization. Where we were really growing with a lot of the major applications was domestically. We purchased a company in Massachusetts called Corporate Software. It was really put us in a unique situation because we were at the point where we were Microsoft's largest customer, and they were our largest customer. We used to print all their manuals. We used to stamp all their CDs, and by buying Corporate Software we actually were now their largest electronic mechanism for deploying electronic licensing. So it created an interesting relationship. And at that time I joined Microsoft's advisory board. So for a while there I was in a different position. I was on Oracle and Microsoft's advisory boards at the same time, and of course they were enemies.

DSM: I was going to ask you if you wanted to comment on that whole question of the Microsoft monopoly.

ARG: I had mixed emotions about that. As an American I think that this is the land of opportunity, and I think that if companies are able to, we shouldn't be penalized for success in this country. Having said that, we also should not be able to succeed at the expense of others. I still firmly believe though in the principle that companies should be able to succeed and not have to worry that if they over-succeed the government is going to step in and have some control over that. I do feel very strongly about that. I don't know in the specifics with Microsoft, some of the specifics around the dealings with Netscape or whatever. Standing back and looking at it as a businessperson or as a CIO, I still think this is a country that should afford opportunity.

I think Microsoft as well as Oracle are a couple of good unique examples of companies where the founders are still actively involved. I think it's very, very unique that these people have been able to stay involved and grow the company over the history of their growth. A lot of companies haven't been able to do that.

DSM: Good business and they love the industry.

ARG: Yes and I said to you earlier that lots of times I have said that I would rather be lucky than good. I think that Bill Gates was fortunate that IBM didn't want to buy his operating system but lease it, and the rest is history. So you look back at these events over history and it's interesting how companies have gotten to the way they are today and the decisions that have been made.

DSM: I want to take you now to Fort James in November 1986, you had a successful career at Donnelly, tell me about the transition over to Fort James. This is another little 6 billion dollar company.

ARG: Yes, actually at the time I left Fort James it was 8 billion dollars. Fort James was an interesting experience. I had never been involved in the retail business. I was recruited out of Donnelly. The Chairman of Fort James, his old boss from Kraft was actually on Donnelly's board, and I guess that's how they got my name. I'm not sure. It was then called the James River Paper Company. I interviewed with them. It was a whole new management team that was coming in to turn it around. The Chairman then was Myles Marsh. He was, is, one of the better bosses I've worked for. He's a very good person to work for. He basically said, "Alan I'm building a new team. If you're willing to take the risk I'm willing to make it worth your while." I remember him interviewing me. I was from the east coast, and he said, "Did you want to get back to the east coast?" And I said, "Yes I would some day." But I really planned to stay at Donnelly longer than I had. Then he said, "Well opportunity doesn't always match your schedule." You know, I remember that to this day. I said, "Yeah I guess you're right." It was really a challenge to get into the retail space and to get into a company. When I went to James River they had totally outsourced all their IT. They were that unhappy with it. So it was a situation where they were just unhappy with IT, and it was an opportunity for me to not only learn a new business but to get in and to really re-establish IT in the organization.

DSM: Again it's an interesting mix. I mean James River they did Dixie Cups and...

ARG: Dixie Cups, Quilted Northern tissue, Brawny paper towels. The unique opportunity was I hadn't been on board more than six months when we merged with Fort Howard Corporation. That's when it became Fort James, and that was a 2 billion dollar company. It was a good experience for me because I was balancing the Y2K. I was charged with the merger of the two companies and also this thing called the Euro hitting me in Europe. So we were balancing all of these and moving forward with them all at the same time. I think in my career I've never had a situation where I've had so many major initiatives going on simultaneously. They all worked out very well. It was a great experience for me because it really taught me, specifically in the merger, that the bulk of the problems in these kinds of situations are not technology, they are cultural and people problems. About 70% of the issues are getting people to work together, getting cultures to change and the technology part of it was minimal.

DSM: That was one of the questions I was going to ask you, the whether the biggest obstacles in the path of this revolution are going to be technical problems or cultural problems.

ARG: I think the technical problems today are a lot easier than they were 30 years ago. For instance, client servers or computing is nothing more than distributed computing that we attempted back in the 70's and early 80's, but we didn't have the networks in place to work with then. We didn't have the standards in place. Today technology is a lot easier to work with and it's a lot easier to understand. Implementing the technology is very easy. It's getting people to adopt it. I think that's the hardest part of the corporations today.

DSM: Again, looking back on this interview from what we hope is going to be 300, or 400, or 500 years if we're lucky, describe what it was like to be in the midst of real concern about the millennium, the Y2K at a 6 billion dollar company.

ARG: Well it really concerned me because I was a programmer, and I was one of the people who created some of those date routines that people were worried about. It was concerning because it just seemed to be so critical and we really didn't know the impact. My biggest concern with the Y2K really wasn't around the specific applications we had in our company, whether they would succeed or fail; my biggest concern was around the operating systems on the computers because I couldn't control that, I couldn't fix that. I had to go on the faith that a lot of these major vendors were fixing that, and that was I think the scariest part to me.

We seemed to feel comfortable about what we had internally and we knew we were going to have some problems, but if at the end of the day a program or two failed it wasn't going to bring the whole company down. But if the underlying operating systems and the networks failed, we were out of business. I remember vividly New Year's Eve following it around the world, and when it hit Australia was when we really knew we were probably going to be okay. We made our first calls down there and we said, "Okay are the desktop operating systems running. Is Unix running?" "And everybody said all the operating systems are running. We followed that across the world and by the time we got to Europe where I had the bulk of my organization, we were pretty confident it was going to work at that time. So it was really around that whole operating system area that was the biggest concern.

DSM: Describe where you were. Was there a bunch of you in the office?

ARG: No (laughs,) I was at home because we had war rooms set up. We had a war room set up in Europe and we had a war room set up in Green Bay, Wisconsin. We had people there sitting behind terminals waiting for catastrophe. We had whiteboards around the room where we were keeping notes of things. We had call-in lines for people to check on status. We had hot lines for people to call. I had a satellite telephone at my house in Connecticut in case the telephones and all of the infrastructure went down. I had a back-up satellite telephone so that I could stand in my yard and chat back with my war rooms. It reminded me a lot of the Cold War 50's. It was really a lot about what was going to happen if we had this cataclysmic event? We had everything backed up and planned.

DSM: You had the red phone.

ARG: I had the red phone, exactly! I could see myself out in the middle of the front lawn with my red phone calling back to my war room. In Green Bay, Wisconsin we paid a quarter of a million dollars to have a diesel generator trailer backed up to the building. We had it wired to the computer room so if the lights went out we had a diesel-generated trailer. I remember, it was \$200,000 for this trailer and it was non-refundable because back then every generator that you could imagine was gone. I remember talking to the IT people at Wal-Mart and one of their biggest concerns was January returns, because all these generators that people bought they were going to return if they didn't need them at the end of January. We spent months and months and months planning for all these catastrophes. What if there's a major blow out in the utilities? What if there are terrorist attacks? We were really concerned with the millennium, were there going to be a lot of terrorist attacks around the world. We tried to guard against and protect against all of those.

That was really when I started my breakfast club. I have this breakfast club that I started in Connecticut back then. It's now up to about 30 to 40 CIOs. I really started it so we could all sit around and talk about this whole Y2K thing, what we were all doing. We got a lot of ideas from that and we also gained a lot of common confidences as well. We put together an entire business plan. We had a catastrophic plan. If everything went down we had contacts. If the manufacturing facilities went down, we had a hot list of people to contact. We had everything.

DSM: Some analysts say that this whole boom is not only an Internet-generated dot-com boom but it's directly related to what went on with people trying to get ready for the Y2K problem. Is that an urban myth or do you think that really did, that fear, and it started two, what three years before the millennium?

ARG: I think some of the dot-com boom before 2000 was, I guess, hysteria for lack of another word. I remember being at Fort James and it was one these things like, you had to be involved in it because it was just the biggest thing ever. If you weren't involved, you were going to be left behind.

I remember going through a balancing act because there were all these emerging dot-com companies, and we also had our bricks and mortar companies, and we didn't want to betray our bricks and mortar companies, yet we couldn't not be involved with the dot-com companies. So it was a balancing act. But to your question, did the Y2K have a lot to do with it? I don't think so. I think that the Y2K really was a benefit to the inter-project requirement companies, the RP companies, more the application type of businesses. The Y2K also afforded IT opportunity to clean up their portfolio. A lot of us IT guys were able to use that as a way to nudge people to get to a place we've always been trying to get them to. Before Y2K, the IT organization wasn't I think, seen as strategic to the company. So therefore we weren't able to exert the influence over the organization that we could with Y2K. I think a lot of smart CIOs used that as the ability to exert more influence over the company, to get the company to move towards a more workable type of platform and throw away some of these more ancillary systems.

DSM: We are going to talk a little about your 30 years as a CIO and 30 years in the industry, which is a marvelous background for the work you're doing now. How do you see that 30-year period?

ARG: I think I'm lucky because I think I have lived in an era that few people will have, or have had the opportunity to live in. When I look back over my 30 years it's amazing how much the world has changed. What used to fill an entire building now sits on a desktop or even smaller. If we can't be in total contact with each other 24 hours a day, we're upset about it.

We fax documents back and forth on a regular basis, we e-mail information. When I think back to when I first started in this industry, people were typing paper cards to communicate with computers. When you were communicating, you hand typed documents if you wanted to communicate with anyone, or you hand wrote documents. I can remember having cases of white-out in my desk because every time you typed something you needed to white it out and go back over it again. When I think about how primitive things were 30 years ago as compared to today, it's a pretty short period of time to have come as far as we have. It just amazes me today when I look around at personal data assistants that people have, and networks around the world, and being able to flip an antenna up and get stock quotes or being able to communicate with people. It just has been amazing to me.

The fact that the technology is even continuing to expand at an even faster rate is truly amazing. And when you think about how much computers are a part of our lives today as opposed to 30 years ago, it, that's when it really hits home. You can't do anything today without computers. And 30 years ago, nobody wanted to be involved with them because they were sort of mythical things that sort of hung out there.

DSM: Is there one invention or phenomenon or company or industry shift that really stands out in your mind as being absolutely critical, or is it the magnificence of this Moore's Law, steady growth?

ARG: I think there's been a number of things that have come along in the years that have been profound. I actually think the introduction of the PC, to me, was probably one of the most profound impacts on the world, because none of us ever thought these things were going to work. We wondered how these little boxes were going to work but they did. And a lot of the personal data assistants, a lot of the other technologies you see today have really spawned off the PC. There are a lot of other things of course that have come along. Remember when Bowmar brains were 400 dollars a piece, and people now give calculators away for free. That revolution has been a big one too, but the PC from the IT industry has had the largest I think, single impact. It really has reinvented the whole new world as we see it today.

DSM: You never would have imagined when you were a soldier in your 20's that you would have A, a computer of your own and B, that it would be smaller than a truck.

ARG: Yes, never, I mean even to the point where today we're talking about implanting chips on products. They're going to take a chip, and the chip is on the product, and the label is the antenna. It's going to sit on your shelf, and they're going to be able to reduce the price, increase the price or whatever. When you go through a cash register it's going to immediately scan it. They're talking about putting chips in people, in kids. They do it now in amusement parks where they put a chip in a bracelet on a child, and if the child tries to go out the gate before the parent leaves the park an alarm goes off and it doesn't let them out. You start to think about all of the things people are doing with technologies in our everyday lives, vending machines where the vending machines can signal they need to be refilled, this to me is really taking technology into an amazing era. I think back when I used to go to the local volunteer firehouse and buy a coke for a nickel a bottle from a machine. You used to push a lever, and I can even remember in my lifetime, ice trucks and coal trucks that delivered coal to buildings. When you think about that from putting chips in people, I mean it's amazing how much this society has progressed.

DSM: It must be very exciting for you to be part of an organization now that gets to play in all those fields at Computerworld. Tell me about your transition to Computerworld.

ARG: I think for me it doesn't get any better as a former CIO to be the CEO of Computerworld. I started reading Computerworld when I got out of the Army in 1970, and I've been reading it ever since. This to me is the epitome of success for a CIO. I'm able to go into the company that is the icon of technology, that has reported it for all these years, that has been around for the migration of technology, and now to be able to come in and continue the evolution of our company into the next generation of technology is just so exciting to me.

DSM: What are the biggest challenges that you see here?

ARG: The biggest challenges I think I see at Computerworld are in a number of areas. One is to create a new space for us in the marketplace. You know 37 or 36 years ago we created a space in the marketplace. Now we're in a space with a lot of other entrants, as is true with any other market.

My challenge now is to create a new space for Computerworld. A space that is, what I think of us more is a brand, rather than just a publication, a space where people can come to and get information to help improve their lives. Where we can link to education. Where we can provide this linkage between education and business and facilitate the flow of information between all of these. So the biggest challenge is to create this new environment over here where no one else is.

The next biggest challenge I think is to work with our organization and our people and help them make that migration from where we are today to where we need to be tomorrow.

DSM: A couple of personal questions, one completely inane and I hope, then a more serious one. The fun one, we haven't talked at all about, you have not only a daughter but also a son. Talk about your son and tell me about your racing team.

ARG: My son is 27 and he is working in the software industry. He sells software. His name is Alan as well, but he has a different middle initial. My father said never put the curse of a junior on anyone so he has a different middle initial than me.

My son and I have a lot of unique things that we do together. We play golf together but our biggest hobby is we race cars together. We have two Formula 2000 cars that we race together. We just finished a circuit in Florida this winter. We did three races in Florida. Last weekend while I was at the Computerworld Honors event he was racing in Virginia, and actually this Saturday we're racing in New Hampshire. I really enjoy it because as I told you before, I really love cars. My son happens to share the same passion and my whole family is involved. My daughter works on the pit crew. My wife works on the pit crew. It's a whole family event where we really get together. It gives us a chance to do something we love and more important, to spend some time together. I love racing, I love the competition of racing and I love the camaraderie of racing. I've met some of my best friends through racing. We all want to beat each other on the track, but we all want to help each other succeed too. We have a couple of rules in racing, one that says you beat them on the track but not in the pits. What that means is that when someone needs help we all help each other out. I think that the camaraderie and the teamwork of racing are the two things that I love most about it. The person driving the racecar isn't successful unless all the bolts are tightened and unless there's plenty of fuel in the engine, unless it's tuned up properly.

DSM: And you're not talking about when you're behind the wheel of the car; you're talking about a situation in which all that teamwork in the pits really is a life or death business right? I mean we're talking about Indy-style racers, how fast are you driving at top speed?

ARG: It depends on the track. Some of our cars can go as fast as 160 miles per hour; 165 miles an hour. It depends on the tracks. We're more concentrated on how fast we can get around the track rather than our top speeds because every track is different.

The smallest part of racing is actually driving the car around the track. The largest part of racing is preparation. What people don't see is my son and I in the truck hauling the trailer for 12 hours at a time and stopping at McDonald's and having sodas. But that's the part I enjoy the most about it. It's my son and his friends that are on our pit crew, and it's my wife and our daughter, my brother-in-law helps out. It's all of us together going to different parts of the country and having dinner at night together, and spending evenings and mornings together, running around getting parts, fixing this and fixing that. For me, that's the part of racing people don't see, but that's the part I also equally enjoy because it's thing we do together. We've had more discussions in the truck hauling racecar than you can believe. We solve more of the world's problems and, I've always felt when I raised my kids that the most valuable thing you can give them is time. When I was going to school all those nights for 12 years, I always made sure I came home first. I always had dinner with my family and then I went to school.

At this point in our lives, as grown-up as our kids are, I value my time with them. That's what I like about racing. I get the opportunity to spend time with my family. I wish more people had that same opportunity. I feel blessed that I can do that.

DSM: The last question I'm going to ask you is, I think the hardest. We record these stories for archives all over the world and you've worked with us long enough to know what our prejudices are. We think this information technology revolution is something people are going to look back on and be really proud of the people who led it, and really proud of the work that was done. So, last question I want to ask is, you've got two children, when your grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren look back at this time and say, oh yeah Alan Guibord, how do you want to be remembered? How would you like to be remembered as part of this revolution?

ARG: As an individual I want people to remember me as a person who always respected other people. Who was honest, who was hard working, fair, and who was not selfish, but willing to share his experiences with other people. I think those are the attributes I would like people to remember me by.

DSM: Think it's a great way to end the interview.

ARG: Thanks.