

1 <http://csta.acm.org/Resources/sub/Podcasts.html>

2 [Podcast interview with Vicki Almstrum by Pat Phillips for the CSTA website]

3 [Recorded March 13, 2008, during the SIGCSE Technical Symposium in Portland, OR]

4 [overall duration: 9min36sec]

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6 PP: I'm visiting with Vicki Almstrum from The University of Texas at Austin and she's
7 involved with an amazing project that it's a wonder that people didn't decide to do this a
8 long time ago, but I want her to tell you about the oral history project that she is working
9 on for Computer Science. So, Vicki, welcome.

10

11 VA: Thank you. The Computing Educators Oral History Project, or as we have come
12 to pronounce it "SEE 'OPE", is the project that is attempting to gather stories from
13 computing educators to, partially, help capture this part of history, but really more look at
14 the pathways that people have followed in the process of their careers. We realized at the
15 2003 SIGCSE Symposium in Reno that these stories are being lost. There are many
16 people who were among those who have taught the individuals who are the innovators
17 from the last 30 years, and these people are nearing retirement or some of them we have
18 already lost and many of these people are women. So it was especially the stories of
19 women that inspired us to start this project. Eric Roberts of Stanford University was the
20 Outstanding Educator Award winner that year and his keynote talk really emphasized the
21 need for diversity. There is a book called *Unlocking the Clubhouse* that is a study of the
22 situation at Carnegie Mellon University and the differences that women experienced and
23 the authors of that, Margolis and Fisher, were the keynotes speakers. The conversation in
24 the hallways and at the receptions was very much focused on "We need to capture these
25 stories; there are important things to be said." So we ended up proposing a Working
26 Group on the conference on [Innovation and] Technology in Computer Science
27 Education in 2005. We created a report that describes what one needs to do to collect a
28 good oral history. We created a set of probing questions that looked at the influences on
29 a person's life, from parents, to siblings, to education, and the career choices they made
30 along the way, so that we had a basic format to follow in collecting these interviews [and]
31 asked some of the same types of questions across all of them. We then started the
32 process of beginning to collect these interviews, at first with the thought that we were
33 looking at collecting these interviews, primarily from women, but we realized that to
34 really understand the women's stories we also had to balance those with the men's
35 stories. In addition we realized we wanted to balance according to continent, so we are
36 attempting to gather interviews with people from Europe, from Asia, from Australia,
37 from South America, from Africa as we can. Although the other continents outside
38 [North America] are going much more slowly just because most people that are involved
39 with the project are in the United States.

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41 So in conducting such an interview, we sit down face-to-face; it's an audio interview; it's
42 a very friendly thing. We create a transcription that goes onto the CEOHP website,
43 which is simply ceohp.org. These interviews, once they are approved, are available for
44 use, for example in the classroom. We are also striving to find ways that the interviews
45 can be adapted and made [into] modules that can be used in educational situations. So
46 it's an exciting project, it's expanding to include the men as well. The gender

47 comparison is very important. In addition, we have realized the importance of getting
48 stories from people across their careers because the best mentor or role model is one
49 that's just a little bit ahead of where you are, so you can visualize yourself getting there.
50 Since we really want to inspire young women in particular at the high school and college
51 level, we are beginning to gather interviews with undergraduates, graduate students,
52 people just starting their career after finishing a PhD, in order to understand and be able
53 to compare the differences in all of those different situations.

54

55 PP: Sounds fascinating and I'm looking forward to listening to some of those
56 interviews. I am sure they are very inspiring. Do you have some ideas on how a high
57 school or even middle school teacher could use what's available there in the classroom or
58 in a club environment? How have you seen them being used, or how might you suggest
59 they be used?

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61 VA: At this point, we haven't gotten very far in seeing them used because the project
62 is really pretty young. We really only started gathering interviews in the beginning of
63 2006. And it takes time to have them adapted and made ready. The way I see them
64 being used is helping with an appreciation of the history of the field, seeing that real
65 people become computer science educators and have challenges along the way. Some of
66 these stories are just amazing for the difficulties that a person faced and overcame as they
67 were going along. So there is a good deal of inspiration. I think that using the stories to
68 have children write essays about the kinds of things that happened to a person, to
69 compare and contrast. There are going to be supplemental materials so that there is more
70 of an historical perspective on what the different developments were over time, the kind
71 of curricula and assignments and other things that may have been given by this person as
72 a teacher, so that at this point there is a strong sense of the differences and similarities in
73 the lives of the people that we've been studying. I also see this moving in the direction of
74 some organized materials, perhaps modules, that we can recommend for use. NCWIT
75 has the concept of a Program-in-a-Box and so we can imagine packaging different
76 approaches to using these materials so that a high school teacher or a middle school
77 teacher could easily make use of the materials in their classroom for whatever the unit
78 happened to be that they were going to be teaching, with recommendations and, where
79 we can, connections to some of the curricular guidelines that may need to be followed,
80 just to help inspire. It could be useful in a science class, in a gender studies class, in a
81 sociology class, in a lot of different contexts, I believe. So we're looking both for people
82 who are interested to start looking at it, as well as ideas for how we can use it, because I
83 am sure there are lots of ways that high school teachers can imagine that we haven't yet
84 come up with.

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86 PP: So, who are some of these individuals that you have interviewed?

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88 VA: We have interviewed one of my mentors, Nell Dale. She was a senior lecturer at
89 The University of Texas at Austin for a lot of years. She was co-supervisor of my
90 doctoral work, and she has been very active in computer science education over the last
91 two and a half, three decades. She is one of the leading textbook writers of introductory
92 texts in computer science, so a lot of high school teachers will recognize her name

93 because of her work in authorship. She is just an amazing person, just charming and
94 witty, and the type of person you are proud to call a friend. [She] served as SIGCSE chair
95 for a number of years, so she really has had great inroads in the field.

96

97 One of the younger people that we have interviewed is Graciela Pereira. She is a new
98 professor at a University in Ohio and was born and raised in Venezuela. In her interview
99 she talks about the influences of growing up in the family system that she was part of and
100 the way that she found her way through her educational path and ended up deciding that
101 in spite of the strong influences of the Catholic culture that she came from that she wasn't
102 going to get married to someone that she really knew she shouldn't be married to, that
103 she was going to pursue her degree, that she was going to go and teach and fulfill this
104 dream that she had of making science alive for other people.

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106 So that is sort of two ends of the spectrum, but gives an example of the kinds of stories
107 we have.

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109 PP: Well, it sounds very intriguing and I'm really looking forward to listening to them
110 myself. Give us the name of that website again, please.

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112 VA: The website is www.ceohp.org. CEOHP dot org.

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114 PP: Thank you very much and good luck with gathering more.