

Computing Educators Oral History Project

An Interview with *Alison Young*

Conducted Tuesday, February 28, 2006

In Houston, Texas, USA

Interview conducted by Barbara Boucher Owens

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[**Context for the interview:** The interview took place during the time both Alison and Barb were attending the SIGCSE Technical Symposium in Houston TX.]

1 [0:00]

2 **Barbara Boucher Owens:** This is an interview with Alison Young from Unitec New
3 Zealand conducted by Barbara Owens. The interview is being recorded on February
4 28th, 2006, in Houston, Texas. It's part of the Computing Educators Oral History
5 series. Did we give your name and pronounce it correctly?

6
7 Alison Young: Yes, you did.

8
9 **B: OK. Hi, Alison. How are you?**

10
11 A: I'm very good, thank you, Barbara.

12
13 **B: And you've just come off a half a world around trip.**

14
15 A: Yep! New Zealand to Singapore to Germany to Italy.

16

17 **B: And then clearly Italy to Texas.**

18

19 A: And then Italy to Texas.

20

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

23

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

25

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

27

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

40

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

43

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

48

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

50

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

62

63 So, no, no, they don't. They have a ... yes, he has a mathematical bent of some sort, because
64 he was doing his degree in maths, his first degree. And my mum never did anything from the
65 time she left high school at fifteen. But my mom and dad were both champion — New
66 Zealand champion — bridge players. And the days before computers you had to do all the
67 bridge scoring by hand and bridge scoring is adding up rows and rows of numbers and then
68 cross-checking them; we used to help Mom and Dad do it when we were kids. And my
69 mother could add columns of figures in her head quicker than anybody.

70 [5:09]

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

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

75

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

77

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

83

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

86

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

92

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

94

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

96

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

99

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

109 education prize at high school. And yes, I was certainly above average at sport. But my father
110 must have seen some sort of ... I'll call it leadership ability early on in me, or maybe we just
111 call it bossiness, and so when I didn't make the top netball team (read basketball here), he
112 actually guided me into refereeing and I became the youngest New Zealand referee for
113 women's netball at sixteen [years old].
114

115 **B: I see. I see. Was there a teacher or somebody else early in life who helped inspire you to**
116 **pursue a degree in computing or math or science?**
117

118 A: No, I think our inspiration was our father. And our mother. She always used to say things
119 like, "You don't have to help with the dishes, because I can't help you with your homework.
120 So my best help will be to do those sorts of things so you can go away and do your
121 homework." Homework in our house was a thing that you did and you didn't do anything
122 else until it was completed, every night.
123

124 **B: Let's go on and get you out of elementary and into high school ...**
125

126 A: OK. That's all right.
127

128 **B: Was there a favorite subject in high school?**
129

130 A: Maths. Absolutely.
131

132 **B: Any particular math that was more interesting?**
133

134 A: No. Maths. Absolutely. Algebra probably. Yes, algebra.
135

136 **B: OK. So you got out of high school. And why did you choose — did you go to directly to**
137 **school? And why did you choose the undergraduate institution that you did?**
138

138 [9:49]

139 A: OK. We're right back in the mid-1960s here and in New Zealand there are no com ... sorry,
140 there's five computers, maybe six in the whole country. And obviously going to boom. And
141 there were no computer personnel. Programmers. There just weren't any. And there were no
142 college or university courses for them to do. So we didn't have degrees in computer science.
143 We didn't have degrees in computer anything. So the people from Auckland Technical
144 Institute ... the emerging new computer industry in New Zealand went to the Auckland
145 Technical Institute and said, "We desperately need people trained in computer programming.
146 Quick! Like yesterday!" And the industry in Auckland said that they'd put money into
147 training these people by giving them scholarships.
148

149 And of course, I was always going to be a physiotherapist, physical therapist, or something in
150 the health sector. I also never thought I was good enough, intelligent enough, to be a doctor.
151 That was what my sister was going to do because she was clever. In hindsight, looking back
152 50 years ago, if I had my life again I now know I was wrong ... So I went to the careers
153 advisor, who said, "Ah! You're doing maths and science. You could be a computer
154 programmer." It was a visiting careers advisor from Auckland, who had come to our country

155 school.

156

157 And so I went home and I told my dad, “Oh, you know, I don’t know what I want to be!”

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

165

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

174

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

190 [14:54]

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

201 program.

202

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

204

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

213

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

216

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

226

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

232

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

234

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

243

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

245

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

247 that stage.

248

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

250

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

256

257 **B: Mm hmm.**

258 [20:12]

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

269

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

286

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

293 each of them goes away for this six-weeks training?” I said, “OK.” It was a wee bit early for
294 me. I didn’t really want to go back when my son was three-and-a-half [years old], I would
295 really have liked to have waited until he was five years old and went to school. But the
296 opportunity arose and at the time money was a huge issue. So I could see twelve weeks of
297 good salary. So I went back to work and I went back for six weeks and stayed six years.
298 Absolutely loved it.

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

301

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

306

307 A: No.

308

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

313 [25:20]

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

324

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

331

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

339 believed him. So when you're told something like that for so long, you actually believe it. I
340 really believed I was really dumb and I had nothing to offer. And I went back to work and all
341 my colleagues would ask me questions and I'd answer them because I knew the answers.
342 And they would say "Thank you" and walk away. And I'd be standing there open-mouthed
343 that they believed me.

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

356 [29:49]

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

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

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

384

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

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

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

421 [35:35]

422 And at this stage I had met this absolutely wonderful colleague called Tony Clear and who
423 had come through a very different path. He had Master's degrees in Latin and Old English
424 and Icelandic and languages, but had done a heap of research. He'd got into computing as a
425 second career, but was able to adapt the research that he had done for his classics career into
426 computing. Plus I had my own colleagues. So we got together and thought, "OK, if we're
427 doing this — and we can do this — we've got to get the rest of the country doing this as
428 well!" So we set up "Getting started in research" workshops. And we ran our first one —
429 national one — in 1998, a two-day workshop. We got everybody in the country to come
430 together in Wellington. We ran this two-day workshop on getting started in research. We still

431 run them now. I don't know if we'll run any in 2006, but we certainly ran them in 2005. And
432 we've run them anything from two days — two-day ones and one-day ones that we've run.
433 And then we've run part two of getting started in research, you know: how to publish, where
434 to publish, how to write, how to get your own faculty motivated to do research.

435
436 And we've actually increased the research output. We had to create our own journal, there
437 were no journals in New Zealand in computing. There was ... the computer society had one,
438 but it was ... it seems to have faded away. And it was not very good anyway; I didn't even
439 like what they published. So we created our own one. And we publish at least twice a year
440 and have done for six years. And we have also ... the conference itself has evolved. It has
441 evolved from eighteen years ago, when we discussed curriculum and how we teach, to now,
442 fully refereed research papers. We've had fully refereed research papers for the last six years.
443 Prior to that we might have accepted on abstract and they weren't fully refereed. But about
444 1999 we decided, "Right, they're going to be fully referred papers now, double-blind
445 refereed," and we've had papers like that ever since. And each year we've raise the bar and
446 we've raised it again for 2006. I always keep my fingers crossed that on last submission date,
447 the 17th of March, everything will be ... we will know if we raised the bar too high. Wide
448 variety of research papers. Much wider — I've just been at the ITiCSE planning meeting —
449 much wider than the ITiCSE papers. Twenty-four of their forty papers are all on CS1 and
450 CS2. Ours are much wider variety than that. So we've got our journal. We've got our
451 national conference. We have international speakers at our conference every year, some
452 absolutely fabulous speakers we've had in the past, keynote speakers. Hopefully this year
453 will be just as good.

454
455 And along all of that, in 1997 I changed jobs again and I left that other town that I was in, in
456 that school, to go back to where I was in 1982 — to Unitec. It had changed its name in that
457 time, but Unitec in New Zealand was always seen as the leading, the most proactive, the
458 most leading-edge and innovative school in the country. And I got to be the chair of
459 department. In New Zealand it's [the chair's position] not a ... cyclic? In the States it can
460 change every three years or however many years. In New Zealand, it's a permanent [tenured]
461 position that you go to. And it's one that is highly sought after. And I got the Unitec chair in
462 1997. Very, very excited.

463
464 **B: I see. Could you ... tell me a little bit ...**

465
466 A: Would you like me to explain?

467
468 **B: Yeah, that's fascinating. I'm sure that ... we'd kind of like to know something about**
469 **your attitude toward research. I mean, we know you value it. Your own research. Are**
470 **you finding that exciting, are you engaged in it now? And are you still teaching?**

471 [40:06]

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

477 based learning at that stage. First time I had done educational psychology-type papers.

478

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

480

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

482

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

488

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

494

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

497

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

500

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

503

504 A: Yep.

505

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

507

508 A: Yes.

509

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

511

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

518

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

520

521 A: And now involved internationally. Yes. And that's important to me, too. To make sure that
522 we can have that standard nationally and we know that it's the same as an international

523 standard. New Zealand are two tiny islands at the bottom of the Pacific. We're very, very
524 isolated. And I want to make sure that any graduate coming out of New Zealand can hold
525 their heads up and be held to an equivalent or better standard than the rest of the world.
526

527 **B: I see. Can you think ... you've talked about challenges that you had with your own**
528 **personal life, and handling a career, and juggling those kind of things. And you also**
529 **mentioned something that is one of our wrap-up questions, actually. Is if you had to do**
530 **everything over again, is there one choice you made that you would have done**
531 **differently, either academic or career-wise?**
532

533 A: If I had my whole life over again?
534

535 **B: Mmm hmm.**
536

537 A: Very easy to look back and say ... oh yes, yes, I'd have gone into medicine.
538

539 **B: We would probably have lost a lot had you done it, but ...**
540

541 A: Well ...
542

543 **B: ... I can understand.**
544

545 A: Yes, that's what I would have done.
546

547 **B: You also talked about some outside interests. That you were interested in basketball —**
548 **netball — and motor car racing and ... Are there ... do you currently have some**
549 **outside interests that ... ?**
550

550 [44:47]

551 A: No, sorry. Just to tell the tape there was lots and lots of smiling happening then. And that's
552 because I've been so involved in my career in the last few years that my father told me I get
553 stressed because I don't have a hobby. And it just made me laugh when I think of all that
554 stress that I went through last year and he says, "Your problem is you don't have a hobby." A
555 few years ago I got injured and I have a permanent knee injury. And that's when I had to stop
556 refereeing immediately. Now, I was at the end of my career when I got the knee injury, so it
557 wasn't like it was starting out and I'd have to ... I had surgery on it and they said, "No, give
558 it all away." I wasn't ready to give it away in my head, and it took my head a long time to get
559 over that.
560

561 So do I still have hobbies? I'm still involved in watching my son-in-law referee at an
562 international level. He was my first protégé referee and now he's my son-in-law. So, while I
563 don't actually have or I'm putting ... I'm only involved in basketball as a spectator now
564 when he referees. I had a ... my youngest, my younger son was a national basketball player,
565 spent two years in the States, playing at high school level. He also has exactly the same knee
566 injury now and he can't play again — oh, at a professional level, he had to give up at that
567 level.
568

569 So really the last eight years, six years has been really dedicated to my career and building
570 that. And yes, the Ph.D. — well, a professional doctorate — was on the list then, but Tony’s
571 has taken priority. And that is, in my head, a good excuse not to have to do it.
572

573 **B: I see. One of the questions that never came up except in your early expectations of what**
574 **a woman does in terms of your mother. Have you felt any ... how have you felt as a**
575 **woman going through these career steps, has it been any different from what you**
576 **perceive men going through the same career steps might have had?**
577

578 A: Absolutely. I had three children in three-and-a-half years. The first two were ... I had to go to
579 the infertility clinic, so they were both with the aid of fertility drugs. The third one was a
580 huge surprise from nowhere. He’s my Immaculate Conception baby. But I had three children
581 in three-and-a-half years. I had a career as a teacher that I absolutely loved, because I got
582 such huge satisfaction out of it and my students did so well on national exams. Remember
583 the one year that the student won the international exam, I was just over the moon because I
584 thought, “Yep, that’s what the satisfaction’s all about, isn’t it?” To actually to see the penny
585 drop, particularly when you’re teaching introductory programming and all of a sudden you
586 see, “Oh, wow, I’ve got this!” and off they go. That just gives me enormous satisfaction as a
587 teacher.
588

589 Now I had that, I had three children in three-and-a-half years, I had a failing marriage, and a
590 business that could have been good but my ex-husband decided that sailing was much more
591 important than running the business and let it fade away. And I had to juggle it. I got no
592 support at home with child care. I got no support at home with bringing up the children. My
593 children were very active. My daughter was a national gymnast, rhythmic gymnast, and
594 played netball. My sons played rugby and went to all their activities as well — that’s before
595 they started playing basketball. And I thought ... I didn’t want them to not have the things
596 that — or the parental support — to do their things. So I would take them to all of their
597 activities that they went to. My daughter went to ballet as well and I took her to all those
598 things. Took my sons to all of their things with no other parental help, because he was off
599 doing his own thing. No wonder I left him.
600

601 So yes, I did find it difficult because my other colleagues were just able to go and do ... and
602 keep their career going. They didn’t have to worry about, “Oh, we have to go to Wellington
603 all day on the plane.” You know, it’s a plane ride away, to a national meeting. Who’s going
604 to look after the children after school? So I’d have to organize after-school care because I
605 knew I wouldn’t be home until 7 o’clock that night, when the plane got back in and I drove
606 back through the traffic. Very lucky, of course, that being in education I had the school
607 holidays off, sort of. You’d still have work to do, but at least you could do it at home.
608

[50:00]

609 **B: Well, as we wrap this up, is there advice you would give to a young woman thinking**
610 **about a career in computing and especially computing education? Any words of**
611 **wisdom looking back on your career for that young woman?**
612

613 A: Go for it. Go for it because it’s enormously satisfying. Especially in education, too, if you are
614 having a family you have the opportunity of vacation time the same time as the children have

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

621

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

624

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

634

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

637

638 A: Have you? Oh cool.

639

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

641 **[52:38]**