

Computing Educators Oral History Project

Henry Walker video snippet transcript

Recorded March 2013

Available both via the ceohp.org website and on CEOHP's YouTube channel
https://www.youtube.com/user/CEOHP#p/u/4/NtKC3_3eyWk

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So, one of the things that I think is important about teaching is to combine theory a little bit and try to connect with one's students. So one of the examples that I think in terms of is binary search. This is not an example that is original with me, but I do use it periodically. Where the idea is supposed to be you want to show how binary search works. And I remember one time when I was talking about this there were some prospective students in the class. And so we got an old Grinnell telephone directory and said, "How are we going to find in this directory where the name is?" So we did the normal bit, went to the middle, and said, "Oh, I guess this name is in the second half." So I just took the directory and tore it in half and went on to the next part.

This was clearly an approach that particularly the prospective students had not seen so much in their classes in high school. I think at that point that my students had sort of understood that this was sort of how that works but they — the prospective students, particularly — were ... they had a difficult time sort of staying settled and not getting up on the floor or something like that.

But, you know, we went along and you get to the next part, you tear that in half. When you get down to one page you can even do binary search and tear the page in half, of course. So it was also, like many things in my life, I think, were coincidences. They weren't planned. But I was lucky to actually end up with a profession with which you can live in different countries and work in different places and really still do what you enjoy without problem. It's a very international field. And this being such an ... such an international field has made it really easy for me to do this work with people in other countries and live in other countries and that is, in

retrospect, one thing that I really, really like. I like the fact that I've lived in different countries. I think that it has enriched my life immensely and has given me perspectives that would be very hard to get if you stay in one place.

And so ending up in a career as a computer scientist, I realize, has made that possible, without prior planning. I was just lucky to get into a job that allowed me to do that. And I thought ... it actually was a lucky strike.