

Autobiographical Essay  
Bill Harrison

I was born in a small town in the middle of Kansas. My parents owned and operated a small dry goods store, with both men's and women's ready-to-wear. As a lad, I worked in the store occasionally; sweeping up, helping with inventory, nothing too demanding. My father liked to tell the story of the first time I helped with the inventory. He sent me to 'count the buttons!' When I had not returned by what he thought was more-than-ample time, he came to check. "No, No" he explained, "you don't have to count each button, just the number of cards full of buttons." From then on he tried to give me simpler tasks.

I have two brothers, one older, one younger, and one younger sister. I spent my early school years at home during the months in which school met but I spent the summers working on a small farm where my Aunt and Uncle lived. It was much later that I learned they were sharecroppers, giving a large share of the land's yield to the landowner for the privilege of living there. I went to high school in Wichita (Air Capital of the World, the signs say, because it is the home of Cessna, Beech, and Lear Jet aircraft companies and has a very large Boeing facility as well). I attended West Point for two years but left for medical reasons and finished a BS in Chemical Engineering at Kansas State University.

I worked for five years in manufacturing supervision for Procter & Gamble Mfg. in Kansas City and was Plant Manager of a livestock pharmaceuticals manufacturing company for a few years after that. I received an MBA from the University of Missouri - Kansas City by attending night classes during those years. Tired of getting all the middle-of-the-night calls characteristic of 7X24 processing plants, I decided to try something different ñ teaching. I was lucky enough to find a temporary position with a community college. I had so much fun, I decided to get better credentials, so I looked for a good Ph.D. program in Business, with an emphasis in things computing.

I worked as Director of Administration for a start-up, computer manufacturing company, Berkeley Computer Company, during the first half of my PhD program at U.C.-Berkeley, performing administrative support functions for a firm that was building a large time-sharing machine. I finished my degree in Information Science in 1973 and took a job teaching Accounting at the University of Kansas, where the Department Head wanted to make Accounting a subset of Information Systems. That idea never got very far and the Department Head got in an argument with the Dean and quit shortly after I arrived. That provided ample reason to return to the West Coast and I took a position at Oregon State University in 1974 and have been here ever since. Primarily, I teach an Introduction to MIS course for non-MIS majors and MBA students. In addition, I teach the capstone Management of I.S. course to MIS majors, and work very hard to get our undergraduate MIS students placed into internships and our graduates into permanent positions.

Several state-wide initiatives in Oregon in the past several years have made working in higher education in the state rather unpleasant. State financial support for higher education has been steadily declining; class sizes are getting much too large; and faculty salaries here are next-to-worst in the U.S. The 'final straw' for me was the College Administration's lack of support for growth in the MIS Program. I decided to take 'early' retirement.

Over the years, I have helped develop and teach a number of executive shortcourses, primarily introducing non-computer-literate managers to computers but I have also taught shortcourses on analytical techniques and management by objectives. I spent one year as a Fulbright Scholar, teaching MIS at National Sun Yat-sen University in Kaoshiung, Taiwan, in 1987-88. It was a very interesting assignment.

My wife and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary in '96. We have two 'children' a son of almost 34 years who designs airplanes as a contract aeronautical engineer (working at Beech at the moment) and a daughter of almost 32 years who works for a small firm in Portland and coaches volleyball in her spare time. My wife works in the OSU Research Office. We both play a little golf (more each year) and ski occasionally (less each year).

I am very proud of my selection as a National Facilitator for Regional Learning Forums for the Society for Information Management's Leadership Development Institute. The Forums are wonderful!