

My Life at IBM

I interviewed for a position at IBM in August of 1983 and subsequently received an offer from Mike Fye for a position in Kingston, New York in the IBM Data Systems Division. After some time, a project called ELES (“Entry-Level Engineering System”) which was a computer to be built using the principle of RISC or “Reduced Instruction Set Computer.” It was during this time that I first met John Cocke, one of the founders of the RISC design concept. I spoke with him many times both in Kingston and that IBM research. He was very interested in the fact that I was a pilot with my own airplane. He wanted me to take him up, but that never happened. The ELES project was the first time I used my airplane for IBM business. I flew several people including Mike Fye and his manager Darryl Jones on business trips. Later, after I became a flight instructor, Mike became my first student to get a Private Pilot License. This project was the beginning of a long and interesting journey, one that I still think about frequently today.

My next position, from 1986 to 1987 was as Advisory Planner in the Data Systems Division numerically intensive computing area (NIC) headed by Carl Ledbetter. During that time, I had the opportunity to interact with interesting people. I remember was one occasion on June 5, 1986, when I flew Ledbetter in my airplane from Kingston to Ithaca, New York for an NSF review of the Cornell National Super Computing Facility, which included Nobel Laureate Kenneth Wilson. After the meeting, everyone went to dinner and there was intense conversation about Cornell and IBM. We had planned to fly back the same day, but the weather deteriorated, and we stayed overnight in Ithaca. The next morning, there was fog and the ceiling was low, so I had to do an instrument departure and approach to Albany, New York where Ledbetter rented a car and drove back to Kingston.

In 1987, I interviewed with Jerry Washington for a position to provide provide technical support to customer situations in numerically intensive computing. This group was available to give presentations and marketing support to account teams who were marketing the IBM 3090 with Vector Facility, a computer system enhanced with an engineering/scientific computing capability. After joining the group, I specialized in working with situations involving academic institutions. I used my aircraft frequently on IBM business and gave presentations at customer locations such as The University of Kentucky, Purdue University, Notre Dame, and Clemson. It was downright enjoyable to use my airplane for this purpose. Some of the highlights of this time were my attending the 1988 100% Club which was a reward for achieving all of the goals set for you that year. Later, I was one of the organizers of a Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) short course given in San Diego, California during April of 1989. The short course, sponsored by IBM, was attended by many in academia and industry. Antony Jame son and several other experts gave presentations which were very well received.

In 1990, I left the technical marketing support area and accepted a position as a manager in the high performance computing area under Louise Nielsen and Troy Wilson. My group conducted confidential briefings to important customers and was also in charge of IBM’s relationship with the Cornell National Supercomputing Facility.

While in Kingston I had heard about the extraordinary success of the new IBM workstation called the RS/6000, which was developed in Austin, Texas and built using the new RISC architectures. As I said before, one of the leaders of this movement was John Cocke,. In 1991, I transferred to Austin in order to join a RISC project under the direction of Randy Groves called Rio Bravo. The design point would be for engineering/scientific computing. My manager for the project, Al Talkington, put me in charge of application program performance for the new system. The project was growing in scope, and I brought in several application and performance experts from IBM Kingston and elsewhere. After a year of

intensive design work, Rio Bravo was canceled because of budget considerations. This was a great disappointment to all of us on the project.

My next assignment was as planner in the organization for numerically intensive computing, working for Bob Amos. During that time, it became clear that the internet was extremely important and IBM had no presence. I was part of a small group of that took it upon ourselves to solve this problem by putting IBM on the internet for the first time. To do this, the group connected a small RS/6000 workstation to the internet using the address "austin.ibm.com." We made available technical information about the RS/6000 as well as programming that the customer could download. This was the first time that IBM was accessible over the internet. Today of course, the internet is an important part of IBM's marketing strategy.

My final project at IBM was as the liaison to Netscape Communication Corporation (NCC), located in Mountain View, California and founded by Marc Andreessen and Jim Clark. The Netscape web browser, a program to access the internet, was the dominant browser in the 1990s and was used by over the 90% of the customer base. NCC also developed other products which were used by server computers. I was responsible for facilitating the porting of all NCC software to the IBM platform. I flew from Austin to California each week in pursuit of this mission. I got to know many of the Netscape employees personally and worked with IBM programmers to port the NCC software.

Now that I think back to that time, I realized how important the work was -- to make the Internet available to the whole world. It was the beginning of Internet advertising, email and download capability for selling software. It was truly a revelation in communication and marketing. Netscape was a critical player in this revolution. In fact, the Netscape logo shows the letter "N" astride the Earth, a very appropriate symbol.



To sum up this memoir, my IBM experience was a long and interesting journey, one that I still think about frequently today.