



Oral History of Ken Jacobs

Interviewed by:
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Ken Jacobs

Conducted by Software Industry SIG—Oral History Project

Abstract: Ken Jacobs, the second longest serving employee at Oracle (after Larry Ellison), describes his family and educational background and his positions prior to joining Oracle in Washington, DC. He talks about his work in setting up and working in this office with government clients and then his invitation to go to California to work at Oracle headquarters. He describes his product management assignments and his relationships with various groups within Oracle. He then covers the financial difficulties encountered by Oracle and the ability of the company to recover from these problems. He also describes his becoming an external spokesperson for Oracle including his keynote addresses at the Oracle User Group meetings and his becoming known as Dr. DBA. He describes his present assignment in leading a new acquisition and trying to make it a significant business within the corporate umbrella.

Burton Grad: This is an oral history interview with Ken Jacobs. I'm Burt Grad and it is June 13, 2007. The interview is taking place at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, and it's being sponsored by the Software Industry Special Interest Group. Thank you very much for joining us. We normally start by asking about your family, personal background, education, and things like that; so, why don't you tell about where you were born and where your family came from and that sort of thing.

Background

Ken Jacobs: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in the middle of the last century, in 1949. It seems like I had a normal origin. We moved upstate in New York when I was about 11 years old, and I later went to Oberlin College in Ohio.

Grad: You're going much too fast. What did your father and mother do?

Jacobs: My dad was a civil servant and he first worked for the State of New York. He then took a position with the federal government as an administrative law judge for the Social Security Administration and we moved to Cincinnati.

Grad: Was he a lawyer?

Jacobs: Oh, yes. He was a lawyer and his first job was in workmen's compensation. He worked for the New York State organization. Then we moved to upstate New York, first to Utica, then Albany. He became a judge in the Department of Motor Vehicles, taking hearings and so forth on people's driving violations. Then he moved to the federal government.

Grad: Had he been born here in the United States?

Jacobs: Yes, he was, as was my mother. My mother was a high school social studies teacher.

Grad: Where were their parents from?

Jacobs: I'm really not sure precisely, but they were from Eastern Europe somewhere. I think one of the four parents at least was born here but the others were from Europe.

Grad: Was there any strong ethnic experience or background?

Jacobs: We had a Jewish background although we were not particularly religious. We were definitely part of the community though, but more in a secular way.

Grad: Was the part of Brooklyn you were born in basically a Jewish area?

Jacobs: Well, I don't recall it being so. It was Flatbush. Fifty-Fifth Street was where I was born, out on Parkside Avenue. If you know the area, it's changed a lot of course since then but I don't recall it particularly much. It seems to me it's a very long time ago.

Grad: Where did you start going to school?

Jacobs: In grade school? Well, I was in Brooklyn and I remember going to PS 103, I think that was the number. I wasn't particularly athletic or any of that in grade school and we moved to Utica when I was, I think, in sixth grade. I spent three years there and then three years in Albany. I finished my senior year in high school in Cincinnati, Ohio, at Walnut Hills.

Grad: You had a number of changes. Was that a problem to you as you were growing up?

Jacobs: It was a bit. It's hard to put down roots, particularly in those formative teenage years, when you're moving every three years. In fact, I was just contacted by my high school for my 40th reunion. I had only spent one year there so I don't have any particular ties to Walnut Hills, which was a very good school.

Grad: Did you remember objecting or complaining about the changes at the time?

Jacobs: I think all kids are unsettled by such moves, so my sister and I were pretty close during that time.

Grad: Just the two of you?

Jacobs: Just the two of us. She's four years younger than I and she still lives in Albany, New York. But I think we went along with the flow. We did what we had to do. And I was a paper boy for a while and it cured me from ever wanting to get up in the morning, that early morning paper route, especially living in upstate New York with the rough weather and so forth. It was not the most pleasant start of the day.

Grad: The move to Cincinnati was because of Social Security?

Jacobs: That's right. My father became an administrative law judge for the SSA.

Grad: Were you middle class, upper middle class?

Jacobs: Middle class I'd say, maybe upper middle class, but we were certainly not extraordinarily well to do.

Grad: What were some of the things in high school that you particularly liked or didn't like?

Jacobs: Partly because we moved, I was a little bit on the edge of the mainstream socially. I remember being on the high school debate team. I wasn't involved with a lot of extracurricular activities.

Grad: Were there particular classes you liked or didn't like?

Jacobs: Well, I was reasonable at math and science. To this day think a mistake was made on my advanced placement chemistry test because I got a 5 and they placed me in college as a freshman and then put me in organic chemistry, which was the beginning of the downfall of any medical career I might have had. But I was more inclined toward the sciences than the other subjects.

Grad: Were you involved in any special science projects or science fairs?

Jacobs: Yes. I did the normal kinds of things kids did. I don't have any particular recollection of anything special.

Grad: Did you do anything like taking apart televisions or things like that?

Jacobs: Nothing quite like that. No. Obviously, computers weren't very well known then and so it certainly wasn't until I got to college that I ran into my first computer.

Grad: Your father or mother had never been involved with the use of computers or anything like that?

Jacobs: No. No, no, no.

Grad: Was there anything else from either particular teachers or things that affected you during your high school period? Or were there relatives who were particularly influential?

Jacobs: My father's brother was a very well-known scientist. He worked for NIH and did some work in parasitology. He was very, very well respected, a world traveler and an inspiration in some ways for both of us. But I had no interest in being a lawyer and my dad put a lot of pressure on me to go into medicine although it was not a passion of mine. It was the typical parental guidance, but when I got to school I did think about a premed career. But there was no one who was oriented toward science other than my uncle.

Grad: How about the other subjects? Were you good in English or other languages?

Jacobs: Well, I took some French and I still remember more French today after four years of high school French, than I do of Russian which I took for two semesters in college. However, I still can read some Russian so I was able to get my way around Moscow and St. Petersburg last fall. But there was nothing else that was particularly important except, of course, for the Sunday school learning of Hebrew. Although again, it was more learning how to read and sound out the words than learning the meaning, which was unfortunate.

Grad: Did you have any special experiences during the summers while you were in high school in terms of work or camp or anything of that sort?

Jacobs: It's so, so long ago. I don't really recall anything that was particularly inspiring.

Grad: Some people find some of those experiences very vivid still in their mind and others don't.

Jacobs: I don't.

Grad: They weren't that influential to you. It didn't make that much difference.

Jacobs: No, nothing that I can recall.

Grad: After you moved to Cincinnati, you were in your senior year in high school and you had to think about college. I'm sure college was an automatic and you just assumed you were going.

Jacobs: Yes.

Grad: How did you decide where to apply? What did you do?

Jacobs: Well, my grades were good but they weren't great so I wasn't necessarily Ivy League. A friend of mine from Albany ended up being my roommate at Oberlin. He was going there and I think, like a lot of kids, I decided to go where my friends were going. I wanted a smaller school so Oberlin, Ohio, was a good choice.

Grad: That's a very strong school.

Jacobs: It's a very good school, a liberal arts school, and so it was a good fit for me and my personality at the time.

College

Grad: How about college? Let's talk about that a bit.

Jacobs: Well, my freshman year was a bit of a surprise. I took organic chemistry, Russian and calculus as a freshman and it was a very difficult workload. I didn't do as well as I had hoped. I think a lot of kids, when they go away to school, find that their first year is challenging;

it requires a whole new work ethic and study style. I was involved with the debate team for a short while as well, but it was pretty early in my career there that I ran into a computer and that sort of took over everything else.

Grad: What happened?

Jacobs: Well, at the end of the first semester of my calculus class we had a two-week introduction to computing. This was in 1967. They gave us little projects. They taught us a little bit about programming and we had a 360/44 at the computer center. I spent a fair bit of time learning how to use a keypunch and program in FORTRAN, and really became captivated by it.

Grad: What appealed to you? Do you remember?

Jacobs: Well, it was very much like problem solving and I like problem solving whether it's doing crossword puzzles or other kinds of things. I found it a very creative outlet. I'm not particularly good with my hands; I'm not artistic. So I found it a really wonderful thing. It just captivated me. The elegance and beauty of a program just really was something special.

Grad: Had you ever played music or done anything like that?

Jacobs: I didn't have a very happy musical career. I learned the clarinet as a little kid and that was okay except that my teacher told me that any moron could count and since I couldn't, I wasn't even a moron. Then, when I went to school, they had a bad policy where if you had played an instrument before, you couldn't take the same instrument in class. They stuck me with the trombone and, unfortunately, I was a little guy and couldn't reach the last position. So it was not a happy musical career at all.

Grad: I was thinking that sometimes people who enjoy the beauty of programming have also enjoyed music.

Jacobs: I love music as a listener, but as a practitioner I have no particular talent, I'm afraid.

Grad: Talk about the rest of your college. You got interested in computers; did you pursue that in some way? What did you do?

Jacobs: Well, as a matter of fact I did. I had the normal freshman opportunities in terms of getting a job washing pots and so forth. I didn't like that very much and the opportunity came up to work for the computer center, so as soon as I found that opportunity, I took it to get out of the kitchen and work with a computer.

Grad: Did you need to have income while you were at school?

Jacobs: No. It wasn't so much that, although there was parental direction that I was going to earn some money while there.

Grad: There was a real work ethic in the family.

Jacobs: Yes. Of course a work ethic, and wanting to be independent and successful on my own, not wanting to be dependent. But Oberlin is a pretty small campus, small community, and you didn't need a lot. I didn't need a car. I didn't need a lot of things, but it was certainly good to have my own income. But it was more important to me to do something I enjoyed doing. That was a benefit.

Grad: You got this opportunity to work with a professor on computers. What kind of thing were you doing?

Jacobs: Well, when I first started it was merely just being a dispatcher, I think they called us. We took cards from the window, ran them through the card reader, wrapped the printer paper around them and put them back out again

Grad: Was it a rubber band?

Jacobs: We put a rubber band around them, exactly. It was a pretty simple job and then I learned more. I was mostly self-taught since there really were no courses in computing at Oberlin at the time. I spent a lot of time on my own just learning what it meant to write FORTRAN and debug it and deal with the punch card machine and the interpreter and the card sorter and all of that kind of stuff. I ended up eventually doing some student consulting, helping other students with their programming problems. So that was a good position for me and, in fact, I think even that first summer after my freshman year, I stayed on to continue working at the computer center. I think I worked there during the summers after my freshman and sophomore years so I was pretty well steeped in computing by that time.

Grad: Were you doing any programming on your own at that point or taking advantage of being there?

Jacobs: Yes, of course. They gave us this resource essentially for free and we could just submit jobs and have them executed so I did some fun programming. I remember writing a bridge program that would take hands of cards and print them out in a nice way and make an initial bid based on the point count following the Goren book. I tested it once with ten hands and

it got seven out of the ten right. I was pretty happy and then I fed it another ten and it only got three out of the ten right.

Grad: You weren't quite as happy.

Jacobs: I wasn't as happy at that point but that was purely for fun. I later started working with a gentleman named Bob Teitel who was the director of the computer center. He had an interest – I'm not sure where it came from – in social science computing. He had developed a programming language or a data manipulation language on his own called DataTran. It was a language for taking input files and transforming them and producing output files, doing additions and moving fields around and that sort of thing. He created an English-like language that you wrote the transformations in and he encouraged me to work with him to enhance it and maintain it and develop it. And I remember at one point using DataTran to write the story of Goldilocks in this English-like language: move here, move to the bed, size of bed too small, that kind of thing, and so that was fun. But I really didn't have as much opportunity to apply computing to my academic work.

Grad: Talk about some of the courses that were of importance to you during that time.

Jacobs: I certainly had to take the standard curriculum of English and history and French which I stopped. I took Russian instead. And I had a science focus so I continued with chemistry and I was a biology major so I continued with that. There wasn't a computing option.

Grad: There wouldn't have been back then.

Jacobs: Yes, and this was in 1967. I graduated in 1971 but I sometimes say I fell in love with a computer instead of a girl in my first years. I remember getting up in the middle of the night to go turn on the computer, a multimillion dollar machine. They gave me a key to the data center and I could turn on the computer and just use it

Grad: What was the machine that was there?

Jacobs: A 360/44. It was a scientific machine in the 360 line. It had some extensions for scientific computing and lacked some of the business capabilities. I think it didn't have packed decimal as a hardware instruction. It wasn't a super computer in that sort of line. It was a 360 but I think it had an augmented subset of the standard instruction set. 44 PS was the name of the operating system if I recall.

Grad: You graduated with a degree in biology?

Jacobs: Yes, I did.

Grad: Were you planning to go into medical school?

Jacobs: No. Academically, it just wasn't going to be possible.

Grad: What do you mean by that? Your grades weren't strong enough?

Brookings Institution and Oberlin

Jacobs: My grades weren't strong enough and I don't think I was motivated at that point to pursue that career. My roommate, after seeing me with computing, said, "I see you have found your career." And I said to him, "No. How long can you program for a living? What's the career opportunity there?" But indeed I did enjoy it and I found people were willing to pay me to do it so it was great. The year before my senior year I spent the summer as an intern at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., which is a social science think tank.

Grad: How did you make that connection?

Jacobs: Well, Bob Teitel connected me with people there and I took advantage of the opportunity so I was able to move to Washington for the summer. My uncle lived in Washington, as I mentioned earlier, so it was convenient. I think I stayed at their house and was given an opportunity to work with some really brilliant people who had pretty advanced data processing requirements for the time, doing statistical analysis and things like that.

Grad: Were you using any special tools or programs?

Jacobs: I was writing in FORTRAN on a DEC-10 and we had some products or software systems we wrote to assist the researchers. There was a product that we called Planet or Planets for analysis of time series data and I knew some of the people involved in that. I did basic programming of statistical routines.

Grad: I seem to remember that SPSS and SAS had products out at that point.

Jacobs: They did and I think I was familiar with SPSS; I did a little work with that as well.

Grad: After you graduated and got your degree, had you made a decision what you wanted to do next or did you just fall in to something?

Jacobs: Mostly I just fell into something. I'd had this experience with Brookings before my senior year and that's where I returned. They invited me to come back after I graduated and I did.

Grad: On a paid basis.

Jacobs: On a paid basis. Well, I was also paid in the summer.

Grad: You said it was an internship

Jacobs: It was an internship but it was paid internship. And then I went back the following year to take a full-time permanent position, and continued on the same vein of what I had been doing. And I had the opportunity to meet some other people, people who led to other subsequent positions.

Grad: You stayed there about a year?

Jacobs: Another year at Brookings. Of course, by that point I had fallen in love with a girl back in school. She was two years behind me at Oberlin so I drove back and forth from Ohio to Washington in this little crap car that barely made it. And I'd be too tired to really be on the road and so it was a good idea to stop.

Grad: It was a little scary.

Jacobs: It was a little scary so I decided to move back to Ohio and rejoin Oberlin College. I worked in the computer center and I don't recall whether Teitel was still there. I think he had left. My girlfriend was still there; she was in her senior year. She was a conservatory student, a music student, so she had no technical orientation at all, not science and not technology. She was a piano student, cello and piano. We lived together on campus my senior year and then we got married after she graduated.

But during that period of time when I was working for the computer center, I helped introduce the first credit-bearing courses in computer science to the campus. I remember teaching these kids who were just a year or two younger than I about programming; at that time we were using basic. We introduced a PDP-11 with RSTS as the operating system. I think it had 28k words of memory and it could support 16 or 32 concurrent users. It was a remarkable platform and timesharing was a brand new thing compared to the batch computing we had with the 360. I remember teaching these kids. I had to write a program to compute bowling scores, that kind of very elementary computer science at that time, but I got to work with the computer center and administer this computer and was the system manager for the operation.

Grad: You basically were there a year.

Jacobs: I was there a year in Ohio and Oberlin was a pretty small place. I saw a bigger opportunity elsewhere so after we got married, we moved to Washington, D.C.

The Urban Institute

Grad: You started working at the Urban Institute?

Jacobs: Right. I had met George Sadowsky who was at the Urban Institute via the Brookings organization and he basically offered me a job that doubled my salary so I couldn't turn that down. So after my wife graduated, we moved to Washington and I went to work for George.

Grad: Did your wife want to work or want to continue her studies?

Jacobs: She was doing music and when we moved to Washington she wanted to teach piano privately so that's what she did for the beginning of her career. We subsequently moved out to Reston, Virginia, and she expanded her practice to 40 or so students. One night I asked her, "Do you like what you are doing?" And she said, "No. I'd rather be a nurse." That shocked the hell out of me. She dropped all her students, went to nursing school, became a nurse, fell in love with a doctor and left me alone.

Grad: That's not a good story

Jacobs: The long and the short of it was it allowed me ultimately to make the decision to move to California, be part of Oracle and all this other stuff.

Grad: It helped that you had no family responsibilities to hold you down.

Jacobs: Yes. So that was certainly very easy but going to work for the Urban Institute was a good thing. I was able to take on a fairly important management position.

Grad: What was the responsibility of the Urban Institute? What did they do?

Jacobs: The Urban Institute is a social science research organization studying public policy around all kinds of economic and social policies. The particular project that I was involved with was a group that George led for this project called MASH, the Microanalytic Simulation of Households. It was a rather large FORTRAN program at the time that would take U.S. census

data, individual information that had been scrubbed of identity, and simulate what events would happen to people and their families at a micro level: so people would go to school, they'd marry, they'd have children, they'd die, they'd receive benefits – all of these things. We would simulate various economic policies like tax rates or changes in health policy or whatever on this basis.

Grad: The models were how those kinds of policies might affect the things to do with family formation or growth or change.

Jacobs: Right, and so they would try to implement a policy that would change the odds that a kid would graduate from college or change income levels and so forth. We would start with census data and then we would simulate all these events. There was a macroeconomic part of the model as well and so we would go year to year to see what would happen over the course of ten years or so. And at one point I remember we took the 1960 census data and ran it for a hundred years to create a hundred years' worth of history on this simulated population. It started as a real population but became a simulated population for which we would retain all of their genealogy and their family histories and economic histories. It was an interesting business.

Grad: Do you remember how they built up the models of impact?

Jacobs: The social scientists would be studying a particular policy proposal.

Grad: I was wondering if they had looked at census data from the 1940s, put in the policies of the 1950s and see what the results were.

Jacobs: Well, that was essentially what we were doing. We started with the 1960s and went forward.

Grad: No. I'm saying to build the original models you would have to have some history.

Jacobs: I don't know. MASH had been established by the time I was there so they had a module for birth and a module for education and a module for X, Y, Z, but my task was pretty technical. I was asked to enhance the running of the thing so it could perform better.

Grad: You were more involved in the systems issues, not the application.

Jacobs: Not the application. I was definitely coding the application but I wasn't involved so much with the design of the models of the social science. They'd say, "I need to simulate this kind of behavior according to these parameters," and I would implement a module that would affect the individual family.

Grad: On the systems side you were trying to do things to get better performance.

Jacobs: Yes.

Grad: Do you remember what kind of equipment you were using?

Grad: There was a DEC 10 which was a great machine. It was actually running at the Urban Institute. It was kind of a shared resource that they had and remember doing a couple of interesting things. One that sticks out involved a hundred-year simulation we were trying to run. The time it took to run one day or one year's worth of simulation was hours and hours so we couldn't afford to restart it all the time if there were a failure or we wanted to look at various checkpoints. So I wrote some code that would create a checkpoint by writing out its own memory image to disk in a format that was executable so when you ran that executable format it would pick up where it left off. This was particularly important because MASH was a little unusual in having a self-modifying code. It used a virtual memory model where it had look up by name. That was very expensive so the first execution of any one of these calls was very expensive. But I was able to capture the modification so we could in fact do that hundred-year run.

Grad: It was done by day by day, not week by week or month by month. Fascinating, but It sounds very granular though.

Jacobs: It was granular because we were dealing with hundreds of thousands or a million records and simulating all of the behaviors of these people and families.

Grad: Did you enjoy the work? Did you have fun?

Jacobs: Yes, very much so. And in fact I think I enjoyed it to a fault. I took it home and worked at home. I remember having one of those Texas Instruments portable terminals with a telephone modem built in with the heat-sensitive paper. I would tend to work to the point where my wife wasn't happy with me; so it was definitely captivating.

Grad: What happened in 1976?

Jacobs: Well, let's see. I moved to Washington with my wife in 1973 and was there for three or so years with the Urban Institute. I had some exposure at that time to database, very minimal exposure. I had a position where I wasn't growing any more. I'd done what I needed to do and learned what I was going to learn and I was in a social science setting rather than a computing environment. It wasn't a computer business – it was a social science business. And at one point I considered taking a position with the then new Congressional Budget Office doing similar

kinds of work. To this day I'm very glad I didn't do that. I'd probably still be working for the government. But I ended up taking a position at a timesharing company.

First Data Timesharing

Grad: Which one?

Jacobs: It was a small company no longer in existence. I think it was called First Data, not like the First Data that we have today.

Grad: We've done some analysis of the early timesharing companies and I think that name comes up there.

Jacobs: They were bought by ADP and that was a difficult transition culturally when you have a big company come in and buy a little one.

Grad: You stayed with the company after it was bought?

Jacobs: For a period of time. It wasn't a long time after that that I left but I had an opportunity there to do a range of computing-intensive things which was great. I supported some of the timesharing customers. I supported salespeople who were working with customers.

Grad: You were still in the Washington, D.C.?

Jacobs: I was still in D.C., supporting the salespeople, doing demonstrations and benchmarks for government agencies, doing more database work and that was great.

Grad: What did you think your special skills were at that point, the technical skills, the communication skills?

Jacobs: I'd say I was a young guy. I didn't have a big picture understanding of the industry. Certainly I tried to be able to communicate well about technology, but I think I was a reasonably strong programmer. I think I had a pretty good sense of design and good coding habits, all the kind of the things that you like to see when you're hiring somebody.

Grad: You weren't worrying about managing other people?

Jacobs: No. That wasn't ever my objective to be an entrepreneur or anything like that. I didn't have anything like that in my family background and I had no drive to have an

independent business. It was quite the contrary. The notion that I was working for a commercial company rather than being a civil servant was quite foreign in my family. My mother was a schoolteacher. My dad was a civil servant. So that was sort of the background and it wasn't at all entrepreneurial.

Grad: Those were safer jobs.

Jacobs: Safer jobs. This business could go under. Where is your paycheck going to come from?

Grad: Was your father or mother disturbed that you hadn't gotten an advanced degree?

Jacobs: No, I don't think so. They were just happy that I was independent and they were distracted with other issues. My sister wasn't doing so well at that time so they had other concerns.

Grad: They weren't focusing on you.

Jacobs: I wasn't causing any problems so that worked well.

Grad: You had said at one point you worked with a failed startup company.

The Creative Group

Jacobs: Yes. That was right after the timesharing company. I'm pretty sure that I went from the Urban Institute to the timesharing company and then from there to this startup. It was called The Creative Group and it did a mixture of things. One was a PC-based ride-sharing system running, I think, on CP/M as the operating system on a Z80 computer. It was really into the late 1970s. And then I did some interesting work with them on a real time radar system for weather forecasting. They had a Data General machine that interfaced to radar equipment. They needed some sort of a control board to manage it in addition to what the Data General machine could do so they had an 8080 emulator board that they built. I remember working with the engineers to wire it and was astounded with the memory access and being stunned to see something happening in 70 nanoseconds. I could comprehend what was going on in the hardware; I never really took a big interest in hardware but at that time that was amazing to me.

Grad: You left after ADP had taken the timesharing company?

Jacobs: Yes.

Grad: You weren't having fun anymore or was it some other reason?

Jacobs: When companies acquire others, cultural changes take place and there was some of that. Some of my friends left. This opportunity with the Creative Group arose. I knew someone who went to work there and it kind of enticed me to come along.

Grad: It was an opportunity rather than "I have to get out of here."

Jacobs: Yes. It was more that.

Grad: Were you continuing to take any classes or do anything like that?

Jacobs: Well, I did. When I was at the Urban Institute I began a graduate program at George Washington University. And previously I had taken a course somewhere along the way at American University where I was exposed to assembly language programming for a microprocessor. That was fun but at one point I decided it would be good to go on and get some advanced education, not because I wanted the degree but because I wanted to learn. In fact, I was really very conscious of that in my mind – that I just wanted to know; I just wanted the education. I didn't really have plans to turn that advanced degree into anything. I wasn't going to teach. I wasn't going to somehow build on that advanced degree. So I ended up going to George Washington and taking classes at night over several years and I came close to finishing my degree. I think I had all but the master's thesis done.

Grad: This was in what subject area?

Jacobs: In computer science. But I had managed to take some math along the way too. I had to take calculus again in order to take differential equations which was plenty hard. I managed to take a number of interesting courses that I found really fascinating both in the hardware and programming areas.

Grad: You were still a reasonable student or an outstanding one?

Jacobs: Now I was a better student and I was working hard with a job and a wife but I was still very interested in this stuff and I certainly did fine. I wasn't in danger of flunking out or anything like that.

Grad: You said you did a variety of things that you've mentioned here. Was that fun there?

Inslaw

Jacobs: The Creative Group was fine. It was a problem that it was a tiny company but it started to do well after I joined it and added employees. But then it reached a point where the business wasn't sustaining itself and it started to lose employees. I didn't want to be the last one out the door so I left and ended up returning to the nonprofit world at Inslaw, the Institute for Law and Social Research. Again there was a connection to the people at Brookings and the Urban Institute, but it was a different company doing some of the same kinds of work, this time in criminal justice. At Inslaw I did FORTRAN programming and I ran a small team of people who supported the social science researchers analyzing survey data.

Grad: Do you remember who was running the company at that time?

Jacobs: I think it was run by Bill Hamilton as the CEO. Inslaw is an interesting company. They built a case management system called PROMIS and there are some very interesting stories about the history of the company. I was again supporting social science research and had a small team of programmers working for me. I tried to do a few things with database but the main business of Inslaw was not on the research side but it was in PROMIS, the case management software that they had built. I wasn't involved with that.

Grad: I remember that was something that they were doing for the Justice Department.

Jacobs: Yes, that's right. They had developed PROMIS to track cases and for local jurisdictions to use for managing cases and prisoners in jails and things like that. As far as I know, in the early days it may have been written in COBOL. It wasn't database oriented. Long since then it has evolved and became a client/server application built around databases.

Grad: Yes. I know the FBI ended up using it extensively and that was where there was a major suit.

Jacobs: There was a very interesting story to be told.

Grad: Unfortunately, you weren't there so that's not really your story so we won't go there. At this point you had worked a couple years. Where are you living?

Jacobs: We were still living in D.C. I think we moved to Silver Spring because I hated the commute from Reston to downtown. It was just a horrible commute at the time. I was at Inslaw for about a year and a half, maybe two years, and during this time I was still taking courses at George Washington University. It was right in the middle of my database course that my wife decided to leave so I was pretty stressed about that but I completed the class. This was a class on database, an introduction to database technology, that I just stumbled into. I didn't even

know a lot about database but I was learning about the relational model and all of that and the new, exciting technologies that were coming.

Joining Oracle in Washington

The fellow who was teaching the class was a guy named Dave Roberts. Dave was at the CIA at the time he was teaching the class. One night he happened to mention that he knew this small company on the West Coast called Relational Software and he was thinking about joining them. It turns out that he knew Larry Ellison and Bob Miner from a prior affiliation and he was intrigued by what they were doing. So I went up to him at the end of the class one night and said, "Well, Dave, if you ever need anybody, give me a call." That turned out to be the smartest thing that I ever did other than ask my present wife, "Will you marry me?"

After a couple of months, Dave did introduce me to Larry Ellison and we got to know one another. It took maybe a few months before we both got serious enough to pursue an opportunity, but I do remember meeting Larry at a hotel in Washington, D.C., because Larry was from the West Coast. I remember leaving the building after having a meeting with Larry and I was driving an old jalopy. Larry happened to see me pull out of the garage and Larry, typical Larry, rolled down his window and said, "Want a new car?" And that's how I knew I had passed the interview.

I think part of the reason I had impressed Larry was that I asked him what he did as a president of a company. I had also read the manual for Oracle version 2 that he had pretty much written and I said I was impressed with the product but I wasn't so sure about the report writer part of it. It was either the manual or the product that didn't impress me very much, but one thing led to another and I helped establish the Washington, D.C. office with Dave Roberts. That was in 1981.

Grad: 1981 is when you changed. Since then you haven't job hopped.

Jacobs: I haven't job hopped and it was sort of interesting. In the first 11 years of my career I had six or seven jobs and after that it has just been Oracle. However, within Oracle, of course, I've had a lot of different jobs.

Grad: I'd like you to talk through some of the principal jobs that you worked on. I want to try to get some sense about the roles you played, not just the titles but what were you contributing; what were you doing that was of value.

Jacobs: Well, it's really been the great fortune of mine to have had so many opportunities to contribute in different ways. Being a technical guy, and Oracle being a technical company, no

matter what role you're in, understanding technology is pretty important. Even when you open a sales office, there are a lot of things that need to be done from direct selling to consulting and training and running the computer room and running support. And so in the very early days, it was just Dave and me and I remember writing training materials and I would teach the whole of Oracle's technology in three days or a week.

Grad: What were the first things you started to do when you went to work for Oracle? What were the first assignments you had?

Jacobs: Well, it was very much a startup operation. I was number 18 in the entire company and I was number 2 in Washington, D.C. It was primarily a sales office so we were focused on demonstrating the product to customers and educating customers. Very early we created an education program and I wrote and delivered what I think was the very first training courses in Oracle at our facility where customers came to learn the full set of SQL. Initially, we didn't have a computer there; we used the computer in California. It was interesting that e-mail was very much a part of our culture, even in 1981. We had a shared office and I'd be sitting on one side of the room and Dave would be on the other, both using a VAX out in California, and we would send e-mails to one another. I would press "enter" and his machine would be disabled. We were using e-mail very early, even though it was green screens and so forth.

Grad: Your background had been essentially all technical up to that point, but now you were getting a bunch of other kinds of responsibilities?

Jacobs: I did and I was petrified of public speaking. I watched Dave and learned how to do presentations and so I was doing demos and I was kind of the demo expert

Grad: Dave Roberts stayed there?

Jacobs: Yes, for the first three, almost four years, I guess.

Grad: Was he the senior person then?

Jacobs: Yes, very much so. I learned a lot from him. He and I spent more time together than my wife and I did, I guess. That probably contributed to my personal situation but we really established the office together. We did a lot of things. For example, he gave me the job of running support and eventually I took on the role of managing the support group for the East Coast; but prior to having a team, I was the support group.

Grad: You would go in to help support the customers?

Jacobs: Well, I'd answer the phone when customers called with problems. Sometimes we had to do extraordinary things because the software wasn't always as reliable as it should have been. We had to be creative, learn how to work with customers who had problems and try to be responsive to them. I got engaged with the local user community and became sort of the technical spokesperson. I definitely had a range of things I did. I ultimately ran the VAX computer that they installed locally and so I got to work with some of the key large defense and military intelligence customers and I learned what they needed.

Grad: You said you got security clearance somewhere along the line?

Jacobs: Yes. I got security clearance along the way and managed to go to some places and see some things that are pretty amazing; and I've subsequently forgotten all of that on purpose. Dave of course had come from the CIA so he had an interest in that and it led to my interest in security so working with a few of the large customers in Washington I came to understand what they needed in the way of enhancements in the security of the data.

Grad: Security in the use of the computers, not security of the computer itself?

Jacobs: No. More the security of the data in the database and what should a database product do to keep the data secure. This of course was long before the Internet, so even within the data center it was necessary to make sure that you had an audit trail or proper privileges for people – those kinds of things. I remember sitting down at one point with the Orange Book, which was a government publication outlining criteria for evaluating operating systems, and I tried to figure out how to apply those general guidelines to database. So, working with people in California I helped design an audit facility. I had a good relationship with many of the developers in California and we'd come out periodically to work with them.

Grad: You would travel back and forth?

Jacobs: Yes, some, but it wasn't a regular commute by any means. But there would be events and we'd get to know one another but we used e-mail and phone to communicate and I was able to influence some product decisions and make requests on behalf of customers and get those implemented.

Grad: Who were your primary interfaces on the West Coast?

Jacobs: Well, back then when there were 18 people in the company I would talk with Larry [Ellison] occasionally. I would talk with Ed Oates, one of the other founders, and the other core developers, some of whom are still at Oracle. I have been very fortunate to be surrounded by a group of people who are brilliant, fun to work with and long-term committed people.

Grad: There are a lot of long-term employees because you said you're the second-longest.

Jacobs: I am. After Larry, I've been there longer than anybody I guess.

Grad: There are a number of others who came in relatively early too.

Jacobs: Yes, there are many in the 20 year plus group. This is particularly true within the core database group; there are a lot of people who have been around a long time. I had an opportunity to do some sales work, some consulting work. I remember selling Oracle to the Food and Drug Administration, for example, and I pretty much did the whole deal even though I had no background in sales prior to that. It was a technical sale and so I worked with them, responded to RFPs and things like that, so I got exposed to the full breadth of the business. It was really a wonderful opportunity.

Grad: Being in a small office like that, you get to see every aspect of the business, don't you?

Jacobs: Exactly, and what was really interesting, looking at it from my perspective, it was like having this little finger of Silicon Valley find its way all the way across the country and touch me because the notion of a startup was nothing I'd ever heard of. I didn't know about little companies. I didn't know about Silicon Valley; this was before Silicon Valley really became a hotbed of startups in the software business.

Grad: In taking the job in the first place, weren't you concerned about the risk?

Jacobs: Oh, I absolutely felt the risk. I was very concerned about the viability of this little, tiny company because when I first started talking to Larry and Dave it had only 12 people. I had previously had experience with this other startup and not having a commercial background and having spent a lot of my career in nonprofits, it was a pretty risky proposition for me psychologically.

Grad: You don't appear to me to be a risk taker.

Jacobs: I'm not a huge risk taker, although in my personal life I enjoy things like scuba diving and other activities

Grad: That was a change in your life style?

Moving to California

Jacobs: It was. It was a huge change for me. After I moved out to California, Larry took a group of us out to Maui to celebrate product completion. One of the activities available was to learn how to scuba dive and I tried it for no reason I remember now. I've always been afraid of water but I tried it anyway and I was just so captivated by it that I kept thinking about it. Three years later I finally got certified and I've dived hundreds of times since; I just love diving and it was one of those personal growth things where you overcome limitations of your own, just like learning public speaking was something that had been a challenge for me.

Grad: You had done debating in school.

Jacobs: I had, but it was different. That was in a very safe environment, whereas standing up in front of a hundred people was more difficult. But my classroom experience certainly helped.

Grad: You had taught so that helped?

Jacobs: Yes, it was definitely something I learned to do.

Grad: How long did you stay in Washington before you went out to California?

Jacobs: I was in Washington about four and a half years. I joined in 1981 and I think over the winter of 1985, 1986 I moved to California.

Grad: Was there anything else that occurred during that first four or five years that was particularly notable in your mind?

Jacobs: Well, I worked with a few large systems integrators or directly with agencies on a couple of interesting technical projects. One involved the specification for a distributed database version of Oracle, and they allowed me to write up this spec which never got implemented so that was kind of a waste of time. But another area that was quite interesting was the attempt to address the needs of the NSA for a multilevel secure platform where you had unclassified secret and top secret data in the same database and you needed to provide access to the data for users with the proper clearance. I got to understand their needs and with Dave Roberts' guidance I wrote them a proposal letter which they then followed up with a sole source procurement proposal to us to develop the system. It was around the time that I moved to California but the project remained with the D.C. office. They later brought it to my attention after they received the RFP and I wrote the proposal. We ended up winning the bid and I contributed to the start of that effort.

Grad: How big had the Washington office become by the time you left?

Jacobs: Oh, there must have been less than 20 people or so in Washington alone and I had hired a few sales consultants and other people.

Grad: That was still a significant part of the business of Oracle at that point in time.

Jacobs: Sure. The government business was a growing business and it was peculiar because the rest of the company was all commercially oriented and they didn't have a lot of patience for the pace at which government transactions took place with the long, complex procurement process and so forth. But the process did generate an incredible revenue stream once you made the sale. And we had success with the pharmaceuticals as a result of the FDA deal. We were selling throughout the government in both civilian and defense applications.

Grad: You continued over that four- or five-year period to have a range of different responsibilities.

Jacobs: Yes. I did a lot of travel, did some consulting at various locations for customers, and started to build up some marketing sense although I wasn't responsible for marketing.

Grad: I'm trying to see how you evolved, from the relative loner doing individual projects to working with a group of people. You're representing a company. You had become a pretty big deal at this point.

Jacobs: Well, Oracle always believed in just throwing people into the pool and letting them swim. There wasn't much management training or any particular guidance. People would be models and mentors but it was definitely not until many years later that Oracle instituted any kind of formal employee training programs.

Grad: The idea was that Larry would find bright people and they'd find jobs that would work out for them.

Jacobs: Exactly so.

Grad: I'm trying to get a picture of how you felt about it. Here you had been doing technical work only. You felt pretty good about yourself technically.

Jacobs: Yes.

Management Responsibilities

Grad: Now you were thrown into a different situation entirely. You had to take a whole range of different responsibilities, attack problems you had never attacked before.

Jacobs: And it was just so much fun. It was interesting doing these other things. It was a variety of things and it wasn't that I wanted to lose my technical ability. Far from it, but it was enjoyable having the people interactions and learning how to help people was really a lot of what it was about in the early years. When somebody had a technical problem, my satisfaction was partly in solving the technical problem but also in helping them with their goal, their business.

Grad: You had a few people working for you this point in time. How did that feel?

Jacobs: I had had some prior management experience. When I was at the Urban Institute, I was working with a team. I had more responsibility without authority, which was a situation I vowed never to be in again. It was a horrible aspect of the position but I certainly learned about team dynamics. When I went to the startup timesharing company, I was an individual contributor. But I was in my late 20s and I wasn't on a management track; that wasn't where I thought I was going. But I did manage a team at Inslaw – I had four or five programmers working for me, so I had some management experience even then it still wasn't where I thought I was going with my life. But when I got to Oracle, I had an opportunity to do a wide range of things. And still today that is one of the aspects of my career at Oracle that I value most – the breadth of activities I've been able to get involved in.

Grad: That was more fun or more interesting to you than just trying to climb the corporate ladder to become the number two person in the company.

Jacobs: Yes. I never had a goal of owning a big group of people and being the big honcho manager; I just never sought that.

Focusing on the Customer

Grad: How about being a technology leader?

Jacobs: Well, I never owned a product per se until relatively recently. We'll come back to that but I was an evangelist. I was an influencer. I represented customer interest to the development organization. I got involved with standards activities so I had some direct technical responsibility. I had a very customer-centered view and that wasn't always the greatest position to be in; I was in a minority at Oracle with that kind of view in the early days. Most people were

just interested in building a technology. I was interested in broadening the acceptance of the product to a larger group of customers.

Grad: Even as you talk here, your face starts to light up more as you talk about this range of things you're doing versus the kinds of things you were doing before. There was nothing wrong with them, but you don't seem to have the same response to them.

Jacobs: Yes. That's probably right. But I have stayed involved in the technical aspect even until today. I'm a pretty technical guy. For example, when my wife calls me at work and I see it's our home number, I say, "Tech Support," because I know she's got a problem.

Entering Product Management

I've been involved with the database technology. I consider myself a reasonable expert in database technology by now, and I'm proud of that, but it is also the variety and the people skills that are important to me. When I was still in Washington, I did all these things, working with a team in California and I had a good relationship with a number of the developers. I guess Larry observed what I was doing and at a corporate meeting he announced to the company that I was moving to California – that was really before I knew it. So he asked me to come and be a part of an emerging product management group.

Grad: By this point, what was your home situation?

Jacobs: I was single so that made it easier to move. And so for a period of time I was bicoastal; I stayed in Washington and spent time out here in California, and vice versa. That was back in 1985, 1986.

Grad: Then you came out to California.

Jacobs: I came out to join what was then an emerging product management group.

Grad: Who were you going to work for then?

Jacobs: I don't remember when he came, but I think a gentleman named Mike Thoma was head of product management, called product marketing at the time.

Grad: Was this a new organization?

Jacobs: It was a relatively new organization.

Grad: What was the responsibility of that organization?

Jacobs: It really was kind of the beginnings of a classical product management kind of function. We were trying to understand the requirements, understand the competition and create the collateral materials to document and train customers in how to use the product and educate the sales force.

Grad: It was a customer-centric and competition-centric view?

Jacobs: And communication-centric – communicating about the technology to all the constituencies whether internal or external, and doing analysis of product. I was for a time the entire product management team for the database, the networking and the loader products, so I ended up writing specs for what the product should look like and I continued in my role of working with development to enhance the product to better meet customer needs. So that was the objective. I did the database and a friend of mine – no longer at Oracle but a good friend – was working with tools and so that's how we got started.

Grad: Did you think strategically or did you think more in terms of very specific, concrete requirements? What were you thinking?

Jacobs: That's a good question. I wasn't necessarily seeing the biggest of the big picture. I saw a bigger picture than just a feature but I didn't see all of the business angles of what we were doing.

Grad: Having done the proposal work for some of these major clients, you tended to see a very broad range. It wasn't just this one function or feature?

Jacobs: That's right. It was technology based, it was application based, it was business based, but it wasn't about our business. I wasn't involved in making decisions about whether we port to this platform or that platform

Grad: Unless you got a specific customer who had that requirement.

Jacobs: Exactly.

Grad: As you went into product marketing, though, didn't issues like platform support become more significant?

Jacobs: Sure, and we had to deal with a lot of different opportunities and make choices about what to pursue, whether it was a particular hardware platform or a particular

benchmarking strategy. Over time I did expand my view of what we were doing beyond product evolution.

Grad: Did you put together a plan for a product? What was the requirement for a new platform or some new set of features? Is that something you would have worked on at that time?

Jacobs: I don't think so. It was much more organic. We were all on a train to make the next release of the product and my sense was that a lot of what Oracle was doing was scrambling to meet and keep up with demand. It wasn't really difficult to decide to do a new platform or introduce a new feature.

Grad: The product management role was a provocative role, a planning role and an external role.

Jacobs: Yes. The planning part of it was pretty limited and informal and more technical than business, so it was not so much a strategic role. It wasn't the typical product manager role.

Grad: How long were you in this product management role?

Jacobs: I stayed in that role for several years once I came to corporate. I started having some product managers work for me and took on the responsibility for documentation; I had a documentation team work for me. I continued to personally be very involved in the day to day technical analysis of competitors and working on future design and so forth, despite having the management role.

Grad: Now you had five, ten employees?

Jacobs: Yes, something like that.

Grad: Again was that rewarding in itself or simply a way of getting a job done?

Jacobs: It was not my objective to be manager of a large group, but I enjoyed working with people and people told me they enjoyed working for me, as a mentor and as a leader, but I wasn't very good at giving people career advice and dealing with their problems. At the same time, Oracle as a company was not particularly conventional when it came to some of these management responsibilities; it had very much a startup mentality, even as we grew to hundreds of employees. So it wasn't really in the cards for me to become a traditional manager.

Grad: We're talking about 1986 to the early 1990. This would be before trouble happened in the early 1990s. Were the management people competitive with each other? Were there a lot of turf issues, things like that?

Jacobs: There certainly were occasions where there were multiple projects started that had similar aims and they'd try to compete with one another. But I think that happened more later in the company's evolution. We had one main product, the database. We added to that some tools and so the internal competition was always healthy.

Grad: It wasn't backbiting?

Jacobs: It wasn't too much backbiting, no. I think that came somewhat later. I'm not speaking of the sales organization. There was always competition there.

Grad: Did you deal much with sales?

Jacobs: Of course, yes. I did a lot of technical product education. I supported sales activities in the form of customer engagements and helped salespeople respond to customer questions.

Grad: How knowledgeable were you in the 1986 to 1989 time period? What was happening with the company as a whole, where was it going, what was happening financially?

Jacobs: I had started to become more and more aware and being at corporate, it was a lot easier to be aware of what was happening broadly. With friends in other departments, I learned what was happening, how we were expanding our international business and so forth. I absolutely came to be aware of our channels group, our platform porting group and sales organization, operations and so forth.

Grad: Were you ever interested in the financials of Oracle's own business?

Jacobs: Clearly, when we had the near death experience in 1991, I was very interested. Before that point I probably was not because everything was going so well. There was never a concern about whether the company was going to meet payroll or have enough money to expand. The business was growing so fast. Over the first ten out of the first 11 years I was with the company, we doubled every year in revenue and employees so there wasn't anything to be concerned about from my point of view.

Grad: Who were the primary people that you talked to and worked with on an executive level?

Jacobs: Well, let's see. Back then I would work with Bob Miner, a founder of Oracle and the head of the database division. Subsequently, a good friend of mine today, Derek Capsinel, took that position and he was in that role for a long time. I would work with the leaders of other groups, with the sales organizations and the support organization, consulting organization, and so forth, so I had a set of connections throughout the company.

Grad: Did you feel these were competitive or were these all collegial?

Jacobs: Very collegial. I didn't have a problem dealing with any of these people so it was not hard for me to work with them.

Grad: You had moved to California. Did you enjoy the life out there?

Jacobs: Oh, when I first moved out I thought I'd made the worst mistake in the world.

Grad: Why?

Jacobs: Because living on the East Coast, I thought it never rained in California. And of course, after I moved out here in the fall, from December through April it didn't stop raining. I was a little annoyed but after that I was quite settled in and no more wanted to move back to the East Coast. This is a great place to live, as you know. I had a townhouse in San Mateo, a very easy two-minute commute to Oracle, so it was a good situation for me – single with a dog. It was fine.

Grad: Were you doing a lot of traveling?

Jacobs: I was indeed. I managed to do a fair bit of travel. I took on the role of representing Oracle in the ANSI database community –the American National Standards Institute Committee on Database. It was called X3H2, chaired by a guy named Don Deutsch. Don had been at General Electric years before and then went to Sybase. Eventually he came to Oracle and I helped get him hired to run our standards activities; he's still chairing the database committee. For about seven years I represented Oracle on the database committee and we would travel every month or every other month to different locations around the country and occasionally around the world. Plus I did customer events around the world, did Oracle trade show events and consulting opportunities. So even though I was running a team of product managers, I was still personally involved in a lot of these activities so that during the standards activities I was able to contribute in certain ways. I became fairly visible, not only inside the Oracle environment, within the sales force, but outside to the Oracle community.

Oracle's Financial Problems

Grad: Let's now move to the 1990, 1991 period. We're not going to spend a lot of time on the Oracle problems, but there were significant problems with Oracle because of the way the financial statements had been constructed, what sales records there were, and this ended up having a very serious impact that resulted in a cash shortage. Is that an accurate summary?

Jacobs: Pretty close. I think some of the issues were booking revenues that were not in hand and things like that but yes, it was a serious cash shortage.

Grad: Were you aware of any of these things at the time?

Jacobs: Oh, absolutely.

Grad: Prior to the 1990, 1991 period?

Jacobs: I knew that there were very aggressive sales practices and I picked up things here and there, but I didn't know the magnitude of it. I was not part of the inner circle that was operating the business so I didn't really know what was going on.

Grad: You were really not on the operations side.

Jacobs: No, no. I did have a role in product marketing so I had a lot of connections with people in the field and you learn what's going on, but I wasn't in the CFO's organization where I could look at the books.

Grad: Who identified the problems and how were they described to you?

Jacobs: Oh, boy. Now this goes back 15, 16 years, so it's a little hard to be precise. We were a public company by then, we became public in 1986, so of course I started following the stock and started following the financial results. As a result, I had some awareness of how the company was doing. Our revenues were growing. Things were good. All of a sudden they were not so good.

Grad: It was not anything that was told inside the company before there was some public awareness?

Jacobs: No. I don't recall learning about the seriousness of the problem until it was announced publicly. We had a revenue shortfall and then things began to unwind.

Grad: I'm not going to go into that story in detail but what I'm trying to get at – that kind of experience can make you feel badly about the company you work for. You may feel uncomfortable. I was wondering if that affected you that way.

Jacobs: Well, it was a serious event and I had had an experience with a small startup that didn't do well. But by that point I was so committed, and so much a believer in what we were doing, that I wasn't tempted to depart.

Grad: That didn't shake your belief?

Jacobs: No.

Grad: Did it make you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable?

Jacobs: Certainly a little bit uncomfortable, a little bit embarrassed, but not to the point of wanting to leave. There were many people who left around that time but I hadn't missed a payroll so that made a big difference.

Grad: I remember after I left General Electric Company, they were then indicted for having fixed prices and I had been gone a while yet I felt very, very badly that I had been a part of that company and I wasn't aware of it. I felt some of the shame though I had nothing to do with it.

Jacobs: Let me put it to you this way: I have had a role at Oracle, both before that problem and after it, where I represented the positive parts of Oracle so in fact this was something of a personality change for me. As I came from the East Coast to the West Coast, I left behind a typical Brooklyn negative mindset and came out to sunny California and learned a positive mindset; I had gone through the divorce and otherwise had gone through some changes and took up scuba diving. After that debacle in 1992, I kind of went through a personal growth period that really helped me a lot. And so I was able to deal with that problem without feeling too much. I felt that I certainly hadn't contributed to it but I also felt that it was something that we would recover from and I didn't feel so much embarrassed about it as wished that the other guys hadn't done those things.

Sometimes you can be aware of things that are less than ideal and you try to present them in a positive light. We certainly had product problems prior to those financial problems and we had customers who thought we had over-promised product and I was very embarrassed about those things. We didn't ship product when we said we would and there were certainly issues of product execution that I felt very bad about. But when it came to the financial business itself, perhaps I didn't understand it as well as I do now or shortly after that as I became more aware

of the larger picture, but I wasn't so much worried about the events themselves, I was more concerned because the stock fell down to four and I had some vested interest in it.

Grad: Sometimes you can just lose confidence in executives and wonder how they could have done that kind of thing.

Jacobs: Certainly it was a shakeup. Then at the same time, fortunately, Larry was aggressive in educating people about what he was going to do to fix the situation and that helped a great deal. He brought in some good executives and things turned around.

Grad: So there were very major changes in executives and new people came in with the kind of skills and attitude that made a difference.

Jacobs: Made a big difference.

Grad: Now what happened after that; what kind of roles did you play; were you still in product management or did you start to shift roles?

Jacobs: I was still in product management, still running a team that did documentation. At one point I took on product marketing as well so my group was responsible not only for the technical things but also for creating the marketing materials and launch activities. We were working with the corporate marketing group but we were the product marketing group in the development organization. There was a time where product marketing was done in development; today it's in marketing. I continued in that role and probably in the late 1990s I decided that I wasn't good at that particular activity; I didn't really want to be a manager of a big group and so I changed my role. I was given a lot of latitude by that time and I continued to be very visible in the community giving presentations and speaking publicly, so I kind of became the senior statesperson for the product. I became the senior evangelist, if you will, for several years. I continued to be involved with standards activities until about 1993. I was on the SQL committee and then I took on a role representing Oracle on the benchmarking group, the transaction processing council. So I was still doing external things.

Grad: But you never ended up in Washington to try and do lobbying?

Jacobs: Not lobbying. Certainly, because I had started in Washington, I maintained close connections with people in Washington but I didn't do any business level lobbying with Congress or anything like that.

Dr. DBA

Grad: You mentioned about being called Dr. DBA. What was that; where does that come from?

Jacobs: That was interesting. Oracle has annual trade shows of our own, we call them Open World, and during the 1990s they grew to be quite large and still are. They're huge and they have keynote presentations. I would do a major keynote every year, standing up in front of 5,000 people and be one of those keynote speakers.

Grad: Why were you selected for that?

Jacobs: I spoke with a silver tongue, I guess. I don't know, people knew me from in the community, the users did, and they expected to hear from me. Even though my bosses during that period, both Bob Miner and then Derek Capsinel, were really the responsible owners of the product, they didn't enjoy the role of making customer presentations. So I became the guy who was the face of those community groups. Each year we would have a theme for these major keynotes and one year the theme was emulating TV shows. So that particular year I was meant to be like the Dr. Frasier of Frasier where people would call in with their problems and I would answer them. I was called Dr. Data and it sort of morphed into Dr. DBA. I created a script for myself where I sat on stage with headphones and microphone. It was during the Monica Lewinsky scandal with Clinton and I had people call in as a voiceover like the voice of God, asking double entendre kinds of questions like, "My name is Bill. I'm calling from Washington and I have a problem with administration and data integrity. How would you fix that problem, Dr. Data?" I would answer, "Well, you use Oracle with these features..." I had a little thing going and it turned out that the marketing department decided they wanted to brand me and create a name so it transformed to Dr. DBA somehow. I had various opportunities to write articles in our magazine or do a radio broadcast on our website and they even created a mouse pad with my face on it. As far as I know, I'm the only human being whose face gets rubbed by a mouse every day.

Grad: Did you enjoy that sort of thing?

Jacobs: Yes I did. At some point I decided I'd been there, done that; I didn't need to keep doing it and so I handed it off to others.

Grad: It didn't become an ego thing that you had to continue?

Jacobs: No, I had plenty of satisfaction from having done all that.

Grad: I don't see a lot of ego in any of these things we're discussing; am I missing something?

Jacobs: No, I think I've had so much satisfaction that I haven't needed to be egotistical about things. I get a lot of kudos; I get plenty of ego massage without seeking it. So I've just been very, very fortunate.

Grad: But people want recognition of various kinds, they want to be on boards, they want titles, they want things like that.

Jacobs: I got all that without going after it. I think it's actually somewhat interesting that my persona and that of Oracle in general are somewhat at odds.

Grad: They're totally at odds; that's exactly the point I was getting at.

Jacobs: So I've just been very fortunate. Fame, fortune and happiness and health; what more does one need?

Grad: And the money has certainly come along I'm sure?

Jacobs: The money has come along very well. Obviously being number 18 at Oracle, I did very well.

Grad: Tell me about your family situation. You got remarried at some point?

Jacobs: I did. As a matter of fact here's a good story. My wife today used to run marketing for Oracle from 1993 to 2000. She was responsible for marketing so she worked very closely with Larry Ellison. Her particular area of interest and expertise is public relations so she would travel with Larry and get him on the covers of magazines and on Oprah and so forth. But in the earlier period, 1995, 1996, which is shortly after she joined Oracle, I was running product marketing for the database group and so I was her client in a way and I would often send her emails complaining about how negative the press was. Why were they saying bad things about us and good things about our competition? And she'd politely reply. Finally, we had worked together on a few launches and press releases and things like that and we got to be friendly and eventually she married me to shut me up. But she gave me a particular insight into the business that I didn't have before. I could learn from her what was happening from a corporate executive perspective and so that was a great benefit.

Grad: She stopped working in 2000?

Jacobs: She did. She left shortly after Ray Lane did as a matter of fact. She had decided work part time so she could spend time with her daughter, Jamie, who is now in college. It was a good opportunity for her to leave the company and she sold all her stock on pretty near the day that it was at its all time high. So I was very smart in marrying her

Grad: You married her for her money?

Jacobs: No, no, I married her before that but it turned out well. So I got an opportunity to gain an insight into other aspects of the business.

Grad: Let's bring things up to now. You're continuing to work with the company. Do you have any thoughts about retirement?

Future Plans

Jacobs: I occasionally have such thoughts. One of the things I had never done at Oracle was run a development group; I never had product development responsibility. About a year and a half ago, I had the opportunity to participate in an acquisition that we made of a small company in Finland. I drove that acquisition and did the negotiation. We were successful in acquiring the company which makes a database component that is used in the Open Source world. And so I'm in a very unique position today in Oracle where my team builds technology that one of our potential competitors uses. Unlike Oracle's other products, it's an open source product but I know and love this particular piece of database technology. I'm dealing with a small team that is distributed around the world and I'm enjoying the management role, trying to not be too involved in the detail of the technology, thinking about how they can operate better and sort of using the experience I have gained over the years in management to bring some structure to this small distributorship.

Grad: Had you been involved in other acquisitions before?

Jacobs: Perhaps only one in a very peripheral way.

Grad: How about relationships with other suppliers?

Jacobs: Not very much, I mean occasionally I'd be involved with conversations with suppliers, but not as a major role. No, it wasn't my responsibility.

Grad: How about for distributors or OEMs or anything of that sort?

Jacobs: No nothing in particular. Many of these relationships were handled more as a view of the partnering organization via alliances; it wasn't part of the development organization. Once I moved to California I was part of what we called Server Technologies. Within the Oracle culture, Server Technologies, which produces the database and our other infrastructure technology products, is the top of the totem pole. So once I was there, I didn't want to move to another organization.

Grad: Who headed up Server Technology?

Jacobs: Well at one time it was Bob Miner, Derek Capsinel, Jerry Hills.

Grad: It was more or less a technical person in most cases?

Jacobs: Yes and they had a variety of personal styles and strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes they would be more technical, sometimes more business oriented. As the company grew and matured, we needed to grow our business sensitivities even within the development organization, so we've been investing in that.

Grad: So you've been part of that organization?

Jacobs: I've been part of that organization since 1986.

Grad: And you were there through the changes in management. That didn't cause you discomfort?

Jacobs: Not in the least.

Grad: And you still had interesting things to do and fun things to work on?

Jacobs: I'm in a unique situation at Oracle today. I have this development organization that's outside the mainstream of what Oracle does so I get to do whatever I want with it; nobody's asking questions, nobody's putting pressure on me. And I still am involved with the mainstream Oracle product family and I'm sort of regarded as a senior statesman within the group.

Grad: Are there others within the company who have had this similar kind of experience?

Jacobs: I'd say I'm pretty unique. There are others who are well known within smaller circles, but I've had an absolutely amazing opportunity, a variety of things to do, and I'm high

enough in the company to travel, to do a variety of different types of work and still be involved with the technology.

Grad: So you sound like you've had a very, very happy career.

Jacobs: I look back on it and I think I couldn't have picked anything better to do for the last 26 years. And when I think about retirement, I know it's out there; it's going to happen sooner or later.

Grad: I guess my question is there something you would retire to?

Jacobs: Well that's the advice that I always give people: don't *leave* some place, *go to* some place. So I have thought about what I might do, whether it would be work in some advisory capacity with startups or work with VCs or teach or other things. Yes, I feel like I have a broad range of opportunities that I could pursue. Certainly I enjoy travel and my wife and I like to travel and scuba dive and so we'll do some of that. But for now I'm interested in taking this group to the next level and its product to the next level so we'll see what that involves. I do think today's a very interesting time in the database business, Oracle's certainly become very successful; it's the unchallenged leader and we've got great technologies coming. And at the same time, there's all this stuff happening in open source and I've got one foot in each camp. I truly think I'm blessed; it's unique in the industry to have the opportunity I did.

Grad: You've been very fortunate because in spite of the travails, management styles of some of the executives, it seems like you've been sort of insulated, maybe because of your personality.

Jacobs: I think that's part of it. I've known Larry for 25, 26 years and longer I guess now. You know, I was never a direct report to Larry; I always stayed one level below his radar. Every now and then I had something where I would be visible with in front of him and certainly in the early days, when he invited me to California, I was very visible to him. But as the company grew and went into other areas, my visibility to him went down and I haven't felt pressured to perform or deliver numbers or product or any of that. I've had this really wonderful opportunity to be a spokesperson and a customer advocate as much as anything else.

Grad: You've been very fortunate. I'm going to close by asking if there are any other outside activities you are involved in, organizations or things like that that you'd like to mention?

Jacobs: Well I am not professionally involved with many organizations. I think I'm going to accept an invitation to join California's Chamber of Commerce Board to work with them. I have had a few positions where I was involved as a technical adviser to some small companies.

Most of my life has centered around Oracle so I haven't yet expanded much beyond that. In sports, I enjoy scuba diving and skiing. I have a ski home and do snowboarding; we have a home up in Park City, Utah and about 7 or 8 years ago my stepdaughter challenged me to learn how to snowboard. So at my advanced age I learned how to snowboard and I love it; it's just the best experience.

Grad: I may worry about your intelligence in some of these things. For someone who says they were not athletic, you're doing some things that are fairly athletic.

Jacobs: Absolutely. I'm not going to be doing ski jumping and if I get air on my snowboard, it's a mistake so I don't do tricks.

Grad: You enjoy the process. Are these all things fun for you, or did you just do them because they were a challenge?

Jacobs: I think both. I really just enjoy them, feel like a kid, just really get a lot of basic enjoyment out of them. And I like to travel.

Grad: What are some of the places you've gone recently?

Jacobs: Just everywhere. Last year we were in Fiji; we're going to go back to Fiji to dive and then we'll go on to New Zealand. We were in Russia last September; we just came back from Israel and had a great trip there. And that was where I got involved with the California Chamber of Commerce, on a business trip. But I've had a great opportunity to travel, just about anywhere I could ever want to go, and it's been a great opportunity.

Grad: Is your wife involved in any organizations?

Jacobs: Yes, she's doing some work for the Positive Coaching Alliance, which is a nonprofit organization that helps with youth sports. She's on a board of directors in her Homeowner's Associations. We've done some work with, and she's been involved with, the Stanford Stem Cell Institute so she has some opportunities to keep involved. I'm hoping she'll have an opportunity to work with the small startup in San Carlos that makes automobiles called "Tesler." I don't know if you know Tesler; but they make an electric sports car.

Grad: I've read about it, yes.

Jacobs: It's an amazing car and it's great to see Silicon Valley getting green and sticking it to Detroit who seems to have lost its way; they're making this all battery operated sports car.

Grad: Are you an investor?

Jacobs: I bought one. I wasn't an investor, but I bought one. I was number 73 on the list in the whole world to buy one of these cars. Me and George Clooney and a couple of other people, and we were given the opportunity to invest. So I'm hoping to pay for the car with that investment. But my wife may do some consulting work for them as well and I wish them well; I think it's very exciting.

Grad: Are there any other areas you'd like to bring up before we close?

Jacobs: Well, I'd only like to say that I've been very fortunate to be surrounded by some really great people. People ask me all the time, "Why do you keep working? You don't need to be here; you've done everything in the world and made a lot of money; why are you working?" And quite honestly I think I'm working harder now than I have at various other times running this little team. I really enjoy it, I enjoy the technology, I love the people that I work with, I'm surrounded by really great people and so I feel like I want to take this to the next level. I'm only 58 so I don't need to stop. And as I say, I want to go to something, so I'll stay for some time longer.

Grad: Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I've enjoyed it.