



Oral History of Peggy Burke, part 2 of 2

Interviewed by:
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Hancock: Welcome back to the Computer History Museum, Peggy. It's an--

Burke: Thank you, Marguerite.

Hancock: --honor to have you, Peggy Burke, founder and chairman of 1185, and so essential to the evolution of Silicon Valley, here to continue your oral history. Today is July 10, 2019. We'll continue our conversation starting with some of the examples of your work, and we wanted to just have you tell some of the stories of who you worked with and what you did and your insights and impact. We thought we'd start with the venture capital community. So how about if we start with your early work, being introduced to them with Pitch Johnson and some of the companies that you worked with?

Burke: Great. So thank you for doing this.

Hancock: It's our honor.

Burke: It's really a privilege and honor to be a part of this, Marguerite, so thank you. So going back to the venture capital world, when I started my business, I had left Boole & Babbage. I had been an art director at Boole & Babbage in-house, and Pitch Johnson was the chairman of the board of that company. So when I left, he offered to introduce me to the venture capital community, which at that point was not huge. And I had done a genealogy of venture capital with him, which was a very large poster, beginning in the 1950s and going through 1983. In 1985, I was pretty familiar with a lot of the names on that genealogy, this huge poster that we had produced. So he went about introducing me to several of the venture capital firms that were so instrumental in funding so many companies that we subsequently started working with.

I've lost count of the number of firms that we've worked with, but I would say in the early 2000s, we'd worked with about 35 different venture firms. Firms like Foundation, for example, and we would go into these firms. We understood venture very well by then, but we had to get to the essence of the partnership. Ultimately, when it comes to venture, it boils down to not just reputation and picking the winners, but it's the people. It's all people, and so many of these companies have such extraordinary partners. So we would go in, spend a fair amount of time with their portfolio companies and with their partnership, and then we would begin to develop a new brand for them. That would include a logo. It would obviously include a website. A part of it would include their story, and the most important thing really about branding is getting to the essence of the story. The story that they can tell over and over, and the story that resonates with every new company that walks through their door.

So we had the privilege to work with companies like Foundation or Kleiner Perkins or Redpoint or IPV prior to that, or Onset or Benchmark. I mean, I can give you a list of dozens of companies. And they then would seed, and there's a whole portfolio that are now in the museum of these firms. But they would seed startups, and those startups would then come to us at a very early stage. So I'm just looking at this portfolio over here. This was a company called Informatica, which still exists today, and they're a data management company now. But back then they were launching a technology that was like data marts,

like tiny little packets of data, that they were storing and managing. So that was Informatica. You can see all those little data packets, you know, connecting from one point to another, and as simple as it was, that was really the essence of what they were doing that was differentiated. It was a technology that had not been accomplished yet. It was complex and difficult and they managed to do it and get lots of traction very quickly. So we developed not just their logo, obviously, but helped them craft the story and then translate that into their website and pretty much every touchpoint of their brand. And they just shot the moon. I mean, they went public very quickly. I would say they were early, maybe 1994, kind of pre-frothy-frothy bubble days. But they went public during the bubble, and they did very well, and continue to do well, I would say. They got a lot of traction, a lot of early adoption, and they're still doing well to this day, which is just great. Because many of these other companies, they were bubble companies.

It's a good segue to go from an established company like this that has endured for so many years to the bubble days. So if I go back to the bubble days, I can close my eyes and just, like, feel how completely overwhelmed and immersed the world was with every new idea that you could possibly imagine translating on the internet. Translated and adapted and attempted to launch on the internet. And I remember sitting in my office. I had an office on the East Coast as well as in Palo Alto. I had 60 people in Palo Alto at the time. We worked around the clock for 10 straight years, and at one point I got a hundred phone calls in one day for new business. I had a philosophy that no matter who called me or who referred me, I would always call them back. So I would be sitting there, and this is before we really were communicating with email, believe it or not. I would call every single person back until four o'clock in the morning, just to let them know we couldn't take their business but, "Thank you for calling."

But many of them came through the door, and let me see if I can just grab one of them that would be interesting, one of these bubble companies. There are so many. Okay. Here's a good one. I can hold this one up. This company is called Win.com, and this was the first calendaring program for the internet. It was a super-simple application, but prior to this company there were no calendaring applications, and I could be misstating that, but to our knowledge this was a very new idea. So we developed their entire brand and it was a consumer brand. You as a consumer, Marguerite, would go onto the internet and download this calendaring program. You could share it with your family members, so they could all be on the same calendar, but that was really a radical idea back then. People just didn't have-- we all walked around with paper, believe it or not.

Hancock: I remember those days.

Burke: It was amazing.

Hancock: <laughs>

Burke: But this is so classically bubble, because it was a consumer application. We had to educate the market that you can now do all this stuff online. You had to get online first to do it, but you could do it all online. It had a lot of features where you could share calendars, among other things, on this simple application. And like all bubble companies, they would have big parties. The one thing I do miss today is all these fabulous parties that the internet companies had in the '90s. I mean, they would have rock stars

like the Rolling Stones come in and perform and it was a very exciting sort of heady time in Silicon Valley, which all came to a very rapid and stark end. But many of these companies endured. This one was lucky enough to get sold before it could've flamed out, potentially. Many did, but many completely flamed out.

Hancock: Would you say a little bit more about that time? I think for many people now in retrospect, they see this sort of witch's hat, the investment went up, and then it went down. And they think, "Oh, that was an irrational, over-exuberant time." But in terms of really the spirit of the time, can you describe that a little? What were those parties like or what was the spirit of the time?

Burke: The spirit of the time was-- I mean, people compared it to the Gold Rush. Everybody was rushing to Silicon Valley and trying to become a part of this, and a lot of it was motivated by money, the potential to get rich quick, right. But most of the companies that actually did well and had some substance really were completely transforming whatever category they were focused on. I mean, completely transforming it with these ideas, and so it served a purpose. People look back and say we were over-exuberant, and that's all true, but the reality is that it changed the world. It was part of a turbocharging of all of these ideas that had never been attempted, from something as basic as what we take for granted today as a calendar online, right. That didn't exist, and so every single thing, you know, people always talk about Pets.com, but everything, everything, was up for grabs.

So we had another company that was sort of the precursor to Geek Squad, and that was Savant.com. They're in there somewhere as well. So a good example of a complete upending and reimagining and transformation of an idea, which was that there were so many individuals, consumers, who had no idea how to turn on a computer. They might go out and buy a Dell computer, an HP or a Macintosh, and they would get it home and be completely befuddled. The idea [was] that you could go online and basically schedule someone to come to your house like Geek Squad. This was the precursor to that, and I remember working with them going, "Oh, this is a brilliant idea. Not everyone can have their own personal IT person, right, and now you can." And I just thought that was a brilliant idea. Of course, they didn't make it, and that eventually--

Hancock: And the name of that company was...?

Burke: It was called Savant.com.

Hancock: Savant.com.

Burke: It was the idea that a technical savant would come to your house and set you up and guide you through the whole process of using technology, and point you to new applications that didn't exist before. So everything. From banking-- we also worked with Esurance. That was another one. So the idea that people would go online and buy insurance today is like, "What's the big deal?" Huge back then. To take a leap and trust that you could actually buy life insurance or homeowner's insurance or health insurance online and car insurance, whatever it was, you could buy that online and that it was real. I mean, there was really insurance attached to it. People had to take a huge leap.

Hancock: How did you help consumers make these leaps? On the one hand, you have people who have real products and services that they're offering in a new way, on a new platform. But on the other side you have people who are having a hard time figuring out their equipment, there are people that are trying to trust for the first time. How did you communicate those ideas or the value of that to the consumers?

Burke: I think what you have to get to is, what is the problem you're solving for? Ultimately, that's number one, and lead with that. Lead with the problem that you're solving for, and this is clearly a solution. And then there's always a financial benefit to consumers because you're cutting out the middle man. We would have to really get to the essence of what is the ultimate problem they're solving for, and then convince people it's real. So, you would have case studies of real people with real cars and real houses, and we would have testimonials from them. They would be incredibly compelling and they would be people that you could identify with. It might be your mother. It could be an 83-year-old woman. Could be a 50-year-old or a 20-year-old. You know, it touches everyone across every spectrum, and obviously advertising is a huge part of that.

So to that point, I think the reason that the internet had so much success-- of course, the whole thing blew up and then we had to reset, but the reason that we got so much traction is because there was just a fire hose of money coming into these companies. And you have to have an incredible amount of money to amplify these brands, because advertising campaigns and Super Bowl ads and kind of traditional mediums, billboards and things like that, were definitely pre-social media. There was no Instagram back then, so you had to have a lot of money to run an ad in *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* or whatever, depending on who you were promoting, or do a whole broadcast ad campaign. So these stories then would have to be amplified and there was so much money that everything could get amplified very quickly. That created early adopters and that created follow-on consumers who would try it and get addicted to these new services and savings and benefits, and it was incredible.

I mean, if we didn't have the bubble, we would not be where we are today. We just wouldn't. It was an insane time but we almost needed that turbocharging to leap us forward. Of course, we had to reset, and that was excruciating, but we all managed to survive it. And the companies that really had some solid traction and didn't spend all their money at once managed to kind of hold on and get through it and become really significant, pivotal technologies that changed the world. So to me, it's not that I would want to go back in time to the bubble again, but I think it was probably the most exciting decade of my career by far, I would have to say, hands-down. I remember sitting there with the CMO of one of these companies and saying to them, "We will never in our lifetime experience something like this again. This is a once-in-a-lifetime moment, and we're here. We're in the thick of it. We're in the middle of it, and we get to see everything before anyone else does. We get to experience it, learn about it, and amplify it. Create a brand and amplify it." It was incredibly exciting.

Hancock: Thank you for sharing that, Peggy. Hearing your perspective is so helpful, about what it meant and also what it felt like. Are there any more companies you want to mention or stories that help us? Because you did have this unusual seat at this pivotal time, and hearing the details really helps us understand in a deeper way what was going on and why it was significant.

Burke: It's one thing when you go back in time and you think about these very early startup companies that came out of nowhere, and they built themselves from the ground up with an idea around pet food, or calendaring, or the precursor to Geek Squad, whatever it was. Online insurance, all of those companies. But it's another thing to go back to a 150-year-old publishing company, Scholastic, and reimagine, "How do they embrace the internet? How do they capitalize on the internet? How do they transform the way they communicate with teachers, for example, with students, with parents?" And Scholastic had been around, I mean, I grew up with Scholastic. Most of the people I know grew up with Scholastic in some capacity, and they were very much an analog business. They're in the business of publishing books and publishing educational tools and books for educators. How could they embrace the internet?

So they came to Silicon Valley, and we got to work with them and create a whole new series that we called smart books. They were actually books for teachers for third, fifth and eighth grade that were all launched, built on CDs. So, we would produce them in a program called Macromedia, and they were interactive. There was a teaching guide, which was also an analog. All of this eventually moved online, and we created Scholastic Network with them, which was a network for teachers. Scholastic would every day have a different speaker, a specialist. Like, they would have an astronaut come in for a science program, and the third grade, fifth grade class, you know, the teacher would go online. The internet would be live and the students could ask the astronaut questions.

Hancock: This is pathbreaking for the time, right?

Burke: It was incredible back then.

Hancock: It's reimagining--

Burke: Yeah, the fact that you as a student--

Hancock: --how content for education--

Burke: --could be in the third or fifth grade and raise your hand, ask an astronaut a question, "What was it like to go to the moon?" and get an answer in real-time. I mean, that just didn't happen. So it was an incredibly exciting time to be working and helping a company like Scholastic transform how they interacted and how they communicated with educators, students, parents, all through the internet, which was very, very early. It was a very early stage of the internet. And that I think is almost more exciting than many of these startup companies, because to take an established, century-old publishing firm and bring that instantly into today, into the future and propel it into the future, was incredibly exciting.

Hancock: So this is huge. How long did you work with them, a client like this?

Burke: I worked with them for about five years, and they had an office in Palo Alto, which was where all this new media stuff came out of. So it was like five or six years, I would say, total. And most of our clients, we had long, long-term relationships with. If they were early-stage startups, we would stay with them for two or three years until, in many cases, they would be acquired. If they were more established

companies like Cisco or Sun or Motorola, we would have very long relationships with them that would last 8 to 15 years, and that was great. Because we had long, enduring relationships with the people there. We understood the vision of the company, where they were taking it. We knew the technology inside and out, and we knew how to, when it was time, to reboot or rebrand. I think we really became very fortunate and experts in many of those categories like networking. I'll bet as soon as people would find out who worked with Cisco, they would call us. So I think we worked with just about every networking company that was either trying to be acquired by Cisco or--

Hancock: Which is a large group of companies. <laughs>

Burke: Yeah. Or wanted to compete. And it was interesting, because when we started with Cisco, we started with SynOptics. I know I talked about this as well, but we were working with SynOptics and Cisco. SynOptics was all Ethernet, so they were doing something different from Cisco. Cisco was bridges and routers. And at one point, SynOptics was going to buy Cisco, if you can imagine that. So I know that I'm not staying on a single thread here, I'm kind of bouncing around. But all of these companies overlapped with this phase, with this big, frothy bubble, and Cisco in particular did very well during that time because all these companies needed networking equipment. So it was really a great time for Cisco as well.

Hancock: Would you like to now turn to Cisco? Or is there anything else in the dot-com time and these things that we should talk about?

Burke: What else from the dot-com time? I think there were many, many companies that, as I said, endured through the dot-com period, and many that went away. There were a lot of casualties from that time, but again, the ideas that they started ultimately endured. So there's one other one. I just flipped to this page, but this is called Gigabeat [ph?], and they were the precursor to Pandora and Spotify. They did not make it, but of course, this idea did actually eventually come to life and now it's ubiquitous. We all live with it every day.

So, to me, I could talk about the bubble all day, because we worked with hundreds of companies during that time. Hundreds, and they were all in different categories, but every one of them needed the infrastructure companies, they needed the big, back-end infrastructure companies. They needed Cisco. They needed the routers. They had to have that equipment. They needed Sun. They needed the servers. They needed the databases to store all this data. They needed the microprocessors. I mean, there was so much synergy, and if those back-end infrastructure companies didn't exist, obviously none of these things could've happened. Nothing could've happened.

Hancock: This deep understanding of the technology, not only separate technologies but the ways that they were connected, independent, co-dependent, is something that's come to define you and 1185. It seems like it's in the DNA of your firm and that was a part of your ability to articulate. Can you say a little bit more about what it felt like to be on the cusp of these changing technologies as they were evolving? And then how did you go about really getting to the essence of understanding in ways that you could connect the dots and then articulate that to customers?

Burke: Yeah. We were in the very fortunate position of being in the center of all of it, and if I think of the waves of technology that have gone through Silicon Valley and continue to go through the Valley today, we were very much swept up by all of those waves. So when I think about the early days of ERP, enterprise resource planning, I'll never forget a company called Bond that came in to me. They were based in the Netherlands, and they started explaining what ERP was. So we took a deep dive into ERP and learned that, and then there were many other companies that started embracing that.

Most of the work that we've done over the last 34 years has been around B2B. Software applications, hardware, all of that. With many exceptions, but our primary focus to this day is B2B. So we understood the enterprise, and the ability to begin to manage your resources, right, and it was IT and infrastructure and all of that. Then CRM came along, so then Siebel Systems came to us, and they were very early in customer resource planning, so, you know, helping salespeople manage the funnel. And that began to eclipse ERP. And then, of course, the cloud came along. Then companies like NetSuite came to us and said, "We're a cloud-based financial--" you know, "We're going to replace Great Plains, as an example, and it's all going to happen in the cloud. We're going to convince people to put all their financials in the cloud." That was a huge hurdle to get people to go to the cloud.

But in between all of that, pick any category, whether it's storage or networking or productivity tools. No matter what it was, each one of those categories had at least 15 companies that were coming to us and they all had a different niche and they were all doing something a little bit better than someone else, but they all complemented each other. So they were speeding everything up all the time. <laughs> The database companies, the networking companies, the storage companies, Flash. All of a sudden there were these incredible technologies that were just like every single month something new was coming in. And we were lucky, because we knew what networking was, we knew all this myriad of technologies, and we were working with optical networking companies. Name a networking company, and at some point we had the opportunity to work with them.

And then, of course, these networks are being built out, and they all have to be secure. So then companies like Symantec and McAfee are all coming to us very early on, saying, "We are the security company." There are a billion security companies to this day, and they're all working on different things. And every one of those technologies is incredible. We would have designers who would come from consumer companies like the Gap or something, and all of our clients are very technical, super technical. So their eyes would kind of glaze over, and I would say, "This technology is so incredible, because it's leapfrogging exponentially what was in here yesterday in the security space," right, and now it just continues. I mean, the pace of innovation is staggering.

So to be there in 1985 in the very nascent, early stages-- when I went and met with Cisco, I think it was '89 or '90, just a few years later. John Morgridge talked to me, and I know I've talked about this with you before, but he explained what networking was, and prior to that I just thought it was, you go to a cocktail party and you network with people. But this was completely different. It was incredible, and it changed the world. It created the Internet, and it changed the world.

Hancock: I remember that you talked about that time. I think you said that you were convinced that Cisco was going to be this huge company and you made this decision to take 2 of the \$3,000, I think, of savings that you had in your personal..

Burke: Yes, 2 of my \$3,000, yeah.

Hancock: I mean, to take this huge risk and to invest it in the company. What..

Burke: I wish I had taken all three in hindsight.

Hancock: You were exposed to so many ideas, and you were taking bets on them for choosing which clients to work with. But here you invested your own money. What was it that helped you take that leap of faith? Was it the way he talked about it, was it your own sense and understanding of what it could mean?

Burke: Yeah. I mean, nobody knew what the Internet was in 1989 or 1990, right? It was so nascent. No one really knew what the Internet was. It was really the precursor to what they were enabling. And I had computers. I had Apples in my office, and they were not connected. Everybody worked on their own independent workstation, right? We thought that was cool, but they were not connected. They were connected somehow to a printer, but the printer had to be plugged into your computer for you to print. So for computers to be able to talk to each other, after I walked out of that meeting with him, I thought, "Oh, my God. This is huge. This is going to be huge, because at my computer, eventually we'll be able to talk to you down the street, not across the room." And I just knew that if they could solve for that problem, if they could really do what they said they were going to do, it would change everything. I remember calling my husband from the car. I said, "I'm going over to buy some stock. I had \$3,000 in my savings account, and he said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah, I think so. I think this is going to be something big." So, anyway, I was just lucky. I was right there at that incredible moment in time, when you think about it.

Hancock: Well, let's continue that trajectory. You worked closely with Cisco for years. You worked with SynOptics. Can you please say more about what it was like to see this evolving cluster of networking companies that has evolved over time from those very early years to Palo Alto Networks and really beyond? Can you help kind of trace that trajectory?

Burke: Yeah. So very early on it was not rudimentary by any means. I mean, it was very complex technology that they were solving for. But it was rudimentary in the sense that they were creating a bridge and a router, these two things. And then SynOptics came along and they were doing this Ethernet product. But over time, the networking companies had to have security, and that was the big thing once you started networking all of these devices. Prior to that it was just workstations, essentially, that we are networking. But once you did that, you had to secure those files somehow, right. Then it was creating more opportunities and problems. So companies like Symantec came along and McAfee, and we worked with McAfee very early on, very early when they started. Those companies started securing this new thing called the Internet or networks, and it wasn't even the Internet at that point; it was really just internal networks for companies and organizations.

But now if you look forward, we're in another pivotal moment, which I'm sure everyone's aware of, which is AI [Artificial Intelligence] and ML [Machine Learning]. So across all technologies but primarily security, it's stunning what companies can do with security, and it's stunning what's happening out there. If you think about things like today, advanced persistent threats are these nasty hackers that go in, and they sit in the inside of your network, and they hide in there for months. They can hide there for years, and they'll turn themselves on and go out. I'm not explaining this in any technical way at all, but essentially, they grab data, and they're surreptitiously going through your network, just grabbing data very quietly. Then they go dormant. So if you saw something that was an anomaly, it very quickly disappears. They just turn on. Three months later they turn on. They grab something. Well, at the end of a year, they've got your entire network, right? They have every piece of data that you've produced, and they're hiding, and then, boom, one day they wake up, and they take down your network.

Those APTs now can be tracked and ferreted out with artificial intelligence. There's a company in Seattle we're working with called Versive that does that. They can go in there and identify those guys, those nasty APTs that are sitting in there, and they can get them. They can identify them and shut them down, and that's all with artificial intelligence and machine learning. You couldn't do any of that without AI and ML, couldn't do any of it. That's the next turbo step in technology is AI and ML. And if you go back to the Cisco days in 1990 or 1989, people are terrified of networking, like, "Somebody can connect to my computer?" I mean, they really were afraid. And now we just obviously take all of that for granted. So now people are very much afraid of AI and ML. There are definitely things to be concerned about, but the advances that AI and ML are enabling right now-- once again, we're going to have this transformative moment globally because of that technology.

Hancock: At these transformative moments, there's not only fear but a lack of knowledge. We were talking a little bit earlier about you and your team not only knowing about the new alphabet soup, AI, ML, but helping create terminology or even visual symbols. I think you were involved with the router symbol, for example. Can you tell us about how that came to be?

Burke: Yeah. There was really no visual language. With Cisco in particular, and Sun and many of these companies. Iconography was kind of a new idea back in that time, especially around technology. And the easiest way to articulate these complex networks was visually, so we created router symbols and bridges. But why do you create any sort of a visual mark at all? Why do we bother? Why not just have word marks with typography? Well, one is to differentiate by telling a story with that mark. And it may be obvious, and it may not be obvious, but if you don't have a story behind everything, then it will not endure. It just won't endure. So that's really the essence of what we do with branding is we take a story. We create a story in many cases. We spend a bunch of time with you, and we learn all about what's happening in the world of AI and ML and security and advanced persistent threats, right. We create a story around that, and then we create an identity to help tell that story, a logo. And then we create a whole series of icons that will reinforce very quickly what the story is that we're telling. We have to create a language for these companies that's very unique and specific to that company and that technology. The essence of everything in branding that's successful begins with that story, 100 percent. If you don't have it, don't bother spending \$1 million, because it will not endure. It just won't.

Hancock: Who are the people, if you could describe and maybe pull back the curtain for people who're trying to understand how your team works? Many times we can see the effect of your work, but who are the types of people on your team that help to-- what do they do, and what does that process look like? What is the timeline? What are the skills that are involved? How do they get coordinated? Can you explain a little bit about how your team works together to help make those stories come to life?

Burke: So the first thing we do when we initiate with a company is, after we've been awarded the business, we'll put together a very detailed questionnaire. In general terms, there are many things that you have to impart to any agency, but we're going to take a deeper dive, in our case, into the technology. A good example is yesterday I was sitting with a company, and it's a very, very technical business. The CEO and the CMO were explaining it, and the CEO interrupted and said, "You don't need to know this. You don't need to know any of this technical stuff." And I said, "We have to understand the technology. If we don't really grasp the technology, we won't be able to get to the essence of what's different and articulate that." And the CMO [is someone] we've worked with him at Palo Alto Networks and Nutanix and a company called Zscaler, I mean, a whole bunch of different companies. So we've had a serial relationship with him, and he's-- he looked at the CEO and said, "Oh, boy. Do they ever have to understand the technology," he said, "because they all come back with a story that is dramatically different and will resonate in a completely different way." So I'll start with that.

So, going back to who does that-- we need the brand-strategy people, the people that know how to write stories. I'm one of those people that writes stories, that creates narratives. We've talked about this before. We call them 360 narratives, and those are the emotive, compelling stories. Then we have a series of writers that support me or actually write 360's themselves. We have a research team, a discovery team that just goes out and finds everything that's out there as it relates to a new technology. Once we establish the story and know exactly how we're going to position that company from a storyline, then we can develop the logo. We can develop the website, and those involve designers.

So historically we've had 60 designers on our team. We'll put 15 on the initial project to solve that initial project. We'll brainstorm, we call it, a charrette, where we do 10 of 10s. We do these rapid-fire brainstorming sessions, and then we divvy up the ideas and we say, "Go off and do some quick prototyping on this." Then we get back together, and then we start seeing-- we always have the competition and the businesses that relate to that that are sort of connected, but not direct competitors, and that's all on a wall. So we can always look at that and say, "Okay, this is dramatically different from anything that's out there." And then we can go start pursuing that path, but we'll show them lots of ideas first and walk them through it and then guide them to one final selection for the look and feel and the structure of the site.

We also have content strategists for the Web. We have copywriters who write lots of content and understand the category, whether it's security or storage or cloud or CRM or whatever it is. I have writers that we work with who are really proficient at those categories. And then we have probably the most important person keeping everything on track, the account director. They're the ones that schedule everything, coordinate with the client, coordinate the schedules internally, make sure we're making our deadlines and communicate constantly. Because if that falls down, then the project will implode. And

that's really our team. Then we pass it off to programmers, and the development team then starts working on building out the actual website and the code. Or if we're printing something, which is pretty rare these days, we'll coordinate with printers, and we have production people. Everything in the end goes through our production team, and they do QC. They get the files ready for print or Web, so that's sort of the gamut.

Hancock: That's so helpful to see in one broad sweep how all the pieces fit together. Thank you for describing that so cogently. Can you remember a time or tell a story about one of the instances of that process when it was either particularly hard or especially rewarding, and how you went from end to end? So we could have a little mini-case experience of a client that we haven't talked about yet?

Burke: I'd say a recent example of that would be a company called Flextronics. They came to us five years ago, and I don't know if I've spoken with you about that, about them in particular.

Hancock: A little bit but not in detail.

Burke: So from the very beginning, we went in and started doing our discovery phase with them. During that stage they brought in an extraordinarily talented chief marketing officer. Flextronics is a contract manufacturing systems company, and they really don't invest in marketing. Up until that point, they had not invested anything in marketing, like negligible. For a 36 billion-dollar company, it's a gnat on their balance sheet, right? So they hired Michael Mendenhall, and he had been the CMO of Disney for 15, 16 years. He was very energetic and really a brilliant marketing mind, right? So when we created their 360, their story, he saw that and said, "Incredible. We're going to transform this company with this story."

So we decided that they were no longer a "tronics" company. We called them in the story a sketch-to-scale innovation platform. They're the kind of company that you can go to, and you can have a sketch on a napkin. They can essentially design that product. They can prototype it. They can test it. They can then build it, manufacture it. They can manage all the logistics of currency, compliance and obviously supply chain, getting it around the world and getting it manufactured. And then they can take it to end of life.

But what they weren't doing is monetizing the front end of that process. They were giving it away, essentially. So to get the 100 million iPhones they were going to manufacture, they would essentially give away, on the frontend, the design piece of it, the piece that IDEO would do, for example, just to get the manufacturing. So when we reposition the company around sketch to scale, the salespeople finally had a way to walk through the continuum of all the products and services that they did for every category, whether it was automotive or health care or energy. It didn't matter what sector, whereas before they would just focus on primarily manufacturing, getting that, and they didn't actually monetize the frontend. So that changed everything.

Hancock: Dramatic, right? Dramatic change in strategy.

Burke: Yeah, and the other thing that five years ago we understood is that we are working with a number of IoT companies at that stage. So only five years ago IoT was very early stage, right, and one of them,

Jasper Wireless, got picked up by Cisco, so we rebranded them. Then they were acquired. So we were very fresh on IoT, what was happening with IoT. And when we went in there, I said to the CEO and all of the presidents at their divisions, "What is your IoT strategy?" We talk about supply chain. That's our secret sauce. So when I went back with the story, I talked about the intelligence of things, not the Internet of things. But this company has 10,000 design engineers. They're on the cutting edge of every new technology, every new material. If it's a nano-LED display fabric, they're on the cutting edge of what's happening all over the world.

And yet the intelligence that they have embedded in their business was not being translated to the market. People think of EMS or contract manufacturing systems companies as being dumb. They just get it done-- not dumb, but they're not elevated to being strategic. So we position them in front of one thing, which is the word intelligence, which Michael Mendenhall was so brilliant in doing. They publish a quarterly magazine called Intelligence. It's not about Flex. It's all about trends, artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, what's happening in the world trend-wise, and it changed the company. We renamed it Flex, and we created an entire brand around sketch to scale, and the rest is history.

Hancock: That's very exciting. Thank you.

Burke: It was fantastic, and we did it in six months.

Hancock: Well, congratulations, and thank you for sharing that example. So here's a question to place you more in the ecosystem of the Valley as an organization. We've been talking about 1185 and your impact. How would you characterize the role of 1185 in the Valley ecosystem, and who else-- maybe collaborators or competitors, aside from your clients that you were working with? What else was going on in that space, because this was defining not only new companies and new technologies, but you were defining how people created brands in a whole new way that changed that. So could you kind of paint that broader context?

Burke: So I think that we've filled a niche back in the mid-'80s and then well into the '90s and beyond that, especially early on, was neglected. So, branding companies-- and just recently I had dinner with a friend who had been a friendly competitor, another agency that was very well-known, and they were in San Francisco. The wife of the principal of this firm said, "You know, Peggy, we would look at 1185, and we would say, 'What are they doing? They're working on technology. We're working on cool stuff like the opera and MoMA and all these cool consumer brands.'" And she said, "Boy, were we ever wrong." Because I was focused exclusively on technology, and companies needed branding. It wasn't that I was the only one. There were plenty of other design firms out there that were creating logos for lots and lots of technology companies. But for whatever reason, wherever I was, I felt like I was kind of in the right place at the right time. Because one branding effort would turn into a dozen new ones, and those would turn into 100 new ones, and they were all within the context and ecosystem of technology.

And then there were firms like Andy Cunningham, who had Cunningham Communication, and she was exclusively focused on PR for technology. I always attribute Andy to introducing me to tons and tons of amazing companies, and so she and I worked very, very closely together for years. But there was a

whole ecosystem then of PR firms, and then there was an ecosystem like-- my husband, Dennis, as you know, is at IDEO, and so they were doing product design and product development. Then they started innovating around processes, and so I would say over time some of these agencies in the city who were sort of turning their noses up at technology were suddenly going, "Oh, my gosh, we got to get out in front of this." But by then, we had 15 years of traction and depth in technology. We worked with an ecosystem of other branding agencies and talent, extraordinary talent in every category, whether it was advertising or producing films or writers. There was just a huge ecosystem that we tapped into of really good writers, and that made all the difference for branding the Valley. So I hope that answers your question.

Hancock: It does.

Burke: Is that what you were thinking of?

Hancock: Absolutely, and while you focused on tech, you also supported or worked closely with many other parts of the ecosystem. You mentioned venture capitalists. You also worked with law firms and others. Can you comment a little bit about that, because that was so essential to the Valley being and sustaining what it is?

Burke: So that's actually a different ecosystem than the branding one I was thinking of, but it was an absolutely imperative ecosystem. We worked with Wilson Sonsini right away and not as a company, but we did their branding, and they were working with all of our customers. We had this massive flurry of IPOs, and of course Wilson Sonsini was at the center of all of that. So we worked very closely with them, with Fenwick & West, tons of law firms, really. We would do their branding. They would work with our clients, or we would work with their clients. And then venture capital, of course, was huge. Silicon Valley wouldn't exist without it. And they were all connected. As you know, the PR agencies, the branding agencies, the law firms and the VCs were all connected as kind of a support for enabling the success of these companies.

Hancock: And both of those ecosystems were exactly what I was hoping to get to, so thank you for that. We've touched a little bit on this, but you've seen these dramatic changes. I want to just hear a little bit more about the notable companies that you're working with now in terms of the technologies and where you see this going forward of the Valley. There have been so many magazine covers, "The Valley is done," and then it reinvents itself, and then, "The Valley is finished," and then reinvents itself. What's your perspective on that? You lived through it. We've talked about the boom and the bust of the dot-com time, and so many others. What's your perspective for now and looking ahead?

Burke: Right now the big wave that I think will be the next transformation of everything is managing data and using data. You know, we talk about big data analytics and how people are managing the analytics, how they're using data. But it goes beyond the analytics. It's the way that you're capturing data. It's the way the whole notion of digital transformation is real, and it's disrupting that ability to digitally transform your business. It's disrupting entire categories. So there's the obvious ones like Uber or Lyft, which have disrupted the way that we all get around. And the entire taxi industry has been upended by these guys.

Airbnb would be the same way. And those are digitally transformed from the ground up, so they were built digital.

The biggest challenge that companies face now that have been around for many, many, many years, is they have to go back and they have to continue to run their businesses profitably and successfully while they're making this huge investment in parallel of digitally transforming their businesses from the ground up. So very powerful, open-source streaming data technology companies are out there now managing, helping companies completely rebuild their infrastructures. They're on the cutting edge and they're digitally transformed, and that's a huge wave. Once we get through that wave it'll be something else, but all of those technologies are also informed by artificial intelligence and machine learning. They won't, they couldn't, succeed or exist without AI and ML. So that's where we are today, and all of the companies that we work with right now, it doesn't matter if they're cloud or hybrid or they're all enterprise, B2B software companies. Open source. They've always been managing data, but data is everything. It's absolutely everything.

Hancock: You've had the opportunity to work with companies that have grown, and some have failed. It's the nature of startups, but also others have been sustained over time. Do you look at certain lessons or takeaways, are there commonalities across different startups you've seen that have been successful? Or are there other pitfalls or things that have been common to ones that have failed?

Burke: I think the companies that I've worked with, that I've seen succeed over time, have had extraordinary management. The actual product is solid and they're constantly pushing to innovate. They come out ahead of most other companies to begin with. It might be that they didn't actually create the category that they're in, but when they launch, their launch moves [ph?] something that's so far superior that they leapfrog the legacy companies that created that category. And they've managed to constantly keep their foot on the gas and not let up. The other thing that I've seen for many, many, many years, is just the passion and dedication, and the unrelenting desire to continually push the envelope. And that comes from the top. Those companies just shoot the moon.

I think when that energy and that drive and that vision goes away, the company starts to languish. Very quickly, and I see it happen when an acquisition takes place. So the drivers of that passion, the drivers of that technology, the drives of that vision, they get the company on this fast track and they become amplified far beyond their wildest imaginations. They just take off. You can think of a million examples of this, but as soon as they're acquired by a much bigger company, in many cases, that company just puts them in their portfolio and they turn off the gas. They take their foot off the gas and they languish. I hate when that happens.

<laughter>

Burke: I really hate that when that happens. But it's just the nature of companies and entrepreneurs. You know, many of those entrepreneurs are ready to go on and start the next big thing, and they do, so that's exciting too.

Hancock: That is exciting. I'd like to talk about serial entrepreneurship, but first, before I do, I want to return back to you talking about the nature of your work. It seems to me that you're at the intersection of design and art, very creative. It combines visual with text and experiences and even strategies you've evolved, and then also technology. Can you say a little bit about how you've combined those different worlds, art or design and technology? How have those come together for you? Do you have a particular philosophy of how those things come together?

Burke: Technology has accelerated what we do. I never thought that would be possible, but it has. So in the past we might've gotten, like, a month to develop an entire brand. Now we might have a week, you know, 10 days, and it's because we have the tools to rapidly prototype things much faster. So I think technology as a tool-- in our case, when I started the business in 1985, the Macintosh had launched. Desktop publishing did not exist; it was just beginning. So from the very beginning we embraced technology, and we ended up being the beta for beta testing PageMaker and Quark and a lot of Adobe products. Lots of Adobe products. So, we really sort of built the business teething on these new technologies, and they're absolutely essential.

The issue I have with a lot of the young designers that are coming out of design schools right now, and I may have mentioned this before, but my worry is they're very proficient at the tools, which is awesome. But they're not proficient at the conceptual aspects of, "How do you take the story once you have it and translate that conceptually visually so that it continues to resonate and tell a story in a profound way?" They're not taught to think conceptually, but they're very good at using the tools. So I think technology in some ways has set back the intellect, the intelligence that needs to be inherent in really good design, in really good visual branding, extraordinary visual branding. And that's not true across the board. It's an incredible, fabulous tool. Obviously, it's here to stay forever and ever. But what I do is I really push my team to think more, to use both sides of their brain and not just one side.

Hancock: Can you say more about this ability that you've had to reinvent really what you're doing? You started at this time when everything was paper.

Burke: Mm-hm. Right. <laughs>

Hancock: And by hand, right? In terms of what you're producing. You fast-forwarded now to this hyper pace of, you just said 10 days, for creating, and it's very digital. How have you actually reinvented how you do your work and your approach? The strategy and business model as well.

Burke: Well, if I go back to 1985, everything was paste-up and we would key line boards and it was all analog. Palo Alto and San Francisco are hubs of design, and in all the design firms, we were all paste-up and everything was analog. Everything was on boards. And then very quickly that changed, especially as we got into the late '80s and some of these tools became available. The Macintosh was launched and Apple came out with better and better tools for us to use computers. What I always said is, "Whatever is new, we have to get out in front of it." So when Macromedia came out and we started doing all this multimedia, we immediately hired people to start becoming proficient at Macromedia. That's how we built all of Scholastic's digital assets was with that tool.

But what I was noticing simultaneously is as we're embracing and building on the technology, a lot of the competition, a lot of the really quality design firms, were going away. They were going away because they didn't embrace technology and they didn't stay out in front of it. They couldn't keep up, and that was really a problem. Because it happens <snaps> like that. So if I look back to the beginning, the typesetters that we worked with started out at journeymen and then they became true craftsmen at setting type, at kerning it, at editing type. They were absolute artists, and overnight they were unseated by desktop publishing, which was horrible typography, by the way.

Hancock: I remember those days. <laughs>

Burke: I mean, it was like everybody suddenly became a typesetter and the typography was awful, absolutely awful. For years we had to deal with this terrible type. But the typesetters went away overnight, and so the design firms that were part of our ecosystem in Palo Alto started just going away. They just didn't make the transition. The other thing that happened is, a big part of all of our business in those early years was print. It was all this stuff. It was annual reports, which were spectacular projects. If I look at Cisco's annual report, I mean, these things were-- first of all, they were great, juicy, fabulous projects to do, they were great fun to do and they were very lucrative projects. And overnight, <snaps> "boom," annual reports went away. Overnight. The FCC did not require you to actually print a hard copy of the annual anymore. This was the internet. You could just distribute it digitally. That changed overnight. It changed everything. I used to judge annual reports, do shows for paper companies like Potlatch, and they were exquisite, just beautiful pieces of art. Within two years, "boom," <snaps> all gone. Gone.

Hancock: Mm. Totally upended.

Burke: Totally upended, and all those firms that built a reputation on producing exquisite design went away. But as soon as the internet started gaining traction, that's when we turned to the web and started developing websites. That's when we became digital, and we changed the way we positioned the company as not being a graphic design firm anymore but being a digital design firm. That changed everything. Then we evolved and started doing strategy, because we were telling these stories anyway, and that transformed the business one more time.

Hancock: Let's talk about that. We've mentioned it briefly a few times but really haven't dug into that, this last chapter of really expanding to strategy, which is a big area.

Burke: Yeah.

Hancock: Was there a particular client or a time when you felt, "Okay. We're really going to focus on this," or was it a more gradual transition?

Burke: Well, for the design team, what I would always do is I would write a narrative so that they could understand what these companies actually did. Because they were so technical that we would have to bring some sort of an emotive differentiation to the quality and the way that we articulated the brand.

You'd have to have a hook that you would launch or grab so that you could build the visual branding out and it would be relevant to what they did. And that hook and that visual brand always had to be reinforced with headlines or copy of some kind, right. So if you imagine a web page, we would be launching a look and feel for a company and we would be developing the website. But we would have to have some kind of language that was very different, very emotive and very descriptive, if you will. Setting up the problem in a really provocative way.

So I used to write these narratives for our team, and we worked with a brilliant strategist named Christopher Lochhead. He had a company called Play Bigger with two partners and they were just amazing, and they used to create categories for companies. To this day, they're the best category design company ever. They would tell stories that they would call POV, a point of view, and that narrative was similar to what we were doing, but it was even better. It was even more emotive. Just the way they would guide you through the story to get to the category was brilliant.

And I'll never forget, one day I had a startup company come in. The CEO said to me, "Where did you get this copy? Who wrote this headline? Where did you get that?" This was 15 years ago. I said, "It comes from the summary or the narrative that I write for the design team." And he goes, "Well, can I see it?" So I showed it to him, and he goes, "This [is the] most valuable thing you do." He said, "This will change our business. With this language that you've created and the imagery to support it, this will change our business." He said, "You need to monetize it. You're giving it away," which we were. So we started monetizing that. We basically started writing the narratives, and that transformed the business. And it really helps transform brands, actually. So Flex is a good example of it, where we created the intelligence of things and sketch to scale and renamed the company. They're no longer a "tronics" company. We changed their story, and it was huge.

Hancock: Huge. Thank you for explaining that. So we've talked about how you had these longstanding relationships with brands, with companies and people. Even people as they've moved among companies, and so I'd like to just explore that a little bit, this idea of serial entrepreneurs.

Burke: Yeah.

Hancock: Could you talk about one or two of those relationships and what that's like? Because those relationships that you have have spanned companies and time.

Burke: Yeah. To me, the most important thing about what I do, my work, is the relationships I have with people. That's more important to me than anything, and when I connect with an entrepreneur or anyone inside a company, it's my goal to make them successful. I mean, I believe. I'm eating the same dog food they're eating, and I'm as passionate about their technology and what they're trying to accomplish genuinely as they are. Genuinely, and because their passion and enthusiasm and intellect are so contagious, you end up connecting, because you both become invested. And as a result, my entire agency becomes invested in the success of that business.

So if I think about Michael Mendenhall, who was at Flex five years ago. He since has left and he's gone to a company called TriNet, and we still have this incredibly enduring commitment together to see whatever company he's with succeed and to tell a story that will really help them get out in front of that market and expand and succeed. I could tell you a hundred thousand stories of people that I've connected with over the years. To this day, the people that I worked with at Cisco are still my friends. I still have lunch with them. I still get together with them. In many cases, I still work with them, you know, depending on where they've gone. The CEOs of many companies. I can think of someone like Hugh Martin, who I worked with at 3DO, and then he went to Optical Networks, and then we were together at PacBio. And then he started a company called Sensity, and he's just one example of someone who's become a dear friend but someone who has put his trust in me and my agency to really help propel his businesses as he moves around from company to company.

And I have so many examples of that. I mean, people who I genuinely adore. At the end of the day, if you didn't connect with people, if you didn't feel that connection with them and you didn't want to be with them, if you couldn't imagine them as somebody special, as a friend, then why work with them? Right?

<laughter>

Burke: It's not just about money. It's about both being equally committed to succeeding, and it's also about just being a good person. You know, working with really smart, wonderful people. Last night I had dinner with Eric Hahn. That would be a good example. He came to me when he was incubating at Benchmark back in the '80s with his first company, Collabra. And being on the board of the Museum together actually just cemented that long friendship and relationship. I just have so many examples of that. That is the best byproduct of being here, to me. It's the best byproduct of the work that I've done and the people I've met. It's the relationships. It's all about relationships, to me. It's the most important thing.

Hancock: I see that in the way that you interact with people and how people talk about you too, and have so much appreciation for your work and your part in their lives, more broadly. I wonder if we could talk about the relationships that you've had outside of working specifically for your agency. You've judged contests. You've been part of the design world. You've served on the board here at the Computer History Museum. Can you say a little bit more about other roles that you've played in the community or in other ways?

Burke: I feel very fortunate. We're a stone's throw away from Stanford, and so I feel like that's been a very rich community for me, as it has been for you. I feel like, "Wow," how lucky I've been to be a part of that community, to be able to periodically teach a course or actually lecture there. So that's something I've really enjoyed and it's a community that's just been extraordinary, I think, and continues to be that way. I'm also in an organization that's called YPO, and it's Young Presidents' Organization. Back in the day, when I first got into YPO, you had to be 42 or younger and you had to have a certain number of amount revenue and a number of employees. So I qualified for all of that and joined that group, and that actually has been just a remarkably rich part of my life. Being with other CEOs and actually growing old

with them, I guess, because now we're in what they call YPO Gold. I always say, "Knock that 'G' off and you've got old."

Hancock: <laughs>

Burke: But those people are very near and dear to me and they've really helped guide me through many tumultuous years, like after the bubble burst and then we had the 2008 debacle. They've really helped me tremendously, and so that organization has been great. And then I've always really been committed to the arts. To me, what I do is sort of blending art with technology, and so I feel like I always have to keep one big toe committed to the arts. Right now I'm on the Montalvo Arts Board, and I love being a part of that organization. For 10 years I was on the Djerassi board in Woodside, and that's another similar organization, a resident artists program. Those experiences have really enriched my life in ways that, had I not participated over many years of their development, as this place has. So being on the Computer History Museum board was such a privilege and honor for 16 years. <laughs>

Hancock: Amazing. You've been synonymous with the growth of this place.

Burke: It was so exciting to go from, those little Quonset huts in Moffett Field to this expanding campus of really the heart and soul of the history of technology. It's incredible what's happened with this organization. So being a part of that has been an enormous privilege for me. Really enormous. So thank you.

Hancock: CHM is indebted to you. You have had an enduring impact of the institution, so we're really honored to--

Burke: Well, thank you.

Hancock: --have you now formally part of the collection through your oral history as well as artifacts. As we close, I wanted to ask if we've missed anything, Peggy. It's hard to think about three and a half decades <laughs> of your work and your impact. We've touched on some of the companies and some of the people and some of the technologies and the trends in the Valley, but have we missed anything that you would like to add?

Burke: You know, the only thing I would like to add, because someday someone might sit here and actually spend the time to listen to a couple of things I might say. And that is that, to whomever that is, I had the absolute good fortune and timing to be in a renaissance of transformation, a true renaissance through technology, from very early stages of all of these technologies until today. I can't wait to see what happens in the next 20 years. I won't be running an agency for the next 20 years, I hope, but I feel like we're just on the cusp of a world that we can't even fathom yet. And if I go back 34 years and I look at where we started, if someone told me 34 years later that we would have self-driving cars and that we would all be communicating on cell phones, I would just say, "You're crazy. It can't happen." So I can't wait to see what's next.

Hancock: Well, as we close I did want to ask. You're such a storyteller. You've been telling the story of companies and technologies, and you've been very generous to share your story with us. You've told a part of it now, but is there any way that you would like to just wrap up your story for this chapter? You have exciting things ahead in what you've planned for your next chapter, but for this chapter both looking back and looking forward from your perspective, the Peggy Burke story, any final thoughts?

Burke: Yeah. I think the fact that I came to California from Ohio, thinking that I would be here for a year, because I was a dyed-in-the-wool Midwestern girl, and the fact that I lasted for 35 years now and got to land where I did and meet the husband that I met and have a beautiful family and be able to be a part of something that's so revolutionary, no one could've predicted that story, I don't think. For any of us. None of us could've predicted that. And so I'm eternally grateful that I made that move across country and lucky that that happened. I just pinch myself every day that I started this little company and that it got to be such an important part of many of the organizations that we worked with, to help promote them and help fuel Silicon Valley in some tiny way. So thank you, Marguerite, for allowing me to do this. I mean, again, I say this a hundred times, but it's an incredible honor, and you're wonderful to invite me to do this, so thank you.

Hancock: Well, thank you, Peggy. It's a remarkable privilege to add your story in your own words and through the evidence of your work to the Museum's collection. So on behalf of the Computer History Museum, we thank you for all of that and more.

Burke: Well, thank you, Marguerite.

Hancock: Thank you.

Burke: I appreciate it.

END OF THE INTERVIEW