Computer History Museum

Oral History of Jayson Adams

Interviewed by:
Hansen Hsu

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Hsu: Okay, all right, today is September 24th, 2020. I am Hansen Hsu. I am here with Jayson Adams, and hi, Jayson.

Adams: Hello, Hansen.

Hsu: So, to begin, we'll start with where and when you were born and where did you grow up.

Adams: So, I was born in 1967 in Los Angeles, city of, and I grew up partly in Los Angeles. When we were-- when I was nine, we moved to Orange County, which is a little bit south of Los Angeles. And yeah, so we lived there, and then I went away to college after that.

Hsu: Oh okay. What were your parents' backgrounds and education?

Adams: So, my dad, he was an aerospace engineer. He worked most of the time at Ford Aerospace in Orange County, and then my mom was a medical technologist. She worked at a hospital in Los Angeles.

Hsu: Okay. Do you have any siblings?

Adams: Yes, I have a brother, Justin, and Janss, my little brother, and then my sister, Aegina.

Hsu: Okay, and is your family actively religious or in politics?

Adams: Not particularly, no, either one.

Hsu: Okay. All right so, what were the kinds of things that you liked to do for fun when you were a kid?

Adams: When I was pretty young, I liked to build Legos and make things, and we would-- sometimes, like when we would go to Disneyland, we'd come back and build Disneyland out of Legos.

Hsu: Oh, cool.

Adams: The monorail and all that. I guess this maybe kind of segues into computers. When I was twelve, so this is 1979, my parents got a computer, a TRS-80. I guess my mom was taking some kind of programming class. She was getting a master's degree, and-- yeah, I don't know if you want me to go into that whole story, but that-- once the computer showed up, that's what I loved to do. So, I would wait-- I would love for summer to come around so I could just sit inside and write code all day.

Hsu: Yeah, we could go a little bit into that story of your mom's master's degree.

Adams: Yeah so, that computer-- so, this thing showed up one day, and my mom took it out of the box. It's got a keyboard, and I was saying, "What is this?" And she wasn't giving me a satisfactory answer. And she turned it on, she typed some things, and then she kind of walked away from it. And I was asking, "What is this thing?" So, I got the manual, and I started reading, and then I really got sucked in. And I remember one thing in particular. There was this game where you had a-- it was like a gun at the bottom of the screen, and there's an airplane flying across. And so, the goal was to shoot your bullet and hit the

airplane. And so, I remember running that and wondering well, how does the bullet know when it hits the plane? And so, that's what got me into digging through the source code and seeing how was that actually done. That was the start of learning to program and creating my own programs and yeah.

Hsu: Oh, cool, okay. I want to back up just slightly. So, it seems like both of your parents were professionals. So, was your family already middle class before you were born? Were your grandparents well-educated?

Adams: No, so my-- they were both the first people in their families to go to college. My dad grew up in the Jim Crow South. He went to college in Minnesota, and my mom, she was born in Michigan, and they both came out to L.A. That's where they met.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: But yeah, we were-- early growing up, I would s-- well, yeah, we were definitely middle class.

Hsu: Okay so, going back to that first experience, so what programming language was that game written in?

Adams: So, that one was Microsoft BASIC, which came on the TRS-80. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay, Microsoft BASIC, right. So, that was the first language that you learned, I presume.

Adams: Yes, and then there were-- I know I got obsessed with making some things go fast at some point, and that's when I got into assembly language, a little bit.

Hsu: Ah, okay. Right, I'm just trying to remember, what processor did the TRS-80 use?

Adams: That was the Z80, and it was 16K of RAM, and we got an expansion interface, which was another 32K of RAM. Yeah, I remember-- I was actually talking about it this week to the guys I work with about how BASIC doesn't-- you don't need spaces in the language. And so, people would take the spaces out to kind of use as many bytes as they could. So, my code was illegible really.

Hsu: Right. So, did you have any mentors growing up?

Adams: Not really. Not really. I mean the closest you could get-- well, I don't know if an idol sort of counts as mentor, but like '82, I knew who Steve Jobs was. I knew who Bill Gates was, and I kind of wanted to-- I wanted to start my own company and take it public or sell it and then retire by twenty-five. That was my goal in high school.

Hsu: Oh, okay. So, we'll get there when we move farther into the story. What were your favorite subjects at school?

Adams: Gosh, I'm not sure that I had--

Hsu: Or best or worst subjects.

Adams: Yeah, English was tough. Analyzing novels, under-- the symbolism and all that stuff was hard for me to kind of tease those concepts out. Let's see, my dad taught me a lot of math, being an aerospace engineer. So, I kind of had a leg up there, but I was enrolled in the AP classes, and those were a little bit tough. The-- yeah, I didn't have a very good time in junior high or high school, and my goal was just to get out.

Hsu: Yeah, okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Understandable.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Was-- so, where did you go to junior high and high school?

Adams: So, yeah, we moved from Los Angeles to a city called Placentia. It's right next to Anaheim and Fullerton and Brea.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: And I went to Kraemer Junior High and to Valencia High School.

Hsu: Okay. So, very suburban area in Orange County?

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: And very, very not diverse.

Hsu: Right. Okay. Right. Let's see, did you-- what sort of books did you read, fiction, media did you consume?

Adams: Yeah so, I got into a lot of Stephen King, Dune, Michael Moorcock, the Elric. I got into Dungeons and Dragons a little bit. I was heavily into music actually and mostly sort of New Wave genre.

Hsu: So, were those sorts of-- the D and D and the New Wave, those sorts of things that your friends at school were also into or--

Adams: Yes, and yeah kind of interesting. I mean I felt like a kind of a misfit, and I hung out with the other misfits, which were the punk rockers at school.

Hsu: Right. So, talk about-- so, you went to college at Stanford?

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: And that began what year?

Adams: '84.

Hsu: '84, okay. What other schools were you considering?

Adams: So, I got into-- I applied to Stanford, Berkeley, and UC Irvine. Irvine was kind of my back up, and I got into Berkeley early. I didn't think I'd get into Stanford. So, I accepted to Berkeley, and then I got into Stanford. My dad had to figure out how to pay for me to go. Luckily, it worked out, yeah.

Hsu: And so, did you know what you wanted to study when you got there?

Adams: Yes, so I knew how to program. What I wanted to understand was how computers actually worked.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: So, I majored in electrical engineering, and what's kind of interesting is I-- looking back on it is I had no intention of doing double E, which sounds kind of crazy. I just wanted to know how they worked. I wanted to know how transistors worked and chips and all that stuff. And I figured I had the computer science stuff kind of covered.

Hsu: Oh, okay, right.

Adams: So, I took some CS classes also.

Hsu: Right. So, what was your intention?

Adams: My intention was to start a company and take it public or sell it.

Hsu: Okay right, yeah, as you mentioned. So, you were already thinking that already in high school?

Adams: Yeah, like sixteen or fifteen.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: This is like '82. So, that's way before that sort of thing happened, I guess.

Hsu: Right, okay. Wow, so you mentioned earlier that you were already sort of idolizing Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. So, you sort of wanted to put yourself on that path as being a computer entrepreneur?

Adams: I did, and the other piece of that is to retire by twenty-five. So, I don't know how I got all that, but that was my goal. And there was a computer magazine called BYTE--

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Back in those days, and my dad somehow-- I don't know why. He had a lot of those sitting around the house. So, I would read those magazines. I think that's how I learned about those guys.

Hsu: Ah.

Adams: Because there's no Internet. There's no-- yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, okay, yeah. So, let's go back to talking about college So, were you one of the few African Americans in the major, in the double E major, at the time?

Adams: For sure. It would just be a handful. I mean I'm having trouble remembering. It was a large major because double E was big--

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Back then. Yeah, there's not very-- I'm having a hard time picturing any others.

Hsu: And did you sort of study on your own, or did you find it easier to study with others or to maybe reach out to some of the other Black students?

Adams: Right-- wait, back up for one second, way back.

Hsu: Sure.

Adams: So, I actually went to Montessori school for-- until-- when I lived in L.A., I went to Montessori school, and then when we moved to Orange County, the schools were better. And so, I enrolled in elementary, and I had the-- I actually had the option to skip one or two grades.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: And my parents, they opted for one grade because they thought two would be too much.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: But so, between Montessori school and the Orange County public schools, Stanford was nothing different. It's what I had known.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: So, the key to places like Stanford is finding people to study with, and that was natural to me, but that's the only way to do it really.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right so, you were long used to sort of being a minority at school?

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Yeah, and so that didn't really affect you at all.

Adams: Right. Yeah, you know later on, I can think about going to a concert, say, and looking around and realizing I'm the only brown person there. So, it's that kind of thing where, every now and then, it would kind of hit me, but day-to-day, I didn't really think about it.

Hsu: Right. So, who influenced you in college? Were there any professors in particular or other people?

Adams: So, my double E advisor was Martin Hellman. I didn't know who he was at the time, but he's Diffie-Hellman public key encryption guy.

Hsu: Oh, okay, yeah.

Adams: And let's see. I want to say Mark Hennessy was also my advisor at some point.

Hsu: Oh, John Hennessy from--

Adams: John Hennessy, sorry.

Hsu: Yeah, of the RISC--

Adams: MIP--

Hsu: Yeah MIPS.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: But I didn't interact with them all that much.

Hsu: Yeah, it's hard to as an undergrad.

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, I would say influences, not that much.

Hsu: Did you join any clubs?

Adams: I did not. Yeah so, I stayed for a fifth year to get my master's, and that was the year that I clued in that college was bigger than I had thought it was before. There's all these interesting things to get-- to explore. So, I took like history-- U.S. history since 1945 was a class I took--

Hsu: Oh, oh, wow.

Adams: In my master's year, and I took some political science. So, to do it again, I would join clubs and then get involved in different things, but I didn't really-- it didn't occur to me at the time.

Hsu: Right so, earlier on, you were just very focused on your major, and did the work?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, okay. So, would you say you were particularly driven at the time, very focused?

Adams: Yes, but I mean that's true of pretty much everyone at Stanford. I was telling someone actually this week about how, Saturday night, I'd go to a frat party and come back and keep working.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: Yeah, like you'd do some homework, do some work studying. You'd go out to party and come back and keep working.

Hsu: I was definitely not like that in college, but then I went to Berkeley, so.

<laughter>

Adams: Berkeley's intense.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: That's true. So, what sort of computers and programs did you write in college? What computers did you work on?

Adams: Right so, my dad-- before I get to answer that directly, my dad said that, when I go to college, I need to be focused on my studies. And so, I did not do any programming during the year.

Hsu: Oh, really?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Not even for classes?

Adams: So, for classes, but that was mainframes and-- but before I went to school, went away to college, I got a Mac, one of the first Macs.

Hsu: Okay, it was 1984, right?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, and they had a purchase program through Stanford. You could get one at a reduced price. Yeah so, that became my computer that I would program during the summers.

Hsu: Okay. So, you were writing Pascal programs or--?

Adams: Yeah exactly, Pascal, that was really-- that was really it. And I wrote this-- actually, I had written on the TRS-80, it's a program that I called Star Trek. You got a ship, and you were flying to planets. So, I-- yeah, I had the latest incarnation of that on the Mac, and you'd get to a planet, and you'd see the continents rotating, and I had a dashboard with the shields. You could see them go up, and yeah that was the kind of game that I kept writing. That was the main thing I kept writing.

Hsu: Okay, right. Yeah, were you into Star Trek?

Adams: Yeah.

<laughter>

Hsu: Okay so, then you mentioned you also did some programming for classes. What sorts of computers was that on?

Adams: Yeah, those were, I believe, DEC PDP-11s.

Hsu: Oh, okay, right.

Adams: Yeah, the funny thing-- I'm sure they're not there anymore, but they called them the tragedies. They were named after Shakespeare plays, but yeah, there was kind of a running joke that they were the tragedies.

Hsu: Okay so, then you graduated. And so, you said you finished your master's. So, that means that's about, what, five years after '84. That's '89?

Adams: Yeah so, '89. Yeah. Let's see, one thing of note from my computer classes. We had a-- let's see. Somehow, I got this idea of starting a chain letter, and I wanted to see how many-- it keeps collecting the headers as it goes along, so I wanted to see where it went. So, I started this chain letter, and it actually blew up, and went all over, and I got in a little bit of trouble for that.

Hsu: So, it turned into a virus or something?

Adams: Yeah, kind of, or like worm.

Hsu: Or a worm.

Adams: Yeah, and actually, one of the questions on the computer science class I was taking at the time for the final, it was like computing the memory cost of a chain letter sort of thing.

<laughter>

Hsu: Yeah. So, did you have ARPANET access?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah so, yeah, living in the future in '85-'86 meant you could log into a machine on the other side of the country, email. Yeah, all that stuff was natural.

Hsu: Awesome. So, let's get to after college. Was your first-- was NeXT your first job, or was there anything in between?

Adams: Right so, okay, so I had my goal.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: But then I'm in college, and it's a little bit easier just to stay in college. So, I was trying to get a PhD. That was the goal that I had set, but then I had failed the qualifying exams, and then I tried to be a resident's assistant so that would get me to stay another year, and that didn't pan out. So, then suddenly, I'm faced with having to leave and then-- so, a friend of mine who I went to school with, Paul Hegarty--

Hsu: Oh okay.

Adams: Yeah, he worked for--

Hsu: So, what-- were you the same year?

Adams: No, he was a year ahead.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: But we were lab partners for a class where we built a chip. We actually laid out the chip, and then it gets fabbed, and then the next quarter it comes back, and then you test it.

Hsu: Oh, like VLSI design.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Oh, cool.

Adams: So, he was my lab partner for that. That's how I got to know him. And so, he started at NeXT right out of school, and then I interviewed there, and I didn't get anything. And so, then it was NeXT is the only place I want to work. So, now--

Hsu: What year was this at this point?

Adams: This was-- it was probably spring of '89.

Hsu: Okay, and Paul had been there for a year already.

Adams: Yeah, that's probably right. Yeah so, now my dream job is gone, and I don't want to work anywhere else. So, then, over the summer and the fall, I got to be an administrator for some NeXT machines on Stanford campus. So, basically, yeah, they said, "You don't have any experience with NeXT machines. You don't have this or that," and I kind of set about addressing all those things.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: And then I taught-- co-taught a course on programming at Stanford. So, I interviewed again probably late '89 and got a job at NeXT doing developer support.

Hsu: Right, okay. So, backing up slightly, so NeXT became sort of your dream job partly because of Paul or because it was Steve Jobs or a combination?

Adams: Steve Jobs.

Hsu: Yeah?

Adams: Yeah, even before Paul [was] working there, I knew about the NeXT machine. I had read about it. I was very excited about it, and yeah so--

Hsu: What was it in particular that really excited you?

Adams: I mean part of it is I guess a belief that Steve does things right. Part of it is the specs, the mono-- well, let's see, the grayscale screen, the megapixel display.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Your world on a disk. Yeah, it just felt like the next step for computers.

Hsu: Right, especially since you already had the original Mac. It was-- yeah, and you were also on-- at the university, you were already on a UNIX based platform.

Adams: Right.

Hsu: So, it was kind of combining those two.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: And I really like design. I care about design a lot, and I really like the graphic design on the Mac-- sorry, on the NeXT machine.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Did you-- were you into that earlier in college as well or even before, like graphic design?

Adams: No. No, I think it's something that I eventually recognized that I was drawn to.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right sort of because of Steve maybe?

Adams: Yeah, for sure.

Hsu: Yeah, right. Yeah, okay, so then the job that you got at NeXT, that was in developer support?

Adams: Yes. Yeah so, there was a bunch of us developer/customer support, maybe ten of us. So, I started out on January 5th, 1990. Yeah. And at the time, NeXT was in Redwood City in two buildings, and I was in Steve's building, but I didn't see him very much. Yeah so, that was pretty awesome.

Hsu: So, could you maybe describe the day-to-day of that job?

Adams: So, you had the team, we shared time on the phones. So, we had phone support starting at 8:00 a.m.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: And you'd either do the morning shift or the afternoon shift, and that was a little stressful because you could get any question.

Hsu: Yeah, wow. So, this was from both developers and end users?

Adams: Where-- I don't know if it was just any end user. It might have been like a school, let's say, like an administrator.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah, but you could get a UNIX question. You could get a AppKit question.

Hsu: Oh, wow.

Adams: You had other people on the team you could ask for help.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: And stuff but--

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: So, that was-- and then, let's see, what else? I don't remember much more than the phones. I also-- I had a NeXT machine. Somehow, I had one in my studio apartment. So, when I wasn't at work, I was writing code on that machine.

Hsu: Oh, wow.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, were you primarily focused on, in terms your knowledge of the NeXT system, was it primarily AppKit focused or--?

Adams: Yeah, and then I got into Display PostScript, but yeah higher-level stuff, technologies.

Hsu: Right, right. And was it-- what was it about the AppKit in particular that you really admired or enjoyed?

Adams: I loved how much you got for free. So, it wasn't too much work to get a string displayed on the screen, those sorts of things. Object oriented programming, that was new, and I-- and that was the way to go.

Hsu: Yeah, was that your first experience with that, with object oriented?

Adams: Yes. I mean not-- when I was running the lab and teaching that class, I think I was already aware of that stuff.

Hsu: Oh okay, right.

Adams: But the NeXT machine, yes, that was my first experience with that.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: And something else I really admired was just how much they went the extra mile to make the system work. So, the code that when you display an alert message, if the message is too long, it wraps it, or it will change the font size or just like taking care of all the edge cases, not like being lazy and-- yeah, so I really-- I loved that aspect of it too.

Hsu: Right, yeah. Did you ever work with Paul more closely, or were you more siloed away from the main AppKit engineering groups?

Adams: Yeah, so I didn't work with them. I didn't work with the AppKit group. Shortly after I started, maybe six months, my manager left for Adobe. And so, suddenly, we had this hole, and I became a co-manager of the team with someone else on the team, and that actually gave me a ticket into Bud Tribble's staff meeting, support staff. So, I got to go to building two and sit in a three-hour meeting where they'd talk about all the software on the system. That was pretty awesome.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, did you make a lot of contacts because of that having access to this larger part of the organization?

Adams: That was part of it, but also when-- if I ran into problems with the AppKit or an application on the system, I would go over to building two and talk to the engineer who wrote the code.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: So, you'd find me a lot over in building two talking to people.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: That's how I got to know a lot of people over there.

Hsu: So, what's-- would you be able to name some of the people that you worked with over there or collaborated--?

Adams: Yeah, like Ali Ozer he was on the AppKit.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Trey Matteson, also AppKit.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Adam Hertz, he was in charge of Digital Librarian.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: I'm forgetting. Let's see, I'm picturing faces but forgetting names. Mike McNabb was the music, and then of course there was Avie.

Hsu: Oh, right.

Adams: Mach, Bryan, oh man, Yamamoto?

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, he wrote Mail and other stuff, and Bertrand Serlet, he wrote like the Finder [Workspace Manager] and--

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, and I knew a few hardware people also.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: But I didn't spend too much time down there. That was the first floor of building two.

Hsu: Right, right. Were there any of your colleagues within developer support that were later important or worth mentioning?

Adams: Yeah, not so much for my story after NeXT.

Hsu: Okay. So, given that you were sort of on the front lines with the developers, how difficult was that, especially given that NeXT was sort of struggling in the market?

Adams: Yeah so, difficult from fielding questions or difficult from the company being in precarious position perhaps?

Hsu: Well, actually, both.

Adams: Okay.

Hsu: We'll start with the first one, and then--

Adams: It was definitely tough fielding questions out of my field of expertise, and I feel like there was a-- if you got those questions, you'd want to give it to someone who knew how to answer them, but they sort of wouldn't take those questions.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Not very-- yeah, that's not a good way to do it. Let's see, I'll throw in there that when I-- shortly after I started-- so, being-- you mentioned being in trouble in the market, so that was-- the Cube had been shipping. I guess it wasn't selling that well. And so, they were building the NeXTstation, and that was an exciting time. So, the company was-- everyone was very focused on the NeXTstation, NeXTSTEP 2.0, and I think after about a year, I was no longer the manager of that team. I became what they called a strategic developer engineer. So, that was assigned to some important developers--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: To help them. Yeah.

Hsu: Right, okay. So, let's move on to that then. So which sort of-- which particular developers did you work with?

Adams: Oh gosh, I can picture the face.

Hsu: Okay. I could name some if that helps.

Adams: Sure.

Hsu: Lotus?

Adams: No.

Hsu: No? Frame?

Adams: Bruce Henderson, not Frame.

Hsu: Aldus?

Adams: No, there was a-- something to do with modems. I don't know if it was a bulletin board system or modem something. They were based in the East Bay.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: And Mathematica.

Hsu: Okay, with Wolfram, okay.

Adams: Yeah. I forgot the person's name, but I was--

Hsu: Wolfram or--

Adams: It wasn't Wolfram himself, no.

Hsu: Right, yeah. Somebody from Wolfram.

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah. I remember I took a trip down to Intel. I remember Andy Grove walked in. I also took a trip down to Borland. They were in Scotts Valley. Yeah, I'm-- yeah.

Hsu: No, go ahead.

Adams: I'm spacing on who ran Borland. I forgot his name now. Philippe Kahn.

Hsu: Kahn, yeah.

Adams: I don't exactly remember why I was there in either of those cases. I think for the Intel trip, I was tagging along. It might have been talking about-- it was something about running on Intel, but it was-- yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, right because NeXTSTEP for 486 was-- was it already under development, or was it maybe that-- the beginning of that deal, that--?

Adams: I know it was under development when I was there, but I don't know if it-- I don't know when it came out relative to when I left.

Hsu: Okay because I think that-- because I spoke with William Parkhurst, and he was the guy sort of-- kind of pushing that whole thing. So, were you sort-- did you go down as part of that delegation or--?

Adams: I don't remember exactly. I wasn't that important, though.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah, but I do remember going down there for some reason, and there was some guy talking about floating point versus fixed point computation speeds, and Andy Grove was there.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: It may have been bringing-- it may have been bringing a machine that's running NeXTSTEP and showing him or something like that.

Hsu: I see, okay.

Adams: That's all I remember.

Hsu: Yeah, did you ever work with some of the smaller companies like Lighthouse Design or Stone Design?

Adams: I mean I definitely knew those people, but I wasn't assigned to either of them.

Hsu: Okay, right.

Adams: Yeah, I don't know if NeXT would consider them make or break developers.

Hsu: Right, they were kind of small. Okay so, you were only assigned to the big name, the big companies.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, nothing like-- yeah, so nothing like a two-man shop or anything would have been assigned to you?

Adams: Right.

Hsu: Right?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: The company in the East Bay I think was pretty small. I'm not recalling what they did, but--

Hsu: Was that Adamation?

Adams: No.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: I remember those guys, though.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Did you have a lot of interaction with them?

Adams: Not a lot, a little bit. When I started-- shortly after I started, I think the week after, there was a retreat down in Monterey to talk about the NeXTstation, and there was a developer award show thing, and I was there, and I remember someone saying to me, "Come on this way. We're about to get started." It's like, "What are you talking about?" They thought--

Hsu: They thought you were a part of Adamation?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: <laugh> Right. Okay. Right, well, you're African American, and you're also-- last name is Adams. <laughs>

Adams: Right.

Hsu: That's just-- Right. So, how big was the-- you mentioned earlier that it was about ten people.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: In your new role, were you-- how big was that group?

Adams: It might have been really just-- for me. I think--

Hsu: Oh.

Adams: I think the deal is I was co-manager of the developer support-- or the support team, but then I think that my partner, Kate Smith, became a manager, and then this was a role created for me so I wouldn't have to go back down.

Hsu: Oh, okay, I see.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right. What was the culture of NeXT like?

Adams: Really smart people. Unfortunately, there was a culture of flaming.

Hsu: Oh, really.

Adams: Yes. So, if you weren't considered sharp or if something happened, you would get destroyed, at least in software.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: I didn't see much of the stories that you hear about Steve, but I know that they happened, and I know people were scared.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: We also spent a lot of money. That meeting, Bud Tribble staff meeting, had a catered lunch. So, when we had money, we were spending a lot of money.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: And when things aren't so good, you're probably wishing you had that money back.

Hsu: Right. So, were you aware of at all, being sort of the bottom end of the totem pole of all the goings on at the high-- the executives' level or all the money troubles or all the-- was that in the air, or you just sort of kept your--?

Adams: I knew some of it because I was friends with one of the admin. Yeah. So, I would get some-- I would hear some things, but I don't recall being worried about NeXT going under, which it seems like they were on the verge of going under.

Hsu: Right, yeah. I kind of actually wanted to go back to that flaming thing that you mentioned because I've actually heard similar things, maybe not in those terms, but about there being a very aggressive culture within software particularly.

Adams: Yes, and I would say not at all friendly to women from what I could tell.

Hsu: I've heard that too, yeah. Right. Was it easy or difficult for you, as a minority, in the company?

Adams: I didn't feel anything. I wasn't aware of anything either way.

Hsu: Right. How many other African Americans were in the company?

Adams: It was definitely one. I'm trying to think.

<laughter>

Adams: I'm trying to see if there was another person. She was a lawyer. I'm not sure there were any other of us.

Hsu: How about other minorities?

Adams: Gosh, not a lot. So, Bryan Yamamoto.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: That's interesting. Yeah, if you're French, does that count as a minority? <laughs>

Hsu: Yeah, there were a lot of French people at NeXT. That is one thing. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah, really, gosh, that was very much the culture of hire people that you know, people that are your friends.

Hsu: Right. Yeah so, they would-- in a way, you kind of benefitted from that because you knew Paul Hegarty from college or from graduate school. So, you were kind of in the network sort of already.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, you benefitted from that, but anyone who wasn't--

Adams: Right.

Hsu: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Let's see--

Adams: You were asking if that was my first job, and it was my first job, but I realized I also worked a summer at HP.

Hsu: Oh, okay right, as an intern?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay, what did you do there?

Adams: So, they had a-- some device that was doing something about Fourier transforms, and they needed to port that code to something else.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: Yeah, that's all that I remember about it.

Hsu: All right, do you think that NeXT could have done better or what could NeXT have done to have hired a more diverse staff?

Adams: Very-- I mean late '80s, you didn't have people graduating in computer science, and a startup, you're being very deliberate about hiring people who can solve some particular problem.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: So, I certainly understand how they wound up at that spot, and I don't know if you decided you were going to hire-- we're going to hire some more African Americans, let's say, there's not a lot coming out of college at that time anyway.

Hsu: Yeah, right.

Adams: Yeah, that was tough back then.

Hsu: Right, right. Do you think the situation's improved that if you were to start up a startup now that you could actually success-- build a successful and diverse team?

Adams: Yes, but probably a lot of work to find those people.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, people for your team.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, places like Google, they say, "Hey, if all we look at is Stanford and Berkeley and wherever, we have a fixed talent pool."

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Probably other people-- if we look at some other schools, there are people who are just as sharp, you know.

Hsu: Yeah, exactly.

Adams: But then you have to make the effort to go to those schools and find those people.

Hsu: Right so, a lot of it is just about the pipeline from the top, elite universities that they--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Companies hire from.

Adams: And in doing the leg work to sift through the different universities.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Like the Historically Black Universities, saying that we're going to go look at those places.

Hsu: Right, right, yeah, yeah. Let's go back to talking about maybe sort of NeXT's business troubles. So, around the time that NeXT was shutting down its hardware business, were you still at the company?

Adams: I think that was about the time that I left.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: Yeah, I think there was a reorg either the week or the month after I left.

Hsu: Okay. So, did you know what was coming down the pipe when you were still there?

Adams: I did not because my job actually disappeared. If I had stayed, someone else would have gotten laid off, I guess.

Hsu: Oh, okay, I see.

Adams: But I had no idea that-- probably part of me thought I could come back--

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: If I needed to or something like that but--

Hsu: Okay. So, then maybe let's just go to talk about your leaving. So, you mentioned that-- so, you had a job, at the time, that was created for you, and then I guess they uncreated it for some reason?

Adams: Well, it was still a head count inside of tech support, developer support.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah. Let's see. Before we leave NeXT, I do want to mention that I wrote a program called News Grazer, and that-- so, it was a Usenet news viewer, and that is one thing that got me well known within the company.

Hsu: Oh. So, you wrote that on your own time or was that for something?

Adams: That was my own time.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, it was-- I used NeXT hardware, NeXT-owned hardware to do it. So, they owned it, but--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Like that was the thing I was working on on weekends was News Grazer, yeah.

Hsu: Okay. So, okay. So, then you mentioned your-- so, your job was essentially eliminated in '92?

Adams: Yeah, early '92, my-- the head count went away.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: I don't know that my job got eliminated, but--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: But head count went away.

Hsu: So, they-- were you laid off as a group thing, or was it just you individually?

Adams: So, I didn't actually get laid off because I left.

Hsu: Oh, right. So, you decided to leave voluntarily.

Adams: Yes, but it wasn't because we were doing poorly. I was going to start a company is what--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: That's what I did.

Hsu: Okay. So, you had finally decided that this sort of long delayed plan of yours, goal of yours, you were going to pursue that?

Adams: Yes because I remember talking to someone there, a fellow developer support person saying, "Well, if I count my shares, if it splits like thirty-two times, then I'll have a million dollars," or something like that. And eventually, I said, "You know, it's probably not going to happen."

Hsu: Right. Yeah so, go through the process of deciding to leave and then starting your own company.

Adams: Right, it's a little fuzzy. I must have just-- I'm sure I decided I wasn't going to be able to retire working at NeXT.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Then I was thinking boy, I'm working really hard to make Steve rich, but I'm-- not so much myself. So, yeah, I decided to leave, and-- so, that was like November/December of '91. So, I did some contracting work for Intel. I had this contract lined up. So, my plan was I will just do contracting work to pay the bills, and then I'm going to write some programs and sell them. So, I did the contracting work, and that lasted a month, and I had-- at the end of that contract, I said, "Oh gosh, I don't have anything else to do. I've got to go find some more contracting work." I didn't really have it all thought out too well, but I did do some more contracting work. I wrote my first program, called Engage, which was a Dock replacement, and then started thinking about Notebook, which-- eventually, my then business partner, Scott Love, we developed that together, but yeah. You know, that was-- okay so, I'm starting this company. I'm working out of my house in '92. The sun goes down in the winter at 4:30. So, that was a very lonely time. It's cold and getting dark really early. I had a couple roommates, and my other roommate, he-- I think he also quit NeXT. I forgot what he was doing, but he was a graphic designer. That was Jay Capela. Yeah, and I figured I could-- my idea was I could live off of credit cards a little bit, and if I flamed out, I could always move home. That's like worst case. I could always get another job, and I could pay off the credit cards and, you know, be back whole.

Hsu: Right. Okay so, you mentioned you first few contracts were for Intel. What were you doing specifically for them?

Adams: Yeah, I wrote a-- it was just a demo. It was the Intel Inside logo bouncing off the sides of the screen.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: That's what it was.

Hsu: And what platform was that for?

Adams: That was NeXTSTEP on--

Hsu: Okay, NeXTSTEP on Intel.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay so, you were doing all NeXTSTEP type--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Of work, okay.

Adams: Yeah, that's all I did.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: There was some other company that was doing a-- some kind of business financial package. I wrote some UI stuff for them.

Hsu: So, you mentioned you had a partner. How did that happen?

Adams: Yeah so, I met him at NeXT. He also wanted to go off and start a company. So, at some point, he actually left NeXT. Yeah so, my first company was called Atherton Software Works because I was living in Atherton, and then that lasted about a year, and then that turned into Millennium Software Labs. That's when Scott left NeXT, and we were working on Notebook and selling it.

Hsu: Okay. So, the-- maybe talk about how that app came about, the origins of that.

Adams: Gosh, I don't know who had the seed of the idea, which was an electronic notebook. I know Scott was big into outliners. And so, the idea was that every page will be an outline. And then we had the clever idea of indexing everything that goes in and then automatically building these pages at the back that show you what's in your notebook. That was all magical back in '92-'93.

Hsu: Right, automatic indexing.

Adams: Yeah, yeah. I remember we had a-- I think the end of '92 probably, we booked a room at I think it was Il Fornaio in Palo Alto, and we invited a bunch of NeXT customers to get a preview of our app, and I remember someone from NeXT heard about it, and they crashed the demo. Yeah, and then-- so, then they saw what we were working on, and then I-- it's like Digital Librarian suddenly had a couple of features from what we were doing.

Hsu: Oh, okay. So, they started stealing your features.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: What other-- what made Notebook really unique? What features were the big selling points?

Adams: Being able to put stuff in it anywhere and easily finding what you are looking for just by whatever little bit you remember about it, so maybe the date you put it in or someone's name. So, basically, you could just dump stuff into a notebook, and you'd know for sure you could find it easily.

Hsu: Okay. So, searchability was the primary--

Adams: Yeah, and then the outlines, and then the notebook interface sections and subsections, you can organize things. Yeah.

Hsu: So, then you mentioned you actually won app of the year from NeXTWORLD magazine.

Adams: Yes, yeah. Yes, I guess at the time it was-- they were-- I think they were talking about naming Pages the app of the year, but then someone pointed out that Pages wasn't even shipping. We were actually shipping.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah so, we got app of the year. So, it's funny. So, we were setting up for NeXTWORLD Expo, Scott and I. It was the next day, and we were in the showroom, and we were building, our whatever you call it.

Hsu: The booth?

Adams: The booth, yeah. Sweaty, whatever. We were going to go to this NeXTWORLD awards show. We had our tuxedos. We didn't have time. So, we're building the booth, and then someone runs-- comes and says, "You guys need to come. You need to come over to the thing." And so, we showed up there in our jeans and t-shirts to the awards show to accept the award. Yeah, and I didn't think we were going to win, but I had been rehearsing what I was going to say, which was, "I want to thank mom, dad, and Kraft macaroni and cheese," and that got a chuckle. And then Steve was in the front row. I remember him smiling, and then I walked past him after I got the award, and apparently someone-- he turned to someone and said that he never should have let me go.

Hsu: Nice.

Adams: That was nice.

Hsu: So, you overheard that directly or somebody told you?

Adams: Someone told me.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, that was in-- what year was that at NeXTWORLD Expo?

Adams: Gosh, it's got to be end of '92 somewhere or maybe January of '93.

Hsu: Right. Yeah because I think-- were there only two of them that were ever thrown or organized?

Adams: I think there's only one that I can remember going to, but yeah, hazy, fun, though.

Hsu: What was the overall experience like of the expo?

Adams: There weren't a lot of people, not something I was aware of really at the time, but after going to Macworlds and things--

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah. We were trying to make a big splash and appear to be very professional. We had a big sign made, like a 3D sign, from our logo. It was very sleek. Everything was black. Yeah, and I think it was pretty small.

Hsu: Right. Did it make a big difference to the business? Did you get a lot of sales out of it or a lot of buzz?

Adams: I'm certain we did not get many sales. Those-- I mean I went to Macworlds after that, and those shows never-- you were fighting to keep them from pulling you under with all the expenses. Yeah, that's all I remember of the NeXTWORLDs.

Hsu: Do you remember meeting a lot of the other developers at the expo, or just do you remember there being a sense of community among the developers?

Adams: I remember there was a dinner. I don't remember who was there. I think it might have been some NeXTWORLD magazine people. Yeah, I don't remember much. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. So, I guess you were just one company out of many that were trying to struggle in the NeXT space.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right. So, did you get to know any of the other third-party developers?

Adams: I knew Andrew Stone. I knew a couple people from Lighthouse. I knew a couple people from Pages. I knew-- what is his name? He wrote the sort of page layout tool.

Hsu: Glenn Reid?

Adams: Yeah, Glenn. Yeah, I don't remember too many others.

Hsu: Did you keep in touch with any of them later on?

Adams: Yeah, not so much.

Hsu: Okay. Is there anything else you would-- you want to add about your experience as a NeXT developer?

Adams: The market was pretty small, and we didn't really understand how small it was. With a lot of things, if you understood just what you were facing, you might not actually go do it. Yeah so, we had a big sale to the Air Force because they had bought a lot of computers. That was our first thing that really funded the company.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: And we sort of felt, "Oh, this is just kind of how it is," but that's not--

Hsu: Yeah, one big contract is--

Adams: Yeah so, the end of the month would roll around, and Scott would say he had to go dialing for dollars because he was trying to sell it.

Hsu: Right. So, wait, was he looking for investors, or what was he--

Adams: No, trying to sell copies.

Hsu: Okay, sell copies of Notebook.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right, okay. How were you trying to market the-- other than NeXTWORLD expo, what sort of marketing things were you trying to do?

Adams: Yeah, we didn't have much. We didn't have money for ads or anything. I mean we ran one ad in NeXTWORLD magazine. Yeah, that was-- I was engineering, and Scott was sales and marketing. So, I wasn't paying attention too much to that side, even though I should have.

Hsu: What-- from the engineering side, was it a fairly straightforward application from your perspective? Were there challenges?

Adams: In retrospect, pretty simple. I did some work-- I did some work to try to keep the size of the index files small like playing with the identifiers and scrunching them. Yeah so, there were some clever tricks I played to keep memory usage down. No real challenges. I mean I did mostly graphic design. So, I mean we're building the entire app, so there's a lot of stuff to think about.

Hsu: Yeah. Right.

Adams: Yeah. I remember driving Golden Master disks over to some disk copy place in Milpitas.

<laughter>

Adams: Yeah. Those were the days. We had boxes with manuals, printed manuals, and we'd go to the run where they're printing them and-- yeah. That's the old days.

Hsu: Yeah. So you were actually selling shrink wrapped, like, boxes on store shelves.

Adams: Definitely mail order.

Hsu: Mail order.

Adams: There weren't a lot of places that were selling NeXT stuff.

Hsu: Yeah, that's what I'm wondering.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So it was primarily mail order that was most of your sales?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: So we would get orders and we'd mail out the software.

Hsu: Right. Okay. Yeah. I mean, would you-- you mentioned if you had known how big the market was, that's probably not something you would've done. I mean, would you just describe yourself as just sort of a die-hard NeXT true believer at the time?

Adams: Yes. Yes. Because even, you know, knowing, like, for example, the Windows market is much bigger, I was never able to bring myself to write Windows code.

Hsu: <laughs> Because once you taste the AppKit it's hard to go back to something else.

<laughter>

Adams: Yeah, and all the things that they did get right. Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs> Right. So should we move on to the next thing then?

Adams: Sure.

Hsu: Okay. Let me know if you need a break or anything.

Adams: Okay. Thank you.

Hsu: Okay. So then in '93, you founded Farcast?

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Okay. And that was to work on an email-based news service?

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah. So the-- NeXT's market was clearly in decline, and so we were thinking about some new products, new company. So we had this idea that we would create a system. We had a satellite dish and we took in newsfeeds, including stocks and press releases, and you could create these robots that live on our servers and as articles and things came in, if they matched the robot, the robot would send you an email saying, "Here's list of things I found," and you could write back and say, "Send me article number one," and then it'd mail it back to you, and you could also do searches, you know, just from email, say, like, you know, "Show me all the things that mention--" whatever, and it'd give you a list of stuff. So this is before-- this is when, you know, the internet is around and people are kind of aware of it. It was before the web really, really took off. Oh. Speaking of the web. So at NeXTWorld, I remember, someone came up to me and they said-- they looked at NoteBook and they said, "Hey, this would be a great interface for this other thing that--" that they-- I didn't know what it was, but they said it would be a great interface for this other thing, and I think that other thing was the web.

Hsu: Okay.

<laughter>

Hsu: So was it-- do you remember, was that Tim Berners-Lee who you met or was it somebody else?

Adams: I don't think so.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: I don't think it was him. But that would be funny if it were.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, so that was the service, and so in '93 we had a server farm, which is unheard of. Yeah, and the idea is that we could add more servers and kind of scale up our service, and I remember we were talking to Netcom about selling them what we had, and the guy there, the owner, he was saying, "No, that's not the way to do it. You want like a big Sun server. That's how you do it," and I'm happy to say that he was wrong.

Hsu: Yeah.

<laughter>

Hsu: One centralized server, not the way to go.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: So some punk kid with a small server farm was correct, so...

Hsu: <laughs> So you started Farcast as a separate company. Then, what, Millennium, which was publishing NoteBook?

Adams: Right. And why did we do that? Because I don't know.

Hsu: But it was the same-- it was still you and--

Adams: Kind of dumb.

Hsu: --Scott or...?

Adams: Yeah. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Same offices, same-- yeah.

Hsu: Just a separate corporate entity but the same actual people?

Adams: Right.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Right. Extra expenses. Yeah. Just not smart, I think, but--

Hsu: Well, was it because it was a completely different business or you wanted to keep the brands separate or...?

Adams: It was completely separate business. I think maybe we had this idea of selling one or the other and we would keep one and sell the other. I don't know. For that business, we just needed a thousand users, and we talked to a couple VC firms. We released one and they turned us down, and we decided to do it ourselves, which was a big mistake.

Hsu: Ah. Right.

Adams: Because if we had money-- eventually we realized we needed to churn. We needed churn on the system. Just get people to try it; some people will stay. We only needed a thousand people to break even. If we had some money to do some marketing, it would actually-- it would've worked.

Hsu: Right. So I think, like, the big difference is like because you have a server farm, you're building for scale and you need scale, whereas I guess with the app you could sort of try to see if it would succeed on its own by word of mouth or something?

Adams: You're saying why it needs-- why we needed scale?

Hsu: Like you, you know, it sounds like you didn't necessarily need to scale for NoteBook because you could just develop the whole thing by yourself.

Adams: Mm-hm.

Hsu: But now with the Farcast, you know, you have the server farm and there's expenses and it sounds like because there's now physical infrastructure, that there's an inherent need for more scaling, so a need for more investment.

Adams: Well, okay. So I don't know. I think our operation costs, I don't know, 10 grand or something or more. I mean, we were leasing these Intel machines, so it was very inexpensive. So it was mostly our salaries. The data feed didn't cost very much. Yeah.

Hsu: So you were managing to break even at least, at the beginning?

Adams: Well, no. So if we'd gotten a thousand people we could've broken even. Yeah. But, I mean, a thousand people to me is zero. That's like-- it's not really scale to speak of to me.

Hsu: Right. Okay. You know, I didn't ask this earlier, but like when you're first starting the other company, you know, were you just doing it purely from your own savings or, you know, what sort of capital did you have?

Adams: Yeah. It was-- yeah. I don't want to say savings, because I don't think I had any.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: But it was cash flow funded, so...

Hsu: Right. Okay. Right. Right.

Adams: Cash flow funded and personal, you know, on the hook for payments.

Hsu: Right. So you mentioned like you were just living off your credit cards at the time and...?

Adams: Not-- it wasn't so bad then. When I first started it was credit cards, but not for-- not once we got going with like Millennium and Farcast. It was--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah, and the, I mean, there were some scary times when we were maybe not going to make our own payroll and stuff, but we, we actually were okay.

Hsu: Mm-hm. Great. Okay. So then at what point did-- how far did Farcast go? At what point did you have to shut it down?

Adams: Gosh, I remember we started in '93, and somehow we kept going for a couple years. That's amazing to me.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: So yeah, because the next thing I remember is '95, summer of '95. We were having trouble and I wanted to put, you know, the web's starting taking off, and I hate HTML. I hate the look of it, the control you get. So I wanted to put a-- I want to put a web front end and then Java came out and so I said, "Oh, that's the answer. I can write some Java, a Java front end, and it will look nice," and then the Java toolkit was horrible. So then I backed up and started writing my own toolkit to... Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. So that's the beginning of Netcode.

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Your next-- so was that also another partnership with Scott?

Adams: Scott. Yes.

Hsu: Yeah. Okay.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. I have some things to say about that, but I won't. I won't say them.

<laughter>

Hsu: Sure. Okay. <laughs>

Adams: I learned some things. But that was the situation I was in, so that was-- yes. That was another partnership with him.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Trying to think what else I want to say about Farcast. We ran some ads in The Wall Street Journal. So that was pretty fun. And we were also experimenting with these radios. You plug it into your Mac. It's basically internet over some kind of radio band. So, you know, it's like on-the-go doing these searches with the system. Was kind of magical.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: Yeah. So let's see. Right. So I wrote that toolkit and then we said, "Hey, Java's going to be big." We could tell. Was going to be big, and, "Everyone's going to need this toolkit. So let's ditch this company and start another one that sells this toolkit."

Hsu: Oh. So you wanted to ditch Farcast to...?

Adams: Yes. We were-- Farcast was-- yeah. If we had taken some venture capital we could've gotten some traction. It was dragging us down slowly, and so our plan was to leave it behind and we found someone who was interested in buying it. The VC firm that we talked to for Farcast, we had kept in touch with someone who was kind of advisor to them and he was a angel investor, ex-VC, and we showed him our Java toolkit and he was interested in being a angel investor in our Netcode company, him and a couple of his friends, and then he also, for some consideration, he would broker-- he would help us get rid of the old company. We basically gave it away. Yeah. They took on the leases and-- yeah.

Hsu: Okay. Right. And was Millennium still existing also separately or did you drop that?

Adams: I think it still existed but it wasn't doing anything.

Hsu: Right. So you were kind of just in maintenance mode for NoteBook.

Adams: Yeah. I doubt we were even selling anything at that time, '95, yeah, and I wasn't-- I certainly wasn't working on any code for it.

Hsu: Right. Okay. Yeah. Okay. So then do you know what ended up happening to Farcast after you guys sold it? Did it go away?

Adams: Right. Actually, I want to back up a little bit. So we-- I started writing a new product for Millennium I think it was that was-- it was going to be a news-based something-or-other and then we got this idea of kind of twisting it inside out and making it this distributed program that turned into Farcast. So that's how that came about. The company that took Farcast, I know they ran with it for a while. There's a whole thing about-- we named our robots droids, and then we applied for a trademark for droids for this usage, and then our law firm, they hired someone away from Lucasfilm.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: They hired someone away from some other law firm and she brought the Lucasfilm account with her, and on the last day that you could contest our application for that trademark, they told Lucasfilm about us. This is like malpractice, legal malpractice, and then they said they can't represent either of us and then Lucasfilm started coming after us to get the name. Yeah. So then we sold the company. We gave it away to this other company, and they decided they wanted to fight that fight, so they kept the droid name. Yes. That blew up. A couple years later I got a knock on the door and I open it and I'm served with papers.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Because Lucasfilm is suing me and Scott, because they'd had enough. That wasn't fun. But I've been sued by Lucasfilm. I guess I can say that.

<laughter>

Hsu: So but then you'd already sold the company, so then how did that work?

Adams: So our name, I mean, because our name was on the trademark application, I guess. Yeah. So the-- yeah, that got all figured out. I got, we-- Scott and I got out of that, and in the papers that we sold the company to, it said, you know, "If there's any kind of problem like this," that, you know, "we're on the hook for fixing it but we can fix it kind of however way we want." So the way I'd fix it is we're just not going to fight that fight. Anyway, that went away, luckily. Yeah. But yeah, that was couple years later. Yeah. I know they kept going, and I don't know what happened to them.

Hsu: Okay. I guess going back to Netcode then. So you said you didn't like the existing toolkit, which was AWT?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: At the time?

Adams: Yeah. My joke for AWT... AWT stands for A Waste of Time.

<laughter>

Hsu: So then you created-- so you called it Internet Foundation Classes for Java is what your--

Adams: That was--

Hsu: --your name was?

Adams: That was after we got to Netscape.

Hsu: Oh, okay. Well--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So did you have a name initially or...?

Adams: Yeah. So it was called RevKit, the RevolutionKit. That's what I called it. Yeah. And then we had an interface builder program that I also created.

Hsu: Oh. Okay. So you wrote it initially on a NeXT machine or...?

Adams: I think I did. Yes. Is that right? Or I had my NeXT is where I did my editing and I had it running on the Sun. I know we had Sun boxes.

Hsu: Right. So maybe you were editing the code on the NeXT, but then compiling it on the Sun, testing it on the Sun.

Adams: Yeah, that's probably right. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. Right. How much of the design was influenced by AppKit and NeXT?

Adams: A lot of it. Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. I would assume so.

<laughter>

Adams: Yeah, and I hired a couple people. One was a NeXT engineer and then another person who'd written a bunch of NeXT stuff. So it was all very-- and then we, later on, we hired another person from NeXT, so it was very NeXT, AppKit influenced.

Hsu: Right. Yeah. And then-- so then talk about the-- well, actually, let me go back to-- so, like, it was really clear to you that Java was going to be the-- sort of the next big thing. Why was that? Because of the object orientation? Was there a lot of similarity to NeXTSTEP that you were seeing, with the object-oriented?

Adams: Excellent question. I mean, it obviously didn't play out that way. It may have been just all the buzz, because there was a lot of buzz about Java, and I guess maybe the idea of delivering applications over the internet maybe.

Hsu: Okay. Right. Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. And were you aware of like some of the people who had gone to work on Java that had been at NeXT, or was that...?

Adams: I didn't know anyone actually who went to work on Java. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. So then talk about how you got involved with Netscape, and how did you end up selling Netcode to Netscape?

Adams: Yeah, so-- okay. So August '95, I had written the bulk of the RevKit and the interface builder, which was called Constructor, and that was enough for our road show to get our angel investor interested and then he kind of understood how the game was played with VCs, and, you know, coming from NeXT, everything's a secret. Apple's the same way. He was completely the opposite. It's like, "Secrets don't sell," and so even though we're doing the secret thing, we were talking to everyone, showing everyone what we're doing. So I think he knew some people at Netscape, and someone who used to work at NeXT worked at Netscape. He also knew-- so we got an audience with Netscape and also an audience with Sun. So I think we were formed officially-- must've been December of '95, the company, and by March of '95 ['96] we'd been sold.

Hsu: Oh, wow.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah, so somehow it just-- Netscape moved faster than Sun. I think the day that we signed the deal with Netscape, Sun called us and said they wanted to talk.

Hsu: Oh, wow. <laughs> Yeah.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. Be very, I mean, at the time Netscape was a much smaller company than Sun, so that--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Understandable.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Or do you feel like was Sun-- do you feel like there might've been, like, you know, some hesitation from Sun because they would've had to replace their, like, was AWT a Sun framework?

Adams: It was. Yeah. Actually, in talking to you, a very interesting thing I just kind of put together. So the team that built AWT, I think, they left Sun to start their own company. Was like Marimba maybe? So they had this idea that they were going to write this toolkit, and I think the-- it was almost-- it was very close to when they formed or announced themselves that there was an announcement that we had been sold to Netscape and we had this demo at some show, I think. So that, that, like, that wrecked their

plans. They had no idea that someone was-- if they even thought someone was writing something, they didn't think that, like, it was far enough along that it was done and it would be in the browser, basically. So they were like, hosed.

Hsu: Ah. So their plan was to replace AWT themselves, with a better thing that they can come up with.

Adams: Yeah, so my thought--

Hsu: And do it outside of Sun.

Adams: Right. Right. I don't know exactly what their business plan was at the time. So maybe Sun saw all those people leave and they said, "We need to hire-- we could hire this team," or something? I don't know.

Hsu: Hm. I see. Okay. Huh. So then talk about, like, what was it like sort of becoming part of Netscape?

Adams: Was pretty crazy.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Pretty crazy. They're, I mean, they're the first-- you heard the phrase "get big fast."

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: So I would say they're the first ones who did that, and it was-- yeah. Get big fast at any cost. They were just hiring people.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: I remember we interviewed someone once we were there. We interviewed some engineer and we said, "Don't hire them." Because they were bad, and then they showed up.

Hsu: Oh, no.

Adams: They hired them.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. I remember-- so Jim Barksdale, and I forgot who the CFO was. I sent them-- they don't know who did this, but I sent them in interoffice mail copies of "The Mythical Man-Month."

Adams: Because it was ridiculous just how many people they were hiring and with the idea that they could do even bigger things just by hiring more people.

Hsu: Yeah. Wow. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah. I remember Netscape, like, they didn't have a source control system. It was all messed up. So someone over in some part would break the tree and everyone was hosed. No one could do any work because someone broke the tree.

Hsu: Wow. Oh, my God.

Adams: And it took a while to kind of figure out how to keep going from that.

Hsu: Wow. Mm.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So then talk about integrating, like, the RevolutionKit into Internet Foundation Classes.

Adams: Yeah. So... Yeah. The name got changed to-- because we're, you know, we, Netscape, are kind of grabbing mindshare and API space and footprint in the internet, so we are-- it's now the Internet Foundation Classes, which is a pretty—something-- name.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Yeah. But that was basically, I mean, we did some work to kind of ship 1.0, of what we had, and I believe it was bundled in the browser. But I left pretty soon after that.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So you weren't there when they-- when the name got changed to Swing?

Adams: Right. We, when I was there, we had talked to Sun a little bit, and the people over there, you know, so they're moving Java forward, and they're proposing these APIs, and I'm looking at them saying, "These are people who've never written an application in their life." They're sitting here in this office speculating on what an API should look like for copy and move, moving files and things, but they've-- it's like I look at it and say, "Well, that doesn't let me do--" this or that. Yeah. I wasn't too-- I didn't have high hopes of whatever was going to come out of that. Yeah.

Hsu: So basically you felt like the-- once it left your hands it got sort of bogged down in design by committee kind of.

Adams: It did. Yes.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Yes. Actually, that's another joke. So...

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: Because that turned into the Java Foundation Classes.

Hsu: Okay, JFC, yeah, okay.

Adams: JFC. So what does JFC stand for? So you've heard the horse-- so you've heard the joke that a camel is a horse designed by committee.

Hsu: Right. <laughs>

Adams: So JFC is Just an F-ing Camel.

<laughter>

Hsu: Okay. Yeah. Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: But that was after me, I mean, there's politics going on. You know, Netscape doesn't want Sun to be too upset about stuff. Because Sun really wants to own Java, but then Netscape is pushing this, Foundation Classes.

Hsu: Yeah. Right. I mean, I would've figured that's a difficult place for Netscape to be in, because they're trying to control something that Sun wants to control, yeah, and there's got to be some difficult politics there.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah.

Hsu: Well, so, I mean, ultimately, I guess, what's your take on Swing and what it became and its ultimate legacy or impact?

Adams: So I haven't... I really, when I left, I just didn't look back, and--

Hsu: You sort of wiped your hands of the whole thing. <laughs>

Adams: I mean, it wasn't even a-- Swing wasn't a thing when I left, so it's something that really happened after I left. So it's not like I left in disgust or I could see that things were going to be bad. It wasn't-- I don't think it was disgust when I was there, but like I've had to remind myself fairly recently that I wrote the code that is the basis of Swing, which is this big thing. Like, it's something I hadn't thought about until a few years ago. So Swing is not in my head. I know that Swing turned into something a lot more complicated than it should be. It's like a lot of design compromises, and maybe that's all I should say about that.

<laughter>

Hsu: Right.

Adams: I, you know, it's a big deal that I wrote the code that went into Swing and then I have to tell people that, "But I didn't make Swing though. That's not--" <laughs>

Hsu: <laughs> Right. You kind of have to backtrack of like you don't really--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: It's... You don't totally want to brag about it, but... <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: It's...

Adams: It's not my fault really.

Hsu: <laughs> Yeah. So then-- so what year did you leave Netscape?

Adams: I left in January of '98. So I have to take us back to my goal, which was to start a company and take it public or sell it and retire by 25. When I turned 25, I had to reset my goal to 30.

Hsu: Right. <laughs>

Adams: So I retired at 29. I left at 29 and 11 months.

Hsu: Okay. Netscape. You left it.

Adams: Yes.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So was that decision because of you were unhappy with what you were doing at Netscape, or did you just want to cash out or...?

Adams: So my plan was to retire, and go--

Hsu: Right. Oh, to just-- uh-huh.

Adams: Yeah. Write music. That was my next kind of thing, but yes. I can't really explain how I got on that, that idea, but that's why I quit, because I needed to retire by 30. That was...

Hsu: Okay. <laughs>

Adams: I had to quit in January, because I would miss my goal of retiring by 30.

Hsu: Oh, wow.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So you were that single-minded about, "No, this is it." Like, "I'm doing this no matter what."

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, gosh. I had a ridiculous salary at Netscape. Yeah. Scott had me-- he negotiated. He said, "We have to have--" whatever. I think was like quarter-million dollars salary in '90--

Hsu: Woah.

Adams: --'97 or something, and they-- yeah, so... <laughs>

Hsu: For all the engineers?

Adams: No, no. The two of us. The two of us had to...

Hsu: Oh. Oh, okay. The two of you who-- okay. Who-- yeah, right.

Adams: Yeah, Scott. Scott and I. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. Right. At first I thought you meant Scott McNealy. <laughs> No, was--

Adams: No, no.

Hsu: --your partner from...

Adams: Right.

Hsu: Right. From before.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. So you guys had negotiated that when Netscape bought Netcode originally.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, okay.

Adams: So, I mean, I walked away from that salary. I mean, I-- single with no expenses. That's a lot of money. I could've stayed there and collected a bunch of money but I wanted--

Hsu: Right. But how-- you had been there for at least, what, three years by that point?

Adams: Eight months or--

Hsu: Eight months. Oh, wow. <laughs>

Adams: --something like that.

Hsu: Okay. <laughs>

Adams: Ten months maybe.

Hsu: Okay. So you got a fraction of that quarter million.

Adams: Yeah. Salary.

Hsu: But it was still a decent amount, that you felt--

Adams: Yeah, but I mean, we sold the company though, so I--

Hsu: Oh, right.

Adams: I could-- I had money to retire.

Hsu: Okay. Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Was, I mean, was there anything, like, that you were doing at Netscape in particular that you were unhappy with or that was just not a concern? You're just-- it didn't matter to you.

Adams: Right. I needed to retire by 30 and--

Hsu: <laughs> Yeah.

Adams: So... <laughs> January was my last month. I-- yeah. That. That was it.

Hsu: Okay.

<laughter>

Hsu: That's it. Okay. <laughs> All right.

Adams: Yeah. I guess part of me, like, I don't-- I don't want to be defined by computers, even though I've been defined by computers. Like, I feel like I'm not-- I don't have to be computers. That's not the whole me.

Hsu: Yeah. Right.

Adams: So, like, to stay in that is to say that I am that, I guess.

Hsu: I see. Right. Before we leave this topic was, I mean, this was-- was it right around this time that the browser wars with Microsoft was heating up?

Adams: I would say they were going strong at that time, yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, okay. Yeah.

Adams: Yeah. For sure they're going strong, because they kept trying to think of ways to stay ahead of Microsoft, like APIs and-- to keep them off balance. But you can't play that game for too long, I don't think.

Hsu: <laughs> Well, not against Microsoft, I guess, with your-- that burn rate. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: And what was your perspective on that whole thing?

Adams: I didn't care for Microsoft, but that--

Hsu: Right. <laughs>

Adams: That's nothing new, really.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs>

Adams: I mean, I'm a product of the Mac/Windows wars, so... Yeah. Yeah. I think at the time I wasn't sure how they're going to keep it up. They would-- they kept Microsoft off balance for quite a while, but seemed like you couldn't keep thinking of things to kind of knock them off balance.

Hsu: Mm, mm-hm. Okay. Okay. So then you finally decide that, "Okay. I'm retiring." So then-- so what did you do during your retirement?

<laughter>

Hsu: Or your brief retirement, maybe we should say. <laughs> Or your temporary retirement.

Adams: Yeah, it was five years. Yeah. I called my friends. I started reading. I went to Europe for 10 weeks. I started rollerblading. Actually started-- I put together like a little recording studio in my bedroom, my spare bedroom. Yeah. I was just kind of living. Yeah.

Hsu: So you mentioned-- so you created a recording studio. Were you just making music? Did you have ambitions to do that?

Adams: Yeah. My next goal was to be a rock star, and so I was writing music. Somewhere between years 1 and 30 I was wanting to write music. So yeah. I was following kind of what I had planned to do. Went to Burning Man a bunch of times. I think I was the only sober one out there though.

<laughter>

Adams: That's not my thing, but it's an amazing art show. Yeah. So in fact, yeah, I-- let's see. I needed to learn to play guitar, and that's actually kind of what got me back down to L.A., was I went to-- I enrolled in guitar school in Hollywood.

Hsu: Mm. Oh, right. Because this whole time you had been in Silicon Valley.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. Yeah. So you had been living in, like, I mean, was it San Jose or Mountain View or--

Adams: Menlo Park. Menlo Park.

Hsu: Menlo Park. Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: No able-bodied person should live in Menlo Park is what I'd say.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: I spent a lot of time in the city, because I had friends up there, and that was the time when I could drive from Marsh Road to Caesar Chavez on 101 in exactly 35 minutes. This is like the--

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: That was like, you know, six or seven at night.

Hsu: Okay. <laughs>

Adams: Those days are far--

Hsu: Yeah, there's no way.

Adams: --far, far gone. Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs> Six, seven at night.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: My God.

Adams: It's two hours. Yeah.

Hsu: It's like a two-hour trip. Yeah.

<laughter>

Adams: Yeah. It's incredible. Yeah. I remember I was there for the first dot-com boom, and I remember seeing brake lights on 280, and I couldn't believe it, and now it's-- everything's just 10 times what that was.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. So then you said you moved to L.A. What year was that?

Adams: That was February 2000. But to back up, I had become brainwashed from living in the Bay Area that L.A. was horrible and why would anyone want to live there? So I was actually commuting. So I would fly up and down. I would fly back on the weekends and fly back down Sunday night, and I had a studio apartment in Santa Monica just to try out that city, and then eventually I really loved L.A. and Santa Monica in particular and decided I needed to move down here.

Hsu: Mm, okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. So you basically decided to recreate-- to start working on Notebook again in 2003 and kind of come out, back out of retirement, at least from the computing industry. So what sort of motivated that move?

Adams: Yeah. So I actually did a little bit of work on it in '98 with Rhapsody.

Hsu: Oh, for Rhapsody. Yeah.

Adams: Yeah. But then I had heard that they were changing the APIs, like the drawing APIs, so I said, "Oh, this is a waste of time." So I stopped working on it, but then I dusted it off when OS X came out in 2002 or so, 2001, 2002. So like the dock-- Yeah. When NeXT went away and it's only Windows and HTML, it's like-- I guess it's another piece of it. Computers were no longer interesting to me. They were-- I felt they were very ugly and boring and so when OS X came out with the dock, the genie effect and all that stuff, they were suddenly exciting again, and I was excited about the possibilities of that platform. So yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. Okay. Well, maybe we should back up a little bit and like just talk about when you heard about the NeXT Apple merger, the acquisition, and you know, what sort of that sparked in you, you know, the possibilities of that, and Steve coming back to Apple.

Adams: Gosh. I didn't think about it. I mean, Steve really took over that company. That's not what I imagined was going to happen, and I had heard that shortly after he-- after NeXT got bought, that he sold all of his stock, and I believe that was a-- I don't know. I sort of believe that was a ploy by Steve to get people concerned. But yeah. So, I mean, right when that happened, right when they got sold and-- or got bought, I didn't know that much was going to happen. Like Steve selling all his shares and he's probably going to go off somewhere and-- yeah, if-- yeah. I had no idea it was going to be what it became. Yeah, and they're also talking about, like, a three-year transition or something like that. That's a long time.

Hsu: Right. Yeah. Did you own any NeXT stock at the time, or from before?

Adams: I did. Some had vested and I bought it before I left, and then I think we got cash for those shares.

Hsu: Right. To fund your companies?

Adams: Oh, no, it was-- this is--

Hsu: Or--

Adams: I mean, I had already retired by that point, but this is--

Hsu: Oh, okay. So you still had the shares and then they converted to Apple stock or...?

Adams: I had the shares and shareholders got paid cash.

Hsu: Oh, okay. I see. The NeXT shareholders all got paid cash instead of Apple stock.

Adams: Right. Right.

Hsu: Right. Yeah. Okay. Let's see. So then-- yeah. So then OS X comes out and then you decide that-- to sort of dust off Notebook again after couple years and sort of update the code base essentially?

Adams: Yeah, start from scratch, actually.

Hsu: Okay. Okay. You just started from scratch.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: But the same design or was it... Did you rethink some of the...?

Adams: Yeah. A lot of the same design. Yeah. Yeah. Learned from some my mistakes. So yeah, that-- you know, we sold Notebook for the NeXT machine was $500 a copy.

Hsu: Mm-hm.

<laughter>

Adams: And we had-- we came out with some crazy price for Notebook on the Mac. It wasn't 500 bucks, but it was-- we had to lower it pretty quickly.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. So it was, I mean, that whole thing was a tough, tough slog.

Hsu: Right. So did you start that company by yourself initially?

Adams: I think I did but then Elizabeth Statmore, who used to work at NeXT, she became my business partner. Mm-hm.

Hsu: Right. And how did you come up with the name Circus Ponies?

Adams: Ah. It was a joke.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: That we should've ignored, but yeah. We were just talking about the new company and we didn't have a name for it and so I think she made a joke about, you know, "Well, what if we decide that Circus Ponies pays us--" blah, blah, blah, blah, blah for salary. It's like, "Okay. Ha, ha." The company's named Circus Ponies, and then we made the joke another time and then, of course, circusponies.com is available.

Hsu: Right.

<laughter>

Adams: I mean, it's a memorable name and it did reflect that we wanted to have some fun this time. I wouldn't choose it if I had it to do over again.

Hsu: Okay.

<laughter>

Hsu: I thought it worked for like the Apple, the Mac space. It was a, you know, I think that market lent itself to some whimsy, I think.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah.

Hsu: <laughs> It was memorable, at least.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: I remembered it.

<laughter>

Hsu: Because when I saw it on your resume I'm like, "Oh, wait. Circus Ponies. I remember them."

Hsu: Yeah. So you mentioned you started-- you start-- your business partner was from the NeXT, you know, you're talking about NeXT. Did you end up working with anybody else from the NeXT time or...?

Adams: No. Let's see. Let's see. So I'll tell you about something crazy. So we were getting ready to release Notebook. I think it was March of 2003, something like that, and I-- somehow I heard that Mike McNabb was writing code or something and I wrote him, I said, "Hey, Elizabeth Statmore and I, we're starting this company to do-- we're bringing NoteBook to--" whatever, and then I don't know if it was the message he wrote back or he didn't write back. I got this feeling somehow. So it turns out that Scott, my old business partner, had recruited Mike McNabb to write his version of NoteBook, which is--

Hsu: Oh, no.

Adams: --NoteTaker. Yes.

Hsu: Oooh.

<laughter>

Adams: And then I tipped him off that we were doing that ourselves.

Hsu: Ooooh. <laughs>

Adams: So that was a battle also, these two products that were very similar.

Hsu: Oh, boy. Yeah. <laughs> Wow, okay. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Did you have any contacts within Apple, you know, people that you'd known from the NeXT time?

Adams: I did, yeah. Yes. For sure. All the people running the show at that point were all NeXT. Yeah. Like Jon Rubinstein and, you know, Avie, you know. Sorry. Yeah, Avie and Ali Ozer was in charge of AppKit and-- yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. Okay. Were you sort of aware of or did you consider yourself part of the, like, the indie app scene on the Mac, Mac OS X in that time period?

Adams: Versus?

Hsu: Well, I guess sort of starting around like the early 2000s, especially with Cocoa developers. There began to be slight-- a lot of the smaller developers began to call themselves indies, independent developers, as opposed to like, you know, like the Adobes or the Microsofts of the world.

Adams: Yeah, I didn't really-- wasn't really aware of that term, and--

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: I mean, that-- we were independent, but I didn't think of us as anything... I mean, we certainly aspired to become an Adobe, you know.

Hsu: Right.

<laughter>

Hsu: So did you have a lot of contact with other third-party developers, especially Cocoa developers?

Adams: Right. I think only Smile. Smile On My Mac. I think they're just Smile today. There were a few others, like people that we would see at Macworld Expo.

Hsu: Mm-hm. Right.

Adams: Yeah. But yeah. Other than that, not really.

Hsu: Mm-hm. Were there a lot of Mac developers or, well, any Mac developers in the L.A. area that you may occasionally have run into?

Adams: I know that-- let's see. I think it was a-- I think it's called Pathfinder. Which is a Finder--

Hsu: Oh, yeah. Right.

Adams: Finder replacement. I knew they were down here. I think close, actually. But I never-- never hooked up with them or anything. Yeah.

Hsu: Right. And so-- oh, go ahead.

Adams: I was going to say, Elizabeth lives-- she lived in the City, so we are, you know, I think we're officially based up North. Actually, that's not true. But actually, I can't remember now. I think until she left the company we were based up North.

Hsu: Oh, so she lived in San Francisco.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Okay. And you were in Santa Monica, so you--

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So you incorporated the company, I guess, in the Bay Area.

Adams: Yeah, I think that's right.

Hsu: Okay. Right. Okay. So then it was just the two of you? Like you had to pretty much do everything yourself, website, graphics, marketing?

Adams: Yes. I think we farmed out our website. We farmed out our graphic design. She was in charge of sales and marketing, and I was engineering side. Yeah.

Hsu: And did you also win an award for this version of NoteBook?

Adams: Eventually I won a-- I think it was Educational App of the year back in-- I have the awards. Yeah, yeah. It's up there. I can't read it, but this was like maybe 2010. Somewhere in there.

Hsu: So was it-- did Apple give that one out or was it a different?

Adams: It was Macworld.

Hsu: Mac, oh, okay. Macworld. Right. Expo. Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: And how successful was the app?

Adams: I would say that we kind of struggled early on. We got into the Apple store with boxes and we did fairly well in there. Elizabeth--

Hsu: At the retail?

Adams: Yeah. We started running some ads in Macworld Magazine and other places and that really-- actually really drove sales. So like 2008 to 2010, we were doing pretty well, and then it kind of peaked. We had a challenge where it's like the iPad, iPhone. People want NoteBook on the iPad and iPhone, and actually I ported it to iPad, and then people wanted to be able to sync their notes. Okay. So syncing is a tricky problem, and then living on top of Mac OS and iOS, which changes every year, is a lot, a lot to try to deal with.

Hsu: Right. Yeah. <laughs>

Adams: Got to be too much eventually.

Hsu: Mm, okay. I mean, how big a deal is, you know, was it for you when the iPhone came out and the App Store came out? The online App Store?

Adams: So when the iPhone came out, I was on the show floor trying to sell NoteBook, and a friend of mine who works at Apple came by and I think he was asking me, you know, what I thought about whatever it was. It's like, "I don't know what you're talking about," and then after I went home for the evening and watched the thing and I was blown away by-- Yeah. So the iPhone is, yeah, pretty incredible. Interesting that I've never really wanted to be an iPhone developer, so like the App Store coming out, I didn't jump on that at all. It just wasn't interesting to me.

Hsu: So it wasn't really until the iPad comes out and then your customers start to clamor for an iPad version that you start to develop for iOS?

Adams: Well, if you think, like, iPad is kind of a-- like a small notebook form factor, so that's like imagining the possibilities where you can swipe and turn pages and-- yeah. That became interesting.

Hsu: Right. So the iPad itself became interesting, just not the iPhone. Right.

Adams: Right.

Hsu: For at least the kind of app that NoteBook was.

Adams: Right. Right.

Hsu: Yeah. Did you feel like the developer community changed significantly once the iPhone came out?

Adams: I don't know if I can describe how it changed, but for sure it did. I remember enjoying going to WWDC, and we would get VIP passes and we'd sit with the rest of the people in the front, and then every year there's more and more people and eventually there's no VIP passes and there's a billion people going to this thing. Yeah. It got to be crazy.

Hsu: Now you're lucky if you can even get a ticket, let alone... <laughs>

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. In the first few seconds of them going on sale. Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah. It's crazy. <laughs>

Adams: Mm-hm.

Hsu: Do you still keep in touch with any of the, you know, the people that you knew from the NeXT days that are still at Apple?

Adams: You know, I'm on a mailing list of ex-NeXT people, so I do see some things go by. Really be a handful of people I keep in touch with. Yeah. I was friends with a bunch of graphic designers at NeXT, and yeah, those are some of my best friends up North, and I still am in touch with them. Yeah.

Hsu: Cool. Let's see. Let me see here. This is really all the... Do you feel like it's difficult to be like a small app developer today, more difficult than it was back in the 2000s?

Adams: Yeah, I-- from where I sit, it seems pretty impossible. There's so much overhead. So you need a website and that's programming. You need be able take payments. I guess there's plugins for that. The expectation with the App Store, it's like the rush to the bottom. So expectation is software costs nothing, and maybe you can make it back in in-app purchases or advertising. So you need volume. So you need reach. So you need to climb above the noise somehow and that's kind of hard to do if you don't have any. If you're just like a small company getting started.

Hsu: Yeah. I mean, remember when the App Store first came out, there was a lot of hope that this would actually be a good thing for small developers, and that has not really panned out. Do you think that could've been different? Like, what could've been done to, you know, to have maintained that?

Adams: I mean, it's such a big space now. Yeah. It's impossible, I would say, to get discovered in general. Because it is so big. So, I mean, the only thing that-- if the iPhone didn't get big, maybe that would be the solution but it's not a very good solution.

Hsu: Right. So it's almost, you know, you have the opposite problem of when you're on the NeXT, when there was no market.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Then a small player could be really big, <laughs> but you don't-- you still aren't selling that many copies because the market's so small.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Now you have the opposite problem. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah, I remember right near the end we shipped Version 4 of NoteBook on the Mac. It's like a $20 upgrade, and there's people complaining to me. They bought it in, like, six years before complaining, like, "Why should I have to pay $20 to upgrade?"

Hsu: <laughs> Wow.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah.

Hsu: Wow. Okay.

Adams: So yes. I'd say it's tough.

Hsu: Yeah. Do you think there's something that Apple could've done to improve things for developers?

Adams: I don't know. I mean, they have done-- they've done some with editor's picks and things like that, but I just think the sheer volume of apps makes it kind of hard for them to really help <02:10:42> the ecosystem for small players.

Hsu: Yeah, okay. So yeah. So talk more about, you know, sort of the overall trajectory of Circus Ponies, NoteBook and, yeah, how that ended up playing out.

Adams: Yeah. So we were kind of puttering along 2003, 2004, 2005. My business partner left I think in 2006.

Hsu: So then you were just by yourself?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Wow.

Adams: Farming out some things, but doing all the coding and sales and marketing. Actually, I hired a firm to help me do some marketing. They created an ad, which really drove a lot of sales. Yeah, so we were doing-- actually, then we kind of took off. We're doing some real marketing. We've got boxes in the Apple Store, CompUSA, and then, you know, software's going away in boxes. The Apple Store's pushing us out, so we don't have any, you know, we're not visible on the shelf anymore. The expected price of software's still dropping. Companies like--

Hsu: Were you selling direct via the web?

Adams: Yeah. We're doing that too, yeah. That's probably the bulk of our sales.

Hsu: Okay. Did you consider a move to the Mac App Store when that came out?

Adams: So I-- we did do that. But I don't think it was-- I don't know if it was right when it happened, but we did go to the Mac App Store and got a bunch of sales off that, and I said, "Oh, this is a great deal," and then those sales really kind of went away, and what I realized is it's people who owned NoteBook already who just like the easy way to update their apps from the App Store. So they-- and they liked us enough so they bought another copy and so as a channel to get more sales, unless we're really pushing it, it's-- it wasn't that kind of magical thing.

Hsu: Right. So it didn't replace having your own marketing push to--

Adams: No, not at all. No.

Hsu: --get new customers?

Adams: Not at all. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: That was our experience. I don't know other people. Also, you know, we're still selling on the web, so there's some people who went all the way in on the Mac App Store, but yeah.

Hsu: Did any of Apple's policies for the Mac App Store bother you at all? I know there were some concerns about some of the limitations.

Adams: I mean, I was never happy with the 30 percent. I don't think anyone is. Yeah. Nothing else to say on the record.

Hsu: Okay. Sure.

<laughter>

Hsu: Yeah, it's a touchy subject. I understand. So then-- so, I mean, you managed to keep that going all the way until 2015, right. That's quite a long time.

Adams: Yes. Yes. That was a pretty long run. Yeah. Right. So March, May? May 2014, we shipped an upgrade, NoteBook 4, and that was the same month that Microsoft announced OneNote for the Mac, And I didn't think much of it, and then we're getting all this money because we got upgraded, so that's great, and then back to school starts end of July. That's always a big bump, July, August, September. There's no bump this year. What's going on? Let's look at our sales mix. So basically all the money that I was making was upgrade money, and then there was no back-to-school sale bump. So they had-- because you got your Microsoft 360 account or whatever it's called. You can still to get OneNote for free. So that was the end of-- at least I saw the writing on the wall. Once upgrades were done, that was going to be it.

Hsu: Yeah. Okay. Hm.

Adams: But like I said, it was a lot. Straddling two operating systems that change every year is a lot.

Hsu: Yeah. <laughs>

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So can you talk about, you know, going to Google afterwards? Is that something that you can talk about?

Adams: Yeah. So trying to figure out what to do. Okay. Circus Ponies is going away. Sort of needed to do something. Children in private school, et cetera, et cetera.

Hsu: <laughs>

Adams: So--

Hsu: So when-- yeah. How old are your children at this point?

Adams: You know, my-- at that point?

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: I think my daughter was five; my son was three. I think my stepson also was going to college.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah. So, I mean, living in L.A.-- if I'm in the Bay Area, there's all kinds of opportunity. L.A., it's, I would say, it's definitely not the same. So as I look around at opportunities there's not much, I would say, except for Google. Google is someplace I've always wondered, you know, "Am I good enough to work at Google?" So yeah. I studied hard for that, that interview. I don't have a Computer Science degree, so yeah. It was a little bit harder than other people have, I think.

Hsu: But you worked for Google from L.A., or from Santa Monica. Are you working with an L.A.-based part of Google or are you kind of remote, working remotely?

Adams: Yeah. So Google has offices all over the world, so I work out of the L.A. office, which is in Venice. Now, my team-- so I started working on Chrome on Mac, and the Chrome Mac team actually is based in New York.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: So, like, I was the only person-- there's 10 people or so on Chrome in L.A., and I was the only Mac person really, and the rest of my team was in Mountain View and Sydney, I think.

Hsu: Okay. So you were the one Mac developer on the team? Or were there others?

Adams: No, no. Of the Mac developers--

Hsu: Oh, oh, okay.

Adams: --I was the only one in L.A.

Hsu: Oh, okay. I see.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right. Okay.

Adams: Yeah. Chrome is a big team.

Hsu: Right, okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Right. So how's the experience been working at a big company like Google compared-- you know, you've been mostly in-- working alone or your own companies or startup like NeXT.

Adams: So, the stability has been good.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: I took my first vacation in 2015.

Hsu: Oh, in your entire career?

Adams: Yes if you don't count the retiring part.

Hsu: Right, wow.

Adams: Yeah, basically, I had maybe two days off, like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Hsu: Wow, oh man.

Adams: Yeah so, my wife was excited about that, actually taking vacations, going somewhere.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, so that's pretty nice. It's a lot harder to get stuff done.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: How would you describe the culture of the company compared to other places that you've worked with?

Adams: I mean there's a huge focus on engineering excellence, work-life balance, very important at Google.

Hsu: That's good.

Adams: Yeah. There's been some rough few years. I'd say the culture has changed a little bit since I started. Yeah.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Maybe my next interview in ten years, I could talk about that.

Hsu: Sure, sure, yeah. Is that because of the regulatory scrutiny? Is it in response to that?

Adams: No, all the-- I mean I know you've seen the headlines.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, the various things that employees have been upset about.

Hsu: Oh, okay, right. Right, okay, those things, yeah.

Adams: So, it's a little bit different place now.

Hsu: Yeah, okay. Is there anything you can-- can you talk about working on Chrome? Is that something that you're able to talk about publicly?

Adams: There's definitely parts I can talk about because Chrome is open source.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, what would you like to know?

Hsu: I mean just what's it like to work on it, being a tech lead on it?

Adams: Chrome is huge. It's like its own operating system really. It is the fastest browser because it is super-optimized, and there's a lot of smart people who've done some amazing work on it. Being such a-- straddling so many operating systems, they want Chrome to be this thing, and that kind of rubs me the wrong way a little bit being a Mac person.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, a lot of people working on that project. It's also fairly mature, so it's like trying to think of things to add is very hard.

Hsu: Yeah, yeah. Are you able to talk about what you're working on now?

Adams: I can talk some. It's open source.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: It's a new operating system that Google is building called Fuchsia. It's designed from the ground up with security in mind and sort of learning from a lot of the mistakes of the past.

Hsu: It's an OS for what sort of-- what kinds of computers? Is it for desktops, or for mobile devices, for servers, cloud, Internet of Things? Is it trying to be everything?

Adams: It's whatever you'd like it to be.

Hsu: So, you think of it as a UNIX replacement maybe? Is that what it's supposed to do?

Adams: So, Google has uses for it internally.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Which they haven't talked about, and I don't know that Google has done a great job explaining what it's for. Hopefully, that will come out soon though.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah, but I hesitate to say anything that it's for.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: So, that's something that will be discussed-- revealed later, okay. All right. So, maybe, at this point, we could maybe just sort of looking back how would you-- how might you think about your career or summarize your career up until this point?

Adams: I mean I can say I achieved my goal.

<laughter>

Hsu: That's true. Well so, you achieved your goal. You retired, and then you came out of retirement. Was it just because of Mac OS X, or was it-- did you feel like it was a driving need for you to come back to work on an app?

Adams: No, it was OS X.

Hsu: It was OS X?

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, but financially were you doing okay? Could you have just continued?

Adams: Yeah, I didn't need to come back. It was supposed to be a fun thing that got less and less fun as the years went on.

Hsu: Right, that turned into a twelve year long--

Adams: Yeah, slog.

Hsu: Slog?

Adams: Yeah. I guess I will say, for me, computers were always kind of a creative thing, like the screen as a blank canvas to do stuff on, to do cool things. It's a lot harder to do that nowadays. It's a lot more complicated. So, it's not as interesting to me as it was in the beginning.

Hsu: So, I'm wondering why did you-- you could have retired after-- in 2015 after shutting down Circus Ponies.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Why not go back to retirement?

Adams: Because I don't really want to spend my retirement money on the kids' expensive private school.

Hsu: Yeah. Well, maybe the question is I guess in this intervening twelve years, you got married. Is that something that you could talk about your personal life a little bit? Did that change your sort of goals for life?

Adams: Let me think. Did it change my goals for life? I mean I did want to get married and have children.

Hsu: Was that something that was just once you'd retired, hit your thirty retirement goal, was that sort of the next thing on your list of things to do, or was it something that just happened?

Adams: Yeah, the next thing was rockstar.

Hsu: Okay, right.

Adams: I got-- I segued into computers again. Yeah, I spent a lot of energy there. Yeah, what I'm doing right now is definitely not what I planned on doing at fifty whatever. Yeah, and a lot of that is because computers are a lot more complicated. It's not as fun.

Hsu: Do you still feel like you're primarily a plan driven/oriented person, or are you more open to what comes, spontaneity in life?

Adams: More of a plan, yeah. Yeah, I mean, right now, I'm actually writing a novel. That's my thing to see where that goes.

Hsu: Okay, that's nice.

Adams: That was-- that's like three years of getting up at 5:30 in the morning and doing a little bit of work every day. So, yes, definitely a planner.

Hsu: Right, okay. Would you describe your experience as a person of color in the industry as exceptional or typical or something in between?

Adams: I would say exceptional. Yeah, I mean the experience that I've had, definitely exceptional. I'm just thinking back. That law firm that I was-- we used. They helped us get a patent on the first version of NoteBook, and I remember bringing-- we needed to show them the program. So, I brought in a computer. So, I walked in there. I had this monitor, and I went to the front desk, and the person behind the desk was basically ignoring me. I'm a client, but they think I'm the delivery guy. So, that was something that happened. Yeah, you have to have the opportunity I guess to get exposed to this stuff to-- yeah, and then even once you're exposed to it, you have to have the opportunity to interview at these places, and yeah, it's--

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Even working in Google L.A., there's not a lot of African Americans.

Hsu: Do you feel like you've been-- your background, your upbringing, has given you a certain leg up in terms of access to this industry that others may not have had?

Adams: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, both in terms of feeling comfortable in this environment and my education and, yeah, having a computer at home at twelve. That's not a big-- that's not as crazy these days obviously, but yeah.

Hsu: You know you mentioned that experience at the law firm. Have there been any other experiences of discrimination or challenges?

Adams: Not in the industry so much. I remember at Stanford I was interviewing, this was going into my master's year, I was interviewing for some-- I don't know what it was, some grant or something and so I was telling the professor that I want to start a company and take it public or sell it, and he started laughing at me. Was that because I was brown? I don't know, but yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, what do you think the industry needs to do to increase diversity?

Adams: I don't know. If it can help, I guess make schools better to start with and definitely seeking out people from places other than just the Ivy Leagues. I don't know. It can also be tough just once you're in the door to feel like you belong.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, it's been challenging for me actually, and that's with my background.

Hsu: So, is there anything more sp-- in what way is it?

Adams: You know, when I first started at Google in L.A., I think even when I walked in that room, I might have been the highest level person in there, or there was one other person at my level. I think they didn't

quite know what to make of me, which on one level doesn't make any sense because there's nothing really to make of me, but that whole experience, for example, I got stuck in a corner with a computer, and I had my headphones on, noise cancelling headphones on, and I took them off. This happened multiple times. I'd take off my headphones and look around, and the entire room was empty because they all went to lunch. And is that because I was brown? I don't know, but that sure didn't make me feel very welcome or--

Hsu: Yeah. Do you feel-- another possibility is ageism in the industry.

Adams: Yeah, but there's a bunch of kids in that room, but there's a decent range of people, and there's a couple managers. I wouldn't think it's ageism. I don't know. I don't know that I walked in there looking like I was an old-timer. I mean I'm obviously not a kid, but yeah, I don't know. I don't know.

Hsu: Right. Earlier you mentioned cultural barriers, what sort of role does that play do you think?

Adams: I mean they can play a big role, not so much for me because this is-- I'm kind of steeped in the sort of White Southern California culture, but if that's not what you're used to, you definitely wouldn't feel comfortable.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, so there's getting people in the door, and then there's retention.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Making sure people are doing okay and feeling supported.

Hsu: Right. So, then that's primarily more of a social thing or does-- do there need to be explicit efforts that a company might need to do, HR might need to do, to make people feel more comfortable or more welcome?

Adams: It's probably a mix.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Some explicit stuff and then some training for managers and other people, yeah.

Hsu: Okay. Okay so, what do you think is the biggest challenge for the tech industry today?

Adams: Gosh, the tech industry is big. The social platforms I think have a lot of problems as far as affecting society in unintended ways. I don't have any good answers for those things, and then just like the bad behavior that you see.

Hsu: Yeah, right. Where do you think the industry is going? Where do you think the next big thing is?

Adams: I don't know. Gosh, human augmentation popped into my head, things like a glucose meter, a non-invasive glucose meter. I haven't thought much about where it's going. I mean there's the move towards these devices that are sitting in our houses, taking commands and things, but, to me, that's not pretty interesting and a little bit scary. Yeah, I don't know that I've ever been good about predicting where things are going. It will be very interesting to see how the self-driving cars play out. Yeah, it's like-- so, okay, AI is something big that I don't think has totally run its course yet, and I don't think we've seen everything that's going to come out of that.

Hsu: Right. So, last question, what advice might you give to a young person starting in the industry today?

Adams: Gosh, that's very broad. Is it someone who's happy to work at a place like Google? Is it someone who wants to start a company? Is it someone-- I guess you're not thinking something specific.

Hsu: Well, it sounds like you would give different advice to a different type of person. So, that's interesting in and of itself. So, let's say for both of those people and maybe for any other people-- types of people that you might enumerate, how would you modify your advice?

Adams: Okay, if you want to work at one of the big companies-- well actually, just in general, you need to-- you need to know your stuff. So, a lot of that comes by actually working on projects on your own. Your own interests will drive you to learn things and make mistakes. It's kind of interesting. I've talked to a few-- like some recent CS grads, and they have a CS degree, but they don't really know CS.

Hsu: What do you mean by that?

Adams: So, maybe how many bits in a byte. Well, that was something we learned a long time ago. If you live and breathe computers, you would know the answer to that, but if it's-- you're sitting through a class and working towards your degree, but it's just the degree and a class that you took a long time ago, it's not part of you, I guess. Yeah so, yeah, there's people I guess who have CS degrees that just having the degree doesn't mean that you can walk up to someplace and get a job. It's like you really have to understand how to program, and that really is self-experience. Yeah, and that's projects-- think of something that you're interested in building and building it.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Let's see, there's a lot of opportunity I guess in the industry. There's a lot of companies doing computer stuff. There's a lot of opportunity, a lot of interesting projects. Gosh, someone that wants to do a startup, I'm not even sure what to say. It's all possible still, but-- gosh, I don't know. In general, if someone has a dream, I think they're going to pursue it, and they'll find a way to make it happen.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: But what advice could I give them? I don't know, maybe don't give up, I guess.

Hsu: Okay.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, it's hard to say. I guess it's probably hard to say because I can't imagine myself going out and doing something right now like starting a company or starting off in the industry, but, obviously, there are lots of people that are doing that today.

Hsu: How about-- let's say you went back in time. What advice would you give to yourself right after graduating with your degree, or let's say starting your retirement at thirty, or something like that?

Adams: Yeah, right after graduating, I would have told myself this is a magical time that will never repeat itself, and enjoy every moment of it.

Hsu: The experience at NeXT?

Adams: Yes, and all the things that have not been written, all the products that are out there to create.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: Yeah, it's a time that's not going to-- it's not going to be like this forever, and it's not going to repeat itself.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: I don't know about the retiring me.

Hsu: Or so maybe starting Circus Ponies back in 2003, maybe that's a better time to--

Adams: Okay. Well, gosh, that's actually kind of easy. We-- Apple had-- they were talking about possibly buying us in 2003.

Hsu: Oh, okay.

Adams: I would have said, "Stop what you're doing. Take that deal and," yeah, "Don't say anything else. Just do it." Yeah.

Hsu: Okay, well, I guess is there anything else you would like to add before we end for the day?

Adams: Let me think. Let's see, back when I worked at NeXT, I ran into Steve in Palo Alto. He was standing in line somewhere, and I was walking by there with a friend of mine, and I don't know if he was with his wife. He was with someone, and he turned to them and said-- he said, "I work with him." He didn't say, "He works for me." He said, "I work with him."

Hsu: Oh, cool.

Adams: Yeah, that was amazing.

Hsu: Wow. That's pretty awesome.

Adams: Yeah, yeah. Let's see, we were-- actually, we were also Be developers.

Hsu: Oh, really?

Adams: The BeBox.

Hsu: Oh, you-- oh yeah, you didn't mention that.

Adams: Yeah--

Hsu: Talk about that.

Adams: I don't know exactly how we got to be Be developers, and I don't remember if it was NoteBook that they wanted us to port. It might have been.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: But that was like '93, '94, '95, somewhere in there. Be was actually two blocks away from us. I think that's right, yeah. It didn't go anywhere with us, but I did have a BeBox for a while. And also, I was telling someone this week about Taligent.

Hsu: Oh yeah.

Adams: Which was the partnership between IBM and Apple.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: In the early '90s, and I was the-- I got a-- I went for like a training, a developer training.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: So, I got to see the Taligent system.

Hsu: Right.

Adams: I was not impressed.

<laughter>

Hsu: Right. Did you ever ship the Be product?

Adams: No.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: No, I don't think we-- I don't remember exactly what became of it because I don't think I actually got much code running on it, and I can't remember now. I know we were Be developers, and that's how I met Jean-Louis Gassée. I've seen him a few times since then, actually. Let's see, little tidbits out of my brain. Whenever I go to the Googleplex, I kind of laugh about being in those buildings when they weren't Google. So, SGI and then Adobe was in one of those buildings. I actually went there when I was at NeXT.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: Yeah, I remember interviewing there, at SGI, once as well right after I graduated.

Adams: Okay.

Hsu: Yeah, it was '99.

Adams: Okay.

Hsu: So, yeah. Well, there's some other odd connections I should mention. So, I worked for Ali Ozer in the AppKit as the QA guy.

Adams: Oh, wow.

Hsu: From 2000 to 2005.

Adams: Okay.

Hsu: So, there was that period of time.

Adams: Okay, that's great. Yeah, I guess that's it.

Hsu: All right, well, thank you very much for spending this time with us.

Adams: Yes, yeah, my pleasure.

Hsu: Yeah. And so, I will send you an email about the instructions for mailing back the recorder and also the-- so, what we'll do in the next part of the-- the next step is that we will transcribe the interview, and then we'll do an editing round on our end, and then we'll send it to you for your edits. What we're looking for primarily is fixing names and dates and other little mistakes like that, but if there are things that you feel like-- like larger things that you feel like should be changed, that can be done in footnotes.

Adams: Okay.

Hsu: Or if you-- if there are things that you feel like are sensitive that maybe we should remove from the transcript, please let us know also.

Adams: Yeah, okay.

Hsu: Even if we recorded them.

Adams: Okay, I appreciate that. As I was going along answering questions, I was thinking, "I hope I didn't cross the line somewhere." I don't think I did but--

Hsu: Yeah, we may have skirted the line in a few places. So, if you feel, in retrospect, that maybe certain things should be struck from the record, we can do that.

Adams: Okay. Yeah because I'm still in the industry, so I have to be a little bit careful.

Hsu: Yeah.

Adams: But I think everything should be okay, but that's great. I'll definitely take a look at that.

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: Yeah.

Hsu: All right, thank you very much.

Adams: All right. Okay

Hsu: Okay.

Adams: See you.

Hsu: Bye.

Adams: Bye.

END OF THE INTERVIEW