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People Profile: Dick Weatherford

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people profile

BORN & LIVED: Born in Seattle, WA. Have lived in the Pacific Northwest most of my life except for three years in Los Angeles when I was getting my Ph.D. in English at UCLA and 10 years while teaching at The Ohio State University.

FAMILY: Father (executive at Sears) and mother (school teacher) married more than 50 years; 2 brothers, one older and one younger, both successful business people.

EDUCATION: M.A. in English from Univ. of Washington, Ph.D. in English from UCLA.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Taught for 10 years at The Ohio State University (1970-1980) and retired there (Associate Professor of English) to pursue a career in the antiquarian book field. I know. Crazy! Gave up a tenured position, but I have never regretted it. I loved teaching, but the book field was where my heart was, and thank goodness my wife and sons supported my choice.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Play with my grandchildren, go for long walks with my wife (preferably in Venice or Paris!), go book scouting, and enjoy the view from our home on Puget Sound in the Seattle area.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Most any book about, books, great libraries, booksellers, and bookselling, including those by Nicholas Basbanes, Jack Matthews, Charles Everitt, adventure books by Gregory Gibson (bookseller), novels of David Gregor, and books on book thefts, forgery, and mystery.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Very little. I avoid selfish, insensitive, nasty tempered, and prejudiced people at every opportunity.

PHILOSOPHY: I approach life with a positive attitude. I believe that people are capable of great creativity and sensitivity, and that they thrive better in a trusting, supportive atmosphere.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: The founding of Interloc and Alibris. This has opened new markets for used and rare books, has made millions of people aware of new choices offered them, has made the job of finding new and replacement copies of books and building collections for libraries much easier, and has allowed many more booksellers to pursue the careers they love.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I plan to continue working in the used and antiquarian book business in one capacity or another.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Computers and the Internet have dramatically changed how libraries, businesses, and individuals find and acquire books and all sorts of information. Libraries were pioneers in using computers to catalog and store information, and now businesses are working with libraries to make more information resources available to more people worldwide. The first stage of the information access revolution is nearly over. Now we are in the mode of refining, of fine-tuning the results. This, of course, will go on for several years, at least five and probably more. Individual businesses will come and go, merge and change, but the fundamental need of people for information will only increase.

Libraries and the Online . . . from page 27

was owned by the **Faxon Corp.**, a large company with 100 years of experience providing subscriptions to libraries worldwide. There were actually two components to the system: **BookQuest** for monographs, and **SerialsQuest** for journals. When the **Faxon** leadership discovered that their investment was going nowhere, they told **BookQuest** management to find someone who could help them fix it. I was called in as a consultant and later hired as a VP, but my insistence that they needed to re-write their software and change their business plan, including their methods of charging users, fell on deaf ears. **Faxon** closed **BookQuest** in May of 1993.

After **BookQuest** failed, I pulled out the old **Interloc** business plan and began to work on reviving the idea. Several booksellers and some librarians who were using **BookQuest** to buy and sell called to encourage me to start a listing service. It would be a kind of automated *AB Bookman's Weekly* that booksellers could use to find books for customers by listing "Wants" and to sell books to other dealers for their customers or for stock. In those days, publishing was the natural business revenue model. That was because *AB Bookman's Weekly* was a mostly dealer-to-dealer environment, even though a few collectors and libraries subscribed. The idea of a listing service collecting a commission for an online sale was as foreign as *AB Bookman's Weekly* trying to collect a commission on a sale generated by its Want ads.

Past failures made it clear that **Interloc** had to be better technically and much easier and more comfortable if it was going to be successful. Before I decided to do the project, I called **Tom Sawyer**, a software developer who had worked with booksellers in the past and asked him if he could work with me to design an online dealer-to-dealer system for buying and selling books. After several long telephone conversations, he told me he could do the job but that we would need a computer network and systems expert to set up and run the data center. For that job, he recommended **Brad Councilman**, a computer consultant who had been supporting dealers for years in the Connecticut River Valley area of Western Massachusetts, which has one of the highest concentrations of antiquarian booksellers in this country.

From talking with these two gentlemen, I realized that this would take money (several tens of thousands of dollars) and, most important, would put me in the position of running a company from a distance, dealing with two people I had never met. I would have to be willing to trust them with my money and that of investors, with my vision as it was modified by their experience and knowledge, and with my reputation, such as it was, in the book trade.

Furthermore, we would have to design and code software for both the back-end system and for the booksellers to use, software that had never been conceptually written. We would have to create a hardware architecture that supported the flow of information we envisioned. It would have to be totally secure and reliable and yet be capable of working through existing telephone lines on most computers. We would have to make the whole thing work on a fully automated basis, controlled by the very booksellers who would make use of it. And, we would have to do it with three people in six months.

The whole idea was, frankly, crazy. But I had learned in working in the book business for about a dozen years that honesty and trust are essential to the working of the book trade. Would it be any different working with programmers and technical consultants? It might, I believed, so we formed a corporation, issued the stock, raised some money from friends and a few booksellers, and launched what was actually the second iteration of **Interloc** in mid-1993.

For anyone interested, the name "**Interloc**" was one I derived from the term "interlocutor," meaning a person who facilitates a communication between two other parties. For me, at the time, it defined the nature of the listing service model for books. **Interloc** customers were the booksellers. We were like a newspaper classified advertising service. We derived income from booksellers, but we did not participate in the transaction between the booksellers who subscribed to the service and their customers. Our advertising campaign was directed toward getting more dealers to subscribe. We held workshops all over the US and even in London, England, to help train booksellers on the use of the system and our software, the **Interloc Record Manager**. We also advertised in bookseller magazines, like *Firsts*, *Book Source Monthly*, and others.

During its first two years, from 1993 to 1995, **Interloc** created many of the features we take for granted today, but it did so in a pre-Internet world. For example, we developed a very sophisticated and successful Wants matching service, and we created "Best Seller" and "Most Wanted" lists.

The Internet Begins —

In 1995 the Internet went commercial. Within a year, two **Interloc** customers, **Michael Selzer** of **Farshaws Books** in Mass., and **Rick** and **Vivian Pura** of **Timeline Books** in Victoria, BC, launched listing services similar to **Interloc**, namely **BiblioFind** and **The Advanced Book Exchange**. The Internet made the investment in such services relatively small; while the companies needed to develop software to search and display books online, they did not need to develop any software for their bookseller clients (**Interloc** already had

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