Mark Mandelbaum

Oral History Conducted by Atsushi Akera

On October 31 and December 29, 2009

At Mark's home in New York City, NY

Edited by Atsushi Akera and then by Mark Mandelbaum

Abstract:

This oral history interview, conducted on October 31 and December 29 2009 by Atsushi Akera, provides a life history of Mark Mandelbaum who served for 30 years as the Director of Publications at ACM. This interview is unique in that it spans 30 years in the history of the organization, providing a valuable cross-check against the multiple interviews of ACM Presidents and Executive Directors that are a part of the ACM Oral History collection. The first session of this interview was structured to examine Mandelbaum's a) early life and career; b) his work primarily as Director of Publications at ACM; and c) his personal reminiscences about ACM and a record of his later career. The second session delves into topics designed to elicit more detailed information about ACM, including conversations about a) ACM's past presidents; b) ACM's executive directors; and c) Mandelbaum's specific contributions to ACM, including his leading role in the development of ACM's Digital Library.

Following the "life history" approach, the interview begins with a detailed account of Mandelbaum's life in Brooklyn. Born on January 2nd, 1950 as the son of Jewish immigrants from Poland who had survived the Holocaust, Mandelbaum grew up in a very vibrant neighborhood in Brooklyn. His immigrant background and focus on scholastics brought him to enter college at the City College of New York, where he studied English. Upon graduation Mandelbaum obtained a staff position at the Marie Rodell Literary Agency. The connections and experience he gained in this position earned him a position as a managing editor at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. This in turn served as a stepping stone for his position at ACM.

Mandelbaum joined ACM in 1977 as Executive Editor, serving briefly under Myrtle Kellington who was ending her tenure as Director of Publications. Mandelbaum served briefly under

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Kellington's successor, Alan Corneretto before himself advancing to the position of Director of Publications in 1979. Mandelbaum helped manage the audience and cost structure for key ACM publications including the *Communications of the ACM*, and played a major role in the launch of new *Transactions* titles, which accompanied the growth of Special Interest Groups within ACM.

The second session of the interview is organized primarily around Mandelbaum's recollections about past ACM Presidents and Executive Directors. Included within the transcript (with some of this material to be found in the first session) are accounts of ACM Presidents Jean Sammet, Herb Grosch, Dan McCracken, Peter Denning, Adele Goldberg, Dave Brandin; and ACM Executive Directors, Sid Weinstein, Dick Hespos, Joe DeBlasi, and John White. Also mentioned are various individuals who were associated with ACM publications, including Stuart Lynn, the chair of the ACM Publications Board who during the late 1970s was involved with major decisions about the structure of ACM publications.

An important part of the interview is Mandelbaum's conversations about his leading role in the development of ACM's Digital Library. According to Mandelbaum, the Digital Library contributed significantly to ACM's revenue stream, based on the considerable success of its group subscriptions to institutions. This work allowed Mandelbaum to expand into new areas of marketing and management, and to assume greater responsibility at ACM headquarters. The second session of the interview ends with additional information about his new position as Executive Director and Director of Publications at the Institute for Computer Science, Social Informatics, and Telecommunications, a European nonprofit organization located in Budapest.

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Media:

Four audio cassettes.

Transcription:

By Christine Hooten, Afterwords, Austin, TX (USA), conducted between February and March 2010.

October 31, 2009. Session I, Tape 1, Side A

OPENING REMARKS

AKERA: I'm speaking with Mark Mandelbaum, former Director of Publications at ACM, and the current Executive Director/Director of Publications of the Institute for Computer Science, Social Informatics, and Telecommunications, a European nonprofit organization located in Budapest. The interview is being conducted by Atsushi Akera, a faculty member at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

So let me start with a couple of preliminary remarks. As I was just saying before the tape was running, the purpose of these interviews is to assemble a life history, and not just your contributions to ACM. But what makes this particular interview unique is that given your 30 years of involvement with ACM, primarily as its Director of Publications, you have a much broader understanding of ACM's history than many of the individuals that have been affiliated with the organization. So that's where Rick Snodgrass was particularly interested in my interviewing you. As he put it, "You've got to talk to Mark because he knows so much of our history. Get all the stories from him!" So this is the purpose of our interview today.

So to start with the interview, I'd like to ask a couple of opening questions about your role with ACM. Mark, when did you join ACM?

MANDELBAUM: It was April of 1977.

AKERA: And what positions have you held in your 30 years there?

MANDELBAUM: Basically two positions. When I started, I was Executive Editor, and I then became Director of Publications.

AKERA: And you were Executive Editor for about four years? Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: A little less than that. About two and a half years.

AKERA: Oh, yes. Executive Editor between April 1977 and June 1980.

MANDELBAUM: Three years, yeah.

AKERA: But then I guess it says you were also Director of Publications from June 1979 onward. So you had both roles for a while? [Yes.] And then you retired in?

MANDELBAUM: December 2008.

AKERA: Well, congratulations.

PART I.1: EARLY LIFE AND CAREER

AKERA: Now, this is just an explanation for our readers that this interview is going to be conducted in three parts. The first part will focus on your early life and career before joining ACM. The second part will be on your involvement with ACM and your knowledge of the organization, and then at the very end of the interview, we'll be talking about your subsequent work and career since retiring this past December. I will also be trying to do establish interesting connections between the various phases of your life, the history of ACM, and the development of computing as a field. Most likely I'm going to try to run through all three sections during the first interview, recognizing that in a second session, if you're willing, I could return to explore more deeply specific issues and other interesting stories that come up during this session.

So Mark, can you tell me something about your early life and upbringing? Where were you born? What was your family's background?

MANDELBAUM: Sure. I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1950—January 2, 1950. My parents were both European and they were in Europe during World War II, and they were both in the concentration camps, so they were survivors of the concentration camps. They came to New York in April 1949, and I was born in January 1950.

AKERA: Could you tell us more about your parents? Where were they born and would you able to share something about their wartime experiences?

MANDELBAUM: Both my parents came from Poland. My mother came from and was born in the city of Lodz, and my father was born in the city of Krakow.

AKERA: And their names?

MANDELBAUM: Sam and Ruth. They each were planning on a career in education, and they were both planning to go to college. My mother was actually in college her first year when the war broke out, and so obviously she never finished.

AKERA: So they were still quite young, then?

MANDELBAUM: They were young, yeah, relatively. And then the war interrupted their lives obviously and they were both taken to two different concentration camps. That was basically it. They survived the horrors of the camps, and they met in 1946 at a Red Cross camp in southern Germany.

AKERA: So they didn't know each other beforehand. They met in a postwar context.

MANDELBAUM: Right, they did not know each other until after the war. My father came from a family of eleven children, of which five survived, and my mother came from a family of four, of which she and a sister survived. So I feel like it affected my early upbringing. I was struck by the fact that unlike most of my friends, I had no grandparents. So it took a while for my parents to be able to talk about what happened and to explain the background.

AKERA: I can certainly understand that... So what did your parents do between 1946 and when they came to New York in 1949?

MANDELBAUM: Well, they came to the United States, and my father had a couple of brothers that survived, and one of the brothers also came to the United States with his wife and started a family. My mother had a sister that survived the concentration camp, and within the course of two or three years, 1946 to 1949, all of my parents' siblings that survived came to the United States.

AKERA: So all of them moved to the United States? Poland must have been part of Eastern Europe at that stage.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. Well, there was one uncle of mine on my father's side that actually lived in Russia—in the Soviet Union—and we did not know of his survival until 1975. There was a big reunion and so on. And a sister of my father's did survive, and she moved to Israel and lived there.

AKERA: These immigrant histories are quite interesting from a historian's perspective. Which was the first sibling to come to the United States? What made them choose the United States? Did they all move into the New York area or was the area in which they settled more distributed?

MANDELBAUM: My parent's immediate siblings all moved to the New York area. My father's younger brother by four or five years came to the United States first and then my father and mother—they were married by then—followed him. There was a compelling reason why. After what they had gone through in the concentration camps and the war, they did not want to be separated from family.

AKERA: So they wanted their entire family to be together.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and it was a very strong need for them to be together, and so all of the siblings both on my father's side and my mother's side came to the U.S. to New York and lived within very close proximity of each other.

AKERA: And that was in Brooklyn, correct? [Yes.] Just to step back, where were your parents between 1946 and 1949?

MANDELBAUM: They were in what was called a DP camp for displaced persons. These were camps set up throughout Germany and Poland, and these camps helped to reintegrate the survivors of the concentration camps back into society. They were fed, they were treated for any medical concerns, and they were given the opportunity to emigrate.

AKERA: And provided with resources so they could make it to a new place?

MANDELBAUM: That is correct.

AKERA: And you said this was a Red Cross program?

MANDELBAUM: Right, administered by the U.S. Red Cross and I believe United Nations also.

AKERA: In terms of material comforts, was this a fairly comfortable arrangement? I mean three years seems like a fairly long time to be in a temporary situation. Was this a reasonably good time in their life for them?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, it was. It was not a refugee camp. It was a level or two above that, so living conditions were comfortable.

AKERA: And when did they get married?

MANDELBAUM: In April 1949.

AKERA: Right before they came to the United States? [Yes.]

AKERA: That's what I thought.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that was their plan.

AKERA: Right, so I guess they had a nice three-year courtship?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. In fact, I remember my father telling me he arrived at that camp. He went to several. He was traveling and wandering around Europe and Poland looking for survivors, members of his family. So he didn't arrive in the camp until well after it was established. He noticed there was this woman at a typewriter typing, and he struck up a conversation, and then a relationship. [Chuckles]

AKERA: That's a wonderful story.

MANDELBAUM: So while in camp, they participated in the "reintegration" effort. Some kind of training. You know, on typewriter or various skills training. My mother was trained...well, she knew how to type, but she was involved in producing the camp newsletter or magazine, a newspaper that appeared three times a week. It was written in Polish and in Yiddish because the vast majority of the survivors were Jewish and Yiddish was the language of Eastern Europe and so on. So she was actually an editor and worked on that magazine.

AKERA: Now I want to move us to the United States fairly soon, but one more question about your parents' experience in postwar Europe. Do you have any stories from their time there. I mean, postwar Europe, regardless of the Red Cross, must have been a pretty harsh place to be. Do you have any stories from your parents about that?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I know my father... After the war what happened was that he was in the concentration camp and he actually escaped in the middle of the night. He went to the Soviet Union and joined the Red Army. He was fluent in four languages, and so he became an interpreter interrogating prisoners of war—mostly German prisoners of war that the Soviet Red Army captured. He knew German and Russian, as well as Polish and Slovakian, so he was useful to the Soviet army in terms of translating and so on. That's how he spent the last three years of

the war, and at the end of the war, he was actually with the army branch in Poland. So he got rid of the Soviet army uniform and got civilian clothes and went back to his town looking for his family. But the town had been completely destroyed. He subsequently found out that two of his brothers that had survived the war did not survive the aftermath of the war. One brother was in a train, a German train, which was evacuating concentration camp survivors because they did not want the world to know. What happened was the Allies on one of the last few days of the war, one of the last bombing runs, bombed a train.

AKERA: Thinking that it was a supply train...?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that my uncle was on it, and he died there. Then another uncle was killed by Poles, by some right-wing Poles I guess who blamed the Jewish people for the war and all of the trouble and so on. So those are two postwar stories.

But basically, my father wandered around Poland for about six months before he went to this DP camp which was not too far away in Bavaria, southern Germany

AKERA: So the camp itself wasn't located in a city? The folks there didn't have the option of working in a local town for regular wages? [Right.] So they spent several years at the camp before they ready to move to the United States and then start their new lives?

MANDELBAUM: Right, that's right. For destinations, they were given a choice but primarily it was the United States, Israel, Australia, and I think Brazil or Argentina.

AKERA: So the camp they settled in was not under Soviet influence, and Russia was not one of the options?

MANDELBAUM: Russia was not one of the options. I think because right after the war, the Soviet Union became the communist menace. So once the war was over, the U.S. felt that the Soviet presence was dangerous. So they did not offer it as an option.

AKERA: Okay. So if we can shift to the United States. [Sure.] So you were born very shortly after your parents settled in Brooklyn?

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: So there's a wonderful story there too?

MANDELBAUM: The funny story with that is that airplanes were not as prevalent for travels, so my parents came over on a boat. So the story is I was conceived on the ship.

AKERA: That's very romantic, I think.

MANDELBAUM: Maybe that's why when I've been on a cruise or fishing I never get seasick. [Laughter]

AKERA: That makes sense! So can you tell us something about their early life, and your early life in Brooklyn? How was it settling into Brooklyn? You mentioned that there were a lot of

relatives right there in the neighborhood. Could you maybe describe the neighborhood to start with?

MANDELBAUM: My first impressions were being around and surrounded by my cousins.

AKERA: How many cousins roughly?

MANDELBAUM: Within walking distance, there were maybe nine or ten cousins, because that was one of the first things that people felt. Especially those who had survived the Holocaust, family is very important, and raising a family and having kids to tell the story—not only to tell the story to but to carry on the traditions. So there was a lot of family, a lot of cousins, and we were all very close. I remember my parents and my aunts and uncles talking to each other every day several times a day just to have the reassurance that they were there. So I had mentioned the early realization that some friends all had grandparents, and they would talk about the grandparents giving them presents on birthdays and holidays, and I did not have any.

AKERA: So what did your parents do after they arrived here? What kind of jobs did they end up with? What did your aunts and uncles do in Brooklyn?

MANDELBAUM: My mother didn't get a job. She was sort of the typical '50s housewife.

AKERA: Busy raising the kids? [Yes.] How many siblings do you have?

MANDELBAUM: I have one sister, two years younger, and she and her family live in Savannah, Georgia. So my mother was the typical stay-at-home housewife. My father had several different jobs, but all within the clothing industry: selling men's suits, for example, and working in various retail outlets for men's suits and clothing.

AKERA: Now you mentioned that your parents had aspired to become teachers, go into education at least and that they wanted to go to college. So was this something they were not able to pursue after they came over?

MANDELBAUM: That's correct. Yeah, it was a combination of both what they had gone through as well as the fact that they were not fluent in English. So they couldn't really pursue higher education in the U.S.

AKERA: But in the Polish context both your parents would have been considered reasonably well-educated... is that the case?

MANDELBAUM: Had they gone through, yeah. I think—yeah.

AKERA: They certainly had a good high school or secondary school experience, enough to enter college. [Right.] And your father in addition had Russian language experience. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Right. Yeah, he was fluent in Russian and Polish and German.

AKERA: Now during the Cold War that must have been an asset. The reason I'm asking these questions is because you eventually decided to pursue English, a literary degree and your family had these literary and educational backgrounds. I just want to make those connections.

MANDELBAUM: Oh, that came more from my mother. She was the literary one so to speak, and she was the one that instilled the love of reading and writing. Yeah, so that came from her.

AKERA: Thanks. Now, can you tell me, what did your mother do to get you interested in literature, interested in reading and writing, and books?

MANDELBAUM: Well, she made sure that I would read a book a week or every two weeks and test me on it by asking questions about the book and asking what I thought of it, what I liked and didn't like about it.

AKERA: Do you recall what kind of books you read?

MANDELBAUM: They were all over the place. I mean this was when I was 8, 9, 10, 11 or so, but there were classical literature books that were easy to understand, such as Hemingway—

AKERA: So classic English and American literature?

MANDELBAUM: Correct. Yeah, it was all in English.

AKERA: Now did your parents try to teach you Yiddish or any other language?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I remember very clearly. Even though they spoke Polish and German in the house, they didn't want my sister and I to learn—certainly not German because of what they went through, but I picked it up and my sister picked it up. Even to this day, I'm not fluent in German, but when I am in Germany, I can get along quite well. Order in a restaurant and talk to a taxi cab driver and so on. So I've retained the German. The Polish was a little harder. I didn't know... I was able to speak—

AKERA: —Was it sort of where you could hear what they were saying but you couldn't speak it as easily?

MANDELBAUM: Right, yes. Polish is a more difficult language anyway.

AKERA: So it sounds like your parents had an assimilation strategy. They were eager to have you and your sister become American as quickly as possible [Yes.], especially in the '50s, which was a particular kind of time in American cultural history as well. So routinely spoke Polish with each other in the house [Yes.], but made the effort to speak to you in English. Is that a correct characterization?

MANDELBAUM: Correct, yes.

AKERA: Before I go on to ask more about your schooling, I would love to hear a bit more about your relatives—your uncles, aunts, cousins. What one or two folks were your favorite folks other than your parents of course?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I had from my father's younger brother, his son who is my first cousin obviously, we are very close and we were for example best men at each other's weddings.

AKERA: What is his name?

MANDELBAUM: Syd. So we've always been very close like brothers, and we developed similar activities. In my twenties and thirties, I was very active as he was in an organization called Second Generation, which are basically children of Holocaust survivors. By that time in our twenties and thirties we were adults, and we realized that we had a responsibility to talk about our experiences and to combat some rightwing and leftwing propaganda that the Holocaust never occurred, that it was all a myth and so on. So we both went out and actively spoke to schools, students, and church groups.

AKERA: So that was a chance not only to stay connected, but to develop deeper bonds with your cousin?

MANDELBAUM: That's right, and we both instilled in our children not only the history of what their grandparents—our parents—went through, but the need to remember and not forget and to have them talk about their experiences among their friends.

AKERA: Yes. And I think I see a picture of your daughter over there on the table?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, that's my daughter at her wedding a couple of years ago, and I also have two boys. So my daughter is 30 and my two boys are 28 and 26.

AKERA: And their names?

MANDELBAUM: My daughter is Jessica and the two boys are Daniel and Adam.

AKERA: Thank you. We'll probably chat about them later, but just so we have their names. So going back to Brooklyn, what kind of things did you do with your cousin, Sydney, in the streets of Brooklyn? What was life in Brooklyn like?

MANDELBAUM: We... how shall I say? We were not the best-behaved of children. [Laughs] We were you know, somewhat independent and a little rebellious partly because we never fit in with our American friends.

AKERA: Sure. So the school you went to was somewhat mixed?

MANDELBAUM: Okay, let me talk about the school. The first six years of schooling, I went to a private Jewish school that taught Jewish religion and culture and the Hebrew language, and then beginning in seventh grade, I went to public school through high school. But my cousin and I, our fathers having both come from Europe, were big soccer players and soccer fans. So while

the other kids were playing baseball, we were dribbling soccer. But then we both learned or began playing baseball with our friends—the American game. But that was also I recall a differentiating factor, of the European background, and we were several years later than the American kids to pick up baseball and develop an interest in American sports.

AKERA: So that contributed to the sense of ethnic difference that you still got in the United States in the '50s?

MANDELBAUM: That's right. That's right.

AKERA: That's great. So what were your passions during this period? Soccer was one of them, from middle school going into high school?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. I wouldn't say it was a passion. I'd say it was an influence from Europe. But I did develop very early the passion for reading, and I developed a passion for science fiction. And also science.

AKERA: What authors would that be? This would be in the late '50s, early '60s roughly?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, right, around 10th, 11th, and 12th grade.

AKERA: So who were some of the authors that intrigued you most?

MANDELBAUM: I remember Ben Bova, Ray Bradbury. That's where I started. I remember the first books, *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*. I remember going through the whole Bradbury works. And then Isaac Asimov began writing and publishing books in the '60s.

AKERA: Yes, kind of that early space age kind of thing...

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that's right.

AKERA: Interesting. And just to continue with what your interests and passions were in middle school and high school.

MANDELBAUM: So definitely reading, and writing too. I remember keeping sort of a diary, that kind of thing.

AKERA: So were you considered a bit bookish...? Not to put a label on it, but ...

MANDELBAUM: Maybe, yeah, because I really did quickly develop a passion for reading, and at the same time a passion for American sports.

AKERA: So what sports did you do in high school?

MANDELBAUM: You know, with the other kids, basketball and baseball.

AKERA: Now did you feel more Americanized by the time you got through high school?

MANDELBAUM: Oh yes.

AKERA: Or was there still some sort of difference?

MANDELBAUM: Certainly by high school I felt I was—

AKERA: —American, and you were into all the sports and stuff?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right.

AKERA: That would make sense as a sort of trajectory.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, definitely by high school.

AKERA: So how did you do academically?

MANDELBAUM: I was the kind of kid that rarely studied but I was able to always do well. I had a hearing problem, but back then it wasn't difficult meaning in grade school and through high school and college I did have difficulty hearing very often, so I would either sit in the front of the room or I would ask a classmate for notes. Very often, I would not even hear a good part of what the professors in college or the teachers in low levels would say. I just figured it out.

AKERA: That's neat. So your situation perhaps forced you to develop skills for learning independently? [Yes.] I can imagine. So do you have any favorite teachers from middle school or high school, somebody that inspired you?

MANDELBAUM: Let's see. There was actually one math teacher, and this is now about the other side of my training because I was fascinated by math. There was a math teacher, Mrs. Byno, that influenced me to also study math and various things like trigonometry and geometry and all of that. So while I was developing a passion for reading and writing, at the same time I developed a deep interest in math.

AKERA: So you were quite strong academically. You just didn't like to study all the time.

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: And you didn't necessarily get the highest grades in the class... or did you? You knew how to—

MANDELBAUM: Right. I mean, for example, the English left brain side. I was getting very high marks writing essays or writing stories or whatever it was. The math side, the right brain side, I really had to work.

AKERA: Work on it to push and develop those skills?

MANDELBAUM: Right, but I was very interested in it always. So even though I got my degree in English, back in my college days I developed a very strong attraction to physics. So I just taught myself.

AKERA: I'm curious, given where you wound up in your career. I'm going to ask more about this in a second. But thinking right now about your decision to go to college... Your parents never went to college but they aspired to it. What made you decide to go to college? And what made you decide to go where you went?

MANDELBAUM: College was an expectation on the part of all the parents. There just was no question that the kids had to go to college to be successful.

AKERA: Just for reference, what percentage of the graduates from your public high school in Brooklyn went to college?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, I would say it was pretty high, maybe 75%.

AKERA: Really? So it was a good high school with a strong college preparatory curriculum? [Yes.] So the entire cohort, not just your best friend but other folks?

MANDELBAUM: That's right, because that neighborhood in that area in Brooklyn was sort of a ghetto. A very high percentage of mostly Jewish families and some Italian families, and I remember some Chinese and Taiwanese.

AKERA: So the typical American urban mixture, but with definite ethnic identities.

MANDELBAUM: Correct, and part of those ethnic identities, a part of those ethnic cultures was a focus on education.

AKERA: Yes. Now was this a fairly harmonious neighborhood?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, there was no racial acrimony of any kind. Everyone respected each other, you know.

AKERA: Sure. Let me go ahead and move college. So why did you choose the City College of New York?

MANDELBAUM: CCNY. My parents had very little money, and so they could not send me to a private school. I realized looking back I made a mistake. Rather than thinking independently, knowing my parents' financial situation I limited my college applications to the City College or City University of New York of which there were five different branches. I didn't even attempt to apply to any other school.

AKERA: Like at a big state university, or Harvard, or anywhere else?

MANDELBAUM: Right. Right. Looking back I realized I should have—

AKERA: —That it wouldn't have hurt to have tried? [Yes.]

MANDELBAUM: Maybe I would have gotten a scholarship or would have gotten something else...

AKERA: Was there expectation on your part of your parents or your extended relatives, whether spoken or unspoken, that you would stay in New York City?

MANDELBAUM: I think there was an unspoken expectation of keeping the family together.

AKERA: And also it entails the fear for costs. I mean I guess scholarships and such at that stage in American history were still relatively rare, and it's probably even more rare from the standpoint of immigrant parents who are thinking, "I have to pay for them to live in Boston," or wherever it is. From that point of view, the assumption is you would be staying at home and going to college.

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: So was it City University or City College of New York?

MANDELBAUM: I attended the City College of New York, which was one of five institutions that comprised CUNY.

AKERA: And what was college life like?

MANDELBAUM: Well, this was college in the '60s.

AKERA: Ah yes, I understand. It was 1967 to 1972! [Laughter]

MANDELBAUM: There's a saying which may not fit well with historians, but it's "if you can remember the '60s, you really weren't there." [Laughter] I do remember it. I do remember the '60s, yeah.

AKERA: So can you tell us some of that history?

MANDELBAUM: Well, it was the whole 1960s awakening. Questioning the establishment.

AKERA: Now was any of the "60s" already there in your high school in Brooklyn, or was that something you discovered after you got to college—the flowering of the liberal consciousness?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, no, it was there in high school. I remember, again, that rebelliousness. For example, I would wear jeans to high school even though they were forbidden at the time. I would wear these flowery 1960s hippie-type shirts.

AKERA: Was your hair long then?

MANDELBAUM: My hair was long.

AKERA: That's great. So this wasn't anything new, being in college. Or was there a difference? Once you got to City College of New York, I imagine the politics there were much more intense than in a high school?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. And the City College of New York was maybe less than half a mile from Columbia University. And there was all that turmoil at Columbia. They used to call City College of New York the little red schoolhouse because of its socialist influence.

AKERA: So do you have any specific stories from CCNY?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I remember in those days there were lots of sit-ins and mass protests and demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and all that. My attitude with all this... I never participated in any of the demonstrations or sit-ins because I really enjoyed the classes.

AKERA: So you were there to study?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and so rather than join the protests, I would go to classes. I also was taking some physics courses, and again the political climate was such that the protests were aimed obviously against the war, but also against the academic subjects that, in the minds of the protestors, were somehow linked to the war. So engineering, math, and the sciences. They would protest and try to block off the access to the science buildings and the engineering building.

AKERA: So you found yourself on the "other side" in some respects.

MANDELBAUM: On the other side, right.

AKERA: But not a principled opposition...?

MANDELBAUM: Well politically I was in agreement with the protesters, but personally—

AKERA: —you felt they shouldn't have been interfering with classes?

MANDELBAUM: Right. So I would go up the back way.

AKERA: And the protests contrasted with your parents' expectations, and you had a specific reason for being at the college in a way that was different from the other students? [Yes.] Can you tell us more about where you stood politically?

MANDELBAUM: Again, it was sort of a schizophrenic relationship. Obviously I was against the war. I was of draft age, and even though my hearing—I actually did get a deferment because of my hearing—but I still felt—

AKERA: —sympathy for that aspect of the students' protests?

MANDELBAUM: Right, and I felt that I was against the war not because I was a pacifist or anything like that, but the way the war was being conducted. We were not winning; we were

losing boys, friends of mine from the neighborhood and so on. So I was against the war for that reason.

AKERA: Was there any connection between your parents' experiences and your attitude towards the war?

MANDELBAUM: Well, that was also part of it, the fear that this could happen again except from a right-wing Nazi standpoint that could happen from a left-wing Communist. So that was part of what gave me pause.

AKERA: So it is a little complicated then? [Yes.] I guess I'd like to ask a little bit about your intellectual environment—an English department would typically be quite liberal, right? I don't know the CCNY faculty per se, but their liberalism must have seeped into the curriculum itself.

MANDELBAUM: Oh, they were very liberal, very. Same thing with the basic courses I had to take as a freshman. I remember the Sociology 101 professor who was a wild man. Rather than teach concepts of sociology and so on, he would yell at us as being privileged members of the middle class. [Laughter]

AKERA: Which you weren't! [Laughter] You could have yelled back. [Yes.] I'm sure he would have loved it, too.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. So it was wild, and I got to think that this is not the way higher education should be. It should not be political. It should not be. So I was not impressed and I didn't think—

AKERA: —it was furthering the cause of education, yours or anybody else's? [Right.] Now did you choose English upon entering CCNY, or did you enter undeclared?

MANDELBAUM: I had to declare a major by my junior year, and so I was sort of torn between going into formally declaring for physics or formally declaring for English.

AKERA: Interesting. So what made you choose the English in the end?

MANDELBAUM: I really don't remember that there was any one compelling light bulb going on. I just thought I liked the idea of writing. You know, I could do creative writing.

AKERA: Did that come easier to you than physics in college?

MANDELBAUM: It did. It did. It did. But I was so interested in and challenged by physics.

AKERA: So it had a real draw?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah. But I also felt this need for independence... that I didn't want to have to sit through hours and hours of what I call basic introductory physics, mechanics, and optics, and all that other stuff. I felt what I really was interested in was relativity and cosmology; Einstein and quantum physics.

AKERA: Now is there a connection between your interest in physics, and the space age, and your interest in science fiction?

MANDELBAUM: Maybe yeah.

AKERA: You were drawn to the big concepts in physics, and not just the nuts and bolts.

MANDELBAUM: Right. The interest in science fiction...

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AKERA: You were saying that you were also intrigued with the thought of writing science fiction.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and so the thought of writing science fiction... I realized I should have the background or knowledge in science in order to be better on the fiction side.

AKERA: So you were trying to bring the two together.

MANDELBAUM: Right, and I actually wrote a paper—I don't know where it is—on putting the two together. A paper I wrote in an English class, of course. Took Einstein with his general theory of relativity and the quantum mechanics, and I compared it to the literary goings on. James Joyce when he wrote *Ulysses*, 800 pages dealing with only 24 hours and the expansion and contraction of time from a literary standpoint, versus what Einstein had discovered.

AKERA: It almost has a science fiction quality if you interpret it in those terms, doesn't it?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So I decided to go for English, and Physics sort of as a hobby... I studied math and the physics and got to the point where I could actually understand the general theory of relativity and some of the quantum mechanics stuff.

AKERA: Now you started college in '67 and graduated in '72, which would be five years. So the extra year... was that to develop your knowledge of science?

MANDELBAUM: No, there were other reasons having to do with having a good time [laughter], and picking a minimum number of courses, you know—

AKERA: Which you could do at CCNY?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. Yeah. I think after time in order to retain matriculation, there was a minimum of 12 credits or three courses at a time. So I stretched it out. Right, right, and the requirement for graduation was 144 credits, so I just stretched that out.

AKERA: Students pay something like \$40,000 a year in tuition now, so I imagine that's changed. Their panic must be the other way: "How can we make sure we don't have to pay for an extra semester?" [Laughter]

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: So did you work at all while you were in college?

MANDELBAUM: At the time, especially in the late '60s, there was a tremendous boom on Wall Street—you know, a multi-year bull session. Obviously in the '60s Wall Street was not anywhere near as computerized or automated as now. So there was a tremendous need for somewhat intelligent people to come in at night and process the trades that took place. It involved taking little slips and entering it.

AKERA: Was this punch card machines? Or were they using computers at the time?

MANDELBAUM: Computers at that time were the big IBM machines that were doing other things. So what they needed was to transcribe from the sales slip transactions into another form, piece of paper, which that piece of paper would then go for coding on the punch card.

AKERA: Okay, so it was an intermediate step to data entry?

MANDELBAUM: It was an intermediate step, yes. So for a while there, about a year, I was working from six at night to two in the morning or sometimes till five in the morning, making great money relatively speaking. And then maybe getting a couple of hours of sleep and then going to the classes.

AKERA: So you were continuing your high school tradition of not necessarily studying too hard.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. And again, for the English courses it just involved reading and then writing, and I found that the night before a paper was due I could hammer out a 20- or 30-page paper.

AKERA: And given that all the other students were doing the same thing, I guess it's relative!

MANDELBAUM: Right, right.

AKERA: That's good. So how many years did you work on Wall Street and in other jobs of that sort?

MANDELBAUM: Yes.. This was at Merrill Lynch. It was not long because the job did take its toll doing that kind of thing.

AKERA: So of your five years in college, how many years did you work? Did you have to work to pay for tuition or for your living costs?

MANDELBAUM: Yes I did. So other than that Wall Street job, what I would do was work summers. I worked a couple of summers up in the Catskills—the hotels, the resort areas there, being a waiter, busboy, and then waiter again and so on. So I did that. Then I also worked as a delivery boy. For a local grocery store in Brooklyn, I would deliver orders that people would call in or that people would pay for and then not be able to take all the stuff, so they had a bike with a big basket. So I would work in delivery, and then in the stockroom.

AKERA: So I'm curious whether you had any exposure to computers before you decided to join ACM. So your work on Wall Street was sort of relevant. Were you aware that this data was going to be coded onto punch cards. I assume Merrill Lynch had an IBM computer behind all of that.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, they did. I think it was the 360 at that time.

AKERA: It would have been a 360 by that time, in the late '60s. That makes sense. But did you encounter a computer directly or indirectly in any of your other work? The summer in Catskills? Probably not, right?

MANDELBAUM: No, no. Not that early, no.

AKERA: How about your studies? Were there computers in use for the physics courses at CCNY?

MANDELBAUM: There were, yes.

AKERA: Did you take a programming course?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I did take a programming course.

AKERA: Now you already had an interest in science fiction. Did the computer intrigue you at all because of science fiction?

MANDELBAUM: Not at the time.

AKERA: Then it was just a tool, right? That's how a lot of folks in the sciences saw it. If you're doing physics, you use it to get a problem done solved, but you're not interested in programming itself per se.

MANDELBAUM: That's right because I did learn FORTRAN, and I thought, "This is a lot of work." [Laughter] I didn't realize it at the time, but the unspoken thought was that we really needed higher-level languages.

AKERA: So were you impressed by these big, glamorous machines?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, I do remember being intrigued by the potential. But I thought it was just so much work to have to do that kind of punch card and do that kind of programming. It was just too much work for the benefit at the time.

AKERA: So at the end of your college how did you imagine your future career? When did you start thinking about getting a job? Did you have an image of what you wanted to do before you found a position?

MANDELBAUM: Again, yeah. I did not have any strong career goal or vision, right. I thought about writing as a career, possibly science fiction or possibly just fiction writing and that I would sell stories to magazines and...

AKERA: I can imagine this was fairly common among your cohort at the time. Students think in very different ways today—they want to know what job they're going to get, and want an internship by their sophomore year. But this wasn't your frame of mind at all?

MANDELBAUM: It wasn't. Right.

AKERA: And certainly not as an English major.

MANDELBAUM: I do remember there were so many jobs available in so many areas.

AKERA: So finding a job wasn't a concern?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that wasn't a concern.

AKERA: If you had a college degree from CCNY, you knew somebody was going to pick you up. It might be an entry-level position, but as long as you could write...

MANDELBAUM: That's right, and not just me. I remember my friends, too. No one was worried about getting a job.

AKERA: What a beautiful time it must have been!

Can you tell us just something about your college friends? People that you met, people that inspired you, twisted you, or whatever.

MANDELBAUM: None of my college friends inspired me. [Laughter] There was actually an introductory Physics 101 professor that caught my attention. I remember having a couple of conversations with him.

AKERA: Did you develop any strong friendships in college, folks that you stayed in touch with? [No.] So not so much. Then it was a big party...?

MANDELBAUM: It was a big party, yeah.

AKERA: And people went their own ways afterwards? [Yes.] I was just wondering whether your time at CCNY contributed to any professional network you had afterwards.

MANDELBAUM: No, it did not.

AKERA: So perhaps we can focus on the job that you got. So how did your career unfold upon graduation?

MANDELBAUM: So after graduation, I began looking around. I was still doing delivery and that kind of stuff—

AKERA: —Just getting by?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. Then I was perusing the want ads, and there was a position that caught my eye being an administrative assistant to a literary agent. So I applied and I got an interview. The agency was the Marie Rodell Literary Agency, and I remember being very impressed with her.

AKERA: Yes. And how big was this agency?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, very small. Her and two other people that worked for her. I remember being very impressed with her in that here was a woman who owned her own company and agency and she had a couple of famous writers, including Rachel Carson who wrote *Silent Spring*. I had the opportunity to meet Rachel Carson's son several times. So it was prestigious but small. So I was the administrative assistant. I did all those kinds of things.

AKERA: Yes. Now it says here in your resume that you worked with publishers to edit and revise manuscripts. So you yourself weren't doing the editing, or copyediting, or other work? Or did you land up doing some of that?

MANDELBAUM: Well, as far as what I did, there were two kinds of tasks. Manuscripts would come in just unsolicited. An author or somebody would send in to Marie Rodell and say, "I've just written this book. I think it's great. Will you accept it?" So she would ask me to read these manuscripts—not edit, just read—and see if it was worthwhile.

AKERA: So give her an initial impression of what you thought it was?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And I was thrilled at the time because I thought, "Gee, I have the control over somebody's... [Laughter] If I thought a manuscript was good, I would pass it on to her for a more careful evaluation; and if I thought it was not good, she would never see it. So I remember being somewhat in awe of that responsibility, being 22 years old. So that was one task. And then I would be asked to review an accepted manuscript or a manuscript that a publisher would have agreed to publish and read the editor's comments and change it before sending it back to the author. So those were the two kinds of reading that I would do.

AKERA: I see, so much more than just as assistant—it was not a secretarial position. You were working with the texts, and you were helping with the manuscripts as well.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. Maybe 50% administrative and 50% editorial.

AKERA: That's great. So it seems that you worked there for about a year and a half. Is that right? [Yes.] Then in January 1975, you got the position as the managing editor of the American

Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, AIAA, [Yes.] which would sound like a pretty important position.

MANDELBAUM: Well it sounded like it, but it was... They had a bunch of typical academic peer review journals in the area of aeronautical and astronautical engineering. They had I think 10 or 12 journals, and there were three or four managing editors each taking responsibility for several of the journals. Those were basic copy editing of accepted papers and working with the printer to get the papers printed and the journal issues out on time.

AKERA: And how did you get that job? From your background at the literary agency?

MANDELBAUM: The fact that the primary requirement of the job was editing, copyediting, and adhering to deadlines.

AKERA: So was it a publicly posted job or was there some other way that you found out about it?

MANDELBAUM: It was through an employment agency that specialized in publishing jobs.

AKERA: And the literary agency itself is already that kind of business, so you knew that such a thing was possible as far as moving forward with your career?

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: So by that time, you're beginning to think more in career-like terms.

MANDELBAUM: Right. That's right, yeah. Like what do I want to be when I grow up?

AKERA: Sure. How does that map onto your personal life at the time? Were you still living in Brooklyn?

MANDELBAUM: I was still living in Brooklyn at that time.

AKERA: With your parents?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Having graduated from college, I was still in Brooklyn at that time. Also at that time, around 1973, my father had a fairly serious heart attack, so he was not able to work for a long time and there were financial pressures and so on. So I felt I should not leave and get my own apartment and move out.

AKERA: So probably you were earning an income that was contributing to your parent's household.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Right, yes. So yeah, I was still in Brooklyn and still living with my parents and trying to help out financially and emotionally to be there.

AKERA: Yes. Just so I don't miss this from a life history perspective, how long did you stay with your parents in their house?

MANDELBAUM: I stayed actually until I got married in 1975. I should back up and say my mother died in 1963, and my father remarried in 1968. So when he had his first heart attack, he was remarried.

AKERA: And your stepmother did not work either? Did she have a job?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, she was working for the United States government. She was working for the INS, Immigration and Naturalization Service in Lower Manhattan.

AKERA: So just to place it in the timeline, [Yes.] how and when did you meet your wife?

MANDELBAUM: Now my ex-wife. Through a mutual friend who sort of set up a typical blind date. It was in December 1973, and we were married in August 1975. So yeah, we hit it off.

AKERA: That was when you were working for the literary agency. You were sort of on your own; you had an income. There were a lot of young people in New York City.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, right. Exactly.

AKERA: May I ask your former wife's name?

MANDELBAUM: Raellen. So we hit it off. It was around that same time that I realized that I need to be on a career path if I'm going to get married and have a family.

AKERA: You didn't have children until later, is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: That's correct. We were married in August 1975 and my daughter was born in May 1979.

AKERA: So maybe I can ask a little bit more about your work at AIAA. What kind of work did you do there? How did it help enhance your skills and career?

MANDELBAUM: A good part of the job involved interaction with the author of the paper as well as the editors of the particular journal, the editor-in-chief and the associate editors and so on. So I actually enjoyed very much those interactions. I found at AIAA and certainly at ACM there was this terrific willingness to, on the part of the very busy, very high-end, well-known people, to just stop and explain things like technical spelling, technical stuff. They were so interested or impressed with the fact that somebody actually cared about what they were doing with their research that they always—not always, I would say 90% of the time an author or an editor-in-chief of the journal, very busy people, would spend a fair amount of time on the phone or...

AKERA: Quite a bit of time with a young staff member. [Yes.] To make sure their manuscript came out the way they wanted, but also to help educate you as well, and to collaborate to produce a good piece of technical writing.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, right. And the vast majority of the authors were professors. You know, the pedantic thing, the need to educate. [Laughter]

AKERA: Yeah, that makes sense. So just to take a step back, when you went through a placement agency to find this position, did you publicize the fact that you had both a literary as well as scientific interest?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I had registered with any number—half a dozen maybe—of employment agencies that specialized in publishing. So I developed a CV and was interviewed by a placement professional.

AKERA: Yes, that's great. So with regards to your AIAA cohort—you mentioned there were four managing editors there? [Yes.] So were they all English majors? How many of them actually had an interest in the sciences?

MANDELBAUM: I don't think many or any of them had a deep abiding interest in the sciences.

AKERA: So you were unique in this respect? [Yes.] So that in some ways you probably did shine in that organization. [Yes.] You know, "Hey, this is somebody who can really span the two sides."

PART I.2: CAREER AT ACM

AKERA: So you worked at AIAA as managing editor for just over two years, and then that takes you to 1977 when you became affiliated with ACM. [Yes.]

Can you tell us a little bit more about that transition? How did they find out about you? How did you get noticed?

MANDELBAUM: There were two factors at the AIAA. Number one, in the short time that I was there, I realized that the growth of the AIAA and the publishing program was very directly related to government money—you know, government support, NASA, Department of Defense and so on. If the government was feeling rich and giving money, then the number of papers expanded because of the obvious DOD support and so on. Then very quickly the money would dry up and the research would shrink because aeronautics and astronautics were strictly dependent on government support.

AKERA: National concern about the space race, missile gap, all of that, yes?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. So that was one factor, that uncertainty, that volatility. Then the other factor was more internal to the organization. I did not see any room to go anywhere for a number of years.

AKERA: It was a smaller scientific publishing unit, in other words, right? AIAA represented a substantial technical field, but was ACM bigger at the time?

MANDELBAUM: At the time, not much bigger; no, not much bigger. Back then both ACM and AIAA had about 30,000 or 40,000 members.

AKERA: And in terms of the number of publications were they comparable? Didn't the whole proliferation of ACM journals occur after your arrival?

MANDELBAUM: That's right. So at the time AIAA actually had more journals and had a larger publishing program.

AKERA: So if we can keep spelling that out a little bit more. What made you decide to shift? What made ACM more attractive? I guess I need some background here as far as whether this was something you actively sought out or you found it through another agency?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I did want to make a change. I remember informing the various agencies which I was registered with that I'm in the market or would like to move on. Curiously enough, I did not get the ACM job through an agency, but I got it through a classified ad that I noticed one Sunday in the *New York Times*. So I replied to the classified ad.

AKERA: Who interviewed you? Do you remember?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. The Director of Publications at that time, Myrtle Kellington. The name I'm sure has come up.

AKERA: Oh, so it was Myrtle! Yes, of course her name has come up many times.

MANDELBAUM: She was on the way out. She was retiring, and her deputy, the Executive Editor at that time was a fellow by the name of Alan Corneretto. So the path ahead was that Myrtle would be retiring and Alan would advance to become Director of Publications, and then I was hired to...

AKERA: ... be the Executive Editor, which is basically the first staff person below the Director of Publications. That's the way it was set up then?

MANDELBAUM: Correct, yes. So I was interviewed by Myrtle and Alan, and then my second interview was with the Executive Director at that time, Sydney Weinstein. I think the fact that I had the AIAA experience, working for a non-profit academic society was an asset.

AKERA: So you fit their interests across the Board?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, it was a good fit. And I thought and I remember saying at the time that it just seemed to be an interesting position with computers and all that stuff going on.

AKERA: Yes, and the position was a clear step upwards because you had worked as a managing editor, but here you had real executive responsibilities.

MANDELBAUM: That's correct. Right.

AKERA: That's good. Actually, I guess that leads to the obvious next question: You mentioned this other person who was slated to become the Director of Publications. What was his career trajectory?

MANDELBAUM: I don't know. I don't know.

AKERA: He didn't stay?

MANDELBAUM: He didn't stay. No, he didn't stay very long, and his passion was wine, which is a nice passion, but it was an overriding passion with him. I remember when we would go to ACM conferences, for example, for the ACM Board of Directors, a Council meeting. We would go out to dinner and he would order these wines. I mean I did get an education in wine... [Laughs] He didn't last very long. He was just kind of an unusual type person: a lot of outside interests and not very passionate in his focus.

AKERA: And you were much more focused—perhaps this maps onto your immigrant experience. You know, you were more serious about your work and your studies, despite the '60s, so that when you had to focus you really were able to focus and understood what you needed to do.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that's right, and it was at that time, again during the interviewing and the evaluation process at ACM that I began to see the potential for computers and computing and the potential for growing a publishing program.

AKERA: Sure. So you're beginning to have stronger aspirations as well. At least you noticed the possibility of the field. [Yes.] So Myrtle Kellington stayed? You said Acting Director? So she wasn't formally Director?

MANDELBAUM: Well no. She was Director of Publications.

AKERA: How long did she stay?

MANDELBAUM: Not that long— I don't remember the exact time, how much longer, but maybe a month or two after I started.

AKERA: Oh. So was there another Director of Publications you worked under for a period?

MANDELBAUM: No. It was Myrtle and then Alan, and Myrtle stayed. She would come by and so on, but eventually it was just Alan as Director of Publications and me as Executive Editor.

AKERA: So you became the Director of Publications in June 1979. Was that when Alan left and you were just directly advanced to that position?

MANDELBAUM: No, he left about a year later.

AKERA: A year after you started?

MANDELBAUM: He left about a year or 18 months after I started, so it would have been around 1979.

AKERA: So you basically inherited the whole shop for a period of time? [Yes.] But did not have the title of Director of Publications until—

MANDELBAUM: Right, I believe they gave me a trial period or something where I was Acting Director of Publications.

AKERA: Because you were rather young.

MANDELBAUM: I was rather young. Right, I was.

AKERA: How old were you at the time?

MANDELBAUM: Twenty-nine. One of the questions, and I understood this, was, how would I get along with the volunteers, with the ACM Publications Board, and with the editor-in-chief of the *Communications of the ACM*—

AKERA: So people knew you could do the technical work, the writing and editing, but ACM was based on a huge volunteer organization... [Yes.] and there were a lot of issues surrounding publications at the time.

MANDELBAUM: That's correct.

AKERA: Especially on the question of volunteers, and we're going to get a lot more into that in a little while. [Yes.] So there was a trial period... can you comment a bit on what that trial period was like?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. My memory here is vague. I don't remember it being very distinguishable in any way or differentiated in any way. I just kept doing the work. I felt intuitively that the number one responsibility was working with the volunteers, even more important than the deadlines for the publication.

AKERA: So communications, building good ties.

MANDELBAUM: Right. The responsiveness to them.

AKERA: Yes. It sounds like you very much had a service orientation. Perhaps not a specific vision but a sense that you were there to be the support staff to what others wanted. [Yes.] So would it be fair to say that you didn't get wrapped up in the politics of the publication issues at the time?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. I wasn't even aware. That came later.

AKERA: As you get older you see more, I suppose. [Yes.] Besides which, if I understand the structure of ACM, there was separately a chair of the Publications Board? [Yes.] So that would have been the person dealing more with these sort of basic policy issues about the direction of ACM publications [Yes.], where especially as Executive Editor but even as you became Director of Publications, your responsibilities were more for the operational aspects. [Yes.] Operational including building positive relationships with all of these academics and other volunteers who are making these publications happen, making sure that it kept going.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. And the majority of the job was the *Communications of the ACM*, which was a monthly magazine.

AKERA: Yes, so what was the structure of ACM publications at the time? How did this translate into workload issues?

MANDELBAUM: There was the *Communications of the ACM*, and then I had three or four ACM journals. There were *Computing Surveys*, the *Journal of the ACM*. There was *Computing Reviews*.

AKERA: Yes, this came up in the Bernie Galler interview.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and Jean Sammet.

AKERA: Yes. So there were basically four publications, but ACM had not diversified into specialized transactions yet at the time.

MANDELBAUM: At that time, no.

AKERA: Whereas AIAA apparently already had. [Yes.] So there were separate journals for different aspects of aeronautics and such. [That's right.] So in hindsight, an obvious direction for the ACM publications, but a step that ACM itself had not taken yet at the time was this. [Right.] So then getting back to how that translates into workload issues.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So I would say at least 50%, probably more, of my time was focused on the magazine. It was a monthly. It had a lot of different components to it that needed to be assembled and coordinated.

AKERA: Right. In other words, the *Communications of the ACM* was partly a technical publication—but of a different genre. Supposedly a quicker publication, supposedly less academic. ...I should let you say this.

MANDELBAUM: Actually, at that time the *Communications of the ACM* was known as a world-class scientific journal. Top work and some of the most fundamental papers in computing science were published in *Communications of the ACM*. We will get into it later about what happened, but at the time, the *Communications of the ACM* was viewed as a top journal.

AKERA: And it contained the state of the art. Really some of the most exciting developments in many respects were being reported there. [Yes.] What was the distinction between the *Journal of ACM* and the *Communications of the ACM*?

MANDELBAUM: *Journal of the ACM* was always theoretical.

AKERA: It's the more theoretical-computer-science journal?

MANDELBAUM: Right. And the *CACM* published some theoretical work but mostly fundamental research that actually led to something practical.

AKERA: State of the art in computing. You know, time sharing, computer graphics...

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Michael Stonebraker's fundamental article on databases, for example, and Diffie-Hellman, the fundamental public key cryptography article, and some really groundbreaking stuff on programming.

AKERA: Sure. But part of the irony is that the *Communications of the ACM* really was intended to be a more rapid-to-publication journal, if we can call it that for the moment, whereas the *Journal of the ACM* was supposed to be more of the studied, fully mature project. [Yes.] But if I understand it correctly, the *Journal of the ACM* at a certain point had a queue of about three months, give or take, whereas the *Communications of the ACM*, because it was such a popular venue for publication, had a queue that had become quite substantial.

MANDELBAUM: A couple of years.

AKERA: Yeah. In the worst case, I've seen three years mentioned. 18 months is what gets cited officially. So there were some issues related to publications in this respect, right?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, and I suspect we will be getting into those later.

AKERA: Yes, and this translates also into the workload issues and such. [Yes.] Okay, it's nice to have this foundation here in any case. So that's great. Thank you.

So I've moved into part two, which is about ACM. We were talking so far about your arrival at ACM. What I'd like to do now is produce a fuller picture of what ACM was like. I don't want to talk just specifically about publications. The question is about ACM as a whole, although publications, both because of your familiarity with it but also because it's a big issue, is clearly part of that story.

So I don't want to exclude publications, but the goal for this phase of the interview can be to get a sense of what ACM looked like at the time that you arrived there. So with that in mind, what were some of the major issues that ACM was facing at the time? This would have been 1975 when you first arrived.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So one major issue was what kind of society should ACM be. So for example, should ACM be a smaller society consisting of 20,000 or 30,000 members but very high-end in academic and corporate research and so on? Or should ACM be more open and eventually be a 100,000- or 200,000-member organization that would include programmers and coders and architects?

AKERA: Yes, I was going to ask this. What is the major difference between these two groups of people? I guess you're saying is that the smaller membership would include some corporate members because U.S. corporations were emphasizing basic and advanced research so much. It's really the top researchers in industry plus the academic researchers talking about state of the art... both in theory as well as the practical aspects of computer design and progress? [Yes.] Or should ACM be a society for computer programmers? Everybody involved in the computing profession in a technical capacity. Would that be correct?

MANDELBAUM: That's correct, and to try to be a society for both groups.

AKERA: Now why did this become an issue for ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Well, what was going on at the time was this explosion in computing and in programming. So one of the questions facing ACM was what kind of society it should be and whether it should reach out towards all the sudden new programmers and software engineers...

AKERA: ...who had no aspirations to do research, or at least little. [Yes.] But they have every aspiration to know the state of the art. [Yes.] So they have an interest and demand for technical information of the sort that's being published, especially in the *Communications* I imagine. [Yes.] Maybe the *Journal* was less interesting to them.

MANDELBAUM: The *Journal*, yeah, too academic. Yeah, but the stuff in the *Communications of the ACM*... So there was always that question about what kind of society. And it's even come up, you know, in the last few years.

AKERA: It does keep coming up again.

MANDELBAUM: It keeps coming up again. Then tied to that, the Publications Board was struggling with the *Communications of the ACM* and the current basket of publications and whether and to what extent they met the needs of the ACM membership.

AKERA: Yes, and when they say that, there is sort of this implicit debate, if I'm correct, between the current members as opposed to the prospective future members in the sense that if you open up ACM, there would be a very different audience. Wasn't that part of the debate?

MANDELBAUM: That was part of it. And it was an agenda item on various Council meetings, the Board of Directors, and the president, Herb Grosch.

AKERA: Yes, I was going to ask more about Herb. Staying along these lines—I don't want to jump right into publications quite yet—in retrospect, all of these issues are quite clear, right?

ACM is a society that needs to make this choice between these two alternatives for growth. To what extent was the ACM leadership fully aware of these issues at the time?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, I think ACM leadership was fully aware at the time.

AKERA: So they knew what was at stake.

MANDELBAUM: A lot of that was pressure from below from the Publications Board, and at the time Stuart Lynn was chairman of the Publications Board. He would bring in pressure to the Council about the need to drastically rethink and to have an entirely different strategy for the publications. The SIGs (or Special Interest Committee (SIC) at that time, before it became SIGs), they were putting pressure to expand and to develop the SIG program, provide more SIGs.

AKERA: Were the SIGs asking for publications at that time? This would have been '77.

MANDELBAUM: No, they were not.

AKERA: They had newsletters, right, but not actual journals.

MANDELBAUM: There were newsletters, right, in print.

AKERA: Were they under the jurisdiction of the Publications Board?

MANDELBAUM: They were, on paper, in the bylaws. The Publications Board did have jurisdiction for publishing. In reality, the Publications Board had delegated this to the SIG Board, to the SIG committees.

AKERA: So they were independently producing their own newsletters... did they have technical content at the time, the newsletters?

MANDELBAUM: Most of the newsletters did have technical content.

AKERA: They did. But they were also used to announce regional meetings and other kinds of things like that?

MANDELBAUM: Right, and the technical content was not peer reviewed or was not reviewed at the level of serious academic peer review.

AKERA: So this also meant that they would not have been regarded as a prestigious publication, as far as tenure and promotion for the academics.

MANDELBAUM: I think it was viewed, certainly back then, that the newsletters were kind of a second order, second level publication. But still, they developed. Later on, some of those newsletters became very important publications within their fields and were recognized for tenure credit. But back then it was not.

AKERA: So maybe one way to get at this story is through specific individuals. You already mentioned Stuart Lynn. Can you tell us a little bit more about his position, what his concerns were, what he wanted to see happen?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So he was chairman, a volunteer position, chairman of the Publications Board. I think academically at that time he was at the University of California Berkeley, and he was both an academic and responsible for computing service. I think he had an associate professorship, but he also was responsible for IT. So he was very, very knowledgeable, and I thought he was the single most influential person in a publications volunteer that we had at the time. He pushed a number of really strategically important decisions and policies, and it was a great pleasure and honor to work with him. One of the things that he initiated was the expansion of the ACM journals, and while he was chairman of the Publications Board, he convened a committee that looked into the structure of ACM [publications].

AKERA: Before we go to that, though, if I can stay right at 1977, when you started, because I think this was happening right around then... A three-year queue for a journal is incredibly long, is that correct? Was that something he was struggling with at the time?

MANDELBAUM: That was part of the issue, the pressure, how to reduce, yeah.

AKERA: Can we spell that out a bit more? What were the various pressures that he was struggling with, prior to his coming up with a solution? What was going on?

MANDELBAUM: Well, one obvious one was the funnel of a vast number of submissions and accepted manuscripts having to be funneled through the production process.

AKERA: Did it complicate the production process at all to have all of these manuscripts coming into the *Communications of ACM*? In other words, things from all the different sub-disciplines of computing were all coming to a single journal. Was that causing challenges for you, challenges for the office?

MANDELBAUM: It was more the challenge for the editor-in-chief for the *Communications of ACM* at that time, Bob Ashenurst. So his challenge was to continue to accept the top papers and commit that they will be published in the *Communications of ACM*... and also calming down irate authors. You know, "When is my paper going to be published? You've had it so long," and so on. So it was not too much of an impact on me other than to try from my side and the ACM staff side to try to argue to get more money so we could publish more pages.

AKERA: Yes, because that would reduce the queue. [Right.] But it then translates into the cost of membership dues and other issues of this sort?

MANDELBAUM: Correct. So there was that kind of tension that would be the point where it impacted my work in terms of convincing the Executive Director.

AKERA: "We need a bigger budget. We've got lots of things coming in. The authors are complaining. They need to get their knowledge out there."

MANDELBAUM: That's right. And from the volunteer standpoint both Stuart Lynn and Bob Ashenurst would agitate within the volunteer structure to get more resources dedicated to publications.

AKERA: Now was this difficult? Was this something that once folks realized what the situation was, things changed easily? Or were there internal tensions within the organization, different attitudes that made this transition difficult or perhaps even difficult to see?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I think it took a little doing, and this is where Stuart and the Publications Planning Committee came into play and became very influential.

AKERA: When was that convened? Do you remember?

MANDELBAUM: The Publications Planning Committee was in existence when I started, so it may have been convened in '75 or '76.

AKERA: So that would have been under Jean Sammet, not Herb Grosch?

MANDELBAUM: That's right, yes. I think Jean took a much stronger interest in the publications than Herb did. Herb had a different agenda, one that was maybe more political, one that was more liberalizing, bringing more members, expanding the membership area.

AKERA: He wanted the 100,000-member society.

MANDELBAUM: I think so. He wanted more members, but he was also very rigorous as well. So he wanted more members, but I think he wanted more higher-end members.

AKERA: I'd like to keep working through specific individuals so that we get different pieces of the ACM story. So Robert Ashenurst was the editor-in-chief of the *Communications of ACM*? Is that correct? [Yes.] What was his position on publications as opposed to Stuart Lynn's?

MANDELBAUM: Well, he was editor-in-chief. He was a member of the Publications Board, and so in the volunteer structure, he reported up to Stuart Lynn and to the Publications Board.

AKERA: Yes. Was his position identical to that of Stuart Lynn's? Or a substantive difference of opinions?

MANDELBAUM: I don't recall that. It was interesting that not only the planning committee but the Publications Board itself were fairly unanimous that some changes had to be made. So Bob Ashenurst wrote an editorial for an issue of the *Communications of ACM* asking about the "JAM," the *Journal for All Members*. "Virtual JAM" was the title, and that's where he raised the question of what should *Communications of ACM* be? It was at that same time that the Planning Committee of which Bob was a member was thinking about those issues and in particular how would the *Communications of ACM* spin off some of its technical sections that had tremendous numbers of manuscripts; and the fact that there were so many high-quality submissions - wouldn't that indicate the need or the success of having a journal dedicated to those topics?

AKERA: Now would it be correct to say that for ACM there was already a model out there? In other words, the IEEE publications already had transactions in specific disciplines, didn't they?

MANDELBAUM: They did.

AKERA: Was that discussed as sort of an obvious model for ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it was discussed obliquely as a possible model.

AKERA: But it sounds to me like there was also a different sort of a commitment because the idea of a *Journal for All Members* suggests that there was a continued desire to keep the publications centralized. Or am I reading this incorrectly?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, but it was posed as a question. Should they be? Could there be a *Journal for All Members*? Could *CACM* be that journal for all members?

AKERA: And what was Lynn's and Ashenhurst's position on this?

MANDELBAUM: That it could be a journal for all members, but in a different way than it had been. So their position, and I was in agreement at that time, was that there should be a spawning.

AKERA: And doesn't this map onto the question of whether you expand the membership, or whether ACM is primarily an academic society, right? [Yes.]

So maybe this is the right time to bring this up. So in April 1977, Stu Lynn as the chair of the ACM Publications Board writes an editorial in the *Communications*. In this piece, he's apparently already in communication with the Council, and he says, "In my view, many of the changes we have attempted over the past few years, they said they've been struggling with this but have foundered for a lack of a long-range plan." And as a consequence, he gets the Council to approve the planning board... what was it called again?

MANDELBAUM: It was the Publications Planning Committee, and they developed ACM's long-range publications plan.

AKERA: So that was the group that was responsible for developing this long-range plan. And I guess Lynn worked with the Council so the committee didn't come up with a vision the Council wouldn't support. So in his note, he goes on to say, "I've sought and obtained Council approval for a set of broad objectives that such a plan should achieve," after which he follows with a couple of specific things. I want to get your reactions on what these things actually meant. He starts by saying, "We need to recognize the strength of ACM publications." What is this saying?

MANDELBAUM: If I recall, the strength of the ACM publications were in the volunteers—the reputation and quality of the editors-in-chief and the editorial boards. So Stuart and the Publications Board felt that the fact that there were high-level people running the journals and so on, should be promulgated and should be promoted.

AKERA: So we have a quality technical journal—we don't want to do anything to hurt that. [Right.] But at the same time, it's partly a “political” statement, right? [Yes.] They're trying to assure the academics who are in control of many of these volunteer committees that both the *Journal* as well as the *Communications* are good; to say that, “We recognize that you've done some wonderful work. We don't want to do anything that would disrupt the quality of the publications,” because part of what they're concerned about is a mass expansion of the membership that may turn the *Communications* and other journals into something else, something that all members can read, but might not remain an academic publication? There were worries to that effect, I think.

The second point, and this seems to be a point of negotiations, was that “the needs of present members come ahead of potential members.” What is this saying?

MANDELBAUM: That clearly played to the Council, and to the more traditional wings.

AKERA: So the academic, research-oriented wing, yes?

MANDELBAUM: Right. That we are not going to do anything radical with the existing publications. We are not going to dumb them down...

AKERA: So it's a promise, a certain commitment. [Yes.] But then the third quote then is this one (and I'm paraphrasing here; these aren't direct quotes): “Every member of ACM must receive technical material and news of the Association.” What is this saying?

MANDELBAUM: That was directed strictly to the *Communications of ACM*. That there has to be some form of regular communication to all members.

AKERA: Hence the original title of the *Communications*, right? [Yes.] Its history is that they created it as something different from the journals so that there can be communication between ACM and their members, between the officers and the membership. [Yes.] So in many ways, *Communications of ACM*, despite being the top journal probably in computer science except for theoretical computer science, it always functioned as a dual use publication. So it also serves as a kind of organizational communications vehicle [Absolutely.], including letters from the president, editorials, commentary about the direction of the field and things of that nature. So it's serving multiple functions. [Absolutely.] So this last statement is an assertion that they want to continue that, when they say both “technical as well as news of the Association.” [Right.] Then Stu Lynn says, “To the extent that it's consistent with the above principles, that there ought to be a financial unbundling of certain of our publications.” So what does this then say?

MANDELBAUM: That tied to... At the time there was a very specific policy and practice where when you joined ACM, you would get *Communications of ACM*.

AKERA: Yes. So that was the one that everybody got.

MANDELBAUM: Everyone got that, right. Plus you then had an option to get one of the other ACM publications.

AKERA: Yes, and wasn't it something like you had a certain number of dollars credit towards the other publications. Maybe that was earlier in ACM's history, but I remember that from one of the other interviews.

MANDELBAUM: Right, that was still in effect. So what Stuart was referring to, what the Publications Board was referring to, was that [we needed] unbundling, meaning you would get *Communications of ACM* and that is all.

AKERA: That's the benefits of membership.

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. And the price of membership would be reduced somewhat, so that you no longer would have an option for a second publication, but if you wanted one, you would then subscribe to something else at whatever the subscription rate was.

AKERA: So in practical terms, that means that there would have been less likelihood that people would have subscribed to the *Journal of the ACM*. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and that was recognized and discussed.

AKERA: And understood that that was what was originally anchoring the theoretical computer science, but theoretical computer science was no longer at the core of the association's identity. Well, it still is at one level, but it's not the most important thing for all of the members anymore.

MANDELBAUM: That's right because at that time, there was this tremendous explosion. There was the explosion in specialization and applications. Computer graphics, human interaction fields were developing, user interfaces were being developed. Databases were being developed as academic courses of study, and developed in terms of practical products.

AKERA: Yes, and the emerging influence of industrial products and product development strategies and such? [Yes.] We skipped over this, but computers by this time are becoming a multi-billion dollar industry, on it's way to becoming the trillion dollar industry that it is today. [Yes.] And it's this massive explosion of the field of computing, which meant that many more people were becoming involved.

The question was how does ACM situate itself? In the early days, computing was more of a theoretical, research-driven discipline, so it made sense that a majority of the members were academics, or top industrial researchers, or others who really wanted to listen to what everyone else was doing so that they... You know, even if they worked for a corporation in whatever management capacity, they knew what the choices were. But as the industry developed, this became less important. You need to know the state of the art in specific areas but there's no need to know the theoretical foundations of the discipline—that's not really where the action was at as far as the technological changes that were happening?

MANDELBAUM: That's right. And the two biggest areas, I recall, where that manifested itself at the time in the *CACM* was programming languages and graphics.

AKERA: Yes. So what becomes SIGGRAPH becomes huge.

MANDELBAUM: Right. SIGGRAPH was developing very quickly.

AKERA: And program languages have a whole cohort of people working on those issues.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, right.

AKERA: [Break] So just to get a fresh cut into this, I'd to ask about a couple of other individuals. Maybe you can tell me a little bit about who they were. I'm going to start with the less likely candidates. So George Dodd, Secretary of ACM at the time, was he somebody that was involved with these issues, someone whom you interacted with?

MANDELBAUM: No, I did not have much interaction at all with George. I mean I remembered him from the Council meetings, but there was very little that I had in the way of interaction or anything.

AKERA: How about Aaron Finerman? He would have been the Treasurer during this period. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I had a little bit more interaction with him because he was also involved in *Computing Reviews* at the time with Jean Sammet.

AKERA: Was he editor-in-chief of the *Reviews*?

MANDELBAUM: No. I believe Aaron was editor-in-chief...he was editor-in-chief of *CACM* way back when.

AKERA: Earlier, so before he stepped into the Treasurer's position? [Yes.] I think Bernie Galler recruited him to be the editor for a while, and then it was passed on. Okay, Daniel McCracken, Vice President. Was he a person involved with these issues at the time?

MANDELBAUM: He was a little bit more involved, and I did have some discussions with him.

AKERA: Can you tell me more about who he was, what he did?

MANDELBAUM: I think he was professionally an IT consultant.

AKERA: Mm-hmm [Yes.], so not an academic, then.

MANDELBAUM: He was not an academic, and this is one of the things I remember that set him apart. He was what I would call a real-world type.

AKERA: Yes, of course. That's what we've been talking about, right?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. He may have had an academic career previously, but by the time I got to ACM and he was coming up the ranks as officer, he was an independent IT consultant.

AKERA: Yes. We actually have an interview with him done by Arthur Norberg, and it's an excellent interview. He went to Union Theological Seminary for a number of years to try to become a minister, but then decided his thing was still computing after all.

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. I remember that.

AKERA: What was he particularly known for?

MANDELBAUM: Arguing with Herb Grosch. [Laughter]

AKERA: Good! That's a topic I'd like to begin to flesh out a bit more. As I understand it, McCracken was well known for writing books on programming and various aspects of computing [Yes.], and in fact produced something like 25 books in the course of his life, many of which became quite well-known. I think he was an independent consultant of sorts and an independent author and writer as a matter of fact. [Yes.] Because he earned such substantial royalty revenues from all of these computer-related books he didn't need to have an academic position or career. He did actually go back into academia at a certain point.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I remember, and in fact I think he ended up teaching at my old school.

AKERA: City College—yeah, that's right. I believe that's exactly right, and immediately after he finished his term as ACM President, I believe. He's vice president then president. Now the interesting thing in the McCracken interview is that it tells the story of how both he and Herb Grosch were petition candidates in 1976. Is that right? Yes? So they are not the candidates that were nominated by the nominating committee, and yet they both managed to win the election. [Yes.] Focusing on Dan first, can you tell us a bit about what that was all about?

MANDELBAUM: I do recall that they were both petition candidates. I don't remember who the official slate was, but I remember all the turmoil and arguing about process and procedures for petition candidates and so on. But I was not very involved in the Council meetings at that time. A lot of this took place before I got there...

AKERA: And that's not what the staff focused on...

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So I was going to say with Dan, it became a bit of office gossip because he developed a relationship with, and eventually married Helen.

AKERA: Yes, that did come up in his interview, and he admits this and says this in the interview. So there's no secret there. But we don't need to delve into that either. On the other hand, I think the election is interesting because it's representative of the exact tension between the academics on the one hand and the others who wanted to expand the membership. [Yes.] But isn't the situation a bit more complicated? In other words, wasn't there a difference between Dan McCracken's position, and what Herb Grosch did or represented with the organization? This is probably more about the organizational lore that you heard as a staff member, and not necessarily what you personally experienced. But can you tell us a little bit of the history that was going on then?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. I think Herb was more political in the sense that he wanted to get ACM and the ACM Council to approve statements or policies tied to issues of that time.

AKERA: So social issues and political issues, not issues about ACM or anything of this nature?

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: Okay, I think have to ask about Herb Grosch. So who was he? There's a lot about Herb in the other interviews, but folks reading this transcript will want to know who this Herb Grosch person was.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. From what I knew of him compared to other past presidents and others... not a lot. I had interaction with him because he was one of the few presidents who was very diligent about writing a president's column every month, and I knew I could always count on Herb not only to send a column but to send a column that would shock me. [Laughter]

AKERA: And everybody else in the membership!

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and that I would have a monthly discussion with him about toning it down. "Do you really want to say it?" And I would always have a monthly crisis of conscience whether to bring Herb's letter to the attention of the Executive Director before it went to print. [Laughter]

AKERA: I think at one point in a letter or editorial somebody writes, "Perhaps we should apply the same peer review standards to the president's letters." Do you recall that incident?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, and then I remember making decisions. As a matter of course I would just simply forward all of Herb's letters to the Executive Director.

AKERA: Yes, you were going to stay out of the politics. [Yes.] If this had to happen, let them fight it out.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. But I was going to say that he was trying— You know, a big part of his agenda was to get the Council to be more politically active. So for example, a major issue Herb was always involved in back then was the Russian computer scientist Anatoly Sharansky, about whom information came to the West that he was arrested and detained and was in a prison camp. He was a computer scientist, and Herb made this a major part of his administration to first get the ACM Council to approve a resolution to take a stance on these types of issues.

AKERA: Now did Herb Grosch have specific experiences with Vietnam-era type protests? Is that where this was coming from?

MANDELBAUM: I honestly don't know about that, but he was very activist and outspoken.

AKERA: But the sense I get from other accounts is that it was not the conventional '60s type protest. [No.] He didn't have those kinds of political commitments, exactly?

MANDELBAUM: No, that's correct.

AKERA: But it was primarily about professional responsibility—activism in that sense, right? [Yes.] That's very interesting.

So what did the ACM membership think of Herb Grosch? I recognize that there isn't any single opinion here. What was his reputation among different kinds of members?

MANDELBAUM: I don't know. There would be some ACM members who would reply to Herb's letters in the *Communications*, letters to the editor and so on, but I don't think there was a tremendous response to his letters. It was more within the ACM Council and among the ACM staff.

AKERA: Caused them angst and all sort of worries?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah. He caused a lot of that.

AKERA: Now did he have his supporters? I mean obviously he was elected president, so there must have been people that supported him.

MANDELBAUM: Oh yeah, yeah. He did have his allies and his supporters. He brought some new volunteers in to ACM.

AKERA: So is it fair to say that it was more the academics that were concerned about Herb's orientation and activities?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I think so, the academics were [not especially concerned].

AKERA: And both in terms of his broadening the membership by expanding the organization, but also because he was kind of a personal embarrassment for ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, he was a loose cannon. And he would go around making these statements both publicly in his letters, and privately. Things like—and he let everybody know—“I was the only guy ever fired twice by Thomas Watson.” [Laughs] I remember that as a classic. I also remember, and I think it may have been in one of his president letters and therefore on the record, where he said there will never be a computer on your desktop. [Laughter]

AKERA: So he made these broad pronouncements. [Yes.] Now to put his efforts in a more favorable light, were there things that he pushed for, things he accomplished that were positive things that people supported and welcomed?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. I think pushing ACM to be active in human rights, like with Sharansky—this got ACM some visibility. I recall it did get ACM a positive comment that this was the right kind of thing for ACM to do, and it got ACM thinking about public policy issues, not just freedom.

AKERA: I think that's all very important, and we can map this out more later, too. But how about his influence on ACM as an organization and also on its publications? The organization first... Did he manage to broaden ACM's membership? Was that a direction that he pushed for?

MANDELBAUM: I think the ACM membership broadened for other reasons.

AKERA: For other reasons. It wasn't him?

MANDELBAUM: It wasn't him I don't think.

AKERA: Did he help break at least?

MANDELBAUM: He did. And I think he tried to get... He pushed the membership committee at the time.

AKERA: Yes, but others already agreed with him. It's just that he was vociferous about it, pushed it perhaps, but this was a change that was about to happen anyway?

MANDELBAUM: Right, yes.

AKERA: How about with the ACM publications? Did he help or hurt them?

MANDELBAUM: I think it was neutral. I don't think Herb had a strong interest in publications.

AKERA: His interest wasn't with the publications. [Yes.] It was really more Stu Lynn and others that managed the transition, supporting the kind of changes that were happening with ACM publications.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. I do remember he was supportive of the direction, but he was not active.

AKERA: So it fit with his vision of ACM, but he was happy to let others do that work?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, exactly.

AKERA: That's very good. So we've already mentioned there's this interesting tension between McCracken and Herb Grosch. So what were they debating about all the time? What was going on between those two?

MANDELBAUM: Well, the social activism of ACM was one. Dan felt ACM should be a little bit more careful and traditional and not make these statements, even though Dan made it clear he personally supported the statement. But from ACM's standpoint, Dan felt ACM should focus on membership, disseminating information...

AKERA: ...its core mission. [Yes.] This is in the McCracken interview, but McCracken comes out as the responsible officer opposite of Herb Grosch. [Yes.] As a consequence, the membership came in behind him. Originally he was a petition candidate and seen by some as sort of an

outsider—I may be getting this wrong. He actually gets elected president over Aaron Finerman. Isn't that right? And he wasn't the nominated candidate for president. I may be getting this story wrong, so people should check the McCracken oral history transcript. But the membership lands up supporting Dan because he does act as a more responsible candidate...

MANDELBAUM: I think if I recall, Aaron was viewed... the perception was Aaron was the establishment candidate. Herb was the loose cannon of the other extreme, and Dan was in the middle so that there was more of a comfort level with Dan rather than the establishment candidate or Herb.

AKERA: The academic and the loose cannon, yes? [Yes.] So Dan eventually steps up as the president and the society accepts him in this role. He's instrumental to ACM's transition in various respects, I guess. [Yes.] That too is in the other transcript. That's great.

Is there anything else about ACM and its publications during this early period, things that you personally... Actually, let me ask it this way: Still focusing on this early period, what was your role in the transition of ACM's publications? Maybe I'm jumping the gun here a little bit. As background, what happened to ACM's publications? So we said that there was a long-range planning committee. What were their recommendations? What happened as a result of their recommendations?

MANDELBAUM: Between the Publications Planning Committee and the Long-Range Publications Plan Subcommittee, there was considerable overlap. Maybe there was one person who was not on both committees. But they came out with an amazing document. Two documents, actually. A long-range plan, which advocated for spinning out from the *Communications of the ACM*, the *Transactions*, and a plan based on what was actually happening technically... They called for the establishment of the *Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems*, and the *Transactions on Graphics*.

AKERA: So those were the first two *Transactions* that ACM put out?

MANDELBAUM: For the new one, yeah, those were the first. Then the second document that they came out with was a matrix of the types of publications that ACM should have based on certain levels of peer review or non peer review. Part of that matrix involved what they called vertical and horizontal publications. The vertical publications were to be the *Transactions on Programming Languages*, *Transactions on...*

AKERA: So discipline-based divisions.

MANDELBAUM: Discipline-based, right. Horizontal publications were to be what we called some of the more "popular" publications. They could be magazines. They could be sections within the *Communications of the ACM*... for instance, a computing practices section that we would develop that would appeal to the non-academic. So those two documents...

AKERA: ...were foundational for clearing the confusion over what ACM should produce? [Yes.] They made it so every constituent within ACM had a publication they could align with, a

clear role in the organization, which would in turn help to assure ACM's continuity as a viable organization that held all the different groups together.

MANDELBAUM: Right, and to allow ACM to grow. By having those documents approved by the Council, it was in effect saying ACM should expand and grow and be more than just the elite.

AKERA: Yes, and allow growth both in the direction of the more specialized folks in the various disciplines, but also the more popular... the larger number of programmers who would read, primarily, just the *Communications of the ACM*. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. A second order effect was that the *Communications of the ACM* should be broadened or liberalized to include content that was not considered scholarly—

AKERA: So different standards of peer review, as you had mentioned. [Yes.] Were the pieces still peer reviewed?

MANDELBAUM: The articles? Yes.

AKERA: But different kinds of contents were allowed.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, and that non-peer review content should be allowed in *Communications of the ACM*.

AKERA: So news-worthy sort of findings and things, yes?

MANDELBAUM: Right. And at the same time, there was a redefinition, or a new definition of the kinds of publications ACM could put out.

AKERA: So the obvious follow-on question is what did this mean in terms of the work you had to do as Director of Publications at ACM?

MANDELBAUM: I remember even before those documents were approved, we, myself— John McCagney was at that time the ACM comptroller, the financial guy. We had a tremendous amount of financial analysis to do evaluating the impact of what we called unbundling, the financial impact. Then I also had a lot of work to do in planning how we were going to do these two new *Transactions*, how we were going to restructure the *Communications of the ACM*, because part of the committee recommendation was to give *Communications of the ACM* a new image, a new look and feel, which in effect meant a new design, a new cover.

AKERA: I noticed that change.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and some new editorial department such as this computing practices department that would publish more interesting types of articles.

AKERA: Now did this entail any shift in responsibilities from the volunteers to the ACM staff? Did that mean that you guys landed up with more of the responsibilities or was it still mostly volunteer-based still?

MANDELBAUM: It was still mostly volunteers, but there were the beginnings of a shift because it was realized that the volunteers could not manage or write or run a computing practices section, a section that consists of articles that could be interviews, that could be case studies, that could be more practical. The volunteers realized they could not do that.

AKERA: So the staff got more involved in those kinds of pieces that are different from the traditional academic articles.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So a new position was authorized for the *Communications of the ACM*: Computing Practices Department Editor.

AKERA: This was a staff position at the headquarters? [Yes.] Who filled that office initially?

MANDELBAUM: The first person hired was a fellow by the name of John Seaman, and he had a long history I recall of being a writer and a journalist of technical material. So he was brought in and he was expected to recruit articles or write them himself, which he did. The computing practices section lasted for maybe a year with John, and then he left. Then we decided to recruit volunteers for that.

AKERA: So go back to a volunteer position. [Yes.] We'll talk about this more in the second interview session. But what was the size of the ACM publications staff at the time before these changes?

MANDELBAUM: I think there were four or five, including myself, full-time.

AKERA: And how did this change historically? I assume it expanded over time.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it expanded slowly.

AKERA: So somebody for each of the *Transactions* at first, or one for both?

MANDELBAUM: No. We hired for the *Communications of the ACM* a kind of general editor because there were so many different departments to help manage all that. Then we added one or two positions to help with the growing transaction, but that was a little later on.

AKERA: Just to establish an end point, for reference, how many people were in the publications office at ACM at the time that you retired?

MANDELBAUM: I think there was something on the order of...total number of people involved in publications was about 20.

AKERA: Twenty, okay. So that establishes the overall trajectory. [Yes.] We'll fill that in also during the second session.

So there must have been other things involved in this transition in the basic structure of ACM publications. Was there anything that you contributed directly in terms of helping with the transition, helping with the ideas that became part of the *Transactions* that we can place in the historical records?

MANDELBAUM: I don't recall. They left it up to me to determine what the new *Transactions* should look like—the cover design and the inside and so on. I worked with a managing editor and we worked with the vendor at the time to develop them.

AKERA: So it sounds like the policy decisions were made by the Publications Board and the planning committees and they basically tasked you with its implementation. [Yes.] But at least at that stage you hadn't specifically contributed to the basic decisions about the structure of the publications. [Right.] You probably did offer your opinions and advice in regard to this?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. But by the time I started at ACM, the Committee and the Board were fairly deep and very well into the process, so there were already drafts of the strategic plan and drafts of the publication framework defining horizontal and vertical.

AKERA: In considering the time, what I'd like to do is shift over to this one other exercise that I'd like to do today, partly because that will help us set up the second session in terms of what the major topics for our conversation will be.

So what I'd like to do is to have you periodize the 30 years that you spent at ACM in terms of:

- a) the major changes in ACM publications, the structure of the publications, the publications office, etc.,
- b) the major changes in ACM as a society, as an organization, its composition, membership, areas of interest, etc.,
- c) and then changes that were going on in computer science, things like graphics getting really big, or programming languages ascending, which we've already started.

And there are of course interactions across these categories over time. So if we can just map out these three parallel tracks for now, and maybe chat a little bit about where we see the most interesting intersections happening, I will use this as a basis for structuring the second session of the interview.

So with regards to the publication office and the structure of publications, what were the major changes that happened between the time that you got there and the end of 2008?

MANDELBAUM: Let's say from the time I became Director of Publications, the expansion of the *Transactions* and the liberalization of *Communications of the ACM*. So that's one.

AKERA: Okay. We can just start with a start date. I'll assume the previous dates. So when's the next major transition for the ACM publications?

MANDELBAUM: So let's say that first period was from 1980 to 1987, and then the second, beginning 1987, was further changes to the *Communications of the ACM* and the continued growth and expansion of the *Transactions*.

AKERA: So more titles. [Yes.] How many titles did that grow to in this timeframe?

MANDELBAUM: I would say at least another 10-12 titles.

AKERA: By what time?

MANDELBAUM: That would be between '87 and I'd say '95. Then from '95 to 2000, there was an actual lull. There was actually...

AKERA: ...so no radical changes. ACM publications are stagnating a bit because its membership level is also stagnating a little bit. Would that be correct?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and at the same time I'm thinking in terms of the *Transactions*, because very much around that time, 1995-2000, there was actually a lull or a stoppage of new publications. We can go into that another time, the reasons for that. But the major changes at that time, was again, the *CACM*...

—*—

October 31, 2009. Session 1, Tape 2, Side B

There was an actual policy decision to remove the volunteer editor-in-chief from the *CACM* and to shift the entire responsibility for editorial content to the staff.

AKERA: Okay, so that is a major change. [Yes.] Then from 2000 onwards, I think I know what the changes are, but...

MANDELBAUM: Well, yeah. Then from 2000 onward, the reestablishment of an aggressive *Transactions* growth program and let us say from 2005 onwards, a reevaluation of *Communications of the ACM*.

AKERA: Actually, what I thought you were going to say, and I don't know if that's in 2000 or 2005, but I'm actually the associate editor-in-chief of the *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, and this was a time when many academic journals began thinking about electronic sales and distribution of their publications. I know this isn't quite the right language, but once the Internet sales of journal articles starts, this also really changed the business model. I managed to find some of the presentation slides online that you put together on this topic. So maybe you can just say a word or two about what this transition was about.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I planned on addressing that later on. The change from print to online and the development of the ACM Digital Library probably saved ACM as a whole in terms of its financial situation. So that is in the timeframe 1995 to 2000, the planning and development and

implementation of the ACM Digital Library. And then from 2000 forward, the growth in sales and the impact on the business model of the Digital Library.

AKERA: Yes, that's what I thought. That's great. So if we can move on to the second column—and we'll see if we can through all three—the second track is changes in the ACM organization. You can talk about it either in terms of how it maps onto publications or just in general. But what's the basic periodization of ACM starting with the late '70s?

MANDELBAUM: So I think going back, starting with I would say in the mid to late '80s, the growth and increasing influence of the SIGs within ACM.

AKERA: Which maps onto the growth of *Transactions*, I would imagine.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. There are some parallels there, but there were also divergent paths.

AKERA: Yes. Let me note to explore that in both ways.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. And then the impact of the series of executive directors. After Sydney Weinstein... Sydney left in... I don't know. We can check. But it was Dick Hespos, then Joe DeBlasi, then John White. So when I was thinking about this for the interview now, I thought that each of those folks should be looked at as an era, and their influence and their impact on ACM in general and on the publications. So I would be prepared to talk about how each of the executive directors impacted or influenced ACM.

AKERA: Shaped ACM and its publications, yes? [Yes.] So that's a good way to periodize it. So I'll look up additional information and organize the interview accordingly.

Okay, now changes in computer science. What were the major shifts? I'm using computer science broadly, including products and technologies.

MANDELBAUM: Again, I don't recall the mapping chronologically, but there was, beginning in the mid to late '80s, this huge growth in computer science in academia. The number of Ph.D.-granting institutions, the number of undergraduate and graduate majors in computer science, the huge expansion...

AKERA: The bubble in the early '80s...

MANDELBAUM: That's right, followed by the bursting of the bubble where computer science enrollment dropped...

AKERA: So enrollment is like this. [Gesturing like a roller coaster; Laughter] But then another whole wave in the '90s with the Internet boom, and then a crash again.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So that sine wave.

AKERA: Yes. Okay, so we'll map that out as well. But intellectually, what was happening? As Director of Publications you saw all the different publication streams, right? [Yes.] And you saw

that in the beginning you had computer graphics and computer languages, but they must have reached a certain plateau... Well actually, computer graphics I imagine didn't; it remains active today. As you get to the *Transactions* and the SIGs become more active, I supposed there are different channels for thought, and so there's perhaps less of a focus on trends, as each discipline has its own identity. [Yes.] On the other hand, software engineering became a major issue, didn't it?

MANDELBAUM: I was just going to say, yeah. So from that intellectual standpoint, the growth and development of software engineering, which starts roughly in the mid '80s, and we started a *Transaction* on software engineering.

AKERA: Now some people will date that back to '68 with the NATO conference on software engineering, but then it continues to develop and becomes a bigger in terms of numbers? [Yes.] And with the '80s boom in computer science enrollment... this is related to the personal computer revolution, right? [Yes.] So it's the proliferation of computers and the development of off the shelf packaged software systems, as well as proprietary commercial systems based on the PC platform that really expands the software industry. A whole new set of professionals are coming in—this must have affected ACM, the field and its structure.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. Now the other intellectual development within computer science—computer/human interaction, user interface design became much more important.

AKERA: Yes. Everybody has their own computers, and this too was tied to the underlying technology.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, right, the look and feel stuff.

AKERA: Then once you get into the '90s with the Internet, there's a whole new set of things, right? Sort of web-based, search engines, data mining, and all that kind of stuff. So that's the basic trajectory in computing? [Yes.]

So what I'd like to do is take all of this and see if I can find interesting ways to ask questions that are based on this map. Ask about separate episodes, but also especially about how the broad changes affect ACM publications and ACM as an organization. You have various insights into this, I think.

So with the time remaining, I would love to get the rest of your personal history, to make sure that's recorded in the transcript of the first session.

Maybe just in an outline format, can you tell me about your own career during your 30 years at ACM? What were the major events in those 30 years for you, personally, at ACM as Director of Publications?

MANDELBAUM: I think the expansion of the *Transactions*, to begin with. It was a very exciting time. The Publication Board identified new *Transactions*, based on the number of submissions to the *CACM*.

AKERA: Meaning a new *Transactions on X*, and “can you make it happen for us?”

MANDELBAUM: Right, yeah. So the Board would identify an appropriate editor-in-chief and ask this person to write a proposal for the new *Transactions*. I would collaborate with them.

AKERA: You would work with them in writing the proposal?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. We would provide the financial and marketing analysis and so on and help them make it happen.

AKERA: And I’d imagine over time you became an expert at that in the sense that instead of just serving primarily in a support capacity, you really started to have a more advisory role in the sense of knowing how to launch a new *Transactions*. Would that be fair to say?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I think that would be fair to say. The Board came to rely on me, for which I was grateful. They had confidence that if I felt this was viable and we could do it and so on.

AKERA: Yes. So you became trusted in the organization, especially because the volunteers were volunteers. You were the permanent staff member who had been with the organization for 10, 15, then 20 years, and by a certain point you knew what you were doing?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that’s right. So I was grateful that the Board had the confidence not only in me but in the publications staff and the larger staff at ACM—marketing and finance and everyone else—that if they felt comfortable with the technical aspects of the proposal and the individual who putting forward the proposal, they would just say, “Okay, we approve. Mark, go ahead.”

AKERA: Now was your responsibility always just in publications? Or as you matured within the organization—there were, after all, several executive directors, whereas you had been there the entire time—did your duties, informally or otherwise, expand over time so that you were responsible or at least advisory to other aspects of ACM and its operations?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, over time. It would depend on the executive director. I did become more of an advisor in other areas, giving my opinion, whether with regards to membership campaigns or conferences. What happened over time, the senior executive level of ACM—you know, myself and director of conferences and the director of membership (and I can name names) and the administration—we became sort of like a cabinet to the Executive Director. So for example, Pat Ryan who came up through the ranks to become Director of Administration and now is currently COO; Russell Harris, Finance; Lillian Israel who has been Director of Membership and Marketing; Donna Baglio, Director of Conferences and working with the SIGs. So we became the cabinet for the purpose of making various decisions.

AKERA: So the ACM organizational headquarters itself really matured as an entity? [Yes.] You know, in the earlier history, it seems like the volunteer computer scientists dominated the organization and were calling the shots. The staff was there to offer support. But over time, ACM really matured as a professional society and organization. And you all collectively became

the executive officers of the organization responsible for the continued success of ACM as a society.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, right.

AKERA: Who are some of the people you enjoyed working with the most?

MANDELBAUM: I know it sounds corny: I enjoyed working with everybody. I mean it was great.

AKERA: That's great. I can tell this is real sincere from your personality as well.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I mentioned this earlier. One of the great legacies is the people at ACM. How much I learned from them and how much they were willing to take the time to explain, and sometimes argue, and just educate me. I'll always be personally and professionally grateful for that. So I enjoyed working with each of the executive directors. They each had their own personal style, and I took it as a challenge to adapt to their style and give them what they wanted and so on. In particular, each executive director brought a particular viewpoint. So Dick Hespos for example was a lot of fun and sort of let things be—very much hands-off.

AKERA: Let the staff sort of run things?— [Laughter]

MANDELBAUM: Let the staff—yeah, yeah. That was great, but like anything, maybe too much hands-off. Joe Deblasi coming from the IBM environment came in with a different perspective, one of greater control, more hands-on, and that had tremendous advantages for the organization.

AKERA: So you can go forward, or wherever?

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. And John White, also bringing his particular management style, one sort of in between the other two. Generally hands-off, but getting involved where needed.

AKERA: And giving direction where it's needed. [Yes.] That's neat.

MANDELBAUM: Each of the executive directors was fun to work with.

AKERA: Well, I will definitely ask more about during the next session.

PART I.3: PERSONAL REMINISCENCES / LATER CAREER

AKERA: I want to see if I can get this much in this session: Would you be interested in sharing any of your personal life history, just for the record, for the time you were working at ACM? You mentioned you had your first child in 1979.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, the intertwining of the personal and professional. You know, we unbundled [the publications], and we created the first *Transactions*, on programming languages and systems, which gave us the acronym, TOPLS or TOPLAS depending on how one

pronounced it. My daughter was born in May 1979 and we unbundled at around the same time. So we created these buttons where I had a picture of my daughter as a baby with a blanket from the waist down and it said, “ACM. We are unbundled and TOPLAS.” [Laughter] I should have saved a few of those!

AKERA: Sure, sure. And anything else from your family history? You’ve always lived in this area?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. So it was at the same time as I was growing at ACM and ACM was growing. The family was growing with three kids, and at that time, I thought because of the growth in ACM I started traveling a lot: going to ACM conferences, going to professional publishing conferences, and going to meetings. So that started to become an issue... it would become a much bigger issue later on when the Digital Library was created and when I had the responsibility for negotiating and selling Digital Library to consortium governments all over the world.

AKERA: Now it sounds like you’ve lived in New York the whole time. You moved out and found your own apartment with your family and started a family. In Brooklyn?

MANDELBAUM: No, no, no. When I got married in August 1975, we moved to an apartment in Fort Lee, New Jersey, and then in 1980 shortly after my daughter was born, we moved to a house further out in suburban New Jersey, Matawan.

AKERA: So you were commuting in to the city from there?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I was commuting in. And I actually lived less than two miles from the old Bell Labs facility in Holmdel, New Jersey. Many of my neighbors were engineers and scientists at the Labs, and they knew I was Director of Publications for ACM. So I would be out, for example, in the summer cutting the grass, and: “Hey Mark, this issue of *Communications* stinks!” [Laughter]

AKERA: Oh dear! Couldn't get away from it! [Yes.] Well, I’m sure you also got compliments for many of the issues as well.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, we got compliments, too, but it was just funny. I will say, later on, unfortunately what happened with Bell Labs and how a lot of these guys— you know, they closed down the Labs and they laid off people and a lot of these neighbors unfortunately were out of work.

AKERA: Let me ask some questions about your retirement and what happened after that. First, what made you decide to retire?

MANDELBAUM: Well, it was several things. I think the travel was an issue. I was doing a lot of it. We were doing so much business in the Pacific, in Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Thailand. I was going over there a lot, and these are 18-, 20-hour flights.

AKERA: It just taxes you as you get older too, I’d imagine.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. So I was feeling run down from that, and I felt that also the Digital Library was for me, both professionally and personally, a culmination. And I just didn't see anything on the horizon that would match up to this.

AKERA: That was big enough.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, big enough, and I thought it was sort of just more of the same old.

AKERA: Was your intent to fully retire at that point then?

MANDELBAUM: At that point, yeah. I thought I would fully retire, and maybe do some consulting on the side. But I thought I would just retire.

AKERA: And again, that was in December 2008? [Yes.] So the end of the calendar year. [Right, yes.] So what did you do right after your retirement?

MANDELBAUM: Well, actually, it was in November 2008. I think my last official day at ACM was like the 30th of November or something like that. So I took it easy for a day or two. [Laughter]

AKERA: And then signed yourself up with another agency! [Laughter]

MANDELBAUM: I didn't want to do that, but I let people know. I let colleagues know that I was retiring, and I don't mean this in a bragging kind of way at all, but I did almost immediately get offers for either full-time or half time or consulting. I got quite a few.

AKERA: Many people knew.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And this is another appreciation for ACM that I was in a position that allowed me to develop a name in technical publishing.

AKERA: Yes, and it was a supportive network, with many people...?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So I realized that maybe retirement was premature, in view of all of this. So I considered a few things, and I happened to know the owner and publisher of a small commercial engineering publishing company, publishing journals and books in mechanical and chemical engineering and physics and so on. So I had known the owner for a number of years, so I went to work with them on a half-time basis consulting on digital library sales negotiations. That was in January. I started January 1st.

And then I got a call from Professor Imrich Chlamtac. We had known each other for a long time from ACM. He was very involved in IEEE Communication Society and the ACM SIGMOBILE and SIGCON and had run a number of ACM conferences. So we had known each other for a while, and he said he was involved in this non-profit European-based organization.

AKERA: The one based in Budapest?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, the office is in Budapest. They're officially incorporated in Belgium, but the office is in Budapest and there was a facility in Trento, northern Italy. ICST was the name of the organization that was formed. So he said they have 70 conferences and he had 30 journals lined up with editors in chief and editorial boards, and needed somebody to run the publishing operation. We talked a lot, and I thought it would be an interesting possibility. And again, it was originally on a half-time basis.

AKERA: Was it originally in a consulting capacity or did you actually accept the directorship?

MANDELBAUM: It was in a consulting capacity but with the title, Director of Publications.

AKERA: And with a half-time appointment [Yes.], which in practical terms meant that you could be over there half the time and back in the States part of the time?

MANDELBAUM: Well you know what? It actually was just half time.

AKERA: However you chose to define it.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, that was the agreement. So between the half-time work for the small commercial publisher and the half time with the non-profit, I was back on a full-time basis. It very quickly became clear that over the next couple of months I could not do both.

AKERA: If nothing else because of the travel.

MANDELBAUM: The traveling, yeah, and the need for me to be in Europe at least two weeks out of the month. So skipping and glossing over things, I severed my relationship with the small commercial publisher in order to focus full-time. In September there was some management turnover. The executive director at the time left the company, and Imrich initiated some conversations with me about me taking it over. So I am now full-time as Executive Director and Acting Director of Publications.

AKERA: The job doesn't go away! [Laughter] That makes sense. Do you have any final thoughts or comments with regard to your overall history?

MANDELBAUM: Well, other than my great admiration for ACM and personally what it had meant to me and to have been associated with ACM during the growth and the development of the journals and then *Communications of the ACM* and most recently the Digital Library, it's been a tremendous experience.

AKERA: So ACM was always a dynamic organization.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, very dynamic.

AKERA: I'm sure ACM absolutely benefitted from all your dedicated effort and your commitment and wisdom. So on behalf of ACM I will say that we appreciate everything you did for the society.

MANDELBAUM: I don't mind that this is for the record now, but I would have done it for free, as a volunteer! [Laughter]

AKERA: Thank you very much, Mark, for this interview.

December 29, 2009. Session 2, Tape 1, Side A

AKERA: Again, I'm speaking with Mark Mandelbaum, former Director of Publications at ACM, and the current Executive Director/Director of Publications for the Institute for Computer Science, Social Informatics, and Telecommunications, a European nonprofit organization located in Budapest. The interview is being conducted by Atsushi Akera, faculty member at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

So Mark, the focus of today's interview will be on the ACM organization, and we'd like to take advantage of the fact that you're somebody who was there for 30 years and therefore have an extensive knowledge of the organization and everything it went through during the past three decades.

As far as the structure of this session, what I'd like to focus on is to

- First ask you about some of the ACM presidents that you remember most;
- Then talk about ACM's executive directors, and talk a little bit about other ACM staff
- And then return to your contributions to ACM, focusing both on ACM publications as well as the specific work you did with the Digital Library
- Then talk more generally about your segue into the position that you currently hold.

There have been many other interviews, so we don't need to catch everything. What I'd really like to do is fish out some of your most vivid memories, your sense of who the key people were in the history of the organization, particularly with regards to the ACM presidency. And although we've covered some of this material in the previous interview, what I'd like to do is to start again with the early years.

PART II.1: ACM Presidents

AKERA: So when you arrived at ACM, who were the first presidents you encountered? What were some of the legacies of past presidents, the people that folks spoke about as being important individuals for having given shape to, or definition to ACM?

MANDELBAUM: I would say Jean Sammet was the first president that I had both heard about and read about. I did not meet Jean during her presidency, but I met Jean not too long after I started at ACM. Jean and I began what was a very long and very wonderful relationship. Jean was involved in a number of publications-related activities such as the *ACM Computing Reviews*, the *ACM Guide to Computing Literature*, and the *Annals of the History of Computing*. Over the years, Jean and I have had extensive conversations about all kinds of ACM publishing activities and areas of where and what ACM should be publishing. So Jean was the first president I came in contact with, but as I said, not during her presidency; only afterwards did we have this extensive communication and ongoing relationship.

AKERA: So it sounds like she was different in some ways than some of the other past presidents. I've heard through the other interviews that many presidents would serve a term, but then sort of withdraw from the organization or find some other functions. Was she unique as far as remaining involved with ACM for a long period of time?

MANDELBAUM: That is correct, yes.

AKERA: There were the interactions you had with her. Was she known for other kinds of contributions to ACM beyond the publications?

MANDELBAUM: Oh yes, Jean had a long history of service to ACM, certainly before I arrived at ACM, and throughout my tenure at ACM Jean had always been active and involved in several different areas.

AKERA: Were there some ways in particular that she made a strong contribution to ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Well she certainly made tremendous contributions to the field via her seminal book on the history of programming languages and with the *Tower of Babel*. It has been reprinted millions of times.

AKERA: That's right, because as a historian I know she was quite dedicated to history, and that she helped develop historical interest in software as opposed to hardware. Did her interest in software carry over into the way that she wanted ACM to go, or do you think it was consistent with where the organization was headed already in general?

MANDELBAUM: I think Jean's ability and familiarity with software drove her personality and her style with ACM. She was extremely logical, extremely algorithmical, and very dedicated to ACM. In particular, to ACM publications, to *Computing Reviews*, the magazine that offers critical reviews of books and articles published in computer science. And not necessarily only ACM, but reviews of the key works in the field. I believe Jean was the original editor-in-chief or maybe the second editor-in-chief after Aaron Finerman. But she was always involved in that, and in the *ACM Guide to Computing Literature*, which is the taxonomy and bibliographic database.

AKERA: What things did Jean seem particularly passionate about?

MANDELBAUM: Going with quality.

AKERA: So the quality of programming, the quality of academic work.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. And the quality of ACM publications, absolutely.

AKERA: Do you have any stories you can share with us, along those lines?

MANDELBAUM: [Chuckles] Where do I begin? Often when we would have some disagreement about some publications issue or something related to an ACM publication, Jean would call me. Or if she read something in the *Communications of the ACM*. She would start the call with, and I quote, "Mark, I know you don't care about the quality of ACM publications,

but...” [Laughter] Then she would go into her complaint, or what the issue was. And there would always be a logic behind it, and often my response would be, “This is the way it’s done in publishing,” or, “These are the extenuating circumstances,” and so on.

AKERA: Now there must have been an age difference. She was significantly older than you when you started?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I don’t know her age, but she was well into her career. In fact I think she had some time, maybe in the early to mid ’90s, when she “retired” from ACM and was on her own, writing.

AKERA: I’m curious about how your working relationship with her matured over time, as you went from a brand new editor into somebody that’s much more accomplished within the organization.

MANDELBAUM: I think it was kind of a normal maturing, because at some point it was not Jean and I having discussions and arguments, but it was Jean and I together in the sense of “things have changed, it’s not like it used to be.” So instead of Jean and I going at it, it was Jean and I on the same side against the newcomers and all of them.

AKERA: Any other thoughts or recollections about Jean that you’d like to share at this point?

MANDELBAUM: No, other than I really appreciated the time that she spent—and she spent a lot of time [with me] and she would talk to me about her view of the profession and what ACM should be doing in publishing, or should not be doing. So I really valued our interactions.

AKERA: Now I’m going to focus on the other presidents from this early the period, focusing on those who were there right before or as you arrived. So, first, what was the dynamic among the different ACM presidents at the time? Did they all share the same vision? Were there differences?

MANDELBAUM: Oh yes, there were big differences from one to the next. A good example of that is the Herb Grosch presidency, where Herb felt both personally and professionally that ACM should take a very strong political and social stand, and that ACM cannot hide in the Ivory Tower or have its organizational head in the sand when at that time there were big issues in human rights. What was then the Soviet Union and its persecution of scientists in general and Anatoly Sharansky, a computer scientist, in particular. Herb used his personality and his position as president to drive ACM to take actual positions with respect to the treatment of these people in the Soviet Union.

AKERA: Can you tell us a bit more about that process? Was he broadly successful? Was there a lot of resistance from the membership? How did those conversations unfold?

MANDELBAUM: I think initially there was push back.

AKERA: Really sort of an academic push back, to say that we’re an academic organization—we may be politically involved, individually, but we shouldn’t use our society to push those views.

MANDELBAUM: That's right. Particularly on the part of the ACM Council, the governing body. Herb on several occasions was able to get the Council to agree on a resolution of some kind, a political resolution either condemning the Soviet Union's practices or encouraging the Russian Academy of Science to let Sharansky come to the United States. Herb was able to get several of those kind of political resolutions.

AKERA: For the Council itself to make those resolutions, after a period of debate I imagine.

MANDELBAUM: That's right.

AKERA: Which probably made for interesting meetings. Now what was the scope of his "activism," so that we're not speaking abstractly about this. This would be the mid- to late-'70s, so the primary political issues were...?

MANDELBAUM: The primary political issue for him was the Soviet Union. There were a couple of other issues where Herb tried to push the organization to take a stand on but ACM did not.

AKERA: This is already after Vietnam, and so there is no longer the direct influence of antiwar activism. But was there carryover of sorts?

MANDELBAUM: I don't think Vietnam was an influence at the time. Perhaps the more general influence was concern about the role of computers in society, and privacy—that was beginning to become an issue then.

AKERA: Now with regards to the Soviet Union, what he's pushing for is really about academic freedom, isn't it? To protect Soviet scientists and the principle of scientific freedom in a totalitarian state. But did he pick up the other issues you mentioned? So was he also active with regard to privacy, for example?

MANDELBAUM: I think there were some, if I recall correctly, there were some attempts and some discussions about ACM taking a stand on privacy of some kind.

AKERA: We spoke a little bit before the tape started running about special interest groups, in particular the SIG on political and social responsibility. Was that a group that was particularly active during this period? Did they in some way fuel the agenda for Herb? Or was it Herb Grosch who had his own agenda, with the SIG operating separately?

MANDELBAUM: I think that was before that group...

AKERA: ...before the real active period of that group?

MANDELBAUM: Right. I think it was Herb pushing, and there were one or two other Council members at the time who felt passionate about these issues.

AKERA: If Jean Sammet and Herb Grosch are two nodes in the diversity of presidents, who else would you pick as representing yet another point of view?

MANDELBAUM: I think Peter Denning.

AKERA: Can you tell us more about who Peter Denning was, and what change he represented?

MANDELBAUM: I think Peter represented an interesting combination. On the one hand, the point of view of a more traditional academic organization for ACM.

AKERA: What was Peter Denning's background?

MANDELBAUM: Peter's technical background was in operating systems, and he wrote a very seminal book and important papers and book on operating systems.

AKERA: Working out of which university?

MANDELBAUM: He was at Purdue for many years, and I think he was Chair of the Computer Science Department for a while at Purdue. Then he went to the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA, where he was head of the Department and head of an institute for computer science research. Then he was at George Mason University, in Fairfax, Virginia.

[Recording paused.]

AKERA: So we were talking about Peter Denning and his difference in style. He was an academic from Purdue University's Computer Science Department, and then eventually at the Naval Postgraduate School. What style did he represent for ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Peter was on the one hand a traditionalist as far as the role of what ACM should be and should do with respect to being a scientific and professional society.

AKERA: Could you be a bit more specific? So what would ACM's function be under that vision?

MANDELBAUM: ACM's function would *not* be one of social activism, and that ACM's function would be simply to encourage the best research dissemination through the ACM publications and the ACM conferences.

AKERA: Did he take any steps towards increasing the development of new special interest groups, the development of new publications that would tend to favor greater research and specialization?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, Peter did come from out of the SIGs, in particular SIGOPS, the operating systems one. He worked hard to give the SIGs more autonomy and to give the SIGs more recognition of the important role they played within ACM. At the same time, what I thought was interesting about Peter and his tenure was he also tried to get ACM more into the real world in terms of recognizing the need in the academic community to develop both a

computer science and software course of study that would prepare the student for the real world as well as give them a solid background in theoretical and fundamental computer science.

AKERA: I'm curious about what issues were buried within that conversation. I'm studying the history of engineering education right now, and there's this definite tension there where you want to provide a stronger scientific foundation—all the rigor and the analytical approaches in a four-year program—but at the same time to say that industry has these specific demands, that the students have to have a practical orientation because they're not just scientists. So there can be very different things pulling on an individual, and curriculum. So what do you think was at the heart of the conversation within ACM? How did they strike that balance?

MANDELBAUM: One of his interests, personal and professional through ACM was computer science education, so while on the one hand trying to maintain the traditional academic society approach for ACM, he was also trying to work within the Education Board and Education Committee to change the curricula.

AKERA: There was a major curriculum proposal back in '68, so what changes were necessary beyond that vision?

MANDELBAUM: Obviously I wasn't there in '68, but later on part of Peter's agenda when he was president and after he left the presidency was to recognize that in addition to fundamental computer science there was the field of information systems, and the needs of the business world. That perhaps in addition to students learning about algorithms and data structures and stuff like that, that they also understand applications development and systems development and the role and the relationship of computing—not computer science but computing.

AKERA: One of the things we did last time at the end of the session was to create a chart of the different periods based on ACM's publications, ACM's development, and then changes in computer science. Was this one of the crossroads for computer science, as far as especially the focus on applications? So if we put the time period correctly, so Peter Denning is the president between '80 and '82, this is a time when the fear of the Soviet Union is beginning to recede, threat of global competition, we're past the second oil crisis, Japan is number one and coming up on the horizon. So really the industrial competitiveness, the strength of our industry becomes more of an issue. Was this the context in which Peter Denning was making a shift towards really saying we've got to not just be great at science, but we have to be able to develop the applications, develop software systems.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I think it is correct to put it that way. Peter brought a realization that there is an outside world.

AKERA: And this probably wasn't just his idea alone, right?

MANDELBAUM: Right. I don't think it was Peter himself, but there were others on the Council and throughout the ACM volunteer hierarchy that then encouraged this change and supported Peter's view.

AKERA: Let me ask. You have the Council, which is made up of volunteers; and then you have the ACM staff. Was the staff also involved in these conversations about future directions for ACM? Or was that really what the academics and the others took care of?

MANDELBAUM: That occurred more on the Council and the volunteer level. At that time, still in the '80s, staff was considered subordinate to and in a service capacity to the volunteers. In fact Peter kind of started the trend—to depend on and rely on the advice of the professional staff, so it really did start with Peter. But up until then, staff should be seen and not heard, something like that [laughs].

AKERA: I know that the one other name that comes up during this period is Dan McCracken. There is a separate interview of him on tape, so we don't need to go into any detail. But it seems to me that he would represent another pole in this constellation.

MANDELBAUM: I think Dan preceded Peter. Dan was in between Herb Grosch and Peter Denning. What was interesting about Dan was that he was not an academic. He did not have the kind of academic credentials Peter would have wanted for an ACM president.

AKERA: We spoke about Dan a bit last time: that he was a well-known author for publishing a book on FORTRAN, among other things. And he was also a write-in candidate where he announced that he was going to run against the will of the nominating committee, which I presume was more “traditional” in the way we've been speaking about it. What constituent did Dan McCracken appeal to? Why was he so popular, other than the fact that he published books everybody recognized?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I think that was a big part of it. And the fact that he was different, coming from the business world, the first president like that. And that he seemed to be a kind of relaxed person after Herb Grosch's term. A low-key guy: did not have a need to put himself in front of the organization, to puff himself up or anything like that. Kind of a quiet president, and worked on a number of fundamental issues at the time: the SIGs, the development of the special interest groups, and the relation of the SIGs to the rest of ACM.

AKERA: Especially the SIG related to data processing, the “business” side of ACM, is that right?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I mean there were some issues—again, the SIGs, much like a child growing up and wanting more independence, the SIGs wanted more independence, more autonomy, more control of finances, more control of the conferences and so on. So Dan did a lot of that kind of mediation.

AKERA: Would you say he was one of the folks who was a proponent of expanding ACM's membership, really embracing the larger number of programmers that were entering the field?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I would say so.

AKERA: So is there a difference in that respect between Dan McCracken and Peter Denning? Would you say that their opinion differed there, or was their position the same?

MANDELBAUM: I think Dan would have loved to have seen the ACM membership grow to a hundred thousand.

AKERA: So all programmers.

MANDELBAUM: All programmers, yes.

AKERA: And Peter Denning instead would have wanted certain standards to be maintained?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, Peter would have been happy to see an ACM membership of 40,000, but the top 40,000.

AKERA: But not just academics?

MANDELBAUM: Academics and researchers, also the top engineers.

AKERA: So academics and researchers as far as the membership. But this group, on the other hand, did want to talk an appropriate curriculum for training the much larger numbers of programmers. As academics and employers, they would discuss what educational commitments they had to have.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And that is what made Peter so unique: he had a vision that encompassed seemingly diametrically opposed and tension-producing extremes. He was very good in that way, of being able to manage both ends, and come up with a solution that seemed reasonable to the different constituencies.

AKERA: So we've already crossed into the 1980s with Peter Denning, was in office from 1980 to 1982. Maybe we can talk about the other presidents from the 1980s. That would be Peter, followed by Adele Goldberg, and then others. Are there any ACM presidents from the 1980s that stand out for you in addition to Peter?

MANDELBAUM: There was the gang of three. [Chuckles] There was Adele, followed by Dave Brandin. The two of them were kind of two peas in a pod—very similar, West Coast, Silicon Valley, industry oriented. Adele did have more of an academic background than Dave Brandin. Both Adele and Dave, during their tenure, very much pushed ACM in the direction of a business orientation, both by internally fixing up and improving ACM's business practices, giving more autonomy to the staff, relying on the staff more...

AKERA: ...so the two of them brought greater managerial expertise into the ACM organization, so internal changes.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Business practices, right. That was with respect to staff relationships. Then with respect to the volunteer structure, both Adele and Dave, coming out of a corporate environment, attempted to impose a more corporate management style, where if volunteer were not doing anything—get rid of them.

AKERA: Now did that raise some waves?

MANDELBAUM: It did.

AKERA: Without necessarily telling the whole story, can you tell us an anecdote from that period that would give us a feel for this?

MANDELBAUM: By that time I was more involved, sitting on the ACM Executive Committee, and there were some very interesting discussions about certain people, about whether they were accomplishing anything or not. I don't recall any specific anecdote, but there were many discussions about particular volunteers and that they needed to be relieved of their duties.

AKERA: Did it ever elevate beyond speaking about the individual to speaking about the organization? Anything about the limits of voluntarism, or something of that nature?

MANDELBAUM: No.

AKERA: So they felt that ACM, as a volunteer organization, worked in general. It was just that there were specific individuals who couldn't meet the obligations of their position, and the question is what to do since these are presumably very senior individuals. They can't just simply tell them...

MANDELBAUM: Right. And they were, again, following a corporate style, to be more aggressive and to reduce the time for decision-making and implementation of programs.

AKERA: Did these changes actually happen?

MANDELBAUM: I think they certainly were not 100% successful, but I think the two presidencies did do a lot to cut down on the number of committee meetings and the length of time that it would take to formulate a new program or policy.

AKERA: Was this a lasting change? This is the '80s; now we're entering into the more conservative era in American history where perhaps it's not unusual for corporate practices to diffuse into other areas of society. So was this a permanent change for ACM? Was this part of ACM itself growing up and becoming a more mature, professional society?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I think so. By the end of Dave's tenure as president, ACM staff became a more equal partner, became a more influential organization within the ACM decision-making process.

AKERA: We're jumping into a different section, but I think it is appropriate to talk about this now. Were there major organizational changes to ACM during this period? Was there a formal difference in the status or the responsibility accorded to the Executive Committee during these years?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I think one of the things that Adele and Dave were able to accomplish during their presidency was to elevate the role of the Council so the Council was not debating or

going over very low-level issues. For example, the budget process. It used to be that Council would debate and look at every single line item in the ACM budget, and obviously any member of Council could challenge what they saw and say, “Why are we spending \$400 in publications on this area?” Or, “Why did SIG XYZ spend \$800 on this workshop?” Whatever it was. That was the level of discussion. So what happened was Adele and Dave, during their presidencies, were able to get the Council to stop looking at the line-item details and to delegate that to the Executive Committee, who then delegated most of that work to the Executive Director.

AKERA: So that’s one important change where the staff assumed more substantial responsibilities, in the allocation of resources? [Right.] And perhaps they decided on ACM’s major activities based on past precedents, though not by setting new policy.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So the Executive Committee would get a budget developed by the staff, and the debate or discussions were not on the level of individual line items...

AKERA: So the Council’s role shifted more to that of reviewing the budget, as opposed to more actively making decisions about all expenditures.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Then the Executive Committee would also set a strategic direction or strategic goal for the year. You know, 10% growth in membership, 5% increase in dues, stuff like that. And the staff would just come back with a budget that reflected the Executive Committee’s strategic goal.

AKERA: So this really also created a much more defined working relationship between the Executive Committee and the staff.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Then at the Council level the budget would be presented with all the detail, but the Executive Committee would have come to the Council by then with an Executive Committee resolution that the budget be adopted.

AKERA: Not specific expenses couldn’t be debated in the process, but it must have made life so much easier.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, it was just an amazing difference.

AKERA: Can you translate that into personal terms, into what difference did this change made for your work as Director of Publications?

MANDELBAUM: Not that much, really. With regards to the budget, I still had the same amount of work to do to prepare the budget.

AKERA: Was there more predictability that the budget would go though?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, more predictability, less uncertainty, less stress in terms of having to answer the \$400 changes in the budget from one year to the next.

AKERA: Did that change how you felt about your position, how the Executive Director and staff as a whole saw their position?

MANDELBAUM: There was gratitude that we did not have to go to that level of detail, and that they accepted, basically, what we determined to be the budget. Part of ACM's growing up, and the acceptance of more authority and more responsibility for the staff, as delegated by the volunteers.

AKERA: I guess what I'm looking for is whether this made any difference in terms of your ability to set strategies for publications... to plan what new publications you might want to launch? Or was this something you were always able to do anyway?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, it's basically something I did always, especially starting in the mid-'80s. I was Executive Editor at the beginning when I was hired, then became Director in 1980. After a couple of years, I was able to develop programs and develop new publications working with the Publications Board—I was able to get volunteers to propose new publications. The Publications Board would go to the Executive Committee and the Council and say we approve of the new publication.

AKERA: I think we'll come back to that in more detail. I'll wait it until we talk specifically again about publications. But I can sense some kind of change, so that even if you had to do this work before, you were now receiving greater recognition for the work you do, and was seen as a reliable source of information for what would be a new publication, [Right.], or one that's not quite ready to launch as a new *Transactions*, which I imagine would be the nature of the decision to be made. [Right.]

If we could continue with the '80s, you mentioned that there were three peas in a pod. There's a third name missing here. Who was this other individual?

MANDELBAUM: There was Adele, then Dave Brandin, and I don't remember who followed Dave.

AKERA: Okay. So beginning with Dan McCracken, this seems to be the first group of presidents that had more of an industry background versus an academic background. So there is sort of a larger change happening in ACM during these years?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, then it would be Bryan Kocher. I forget what year he was president. So somewhere in that line was Bryan. He was the third of that group.

AKERA: Would this then also translate into a change in the ACM's attitude towards membership? Did it mean going away from Peter Denning's vision and going towards a more inclusive ACM?

MANDELBAUM: I think Dan did try that, yes.

AKERA: How about the other three?

MANDELBAUM: Bryan Kocher certainly pushed for a very inclusive and as-broad-as-possible ACM membership.

AKERA: But your opinion is that he didn't succeed in this endeavor?

MANDELBAUM: It didn't really succeed very well.

AKERA: Do you know why that was the case?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Bryan had some good ideas about increasing membership and more marketing and stuff like that. But he was not an academic, and not only was he not an academic, he did not have much in the way of academic credentials, so he did not carry much weight in the Council, with these big names.

AKERA: So it sounds like despite acceptance of industry-affiliated individuals as presidents of the society, the academics still have a fairly strong role within ACM. [Sure.] Was that related to the structure of the organization? Was Council representation based on the chairs, for example, of the special interest groups?

MANDELBAUM: No. For a very long time, and even to this day, the volunteer management and governance at ACM is ruled primarily by the academics because they had the time. They are given the time because it is part of the academic work. You don't get paid to do this work, but it looks good on your C.V.

AKERA: So it has academic rewards.

MANDELBAUM: It has academic rewards. The academic system rewards that kind of participation.

AKERA: And does the corporate system not reward such participation?

MANDELBAUM: No, not to the same extent. If you're up for tenure...

AKERA: ...it's one of the gold standards.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So it was hard to get... and even up until very recently it was hard to get really good businesspeople to donate their time on the ACM Council and the committees.

AKERA: Yes, and I think a lot of professional societies complain about this—that they would love to have the president of IBM or GE participate, but...

MANDELBAUM: Right. So that was the issue, and it still is the issue that academics have more time because they're given more time by their academic institutions, who realize the importance of this work.

AKERA: So then this become one part of the structure of the organization, so the organization is more inclined to facilitate the production of new knowledge, despite there being other needs. So

ACM couldn't stretch to become just a general society for all programmers. [Right.] I imagine there is a member services story here, but maybe we'll defer that until the discussion about the staff.

So moving to the 1990s, were there any notable presidents from that decade? This would be the time that you were developing the Digital Library. Were there other key individuals that helped reshape what ACM was, or deal with any crisis the organization had?

MANDELBAUM: John White was president I think from 1990 to 1992. I'm not sure about the year, but John was president of ACM back then. He also came out of the SIG area, SIGPLAN.

AKERA: What was his affiliation outside of ACM?

MANDELBAUM: He was at Xerox PARC for many years.

AKERA: So not in the universities, but still basically an academic researcher.

MANDELBAUM: Right, yes. He was also a professor at the University of Connecticut before PARC.

AKERA: So what changes did he want to see during his tenure as ACM president?

MANDELBAUM: I think he continued with the greater reliance on staff for input on major decisions.

AKERA: So he, more so than other presidents, was willing to work with ACM staff in a much more direct way. [Right.] Now substantively, what kind of changes did he want to see in the organization, or what kind of issues were going on that he felt he had to act on?

MANDELBAUM: Again, John came out of the SIG area, so he spent a lot of time working on SIG issues.

AKERA: So developing the SIGs.

MANDELBAUM: Developing the SIGs, and clarifying the relationship of the SIGs to ACM. Again, the SIGs were always clamoring for more autonomy.

AKERA: You mentioned this a number of times—the SIGs' desire for greater autonomy. Can you spell this out for us a bit more? What exactly were they looking for?

MANDELBAUM: Autonomy in the budgeting, in the conference decision-making process.

AKERA: Can you be a little bit more specific? So in other words, was there money sent back from the ACM national organization back to the SIGs?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Traditionally for a very long time, ACM would provide SIG money for new conferences, and it would provide money to existing conferences.

AKERA: So everything was funded out of a single, combined membership fee.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, from centralized ACM. The SIGs and their conferences committee would run the conferences, and the conferences were more often than not successful financially as well as technically.

AKERA: So they were profit centers, in a sense.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Surplus centers they're called in a nonprofit. So the tension arose when ACM took the money back and said, "Well look, we're the investors."

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AKERA: So we were speaking about John White and his relationship with the staff, and what this represented in terms of a change in the ACM organization.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, so ACM viewed itself as the investor in the conferences, but the SIGs viewed themselves as the organizers and the managers of the conferences, and they thought they should retain the revenues or some decent portion of them.

AKERA: And what would they have wanted to do with those revenues? What would they have been used for?

MANDELBAUM: Initiate new programs, having larger and more frequent conferences, having perhaps an awards program, having subsidized student travel to the conferences.

AKERA: Now were the ACM publications surplus generating, or were they deficit based? Did subscription fees fully cover the costs of ACM publications, for the most part?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. But we should look at that pre-digital library and post-digital library period. Pre-digital library, yes, certainly the subscription fee paid by individuals and institutions (libraries and so on) generated a decent surplus.

AKERA: Were any of the SIGs interested in retaining that surplus as well?

MANDELBAUM: No, that was not the issue.

AKERA: Partly because ACM had a staff to pay and operating expenses as well. [Right.] So they were not trying to retain those resources.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So part of the argument was that ACM staff was used to help the SIGs run, manage and operate the conferences. So not only did "ACM" invest so they therefore

deserved a return, but we had overhead in order to support the conferences, and we had to pay the staff.

AKERA: And academics are not very good at recognizing overhead costs. Not always true, but it does become a point of contention sometimes.

MANDELBAUM: That's true, right.

AKERA: So John White helped sort these issues out.

MANDELBAUM: Right. He spent a lot of time during his presidency negotiating and working with the SIGs, and developing some financial agreements.

AKERA: Did it help that he came out of the SIGs? He was therefore trusted and able to develop a more common understanding, because it was probably more a case of lack of communications ...

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: Was he able to accomplish all he wanted during his tenure as president? I'm wondering whether there was any connection between his success as president and his decision to become an Executive Director of ACM.

MANDELBAUM: I don't know. John would have to answer that.

AKERA: There was some time in between, I suppose.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, there was a lot of time between his presidency and his directorship. His term ended in 1992, and he became Executive Director in 2000 I think. I don't think one influenced the other.

AKERA: Except perhaps to the extent to which he became much more familiar with the staff than many ACM presidents. So perhaps he was more comfortable in that role than others.

MANDELBAUM: Right. And I'm very sure the knowledge and relationship he had with the ACM professional staff, even after he left the presidency, helped make him decide to accept the position as CEO and Executive Director. He knew us all and we knew him.

AKERA: So I wanted to interject a slightly different question here: We've interviewed many of the ACM past presidents through this oral history series, and you mentioned during our last interview that you had read many of these transcripts. Was there anything in any of the earlier oral histories that you'd like to comment on? Were there any mistakes that we should try to correct here?

MANDELBAUM: I don't remember any mistakes. Nothing is jumping out. If I had, I would have talked to Rick or somebody. No, there was nothing that jumped out at me from what I read.

AKERA: Good. I just wanted to give you this chance. Then finally, from the year 2000 until the time you retired, what were some of the current issues that the most recent ACM presidents have been dealing with?

MANDELBAUM: I think social issues came back again; political correctness issues. I don't have any other way to say it except to say it. This issue of women in computer science—it's one of these political correctness issues where there is a certain grain, a certain kernel of legitimacy to it. But it seems over the last few years to have been hijacked into a huge issue, a major campaign.

AKERA: And who are the proponents?

MANDELBAUM: Some women [chuckles].

AKERA: Now I've seen the product of these efforts, as a historian. There have been new articles, books, and conferences on women in computing, and studies as well on women in computer science education.

MANDELBAUM: Right. It started a few years ago in relation to some studies that were done that indicated that in computer science, both PhDs and ACM membership, and in IEEE membership, the ratio is something like 87% male, 13% female, and people felt something had to be done about this great disparity.

AKERA: Wasn't it the case that the number of women in computer science was increasing for a period of time, and then it sort of leveled out, raising some concerns?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, that was part of it. So for many years ACM had a committee, Women in Computing, and they would foster this kind of research and run a conference and so on. But in the last few years it seems to have taken on a life of its own.

AKERA: Asking this in a more neutral way, has this interest translated into a greater demand on ACM for resources? [Yes.] Can you put some general figures to that?

MANDELBAUM: I don't know. I don't remember the budget numbers. But there was more of a demand for more resources from ACM to support women in computing type activities, to throw more money to their committee. So it started out ACM Committee on Women, then it became a Women's Council, and then about the time I left there was discussion about having a seat on the Council.

AKERA: Is this a good thing, or a bad thing? [Laughs] You don't have to answer.

MANDELBAUM: In relation to the effort expended, and the resources and the amount of time spent certainly when I was going to the Council meetings, the amount of management time of the Council and Board of Directors, in relation to what they were trying to solve was not productive. It was a huge issue. ACM thought it can solve that issue, or the ACM Women's Council thought that they can solve this issue, and go from 87/13 to 50/50, or maybe 60/40. But this is such a huge thing that is way beyond ACM.

AKERA: It's K-12 education, and a bunch of other things...?

MANDELBAUM: That was another one. In the last few years, a movement developed to have ACM somehow lead in K to 12 education with regard to computing and so on, and to develop some kind of K to 12 computing curricula in the U.S. So again, tons of resources for a problem we couldn't solve.

AKERA: Would it be fair to say the primary concern that you had was the time devoted to these issues occupied a disproportionate amount of the time that the Council and the staff had. That these political issues had a certain draw to them that other important issues didn't.

MANDELBAUM: That's correct. There wasn't and there isn't a realization that these are issues way beyond the capability of a professional academic society. So the education one, the idea of trying to have K -12 curricula in computing, without the understanding that in the U.S. each state determines this, and so there would have to be a state-by-state committee going to each state's legislature, going to each state's Department of Education.

AKERA: And you don't see computer science professors doing that kind of work.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So it's right to characterize it as a waste of time.

AKERA: I think one thing we're seeing is that volunteer organizations are volunteer organizations. People do develop passions that do not necessarily map onto what's efficient or realistic, or even match the capabilities of the people who participate. Yet people do become passionate about certain issues and want to move them forward through whatever means that they have.

So are there any other issues that the ACM, as an organization, had to deal with in the past eight years? We had September 11th, we had a major financial crisis much more recently. It's been a generally tumultuous time. Did ACM have to struggle with financial issues during this period?

MANDELBAUM: Not recently. Let me say at the time I left ACM, they seemed to be doing extremely well, despite the recession. As a result of the economic crash, I think the financial picture changed somewhat and people could not afford, or institutions would no longer send employees or faculty to all the conferences. They cut back and so on.

AKERA: So the dot-com bust did not affect ACM?

MANDELBAUM: It did to a small extent. There was some drop-off in membership in 2004, 2005, 2006—whatever, a year after the dot-com bust. But then membership started picking up again, slowly.

AKERA: So this is to say that the organization was fairly robust to that kind of economic disruption. Basically you have academics who have tenured positions—they're not disappearing. There's industrially employed programmers who might be undergo some change. But for ACM, there was no membership crisis during this past decade.

MANDELBAUM: No. Membership went down a little bit, but IEEE membership went down also.

AKERA: In the last interview you mentioned a period of stagnation. That would be the previous decade, so I think I'd like to get back to that during this interview, but right now we'll leave it at that.

Any other memorable stories about any of the ACM presidents?

MANDELBAUM: Well yes. I don't know how to do this in a way that gives the essence of what was going on while preserving confidentiality. But for many years, there was a view on the part of ACM volunteers, a perception that ACM staff was, well, fair game. This almost cost ACM a lawsuit. For many years there was this ACM tradition at the ACM annual conference, SIGBOOZE, which was one night during the conference where there would be a party for ACM volunteers and the ACM staff that was there, and it would usually be held in a suite. There would often be some wild drinking.

AKERA: So this had something to do with an organization that is 87% male, and a staff whose composition was somewhat different.

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: Now I imagine these kind of socializing events are quite common for any professional society. So the intent in general was fine, but...

MANDELBAUM: I think the difference was ACM went much longer in terms of disregarding the potential danger.

AKERA: And as an organization, it needed to act to change some of those practices.

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: Were those policies changed?

MANDELBAUM: They were. The SIGBOOZE was done away with around I guess the time Joe DeBlasi came in. And Joe, having come from IBM, having spent all his life at IBM corporate, he saw what was going on and he said, "No way. This is not going to happen anymore." And this is not the way that a professional society's leadership should behave.

PART II.2: ACM Executive Directors

AKERA: So let's move on to the executive directors. We were chatting beforehand, and you mentioned that the executive directors during the period you were there were Sid Weinstein, Dick Hespos, Joe DeBlasi, and then John White. Can you tell us what their terms of office were?

MANDELBAUM: I think Sid Weinstein left around the end of Adele Goldberg's term, about 1984.

AKERA: How long was he there? When did he start? Well before you arrived?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, well, he started maybe in 1974. Dick Hespos replaced Sid, who was there from about 1985 to about 2000, I think. I think he was there about fifteen years. And then Joe DeBlasi started in the late 1990s, maybe 1998 or 1999, then John White became executive director around 2003 or 2004.¹

AKERA: This just gives us approximate dates to work from. We can check these dates later.¹ So let's shift to the substance of what these individuals did, starting with Sid Weinstein. What was he like as an executive director, when you first arrived?

MANDELBAUM: He spent most of his career with the federal government, and he was the typical government bureaucrat-manager. Really. If I wanted to have a business lunch and pick up the bill, I would have to send a note in advance stating who I was having lunch with, what the purpose was, what I expected to get out of the meeting, how much I expected to spend, and then fill out a form, then send it to him for approval before the lunch.

AKERA: Was that atypical of professional societies at the time, or was that within the scope of how organizations behaved?

MANDELBAUM: I don't know. I think it may have been atypical.

AKERA: Did that hamper ACM, in your view?

MANDELBAUM: It was an example of government bureaucratic-management thinking—very hierarchical, very conservative, accountability oriented, don't make waves and so on. Sid, all he cared about was getting through the Council meetings with the minimum disturbances and argument and discussion and so on.

AKERA: Did he have any vision for the organization? Did he bring anything unique...? [No.] So in some ways your feeling was that he allowed the organization to survive, but didn't bring to it any real direction?

MANDELBAUM: I think he felt that this was a volunteer organization, and that the volunteers should make the major strategic decisions.

AKERA: So not a visionary.

¹ A member of the ACM History Committee reports that the dates of tenure for ACM executive directors were approximately: John D. Madden (1964-1970); Gordon Smith (1970-1974); Joseph Cunningham (1974-1975); Sidney Weinstein (1976-1982); Richard Hespos (1982-1989); Joseph S. DeBlasi (1989-1999); John R. White (1999-present). White also holds the title of Chief Executive Officer.

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: Is there anything else about Sid Weinstein and his term that would be worth putting in the record?

MANDELBAUM: He was not a big fan of mine, and he did not think I could do the job. I remember some issues. He called me into his office, and he said he thought when my predecessor left, which was '79 or something, he thought I was too young and too inexperienced to take on the role of Director of Publications.

AKERA: There was someone who served in that capacity before you for a short time, is that right?

MANDELBAUM: Myrtle?

AKERA: I understand Myrtle was there for a long time, well known in the organization.

MANDELBAUM: Then Alan Corneretto.

AKERA: Now was the reason he left because he couldn't work for Sid Weinstein?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, I think so. He also did not get along with Sid.

AKERA: So would it be fair to say that Myrtle Kellington's shoes were difficult to fill?

MANDELBAUM: Only in the sense that she had been there a long time, and she had developed a relationship with the ACM governance.

AKERA: I mean more in terms of the social relations, as opposed to the actual requirements of the job.

MANDELBAUM: I would say yes.

AKERA: So you stepped up to become Director of Publications in 1980, so those four years were difficult, then, working for Sid?

MANDELBAUM: No, I don't think they were difficult. Myrtle had retired and Alan Corneretto was the Director of Publications, and I was responsible for the magazine *Communications of the ACM* when I started, and the journals. I don't remember it being difficult. Alan was a strange guy, and had a lot of outside interests, and did not really put everything into doing his job. Honestly I don't even remember, he either left on his own or was told to leave.

AKERA: I was thinking more in terms of Sid Weinstein and your relationship with him while he was Executive Director.

MANDELBAUM: It wasn't difficult.

AKERA: No. He just didn't have confidence in you at the beginning.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, he thought I didn't have enough experience or seasoning.

AKERA: Did that change during the time that he was still there?

MANDELBAUM: What happened with the volunteers that I worked with, the Publications Board, and the Chairman of the Publications Board at the time, Stuart Lynn, and the volunteer editor-in-chief of the *Communications of the ACM*, Robert Ashenhurst... I worked very closely with them, and they felt that I could do the job.

AKERA: So you earned their trust. [Right.] They came to admire you, and in turn the Executive Director was willing to step back and allow you to do your work then.

MANDELBAUM: Right.

AKERA: So 1984. That also coincides with when you mentioned you started taking a more active role in recommending new publications, becoming more proactive and managerial in that capacity. Can you fill out that story for us and tell us how this transition happened, including under the new Executive Director?

MANDELBAUM: The Publications Board in 1979 came out with the strategic plan for growing and developing the ACM journals, and as Director of Publications I was the one responsible for implementing that plan, and working to develop new journals, working with the volunteers. Part of my responsibility was to identify people who could lead the development of a new journal. So professor so-and-so at Berkeley, I would approach and say, "Hey, you're one of the leaders in artificial intelligence. How about writing a proposal for a journal?"

AKERA: So that was true even in the early '80s, is that right?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. That was in response to the Publications Board's strategic plan, which said we have to grow the publications program.

AKERA: We've actually veered away from the executive directors. What was Dick Hespos like? Did he bring a change to the ACM?

MANDELBAUM: He did. He brought a breath of fresh air from both a personality standpoint and professional standpoint.

AKERA: What was his background?

MANDELBAUM: Dick was a management consultant for McKinsey and Company for a long time.

AKERA: So private sector, and much more aggressive.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. He had a ton of degrees. He had a degree in I believe electrical engineering from Columbia, and a master's and PhD from Harvard. He spent many years in both the engineering side and then the management-consulting side of McKenzie.

AKERA: So what convinced him to come to the ACM? Or what convinced ACM to hire him?

MANDELBAUM: ACM hired a recruiting firm, and the recruiting firm basically set up three candidates: one was a typical ACM volunteer, somebody from the ranks; and then somebody else representing a different perspective; and then there was Dick Hespos coming from the corporate world. He was very good, very polished, and he had some unique ideas for how ACM could grow and move into the corporate scene and become more global.

AKERA: So he had broad support from the Council when he stepped up as Executive Director? [Yes.] So what were some of the most important changes he brought to ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Well, that breath of fresh air. I remember when I was talking to Dick one of the first times, and I mentioned the expense account policy, and he just couldn't stop laughing. So he brought more of a normal corporate approach, more progressive.

AKERA: I'm curious about something. Working for McKinsey, so a management consulting firm, analysts would have had a solid repertoire of strategies and techniques for improving managerial operations. Was there anything specific he brought into ACM in order to change, say, its business model or its revenue structure?

MANDELBAUM: He did bring some new financial management policies and financial analysis techniques, but that was more the changes to the staff side.

AKERA: Did that make any difference to the organization, its ability to grow, its ability to offer member services?

MANDELBAUM: I think it made things a little more streamlined.

AKERA: So in general, more efficient, but no radical change in the vision or the direction of the organization.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. The big issue during Dick's tenure was the IT department and the move away from ACM outsourcing to a data processing vendor—we were actually relying on IEEE. ACM actually had a contract with IEEE for membership services, and other accounting operations, and so on.

AKERA: So the basic MIS functions of the organization were being conducted at IEEE.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Dick brought that in-house, developed the staff as well as our IT resources.

AKERA: Was that a smooth transition, or was it difficult in some way?

MANDELBAUM: It was a real transition, you know. It was difficult, no question.

AKERA: But it was not out of the ordinary...

MANDELBAUM: Not out of the ordinary. There were some personnel issues that Dick had to deal with in the new IT department. At one point Dick asked me to do management consulting for the IT department, interview everybody and write up a report about what the problems were and what the challenges were.

AKERA: Was there anything in that finding that was telling about the organization—surprising in some way?

MANDELBAUM: No, the finding was that basically there were some internal personnel issues that just needed to be resolved.

AKERA: One possibility, for instance, might be that ACM, as a volunteer organization, had a harder time attracting good IT staff as compared to a major corporation or university facility. Was anything like that involved? Was there a quality of staff issue?

MANDELBAUM: There were quality-of-staff issues. There always are with IT departments.

AKERA: Now this sounds familiar, especially during the mid-'80s because this is when there was a boom, and a substantial shortage of computer people.

MANDELBAUM: Even now, in our situation, there are IT problems. Personnel issues.

AKERA: Now we're not quite certain at this point about his dates as Executive Director, but you mentioned in the previous interview that there was a period of stagnation at ACM in the '90s. Does his tenure cross into that time period? Was there something he had to manage, or was that more under Joe?

MANDELBAUM: The stagnation was more specific to the volunteers, and even more specific to the ACM Publications Board, the group of volunteers.

AKERA: Okay, we'll talk about that in a second. As far as the ACM organization, it is operating fairly successfully from the mid-'80s and into the '90s—there aren't any major internal issues with operations?

MANDELBAUM: No. Conferences were growing; there were more and more conferences. There were more SIGs, more publications being managed.

AKERA: So more things to manage, but ACM is scaling up fairly smoothly as an organization. One thing you mentioned, though, is that there was a change in the relationship between the ACM staff and the volunteers, in particular the Executive Committee and the Council. From the dates involved, it sounds like Dick Hespos was a key player in that transition. Was he the trusted executive that the Council and the Executive Committee finally felt they could entrust the budgets to?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. I think Dick had a lot to do with that. Dick, by virtue of the fact that he came out of the business environment, financially shrewd and astute, so the Council and Executive Committee came to have more confidence in him.

AKERA: Can you describe this in more concrete terms? In other words, looking at this same story from the Executive Director's point of view, what was the work that he had to do to win the trust of the volunteer community, and to help ACM, as an organization, to mature?

MANDELBAUM: He imposed some new financial discipline and new financial systems. He made a change in the top financial personnel.

AKERA: So to bring financial stability to the organization on an internal level. [Right.] Did he interact more with the presidents or with the Executive Committee? Did he tend to spend more time with them, or less?

MANDELBAUM: I don't think that eventually led to his leaving. I think at the beginning he did, and then he sort of tapered off as far as spending a lot of time [with the volunteers.] He would spend whatever time was necessary.

AKERA: But in the beginning he really cultivated those relationships?

MANDELBAUM: He did. But I recall at the end of his tenure he was more and more frustrated with the slow, deliberative nature of the Council—you know, typical academic decision-making time.

AKERA: So really his management sensibilities made him want a more efficient organization. [Right.] And given ACM's voluntary nature, couldn't get it there.

MANDELBAUM: Right. And he also had some very definite ideas about the SIGs. By then there were two financial buckets: there was the SIG cash bucket, and the rest of ACM. He was of the very strong opinion that there was just one organization, and that there ought to be just one financial pot.

AKERA: So he was in tension with the SIGs over this issue—would this be fair to say?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. Nothing overt, other than he made it clear before the Executive Committee and Council that this is not the way you run an organization, regardless of whether it was for-profit or non-profit.

AKERA: How did the Executive Committee and the Council react? Did they accept his views?

MANDELBAUM: Being that more than half of them came up from the SIGs [chuckles], they were sort of tolerant of his view, but also respectful of where they came from and of the role the SIGs played, and not wanting to really upset the apple cart.

AKERA: Is it true that the SIGs were becoming more powerful during this period? More members are identifying with the SIGs as opposed to ACM as a whole, partly because of the larger membership of ACM, and partly because of increased specialization in the field?

MANDELBAUM: Right. And the SIGs were running very financially successful conferences.

AKERA: So then it sounds like there is almost an impasse. Would that be a fair characterization?

MANDELBAUM: It never came to an impasse. But it was coming to an impasse.

AKERA: But then there was a parting of the ways. [Yes.] So did he retire, or did he simply leave the organization?

MANDELBAUM: He retired. He was a great guy personally, fun-loving guy and very easy going. He had made enough money so that he didn't need the ACM job. At some point I remember him telling me it stopped being fun for him. So he retired. On a personal note, it turned out he bought a retirement place in Savannah, Georgia, which then turned out to be around the corner from where my sister and brother-in-law—they live in the same development in Savannah, so they became friends.

AKERA: I'm sure these are all wonderful people. Large organizations embody different directions and views, and it can presents management challenges for people along the way.

Continuing, then, with Joe DeBlasi. Who was he? What was he like?

MANDELBAUM: He was the IBM guy that came in, and also brought much more discipline to the organization: financial and managerial.

AKERA: What was his background at IBM? What position did he hold?

MANDELBAUM: When he retired from IBM he was Senior Vice President of Technical Standards.

AKERA: So did he have a technical background?

MANDELBAUM: He had a technical background. He had a degree in mathematics; went to WPI.

AKERA: But was thoroughly immersed with managerial experience.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. So he was responsible for presenting and representing IBM's position on various standards to the various standards bodies, like ANSI and so on, and he would be the IBM representative to all standards committees when they had discussions about whatever particular standard was being developed. So he brought with him an IBM corporate culture—more hierarchical—making it clear who the executives were, for instance, by giving each of us a corner office.

AKERA: So certain protocols had to be followed!

MANDELBAUM: IBM protocols, yes.

AKERA: So can we continue to make this a little more concrete? In other words, prior to that there wasn't a clear definition of who the executives were within ACM?

MANDELBAUM: No. Prior to that—and it was tied to where the ACM offices were located. Joe was Executive Director when we moved from what was a rabbit warren of small offices into a larger, professional space. So that's when he took the opportunity to work with the designer to impose sort of an IBM kind of space.

AKERA: Was it just superficial, or did this really change the sense of the organizational culture within ACM?

MANDELBAUM: It did change the organizational culture. People knew who was who in the organization based on the size of their office, whether one got a private office or a cubicle, and where everyone sat.

AKERA: Those internal issues are interesting, but I see as an undercurrent a slow maturing of the ACM organization and its staff, relative to the main body of volunteers for the society. Did the headquarters' move really change the image of the staff in the eyes of the membership?

MANDELBAUM: No, it changed the image of the staff in the eyes of the staff.

AKERA: So the staff felt more professional, with better-defined functions, and also a chain of command ...

MANDELBAUM: Right. And the new office space itself was more presentable to the volunteers.

AKERA: And also more functional? Did it actually make the work easier to do in some ways?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, it was more functional. And it allowed for...

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AKERA: So you were just finishing the sentence "...and it allowed for more opportunities to meet with the volunteers at headquarters, as a consequence of the move."

Let me just move to John White then. So John White becomes Executive Director around 2004. Did he represent anything new or different for ACM?

MANDELBAUM: New and different in the sense that here was a former volunteer deeply embedded in the ACM organizational culture, who was now the senior staff executive.

AKERA: Yes, yes. Post-retirement, is that correct? Did he retire before stepping into this position? [No.] He's was not at retirement age yet then?

MANDELBAUM: No, he was not. Now he is. But he was at Xerox PARC. Let me just add that it was an unusual situation. I'm not sure of the details, but he was living in the U.K. in London at the time. His wife was British and they were living in London, and the arrangement he had was that he would not be at ACM on a full-time basis. Rather, he would fly in to New York for one week out of the month or so. So this was new in the sense that there was not an Executive Director who was on site. He was not an Executive Director who was there full-time.

AKERA: Was this difficult for the staff? Was there concern about this arrangement?

MANDELBAUM: There was some concern. It was a relief, you know, to have him. That was sort of the impression of the entire staff. For the senior staff, for the Directors, we've all known John. We've all been there for a long time and we've all known John for a long time and we felt it would be no problem. Between emails and conference calls and stuff like that, you know.

AKERA: So it sounds like at some point through this whole period, the Directors really matured as the executive staff of ACM and their responsibilities became well defined enough so that they could function quite well on their own.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Yeah, we each functioned well on our own, individually, within our own areas of responsibility, and we functioned extremely well as a de facto management team.

AKERA: Yes, so really sort of collective decision making in which the Executive Director then made the final decision. [Yes.] Now I was under the impression from our previous conversation that some of these Executive Directors had a vision, that they shaped ACM as an organization. But now it sounds like it really wasn't the Executive Director acting alone. Would that be fair to say?

MANDELBAUM: I'll tell you where the change came—from Joe DeBlasi, who was in many ways visionary and who led the development of the Digital Library, to John, who was visionary in the sense that he let the staff lead. His role was sort of an outside ambassador, - to NSF, to the government, to other high-level people and organizations.

AKERA: So almost Chief Executive versus Chief Operating Officer? [Yes.] His focus was more external.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. Pat Ryan was the Chief Operating Officer, and John was the Chief Executive and he was the outside guy, so to speak, and Pat was the inside person. Pat kept the minutes for the Council and HR personnel reported to her. So she was sort of the internal and John was the external face of ACM.

AKERA: So this is more about the present or at least the recent past, but it still sounds like the volunteers, for the most part, still dictated the overall direction of the organization. Would that be fair to say? Or was there a change?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it had changed to where the staff would take on more of a visionary role. And it started with Joe DeBlasi. You don't get to be Senior Vice President at IBM just by following. So Joe would go to the executive committee and say, "Okay, we've decided. We're going to do this." [Laughter] And then lay it out. He was very compelling.

AKERA: What were some of the key decisions he made along the way?

MANDELBAUM: Well, the Digital Library was one. And the pricing and the financial model for the Digital Library came directly from him.

AKERA: How about the relationship with the SIGs? Was he instrumental in redefining the relationship?

MANDELBAUM: There was no relationship with the SIGs. He also continued from Dick Hespos in the sense that he found it abhorrent that...

AKERA: ... that the SIGs wanted almost to break away?

MANDELBAUM: Not so much that they wanted to break away. Really one or two SIGs talked about that, but the fact that there were two separate financial records, two separate accounts, so to speak, one for the SIGs and one for ACM. As a result of the financial success of the Digital Library, as well as the success of the SIG conferences, there was something like \$20 million in the ACM bank. The SIGs had something like \$16 million, and ACM, through the publications and Digital Library had \$4 million just sitting there. Joe felt that it was one organization and it's one pot, one bank account, and he really wanted to get his hands on the \$16 million to do all kinds of things. He had visions. He envisioned a television program, a television series on technology, all kinds of very interesting things. A worldwide ACM global structure with chapters and conferences.

AKERA: Which is the direction the IEEE went in, right?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, or at least similar. So he wanted that money. He felt that ACM was one organization and it's ACM, and let's run it the way we would run any other business. No other business has two sets of books where you can't go from one to the other to get resources...

AKERA: I guess we need some more background here. So you mentioned there were two separate pockets of money. So the \$4 million is from the regular publications stream and that part is centrally managed by ACM. Is that correct? [Yes.] So how is the other \$16 million managed then?

MANDELBAUM: By the SIGs, by the SIG Board.

AKERA: So the decision was that the Digital Library purchases, the revenue from it would go directly to the SIGs?

MANDELBAUM: No. It was that the SIGs controlled other money. The revenue stream from the conferences and the SIG dues and so on. Out of that money, the SIGs would pay ACM a tax or pay ACM for the services headquarters provided—conference staff, overhead, IT and all that. But ACM could not go and take money out of the SIG accounts without asking the SIG Board.

AKERA: When was the decision made to give the SIG Board control over this other revenue stream?

MANDELBAUM: There was no one point [in time] that I recall, but over the years, incrementally the SIGs got this control. When an ACM president came out of the SIGs, incrementally the SIGs would gain more authority, and get more concessions from the ACM Council.

AKERA: I see. So when Joe DeBlasi stepped in with his IBM background, he looked at this and said, “This is not the way you run an organization.” [Yes.] And there was a continuation of some of the tensions that might have existed previously.

MANDELBAUM: Right. Joe never went to a SIG Board meeting. Really, the Executive Director should be there.

AKERA: So some of the relations there broke down in a way that was not necessarily best for the organization at the time. [Right.] Are there any other stories like this? [No.]

I think I’d like to move on then to your contributions to make sure we get that information directly on the tape. But before we do, was there anything else about the work that the Executive Directors did in transforming ACM? The Executive Director or any of the top staff. I guess there’s a Deputy Executive Director at a certain point as well, and you have, a COO versus the CEO.

MANDELBAUM: Well, Pat Ryan is COO. So she was like first among equals of the Directors and IS, MIS, and personnel reported directly to her. The other Directors reported down the line to her and to John, sort of very informal, casual type of reporting. When I left, Pat was delegating. John delegated to Pat more and more of the formal responsibilities—

AKERA: More and more of the internal functions?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and the Directors reported to her more formally.

AKERA: Just for the record, who are the other Directors? Who are they and what positions do they hold within ACM?

MANDELBAUM: The Director of the Office of Information Systems is Wayne Graves; the Director of SIG Services is Donna Cappo; Director of Membership and Marketing is Lillian Israel; The Director of Finance is Russell Harris; and there was myself at the time.

AKERA: And that group would constitute the executive body of ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Of the ACM staff. We had a weekly meeting that involved folks one level down from that, a couple of other people, but that was basically the management.

PART II.3: Mark Mandelbaum's Contributions to ACM

AKERA: Let me shift then to your contributions to ACM. So in this section, I'd like to focus on three things: publications, the Digital Library, and then whatever other work, including especially your broader administrative responsibilities at ACM.

So returning again to ACM publications, I want to go through a couple of different time periods here. During our last interview, you had mentioned that there were several different periods in the history of ACM starting with 1980-1987, which you described as a period of expansion, especially of the *Transactions*. Then 1987-1995 was a continuation of that trend, but specifically with the introduction of 10-12 new titles of the *ACM Transactions*. Then it was 1995-2000 that you described as lull period. But there was also a decision made during this time period to fully develop the Digital Library, whose growth then constituted the last time period. So I was wondering if you could talk about each of those time periods, and frame it as a conversation about your legacy in this era. First, is that rough periodization okay for us to work with?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I think that pretty well is it.

AKERA: Good. So starting with the early period, can you remind us again what occurred then? What changed in ACM's publication during the first five to seven years that you were at ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, following that strategic plan that was developed by the Publications Board, there was an expansion in the number of journals. I was involved in some of that, as I indicated previously, working with the Board and identifying candidates who would write proposals for new journals.

AKERA: So what were the major new journals that came out during this period?

MANDELBAUM: Some of the best ACM journals were launched during that period. The *Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems*, the *Transactions on Graphics*, the *Transactions on Information Systems*.

AKERA: So it really was a key strategic decision to launch those *Transactions* and really create foundational journals in several of the subfields of ACM? [Yes.]

Now can you tell us about a specific journal launch, one that you remember the best? Who did you approach? What was this conversation like? Did you have to sell the idea or were they on board right away?

MANDELBAUM: Generally, they were on board right away. You know, 1980, '81, and '82. At that time, ACM only had three journals ...

AKERA: The *Journal*, *Communications*, and the *Reviews*? Is that right?

MANDELBAUM: And *Computing Surveys*. One of the things was ACM had this bizarre offer. If you were an ACM member, you got *Communications of the ACM* and your choice of one or two of the other publications. It was clear to the Publications Board and to me that this was not a good business proposition. It was costing ACM a lot of money. So one of the fundamental changes that was made was to unbundle the publications, so that as a member of ACM you got the *Communications of the ACM*. If you wanted *Computing Surveys* or *Computing Reviews* you would have to pay separately for each publication. The membership dues which was based on two publications was reduced somewhat, and then the loss of revenue was offset by subscription revenue to the other publications that were now growing.

AKERA: Did that change in financial model then make it possible to launch the *Transactions*? Was this related?

MANDELBAUM: As a matter of fact, [the revenue] was not tremendous. It wasn't a cause and effect because the decision was made by the Council to support publications growth whatever this cost.

AKERA: Now the members paid additional for each of the new *Transactions* they received—[Yes.] Was that a payment just for the *Transactions* or was that structured as a fee for the SIG membership?

MANDELBAUM: It had nothing to do with SIG membership.

AKERA: So it was simply purchasing the *Transactions*, whichever ones they wanted, with a set fee. [Yes.] Which in many ways makes it more straightforward as far as a budgetary structure for the publications office, I would imagine. [Yes.] So what kind of decision did you go through in recommending the launch of a new transaction? What were some of the financial issues you had to think about?

MANDELBAUM: We weren't looking to make a grand slam. We weren't looking to make tremendous amounts of money. If the quality was there, meaning if the proposed editor-in-chief for the journal and the editorial board was of sufficiently good quality as determined by the Publications Board, then if the business plan looked like the journal would break even within two to three years, that would be enough.

AKERA: So it's really launched based on the intellectual content. So here's an exciting field. There's somebody that's prominent that's willing to step forward. [Yes.] If that came into place, then you would run a business model and make a projection—which I imagine would be about counting the number of people in the SIG and what the likely subscription level, and revenue and cost would be for the publication.

MANDELBAUM: Basically, yeah. There wasn't a whole lot of sophisticated financial information available. One other thing contributing to this was that, at the time, the *Communications of the ACM* had 10 or 15 technical departments. And a number of those technical departments were swamped with submittals of high quality.

AKERA: So to launch a *Transactions*, involved just partitioning out that material. And then to develop and grow it.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So the *Communications of the ACM* would serve as an incubator or spawning ground for these new *Transactions*. The programming languages and systems section of *Communications* had some huge number of accepted papers and an estimated two-year backlog.

AKERA: So you had some basic models and data to go on to say this could be a successful journal.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So that one and the graphics and I think software engineering all came out of *Communications* where the quality control was already there, the papers having been accepted by the editors of the areas.

AKERA: Now once you decided to launch a new *Transactions*, a new journal, what work did you have to do, personally, or what work did your office have to do to really make it successful?

MANDELBAUM: Standard type of things in publishing. Once the papers had been accepted by the editor-in-chief, they would come to ACM for copy editing, and then they would be copy edited, sent to the vendor, the printer for the creation at that time of galley proofs, which were then sent to the author to review and to make last-minute corrections and so on, and then came back to us and we would complete the manufacturing process.

AKERA: So that's sort of a routine general production process, but I was thinking specifically in terms of a journal launch. Did you have to do something to advertise it, to create events during the annual meetings to bring awareness to a new journal? Or did they more or less launch themselves?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, there would be a pretty generic standard advertising campaign. So there would be an ad for the new journal in the *Communications of the ACM*. There would be an announcement in the relevant SIG publication of the related journal. There would be handouts and fliers at various ACM technical conferences as related to the journal.

AKERA: Was there a learning curve for you in doing this work? This was still during your early tenure at ACM, I imagine. Were you learning about this for the first time, or was this fairly familiar to you already?

MANDELBAUM: No, there wasn't a learning curve. It was just part of the traditional publishing routine.

AKERA: That's great. Anything else from the earliest period? Any other notable changes?

MANDELBAUM: The other aspect was that there were certain changes to be made to the *Communications of the ACM* in an attempt to try to get the *Communications of the ACM* to be more reflective of or to appeal to a larger section of the ACM membership. This ties to the old tension of academics versus practitioners.

AKERA: So who was dissatisfied at that time? The academics, the practitioners, or both?

MANDELBAUM: At that time, the practitioners were dissatisfied.

AKERA: So there were too many academic articles: things didn't talk at their level.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and at that time the *Communications of the ACM* was publishing top seminal papers that really have lasted—that to this day continue to be cited and so on. But there was a component of ACM membership that were practitioners or former academics who were now in the business world who also needed other kinds of information and literature.

AKERA: And what did they need? What were their needs as opposed to the academics?

MANDELBAUM: Their needs were articles and information on how to solve immediate problems..

AKERA: More practical problem solving?

MANDELBAUM: Problems, yeah, real world.

AKERA: Was there also a demand for different kind of news items about current events, non-technical news items that were not being satisfied?

MANDELBAUM: No, that never came up in any discussion that I recall.

AKERA: That has always been a part of the *Communications* as well, right?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. I mean covering news of the society, news of ACM, SIG news—that's always been there— There was never a new demand that I remember.

AKERA: So no new departments were launched during this time period.

MANDELBAUM: Well, in an effort to appeal to the practitioner component, there was a new department called Computing Practices that was developed, and the idea was it would be articles of general interest to the professional, and even of general interest to a knowledgeable person, much like the *Scientific American*. That was our model.

AKERA: I see. Was that a change that you felt was good for *Communications*?

MANDELBAUM: Absolutely, yeah. I encouraged it. I supported it. I fought hard for it. I interviewed and hired the first editor, staff editor for that section. John Seaman was his name.

AKERA: Now can you tell me a little bit about the size of your staff? What was your staff like at that time?

MANDELBAUM: I don't remember. Pretty small. I think it might have been about six or seven people at that time.

AKERA: What were the different roles that they played?

MANDELBAUM: Two people were dedicated to the *Computing Reviews*, the guide to computing literature publications, and one person was dedicated to the journals, you know, production and the trafficking of manuscripts to and from authors and printers and so on. I think three people were on the *Communications of the ACM* staff.

AKERA: So the staff were attached to a specific publication. [Right.] When you launched the *Transactions*, did you then add new staff with each *Transactions* that you launched?

MANDELBAUM: No, we didn't add new staff. There was no need to add new staff for each *Transactions*, but we had to add more copyediting and editing capability as we gained more titles... So we did add a couple of staff people, but then started outsourcing this work early on to vendors and freelancers, freelance copyeditors and proofreaders.

AKERA: Which you could find in New York City in abundance.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, there were many, many of them. They were hungry and willing to work.

AKERA: Yes, I understand. So moving on to 1987-1995. This is the period you had said was an extension of what happened before, but primarily by adding new titles of the *Transactions*. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. We continued to add journals, yes.

AKERA: So would that also then correspond to a time when the Office of Publications is growing? Not necessarily in internal staff but in terms of the total volume of work.

MANDELBAUM: ACM in general was growing. The conferences and the SIGs were growing and the journals program was growing, and we started a book program. I think it may have been in 1987 or 1988, in partnership with the Addison Wesley Publishing Company. The idea was to produce high-quality books and monographs in various areas of computing.

AKERA: So that was a totally new product ... [Yes.] How successful was it?

MANDELBAUM: It's one of those things that, as we say, was extremely successfully technically; not very successful financially. The books were pretty esoteric, pretty narrow, written by well-known authors.

AKERA: Now was that the original intention of the series, to produce esoteric texts?

MANDELBAUM: No, at the time books were still popular, and there was an opportunity we thought to have a book program with a well-known, well-respected computer science publisher

like Addison Wesley, and that rather than commercial publishers publishing these books and charging exorbitant rates and so on, the opportunity for ACM as a non-profit to publish these books at a much lower rate—lower cost to the reader—seemed like a good thing.

AKERA: So in retrospect, what made them not work, as a financial proposition?

MANDELBAUM: We could not compete with the commercial publishers. From a royalty standpoint, we could not offer the kind of royalty that a commercial publisher could offer. So the selling pitch was “You’re publishing with ACM and you get the ACM seal of approval.” But that, as we found out, was not a very compelling argument.

AKERA: It didn't have the right incentives.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it just wasn't...

AKERA: And was it also more difficult from an advertising point of view? In other words, were the commercial publishers more successful at really getting their books sold to the libraries and other customers

MANDELBAUM: Well, that was the job of Addison Wesley in the partnership. ACM brought the intellectual content.

AKERA: So Addison Wesley should have, or could have marketed it with the same strength that they did their other products.

MANDELBAUM: They claimed they did, and it would be to their interest to have done so. But the volume of sales was very small for each.

AKERA: So it just wasn't a successful product launch.

MANDELBAUM: Right. And it wasn't successful enough for Addison Wesley to continue to support.

AKERA: Are there any stories associated with the proliferation of *Transactions* during this period? How did that map onto the development of the SIGs?

MANDELBAUM: Only that it became clear to us that there had to be closer communication and collaboration with the SIGs. So when there was a proposal for a new *Transactions*, we developed a set of procedures to bring the relevant SIG or SIGs into the conversation.

AKERA: The conversation about the launch and decision-making process.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So a proposal for a new journal, after being reviewed by the Publications Board, if the Publications Board felt it was a good proposal and had the potential to become an ACM publication, I would take and send that proposal to the relevant SIGs.

AKERA: Because it's about intellectual content, the volunteers felt they wanted to be involved in the decision-making process. Is that right?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. And the SIGs were grateful that they were brought in. It is something that affects their area, a new journal, and it was a very good collaboration. We did get good feedback and input from the SIGs.

AKERA: Now did the revenue model change at any point? The payments kept going directly into ACM, not the SIGs, and there was no conflict over how to handle those funds?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, not in publications, not until the Digital Library.

AKERA: So this brings us into the '95-2000 period where last time you mentioned there was a lull in publications. [Yes.] What happened?

MANDELBAUM: The Publications Board at that time, either because they were focused on other things like the Digital Library, or I'm not really sure—they felt that the development of new *Transactions* was not necessary and not as critical anymore because how fine can you chop up the field.

AKERA: There are already all these established journals. [Right.] Each new launch is going to be perceived, at least initially, more as a secondary journal perhaps.

MANDELBAUM: Right, or that any new proposals would encroach on existing journals or that an existing journal would have to be chopped up and have its scope narrowed in order to allow a new journal. So there was a feeling on the Board that there was no such need.

AKERA: So the period of expansion in titles reached an end. [Yes.] Is that true? Has the number of titles remained stable since 1995?

MANDELBAUM: Actually, with some changes in the Board leadership around 2000, there was a new impulse.

AKERA: A new wave of additional titles?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and so we started a number of new titles.

AKERA: And partly in parallel with the shift to a digital model in publishing and distribution.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And the titles started getting further and further afield, meaning away from the core areas of computer science, and into applications-related areas.

AKERA: Could you name a few?

MANDELBAUM: *Transactions on Storage*, which is not core computer science. It deals with storage media and sort of hardware and so on. *Transactions on Multimedia*.

AKERA: But areas where there is considerable interest even though it's not core computer science anymore?

MANDELBAUM: Right. *Transactions on the Web. Transactions on Speech and Language Processing. Transactions on Asian Language Information Processing.*

AKERA: How successful have these new journals been?

MANDELBAUM: Definitely successful. [Chuckles]

AKERA: And financially?

MANDELBAUM: Again, I have to qualify that answer by pre-Digital Library and post-Digital Library. Pre-Digital Library, they all broke even or generated a small profit. Post-Digital Library, the success of each individual *Transactions* was less significant. When I retired from ACM, a number of *Transactions* were actually losing money on a direct basis, meaning losing money on print subscriptions compared to the cost of providing print. But within the context of the Digital Library, they were all making money. I mean we are sort of segueing into the Digital Library.

AKERA: Yes, and that's our next topic.

MANDELBAUM: But the decision was made during Joe DeBlasi's term that the Digital Library, other than making some accommodations to the SIGs, would not return revenue to the individual publications. It would stand on its own as a profit center. So a number of the *Transactions* are actually losing money on a direct basis. The income from subscriptions less expenses is a negative number—not tremendous, not too bad. But if one factored in the revenue from the Digital Library and then applied it to each *Transactions*, then they're all making money quite well.

AKERA: Interesting. I think I'm going to ask more about this in a second after we capture that whole story.

So let's move fully into the Digital Library story. Where did this idea come from? When did the initial idea and conversations start about creating a Digital Library?

MANDELBAUM: This was Joe DeBlasi's initiative. Part of his vision.

AKERA: Actually, maybe I can say for the record some of the things you mentioned in your resume. You mentioned that the Digital Library is basically a full text, searchable database containing all ACM publications from their earliest origins. Is that correct? [Yes.] So there are basically about two million pages in the database, all searchable, and that it is currently responsible for generating very large revenues

Starting from the beginning, where did the idea for the Digital Library come from?

MANDELBAUM: It did come from Joe, who I remember initiated some discussion within ACM staff in the beginning.

AKERA: Now was ACM a leader in this regard, or were they following what other societies like IEEE had already started?

MANDELBAUM: I believe we were the leader. IEEE may have been discussing something in parallel, but we were the first.

AKERA: Sure. So what was the nature of the conversation? Why did this sound like a good thing to do at the time? Maybe this is speaking about the obvious, but—

MANDELBAUM: There were several independent individual threads going on that Joe kind of wove together. The *ACM Computing Reviews* and the *ACM Guide to Computing Literature* had a database. The *ACM Guide to Computing Literature* had a database of several, maybe a couple hundred thousand articles. Not full text, but just citations of articles that had been published in the computing science.

AKERA: Was it keyword searchable?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, keyword searchable. It came from a print product ACM had many years ago, sort of a sister publication to the *Computing Reviews*, which was the *ACM Guide to Computing Literature*. It was originally called the KWIC, Key Words In Context index. We mechanized that in the early to mid '80s: we got them all digitized and on paper. So one thread was that we had the couple hundred thousand citations to articles and books in computer science.

AKERA: Yes, all in digital form already and actively used by the membership.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And we had the *ACM Computing Reviews* also in digital form. All of that ran under the ACM classification, a taxonomy.

AKERA: Right, subject area classification of the...

MANDELBAUM: Correct, and in fact a grandchild of Jean Sammet. So we had all of that. *Computing Reviews* was losing money. The *Guide to Computing Literature* was a telephone-sized book of these indexes.

AKERA: That people never read in its entirety.

MANDELBAUM: People would look up some reference or title.

AKERA: Yes, it was a reference.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, author index, title index, key words index all in this big book.

AKERA: And was that revenue positive or negative?

MANDELBAUM: That was published every year, and that had a positive revenue.

AKERA: There would be a lot of institutional purchases. It had a fairly high price tag, I'd imagine.

MANDELBAUM: Right, exactly. But the *Computing Reviews* was losing money and this was making some money, but it had a tremendous overhead, staff and IS and so on. Joe looked at all of this and thought of the possibility of having a digital version—the Internet was coming up, and...

AKERA: The World Wide Web was beginning to emerge, yes.

MANDELBAUM: ...and high-speed access to data was becoming cheaper and storage was becoming cheaper. So Joe actually came up with this idea, "Why not have a repository where articles would be available in full content and searchable?"

AKERA: So was the conversation from the very beginning to have a fully archival database not just for all current publications, but to go back and digitize the entire collection of ACM's past?

MANDELBAUM: Yes, essentially that was the idea, to have a repository.

AKERA: Now did it make a difference that Joe DeBlasi came from IBM? I mean IBM is a company that had been working on these kinds of systems, and by the '80s, I think, they're also beginning to move more substantially into software, and system engineering, and consulting type services if I'm correct? Did he have enough exposure to that culture so that this was something he specifically brought to it?

MANDELBAUM: I think that's a reasonable—yeah, because IBM was developing solutions for other companies along those lines.

AKERA: So for you, personally, was this a big new idea? Or was that something you were already thinking about as a future possibility?

MANDELBAUM: I remember thinking I wasn't so much concerned about the past. I was looking to the future. How do we deliver this stuff faster? For manufacturing we were using pretty state-of-the-art printing technology and cutting down the time it would take [to produce a journal]. So I was thinking into the future. How can we deliver these articles faster, and so on.

AKERA: And keeping everything digital would be part of that conversion, I guess.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah. So what I appreciated in Joe's vision was the archive aspect, that we can not only plan for the future but go back and capture...

AKERA: ...this wealth of knowledge that could then be made more accessible.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, give the ACM members access to the complete works of ACM, so to speak.

AKERA: Now was there a member services rationale for doing so as well? In other words, was there a sense that, in order to keep the members...

MANDELBAUM: I think it was regarded more as just one of the benefits. It would be an attraction for new members. Join ACM and get access to everything ACM ever published.

AKERA: ACM's whole body of knowledge. [Yes.] Now actually, this would be jumping out of sequence, but has it made a difference to the members? Now that they have access to the entire past, have you heard stories where computer scientists or practitioners make use of the database and accessing things in ways that they had not done so in the past?

MANDELBAUM: Oh absolutely. I mean I may be prejudiced because this is my baby. It's my baby, but that's just an absolute number one thing. I believe it saved ACM. You know, the stagnation, and there wasn't...

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AKERA: So you were saying that the Digital Library is what saved ACM.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. It became a huge thing for the ACM members to do research. And it's great to be able to say ACM was there first.

AKERA: Just out of curiosity, has this made any difference in terms of international subscriptions?

MANDELBAUM: Absolutely, yeah.

AKERA: In other words, people from overseas who didn't have access to ACM publications now have—

MANDELBAUM: Absolutely. I can get into that now or a little bit later.

AKERA: Give us the numbers, at least, for now. Then I'll ask about the whole story later.

MANDELBAUM: So throughout 1997 and 1998, we embarked on a digitalization project where we started with the *Journal*. We sent copies of every issue of the *Journal* going back to Volume 1, Number 1 out for scanning.

AKERA: So you are scanning both for digitalization of the text and for image capture.

MANDELBAUM: Right, OCR scanning and a digital capture, and the reason for the OCR scanning is we wanted to index every word, every term in the background, so that every word in every journal was indexed by OCR, so it would facilitate search and retrieval. So the text was

OCR'd, and then the files were captured in PDF, so that we presented to the user the PDF in a nice format and hidden behind it was the OCR layer, which was operating for search purposes.

AKERA: Oh, right! Scan both, yes. Now I have to ask, did it matter that you were ACM in that you decided to choose a particularly aggressive technological approach? Was this novel and state-of-the-art enough that you wouldn't expect organizations other than ACM to really take on this kind of project?

MANDELBAUM: I don't think it was ACM. Other organizations had the same idea. But they were commercial organizations.

AKERA: I see. So the technology was already there.

MANDELBAUM: The technology was already there. I think sent it to a facility in Monterey, California—Sony or some other big name. They were doing the scanning for corporations to capture corporate legacy data.

AKERA: Yes. But so much smaller data sets. Would that be correct? [Yes.] So I'm trying to capture right now, for the record, what's unique about the Digital Library project. Would it be fair to say that what was really unique was the volume of the data that was being converted to a digital archives format?

MANDELBAUM: There wasn't a whole lot of volume at the time. It was the ACM journals. In total, it wasn't a tremendous amount of volume. I don't know, maybe 40,000 or 50,000 pages of text. We decided, because of the sheer mass, that the conference proceedings were too huge so that we couldn't scan all of that in.

AKERA: So not do that on the first pass.

MANDELBAUM: It would have cost a fortune, right. So we started with, I don't know, two or three years back like '95, '96, '97 with the conference proceedings and of course going forward. Every new conference proceedings and journal article, journal issue would be captured. So that's how we built the Digital Library, initially. I think that was in July 1998. We launched the Digital Library with whatever content, the journals archive and relatively few proceedings, and made it free and open to the world. We did not charge for it initially. We just asked for an email name and an email to capture.

AKERA: Potential marketing data.

MANDELBAUM: Right. During those six months, we got a lot of good feedback and got the word out about the Digital Library. And the intent was that, beginning in January 1999, we would begin charging. This is where Joe DeBlasi came up with his business model for charging. So if you were an ACM member, you could get the Digital Library for whatever it was, \$99, in addition to your membership. Then we developed a price for institutions, for libraries and so on.

AKERA: Actually, maybe we can take a step back. I don't want to run too quickly through the whole story because I want to make sure to capture the story about its origins. So maybe we can

step back for a second and go back to the beginning. So in the beginning, Joe DeBlasi comes in and proposes the idea of a more integrated vision for the Digital Library. So how did the conversations proceed from there, both within your office as well as in conversations and negotiations with the Council and the Executive Committee?

MANDELBAUM: It proceeded very smoothly. The Publications Board immediately recognized the value.

AKERA: That this was a potential hit?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. No one for a minute thought—I wish I could take the credit that I foresaw this tremendous financial potential... Can't do it. No. To be honest.

AKERA: Nobody saw it as a financial runaway success?

MANDELBAUM: Right. This was viewed as a great service to ACM members, a great service to the community.

AKERA: It had intellectual merit, in a sense. [Yes.] Actually, was it more intellectual merit or was it more capturing the material for posterity?

MANDELBAUM: It was [the latter].

AKERA: So it was really based on a sense of historic value because historical things weren't viewed as having much current, intellectual value...

MANDELBAUM: Right. At that time, with the rise of computers, there was this discussion in the technical librarian community about where the responsibility lies for archiving. Does it rest with the libraries or with the publisher, now with computers and everything. So I was involved in those discussions.

AKERA: And did that influence your decision to build the Digital Library?

MANDELBAUM: Talking to the librarians, yeah. It kind of influenced my decision and my thinking that the responsibility for permanent archives should now become part of the publisher's responsibility rather than the library's because we also started saying early on that there was value in the data, but there was great value in the services and tools surrounding the data—specifically search and retrieval.

AKERA: Yes, yes, and that was better done at a central location rather than dispersed through different institutions. [Yes.] So from there, I think you just gave us the core origin story of starting up the project. Was there anything else in between? So the Publications Board approved it.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So the Publications Board supported it wholeheartedly. It went to the Executive Committee and Council and said we need a couple hundred thousand dollars for the capture.

AKERA: Basically launch it with the *Journal* and the *Communications* and whatever. [Right, yes.] And so you received the funds to do that work. [Right.] And then that's where you then initiated the digitization process, which you said occurred between '97 and '98? [Yes.] The Digital Library was launched when?

MANDELBAUM: It was launched in the middle of July, 1998, free and open to the world. Sort of a beta.

AKERA: And was it announced that there would be a fee for it as of '99, or that was not decided until later?

MANDELBAUM: Somewhere along those lines. I think it was [decided] maybe in the fall of '98.

AKERA: And that's consistent with what other publishers have done. Like the *New York Times* initially put their material out for free— [Yes.] Actually, theirs is still free, but there are others like *Scientific American* who now charges for their online archive, whereas originally they too were launched for free. [Yes.] So it's in that timeframe, consistent with industry practice, I would imagine. [Yes.] So what were your internal conversations about this? When did it begin to look like there was a potential revenue stream here in this product?

MANDELBAUM: So when we were planning for the official launch in '99, Joe DeBlasi came up with a model for charging ACM members a member fee for access to the Digital Library, and we worked on an institutional fee for libraries.

AKERA: Right, which is not a single fee for an institution? I know a little bit about this... It depends on the number of retrievals and such, a formula?

MANDELBAUM: Well, the original model for the library was for a set fee for a single site, whatever the fee was. A couple of thousand dollars.

AKERA: Oh, so it was a fixed fee.

MANDELBAUM: It was a fixed fee, right.

AKERA: Which is sort of the print subscription model.

MANDELBAUM: Right, right. Unlimited downloads, unlimited simultaneous usage, which I remember was pretty radical at the time, because the IEEE, I think they had a limit of three or five simultaneous users, and we felt we would be aggressive, and so we said unlimited downloads and unlimited simultaneous users.

AKERA: Now was that a Publications Board decision?

MANDELBAUM: Well, this was Joe DeBlasi's decision.

AKERA: Okay, I just wanted to know where it came from.

MANDELBAUM: He justified it to the Board.

AKERA: What was his main justification?

MANDELBAUM: That the PR value in saying unlimited downloads and unlimited simultaneous users would more than make up for the cost of providing unlimited access, and it turned out that unlimited simultaneous users did not present a problem. The technology improved very, very quickly.

AKERA: Kept improving so rapidly, yes, the client server models.

MANDELBAUM: Yes.. So we actually out-shone the IEEE on the hardware side! IEEE members were saying— Or the librarians were saying, “How come you’re restricting us to five simultaneous users and ACM is saying unlimited?” [Chuckles] So IEEE had to very quickly change their policy.

AKERA: So moving forward, what happens with the Digital Library product as you move forward?

MANDELBAUM: So a fundamental change occurred around 2000, where in my discussion with librarians I discovered that there were groups of libraries organized mainly in the U.S., mainly within states as library consortia. They were formed as sort of a buying group, buying co-op for the purpose of getting better deals from publishers for the purchase of textbooks and other education material.

AKERA: Including science and other technical publications, which can be expensive.

MANDELBAUM: Right. So the idea occurred to me that we could sell the Digital Library. Commoditize it and sell it to the library consortia and give them a discount. So I reached out to several consortia: Viva, the Virtual Library of Virginia, which had 30 or 40 institutions, both public and private; the University of California consortium, which became the California Digital Library, [with] ten member institutions; a consortium in Ohio, Ohio Link; and several others. I initiated negotiations with each of them, and I brought this to Joe, and said, “Viva, the Virginia consortium has some 40 members and they’re willing to take the ACM Digital Library for all 40, but they’re going to want a big discount.” So we talked about it a little more and we talked about the mechanics and all of this, and I’ll never forget: the next day, Joe came in and he said, “Okay, I have the pricing formula for the consortia.” We went over it. It was based on the idea that the greater the number of institutions in a consortium, the greater the discount. So for example, if the single institution price for the Digital Library at the time was, let’s say \$4,000, a consortium with 40 members would each get the Digital Library access for, let’s say \$1,500 each instead of \$4,000—a very significant discount. From a cost standpoint, it was nothing. You know, how much it cost ACM to send some bits down the line or send PDF files. So we realized we could give a very significant discount.

So I took the formula and this explanation to those first few consortia, California and Virginia and Ohio, and within a matter of several weeks, we had signed agreements. The

agreements themselves were interesting because they were basically experiments in licensing, an agreement for licensing, you know, publisher's data.

AKERA: Because you wanted to retain control over the data and its usage.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, and under what terms can they use the data, and who in the institution is authorized to access it. Faculty obviously, students obviously; but a visiting scholar... In many university communities, the town can access it—

AKERA: So was ACM one of the first organizations to negotiate these kinds of licenses?

MANDELBAUM: One of the first, if not the first.

AKERA: Okay, good. That's what I wanted to get on record, yeah. So it really changes some of the academic models for access to intellectual property and academic materials.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And because we were first to market this and because we gave a very significant discount, the word of mouth in the librarian community spread very quickly, and I was getting calls and emails from consortia that were interested in the price for the ACM Digital Library. I didn't have to sell. I mean it was very easy.

AKERA: Did you get calls from other organizations who were asking about... seeking your advice on how to launch these kinds of products?

MANDELBAUM: A little later, a little later on. Several non-profits including the IEEE Computer Society.

AKERA: Yeah, that makes you very proud, I imagine. [Laughter]

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah. The Executive Director at the time and the head of publishing and the head of IS came to New York, and they took me out to a *very* nice restaurant. And they picked my brains for a couple of hours.

AKERA: That's wonderful.

MANDELBAUM: But Joe was angry with me when I told him, because he said I was giving away corporate secrets!

AKERA: Was he really angry, or just joking?

MANDELBAUM: He was a little pissed. He was a little annoyed.

AKERA: Well that's sad to hear. It's an academic world.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. And I said it's a [matter of] professional courtesy. And there were no trade secrets given. Then later on, a couple of societies asked me for help. I spent some time with

a couple of other societies. Then also later on as word got out, I was inundated with requests to talk at publisher conferences, at society annual conferences, and so I did a lot of that.

AKERA: So I'd like to continue capturing this story. So then how did the Digital Library product continue to change?

MANDELBAUM: So the early success,— deals like that were generating real revenues. Virginia, \$100,000. California, \$80,000. Ohio, \$150,000. Whatever. There were big numbers that suddenly...

AKERA: ...suddenly began appearing on the ACM's books, and it's clear you have a hit...

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, suddenly.

AKERA: ...with significant revenues that compete even with the conferences and other such items in terms of revenue?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. The revenue was coming in. It was like one after another. Oregon, Michigan, Texas, Illinois, Pennsylvania. All of these consortia were just eager—

AKERA: So it's really the consortia sales that constitutes the bulk of the Digital Library revenues at that time. [Yes.] So how did the Digital Library evolve from there?

MANDELBAUM: So just continuing with the marketing, with the sales. I think it would have been around 2001, 2002, I met the guy who was President of a marketing and sales agency based in Bangkok and Singapore, at a publishers conference. We were chatting, and he said, "I can deliver the Asian market." We talked some more and we signed the contract, and within a year, we had agreements for entire countries. Korea, \$200,000 or \$300,000, paid for by the government.

AKERA: Interesting. So the entire country in Korea has access. [Yes.] Not everybody in the U.S. has access. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I would say in Korea, there were 40 or 50 institutions.

AKERA: It's specifically those institutions that have access.

MANDELBAUM: Yes. And then Thailand and then Singapore and a little later on China, which became huge, and then India, which also started out with 75 or 80 institutions and now when I left ACM, there were at about 200 institutions there.

AKERA: But for whatever reason the SIG Board gained control over some of these revenues. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Not of the Digital Library. Not at the beginning, but once it was clear that this was a cash cow and this was a goldmine... And as we were digitizing and adding more conference proceedings, the SIG Board said, "Hey, that's our conference and our proceedings."

So Joe negotiated an agreement that the SIGs would get in their bucket 30% of the revenues, even though they produced 70% of the content. But there was overhead...

AKERA: ...including the marketing costs and everything associated with the production of the Digital Library.

MANDELBAUM: Right. And they were perfectly happy with that. I think Joe was very astute. It was the only time I think he went to the SIG Board.

AKERA: Sure. It had to be settled before...

MANDELBAUM: Joe said, "We seem to have hit on a tremendous financial benefit here, and in recognition of your work and your content being such a big part of the Digital Library, we are going to give 30%." The fact that he went to them rather than waiting for them to come ask and demanding, there was no argument. There was no negotiation, and they accepted, and to this day that's been a peaceful and productive agreement between the two sides. And then one level down from that, the SIGs take that 30% and then give the money to each SIG based on a formula of downloads of each SIG's content as a fraction of the whole.

AKERA: So is the ACM Digital Library's revenue model still based on unlimited access, unlimited downloads? [Yes.] Really? So it's not on a per-item download basis.

MANDELBAUM: No. Other models that were developed at the time right after ACM— It seemed some publishers went to a pricing model that was based on FTEs, full-time employees of the [subscribing] institution.

AKERA: But still the institution size, not based on the individual download cost.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, right. The most recent ACM pricing model that was put into place just as I was leaving does now account for downloading. There's a price factor that goes into the calculations based on downloading, but at the beginning it was strictly for consortia, the number of institutions in a consortium.

AKERA: Yes, and a set fee for institutions. So there are just bits of the history still missing. So how did the Digital Library product change? When was the decision made to add additional publications?

MANDELBAUM: So as the revenue kept pouring in, it was clear we could take a portion of that revenue and support the digitization of all other ACM products, including SIG newsletters.

AKERA: So basically the revenues coming in were contrasted against the cost of digitization and was such that it was a very simple decision to say, "We should just redirect and digitize the entire collection."

MANDELBAUM: Right. The cost of digitization, in two years it went from something like \$1.50 a page to 30¢ page.

AKERA: And it's continued to fall since then?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. It became almost nothing. The big cost, especially in the early days, was the delivery of the file, of the PDF to the users.

AKERA: And those costs have gone down, too, I imagine.

MANDELBAUM: And those costs have gone down tremendously, yeah.

AKERA: So when was the decision made to digitize the entire collection? It must have happened in stages, but...

MANDELBAUM: It would have been around 2001.

AKERA: Okay, so it was decided fairly quickly.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. When we saw the money and the potential.

AKERA: The quicker you did it, the more you would get in revenue. [Yes.] So that was a quick decision.

MANDELBAUM: We decided, "Yeah, we're going to do everything." It cost about \$400,000-\$500,000.

AKERA: Compared to the millions that are coming in annually. That's wonderful. Wow! Congratulations! That's quite an accomplishment.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it was, and then after that my role changed and I started traveling. Started traveling extensively. The Asian market was huge.

AKERA: So you became more responsible for marketing and sales?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah, because it became clear that the future of the society—and print subscription then were falling through the floor, dried up because of the Digital Library. It was clear that the society was going to rise or fall based on Digital Library revenue, and so Joe and then John basically asked me to be responsible for sales and for the revenue because it was so important.

AKERA: But your formal job title didn't change, right? You still remained Director of Publications or did you get a new title as well? [No.] But basically by de facto, you became the marketing director of ACM.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, I was the director of sales. Yeah.

AKERA: At least for its major revenue-generating product. There are other aspects of marketing that are handled by different parts of the organization, I imagine.

MANDELBAUM: Right, yes.

AKERA: So what portion of ACM's revenues does the Digital Library account for?

MANDELBAUM: I don't know what it is now; I haven't looked at the latest. But it was about, when I left, maybe one third, maybe 33%, 35% of revenues.

AKERA: Then the rest are the conference fees and the print subscription and the membership fees.

MANDELBAUM: And the other aspect of Digital Library revenue is approximately 20,000 ACM members pick the Digital Library for \$99, so that's another \$2 million on top of that. So I was in Europe, Asia, Latin America, South America—I was flying all over the place negotiating and doing demos for government agencies and academic consortia.

PART II.4: New Career and Other Conversations

AKERA: So now I think this is a very good transition into the final topic. Did any of this work with the Digital Library connect to your position now as Executive Director of a European computer society? Did this broader exposure give you some of the managerial background and broader perspective that allowed you to step into a new role?

MANDELBAUM: Not really. My situation currently— I joined ICST as the Director of Publications, and especially because of my experience at ACM and with ICST launching 30 journals and a Digital Library and some books and so on. I kind of fell into the position of Executive Director due to some personnel changes there.

AKERA: That's right. So is ICST larger or smaller than ACM?

MANDELBAUM: Oh, smaller.

AKERA: So it's much smaller? So the Director of Publications there really was a job you took after having retired from ACM here, and then you wanted to go back to work again and they happened to have that opportunity. So even though it wasn't the same level of job, you decided to accept it. [Yes.] Okay. I'd love to recapture that story, but just in case, is there anything else about the Digital Library story that we should complete? Anything else in its development or success?

MANDELBAUM: I think we covered most of it. I think once the content was digitized and captured, then it's just a question of adding new content. Every time a new journal issue comes out, every time a new conference proceeding comes out, it goes into the Digital Library.

AKERA: Now I imagine there was some thinking into an all-digital stream so that you didn't have to rely— You didn't want to scan anymore the print publication to put into the Digital Library. Is everything done digitally now?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah. So in the production process of the journals and of the conference proceedings, there is a branch that goes to produce the print, and then there is another branch of—

AKERA: The digital product gets forwarded and goes right into the Digital Library?

MANDELBAUM: Yes. So now when I left ACM, the latest was to put out articles to each journal as soon as they are accepted or as soon as...

AKERA: ...so you don't have to wait till its official publication until it's available in digital form?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and that's also been a huge thunderbolt. Authors love it because their work shows up sooner. Readers love it because they don't have to wait two years to see the latest development.

AKERA: Yes, yes, and it helps the intellectual development of the field. Are there any other changes of that nature that have happened as a result of the Digital Library? What change did this bring about to the publication models of the field?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, it does represent a fundamental change in how technical publishing works. So it could work in the future that we are no longer dependent on this old print model of defining a journal issue but rather as soon as it's ready, it's published. What does a journal mean now when you have that? No more issues. We might decide arbitrarily 20 articles in a year and that's what you get for your subscriptions, and it doesn't matter volume, issue 1, 2, 3, or 4, spring, summer, fall, winter, or January, April, July, October.

AKERA: Just a continuous stream of new ideas.

MANDELBAUM: Right, and that has implications on bibliographic citation. When is the article considered officially published? When it appears in the Digital Library, which could be any time. It does not have to conform to four or six issues a year. So these are the kind of new issues that will have to be resolved in the field.

AKERA: Now there is obviously a new Director of Publications at ACM. Is that correct?

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, Bernard Rous, who worked for me for almost as long as I've been at ACM. I've been there 30-some-odd years. He's been there I think 28 years.

AKERA: What was his title before?

MANDELBAUM: He was Deputy Director of Publications.

AKERA: That's wonderful. So the question I was going to ask makes a little less sense in this context, but do you have any advice to offer to your successor? [No.] He must have done this extensively all throughout the process. He knows everything you've done.

MANDELBAUM: He knows everything.. I mean Bernie had been intimately involved in the Digital Library from the beginning. He was originally responsible for the *Computing Reviews* and the *Guide*, so he goes back to the beginning with the bibliographic citations and the databases and so on. He'd been instrumental in the development of the Digital Library from the technical and from the database standpoint.

AKERA: Now do you foresee any challenges up ahead for ACM publications or ACM as a whole? Really in publications given all the changes that are happening with digital technologies?

MANDELBAUM: Well, I think the biggest challenge is getting and retaining members. When you have the web and you have LinkedIn and Facebook and Twitter and all those social networking things and Web 2.0, how relevant does a society become? How relevant is it to be a member of a society when you could be a member of a community and get just as much or even more value from that? So I think that's a big challenge.

AKERA: Do you have any ideas in terms of what kind of things societies have to do?

MANDELBAUM: Well again, something we're doing at ICST, and I'm sure ACM is thinking along the same lines, is to provide the membership with tools that they can use, whatever those tools are—social networking tools, Web 2.0 tools. ACM has been doing author pages where each member can have his or her own unique author page where all of your articles are listed, your work affiliation in an effort to personalize ACM for each member. ICST is doing those same kinds of things, providing— You know, there's a "My ACM" and a "My ICST". So the trend would be social networking, community development, organizing and managing the community rather than organizing and managing a society membership sort of thing.

AKERA: So just as a final conversation then, can you tell us a little bit about your stepping up to become ICST's Executive Director?

MANDELBAUM: Do I have to?

AKERA: Yes, please! We'd love to hear it. So what has this involved? What work have you done? Have you expanded your horizons?

MANDELBAUM: It's basically trying to manage an organization that is new and trying to manage a staff in Hungary, in Budapest...

AKERA: ...in a former Communist society.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, yeah, that needs to learn how to think on their own more creatively, to take responsibility to work hard and see the rewards of working hard even though they may not be that obvious, to take chances, to think independently, out of the box, and come up with solutions to problems. The organization has a lot of issues and a lot of challenges, and it needs a lot of management and a lot of supervision.

AKERA: I can imagine that's part of the structural problem for the transition of these post-Communist societies. [Yes.] But are there any specific managerial lessons that you've learned from your years at ACM that you are now applying or carrying over to ICST?

MANDELBAUM: Oh yeah, yeah. There is a need for communication over there, for people to talk to each other about what they're doing. By the way, Dru works with me.

AKERA: Yes, I sort of pieced that together along the way. Thank you!

MANDELBAUM: So the challenge there is to bring American-style [management] in to foster and encourage communication. If they talk to each other about what they're doing every day and they talk to us, which is something that has not happened.

AKERA: Yes, and let's say the top three lessons. What are the second and third things that you carried on into your new position?

MANDELBAUM: Second and third. Unlike ACM where the bulk of the revenue comes from publications, at ICST the bulk of the revenue comes from conferences. ICST has been trying to emulate ACM and IEEE's style and procedures for managing and handling conferences. It's been a problem.

AKERA: So you have the model, but the replication is difficult because of the personnel and cultural differences, I guess.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, and some of the challenges are ICST—you know, new guy on the block, primarily European. It's hard to get some of the top people in the field to be a conference chair or a keynote because they've already done it more than once for IEEE and ACM. Now ICST comes along and, "Hey, Mr. or Ms.. Big Name, can you do—?" "Well no, I've given to ACM and IEEE. I've done that already in my career." So it's a challenge to find good, top people. And lesson number three, volunteer development and the challenge of...

AKERA: ...of developing the loyalty of the computer science and extended community.

MANDELBAUM: Yeah, for ICST, and finding a good group of volunteers who are well known and who will be dedicated to furthering the ICST mission.

AKERA: Sure. Well, I certainly wish you luck with all of those ventures.

MANDELBAUM: Oh, thank you.

AKERA: That is wonderful work you are doing for the European community.

MANDELBAUM: Yes, thank you. I'll need all the luck I can get.

AKERA: Final remarks?

MANDELBAUM: ACM has been the professional outlet for me for over 30 years, and the volunteers have been absolutely great. It's been a tremendous experience working with them. By and large, most of them were always willing to take the time to explain things, to talk about what they're doing, to work together. It's just been— Computing—I don't know if there's a certain type that gravitates to computer science, but they tend to be outgoing and willing to share and share knowledge and share insights. I learned a tremendous amount. I have nothing but the fondest memories of ACM and still keep in touch with its volunteers. I'm trying to twist their arm to join ICST.

AKERA: To defect over to ICST! [Laughter] That's good. Well Mark, thank you very much for all of your time in these interviews.

MANDELBAUM: Oh, thanks.