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Forks in the Road and My Travel Through Life

Chapter 9 Beaverton, Oregon 1981

New Job

I terminated employment with EG&G Idaho the first week of December 1980. My new job was with Floating Point Systems (FPS) in Beaverton, Oregon. I would be in marketing on the four person team preparing for the introduction of the new FPS-164 computer.

The FPS-164 was designed for scientific computing with 64-bit accuracy to compete with Control Data and Cray Research. It was also competitive in speed. The big advantage it had was that it was very affordable, in the \$300k-\$500k range versus millions for the competition.

FPS was a highly successful relatively new company that made 16-bit array processors for oil companies and CAT scan medical devices. Their entry into the high speed scientific number crunching world was unknown territory for the company. That is why I was hired.

We decided to delay our move to Beaverton until after Christmas. LaRue and Julie would stay in Idaho Falls and I would go over and start work.

Brian and Kathleen were in college at Boise State, so that was not a problem. Their only change would be to go the opposite direction when they came home to visit.

I loaded up the Dodge Colt with my skis on top and headed to Beaverton. I checked in at the Satellite Motel about a half mile from FPS. FPS would pay for 30 days. I would go back to Idaho Falls for the Christmas break and we would start the move process.

I would be working for an old Control Data friend, Carl Haberland. He had

recently hired Phil Vaughn from Tektronix for his IBM expertise and David Long from Phoenix, Arizona where he did design work for a company that built array processors. Carl and I were both ex Control Data employees with extensive experience in scientific computing.

The FPS-164 was in the prototype phase. Manufacturing capability was ramping up. The first shipment of a production model was expected to be Chevron Oil in Houston, Texas around mid 1981.

My first purchase after I arrived in Beaverton was to buy a raincoat. My coworkers made fun of me. According to them a raincoat was not needed for "Oregon dry rain".

I dug in and learned all I could the first two weeks. Christmas was approaching and FPS policy was to shut down for a week over the Christmas holiday. FPS also sponsored a Christmas party the last day of work before the shutdown. It was held at the Greenwood Inn between Beaverton and Tigard.

The party started around 3pm and it was food, drinks, and live music all courtesy of FPS. I went to the party for a couple of hours and hit the road for Idaho Falls. I was impressed how well FPS treated their employees.

There were a couple of workdays before the New Year's holiday. I had agreement that I could stay in Idaho Falls and work at home.

We decided I would return to Beaverton and work for a couple of weeks. LaRue would fly over and we would look for a house. I went back to the Satellite Motel and checked in again.

A Strange Encounter

I went skiing on a Saturday at Mt Hood Meadows which is on the east slope of Mt. Hood. It wasn't much fun skiing by myself, but I ran into some people that I knew at FPS. That made it better and I had a good day skiing.

I returned to the motel that evening and decided to go to a tavern on the highway towards Aloha that a great bratwurst sandwich. It was dark and raining and not much traffic. A small car kept running up on my back bumper then would fall back and run up on me again. I couldn't see the car with the rain and spray flying up. It did this four or five times then pulled beside me looking me over. I could make

out one guy in it looking at me. He then accelerated and took off. I noticed it was a yellow VW with stickers in the rear window. The encounter stuck in my mind.

A few years ago I was clicking through TV channels and saw something about the I-5 Killer. He was operating around the Portland area at the same time as my strange encounter. It got my attention and started watching. The killer preyed on young women and several were killed or missing in the area of Interstate 5. He was a serial killer and named the I-5 Killer. He was linked to 18 murders and there may have been a total of 44. One of the last was February 15, 1981 in Beaverton. When they caught him he was driving a 1974 champagne gold VW. I am positive he was the one I had the encounter with that night in January 1981.

Relocating to Beaverton

After a couple of weeks LaRue flew over. We would look at houses and hopefully find something we liked. An intriguing one was a narrow 6 story house on the side of a ravine off Canyon Road that went over the hill to Portland. Each floor was one room or so. We only looked and imagined what it would be like.

We found a newly finished house that the builder wanted to rent, and struck a deal. The address was 7085 SW 125th Place, Beaverton. It was 2,476 sq ft, cedar sided, 2 story, 4 bedrooms, 3 baths, large living room, dining room, large kitchen with an eating area, a family room, a bathroom, and laundry room on a 2 level main floor. The 4 bedrooms and 2 baths were upstairs. We were fortunate to find such a nice new house and reasonable rent.

It was super bowl Sunday and we watched Oakland beat Philadelphia to my satisfaction. After the game we went out for Chinese food. LaRue flew home Monday morning and we started the process of moving. We decided we would play it safe in case the new job didn't work out and rent our Idaho Falls house.

FPS would make the moving company arrangements and pay all expenses. I asked them to use Allied moving in Idaho Falls and they did. This was the father and son team that packed us for Switzerland and unpacked us when we returned. They knew what they were doing.

A realtor found a renter for the house.

FPS allowed me a week to fly home while the movers were there and get things wrapped up. I left the car in the FPS parking lot and Phil took me to the Portland

airport.

Once things were loaded in the moving van we had to get going in order to be at the house in Beaverton when they arrived.

We almost lost the cat, Radar, when we stopped at a roadside rest before getting to Baker City, Oregon. Radar disappeared into a thick stand of low juniper bush and wouldn't come out. After three hours we were about to leave when he casually strolled out.

We got to Beaverton and checked into the Satellite Motel for the night.

Our furniture arrived the next morning. Smooth move and everything came through in good shape.

Mt. Saint Helens

The volcano eruption of Mount St. Helens in March was of concern. It was history, although it was still smoking. My folks were in their pickup and camper in the Idaho panhandle when it erupted. It went dark, heavy ash was falling, and they had to pull off the road and stop. They couldn't get anything on the radio and they thought the world was coming to an end. The next day they went to a farm house and found out what happened.

Life in the Beaverton Area

One day I was looking in the attic of our house and saw a coating of stuff on the rafters. It was ash from the Mount St. Helen's eruption. Evidently the roof was not on the house when the volcano erupted.

After we were in Beaverton a while a friend of Phil Vaughn took the two of us on a flight to see the volcano. We flew over miles of flattened trees and ash and mud slides as we flew up the western slope. He intended to fly into the low end of the crater and circle inside. However, there were two helicopters inside the crater, so we flew by looking in. There was a lot of smoke and steam coming up and the smell was terrible.

We liked Beaverton and there was a lot to do. The main attraction was the coast that was about 60 miles from Beaverton. Max and Loa's cabin was a little over halfway on Highway 6 to Tillamook. It was a tiny ormer logging camp cook

shack. In later years Max and Loa put a double wide manufactured home on another lot and son David inherited the little cabin.

There was a big wood cook stove for heat and cooking as well as a small electric stove. There was no TV or phone. The North Fork of the Wilson River ran by and had some deep holes to cool off in on a hot summer day.

The cabin was located on the Reeher (Max's family) homestead of 320 acres. There were about 30 cabins owned by family members. A locked gate off the highway at Lees Camp kept people out. It was paradise that we could use any time we wanted.

On weekends there was always some kind of festival going on in the area. It was bluegrass music at a winery, an octoberfest in the fall, or something in Portland.

It was always fun to get a huge hamburger at the Helvetia Tavern in Helvetia, that was about 10 miles from Beaverton. ABC's Wild World of Sports filmed a hamburger eating contest a few times. My coworker, Phil, was a contestant in the first one. He said once was enough.

Brian, Kathleen, and her friend, Denise, came for Easter and we took them to Astoria, Fort Clatsop, and down the coast. Then we stayed at the cabin.

They drove over from Boise, in Kathleen's Corolla and the windshield wipers quit working. Windshield wipers that don't work in Oregon is not good. We gave them the Colt to go back to Boise and got the Corolla wipers fixed. We delivered it to Boise the next weekend and retrieved the Colt.

There was skiing at Mt Hood and Mt Hood Meadows about 80 miles west. You could ski year around. Brian and Kathleen came for the 1981 Memorial Day holiday.

We loaded up our camping gear and ski's and headed for a lake campground at the base of Mt Hood near Government Camp. We drove into the campground with ski's on top of the Suburban and people gave us funny looks. They were canoeing and fishing. We went skiing.

Brian was in need of a car as something had taken out his Chevelle. While in Beaverton he found a used Mercury Capri and we made the purchase. It sideswiped a tree in Boise not too much later.

Near the end of the school year Julie's class was going on a one week field trip to Oregon State Parks. They would be camping and needed tents. I color coded the ends of the aluminum outside frame of our tent. We conducted drills for Julie sitting it up. The trip went well but they had six inches of snow one morning.

LaRue was in Utah during Julie's field trip, so I handled the logistics. LaRur's mother was having cataract surgery which in those days was a major deal. She had to be in bed with eyes bandaged shut for a week. So, LaRue tended to her mother and Julie and I made out fine.

The Idaho Falls bunch was going to the head of the Pahsimeroi again for the 4th of July holiday. We couldn't miss out and I had a few vacation days.

We loaded up and headed for Idaho. We arrived early in the afternoon and secured our usual spot at the end of the road. The others arrived later and we had a fun reunion and campout. This was the last time we saw Bob Scott's wife, Denise. They split and she returned to Switzerland.

FPS sponsored the company picnic that summer at a private place on several acres near Battle Ground, Washington and Mount St Helens. It was an all day affair with food, drinks, sports, and music provided at no cost to us. Our CEO, Norm Winningstad, arrived flying his helicopter, circled a few times, and landed to an ovation. It was a beautiful day and a great picnic. FPS treated its employees very well.

We decided for Labor Day weekend we would go camping near the lakes south of Mt Hood. Julie invited a friend and we loaded up the camping gear and took off.

The forecast was for rain. In Oregon if you wait for no rain you don't go.

We got our camp set up and it rained for two days. We had tarps and we weathered it. There was plenty of wet firewood. If you got the fire hot enough it would burn. Monday it was time to pack up and it was beautiful sunshine.

With Julie back in school in the fall and two going to Boise State LaRue went to work at U.S. Bank in Beaverton as a teller.

We had an interesting Thanksgiving. Kathleen's friend in Switzerland, Jane, was with Ballet West and they were performing in Portland. She came and had

Thanksgiving with us. Brian, Kathleen, and Julie attended the ballet.

I saw an ad in the Portland paper about a boat shop on Sauvie Island that also had great deals on diamond jewelry. LaRue's wedding rings were stolen while we were traveling in Europe and I thought this might be a good time to replace them.

Julie and I slipped away on a Saturday to go Christmas shopping. This guy had just what I was looking for and made the purchase. When we went to get the rings I saw a man's ring in the show case that had a unique design. I asked about it and it was special made for a guy that never picked it up. I bought myself a diamond wedding ring.

My Job

When I came on board the first shipment of the FPS-164 was targeted for the summer of 1981. It would go to Chevron in Houston who was one of the largest users of FPS array processors.

The sales force needed to be brought up to speed. We made sales calls with them and they brought prospects to Beaverton. Sales brochures needed to be developed, pricing determined, and pricing manuals produced for the people in the field. There was a weekly meeting with the hardware, software, and manufacturing people. It was a busy time.

FPS array processors came in one color, and it was the corporate color, green. It was decided that the FPS-164 should be different, such as blue. It took many meetings to pick which shade of blue. It was finally determined there would be a choice of three colors. It would be IBM blue, DEC blue (darker), and the new CDC Cyber color, harvest gold. Problem solved. It took many meetings and man hours to arrive at that decision.

IBM saw the potential of using the FPS-164 to augment their small computers. Carl gave a presentation to a huge audience of IBM sales people in California.

This led to a joint agreement with IBM. We then went as a team to the IBM Seattle office and Carl gave the staff a presentation. It was a strange experience after being an adversary of IBM in two large competitive procurements. Now we were buddies. We also made a joint sales call with IBM at Union Carbide in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I gave my first presentation on that trip.

A meeting of all FPS salesmen was scheduled for Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Carl and I went to give presentations.

FPS had a policy if you flew before 7am out of Portland you could book First Class. We had a stop in Denver where we were joined by Grumman executives. They were going to launch #2 of the space shuttle at Cape Kennedy. We visited with them and were invited to join them in the VIP viewing stand for the launch. We were obligated, but it was nice to be invited.

The launch was scheduled for around 3am and we were told it would be highly visible from our hotel. I got up to see it, and after delays it was scrubbed for several days. It was a big disappointment, but we had time to visit and tour Cape Kennedy when our meeting was over.

The salesman in New York requested my assistance for a call on Grumman Aerospace on Long Island. He picked me up at LaGuardia and drove to Long Island and checked me into a hotel. There was a nice restaurant he wanted to take me to, and we went there for dinner. On the way out of the restaurant he pointed out that they sold this great berry jam they displayed on a shelf. I told him it was from Oregon. He had always thought it was from New York.

I also visited Ford in Detroit, Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburg, McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis, and a sales meeting in Philadelphia.

I was in St. Louis again to give an update to the FPS User Group Conference. Carl told me to entertain the Chevron people that were attending. I made dinner reservations at a steakhouse across from our hotel and met them for drinks at the hotel bar. The head Chevron guy asked me where we were having dinner and I told him it was at the steakhouse nearby. He says there is this acclaimed Italian restaurant that would be much better.

I am here to entertain the customer, so went along with his wishes. I discovered later this place was considered the best Italian in St. Louis. We had to wait for a large table. A waiter made drinks as we watched and lounged in big chairs.

There were four Chevron people and they ordered big. Dinner was outstanding and good wine flowed. I reached for a wine bottle once and a waiter was there in a flash.

The drink and dinner tab was out of sight. I was a new employee and knew it

would not go well on my expense report. I called Carl the next morning and he agreed that it was a problem. He should have warned me about the Chevron people. It will be approved this time.

Changes at FPS

It came as a total surprise when it was announced around mid year. Norm Winningstadt was no longer the President. His replacement was a former IBM executive. Norm would be the CEO reporting to the Board of Directors. It was a shock to everyone. Morale took a hit.

Then Carl Haberland, who recruited me, announced that he was moving to California as a salesman for FPS. I couldn't understand why as he was doing a good job as the Product Manager. There were manufacturing problems delaying the first shipment of the FPS-164, but that was not any fault of his.

I was promoted to Product Manager which I really didn't want. There were too many meetings to attend, and now I was the manager of my two co-workers. They accepted it and were not a problem.

Problems With the FPS-164

The first system was supposed to ship by mid year. It kept slipping due to various problems during manufacture. I was getting beat on daily by the sales force. They were trying to sell the product. There was no success story to reference. All I could say is how great it is going to be.

In late November we had the first system on the floor for final checkout. I had brought some benchmark programs with me from Idaho that we utilized to check the results the Cyber 176 was producing.

It would be a good test to see if the FPS-164 would produce accurate results with real life engineering problems. This would be a far tougher test than what the engineers used for checkout. I made a run and was impressed that it ran to completion. The output looked good. I ran the program a couple more times.

I knew from past experience that when components heat up from continual use that things can fail. I got different results on each run. The engineers blamed the program, but I knew better. In my opinion the system could not be shipped.

I went to my manager and explained the problem. He was not a technical person, He was more of a bean counter. His job was to approve expense reports, manage budgets, performance reviews, etc.

He sent me to the Sales and Marketing Manager over him. He was distracted and in a hurry to leave. His wife was outside waiting to take him to the airport. He had to catch a flight to connect with a Concorde flight to Europe. So much for that.

I ended up in the new President's office and went through what I had found. His comment was, "I shipped computers with worse problems when I was at IBM". He intended to ship it as is. That was enough for me.

I went away hoping something would be done to fix the problem, but plans were made to ship serial #1, and that was it. I wanted no part of something that was wrong.

I waited until well into December and I had my one year obligation fulfilled. I called my old boss, Dick French, to see if anything might be available at EG&G.

Sure enough I could take back my old job in operations or be staff to him. I didn't want my old job and it would not be fair to Bob Scott. I said staff to him would be fine. He would have personnel send a written offer and I should have it within a week. The offer arrived and aaI ccepted.

A couple of days before the Christmas break I gave notice. My boss asked for 30 days which would put it in the last week of January 1982, and I agreed.

Then it was the annual Christmas Party. It was at a big hotel in downtown Portland. We boarded busses around 3pm so people would not have to drive and find parking and then drive back under the influence. Spouses came to FPS to travel on the bus also. It was a grand party in the grand ballroom of the hotel.

Winding Down in Beaverton

Brian and Kathleen came to Beaverton for Christmas. After Christmas we would all go to Idaho. Brian would drive our Dodge Colt and we would leave it in Idaho Falls. We departed Beaverton with Kathleen and Julie in the Corolla, Brian in the Colt, and LaRue and I in the Suburban.

The weather turned bad with snow and freezing rain going into Lagrande, Oregon. I slowed down and Kathleen didn't. We saw her spin around and off the highway. We caught up and they were ok but shook up. Brian was behind us and stopped also. The Corolla had a dent in the driver's side rocker panel where it made contact with a highway reflector post.

A passerby stopped with a tow chain and we got the Corolla back on the road. Kathleen was too shook to continue driving. The girls got in the Suburban with LaRue driving. I drove the Corolla with Brian following behind. We got to Ladd Canyon and it was snowing hard.

A semi was stopped in the right lane and an old couple in a sedan was trying to pass. They were going too slow, lost traction, and stopped. Now both lanes were blocked. We would have made it if the car in front of us hadn't spun out and stopped. Now we would have to chain up the two cars.

The Suburban was four wheel drive and had good traction. Chains went on the Colt easily, but the Corolla's was a problem. I worked for more than an hour laying in the snow. By then the truck and the car that caused the problem were gone and Brian also.

I finally got the chains on and we got going only to lose one chain going into Baker City, Oregon. I took the other chain off and we had the worst roads to Boise that I have ever been on. We never saw Brian again. We got to Boise about 4am and he was there. That was a scary trip.

LaRue and I went on to Idaho Falls the next day in the Suburban and the Colt. We visited friends and arranged to leave the Colt at the Lotts.

We met with our realtor and had him notify the renters of our house to be out by February 1.

On New Year's eve we drove to Boise in a blizzard and stayed at Kathleen's. We returned to Beaverton in freezing rain along the Columbia River. It was a round trip to remember.

The 1982 sales kickoff meeting was the first part of January. It was at a remote resort on an Indian reservation between Portland and Bend, Oregon.

The last half day of the meeting was for educating and updating the sales force on

the FPS-164. I drove over that morning with my staff of Phil and David. I gave the standard hype presentation and asked for questions.

The sales people had been sequestered all week at a remote resort in the middle of nowhere . They were not in a good mood. They demanded to know why the first system had not been shipped and just when it would.

They wanted answers and it was getting annoying. I held nothing back. I had nothing to lose and would be gone in a couple of weeks anyway. I said, "It doesn't work and I don't know when it will".

The room went silent and there were frowns on the managers faces. The meeting was over. Later Phil and David said my response was appropriate and loved it.

On the way back to Beaverton we stopped and had a nice dinner and drinks on FPS. I submitted the receipt on my expense report and never heard a word about it.

Preparing for our move I called Allied Moving in Idaho Falls to get a recommendation for a moving company in the Portland area. The owner said, "No need to talk to anyone. I will send my two boys with our moving van and take care of everything". They arrived on schedule and three days later we were packed and loaded.

The sales and marketing department had a going away luncheon on my last day at work on Friday, January 29. LaRue needed the Suburban for last minute running around and would meet us at the restaurant. I would catch a ride.

I was busy checking out with human resources and everyone was gone when I got back to the office. I had to call the restaurant to get someone to come and get me.

We had lunch and said our goodbyes and loaded up the Suburban. We had a lot of stuff. We were going to do some skiing along the way and begin work on Monday, February 8.

The moving van was on its way and would be In Idaho Falls the next day. They would leave our stuff on the van until we were ready to move in.

We decided to spend the night at Max and Loa's cabin. It was raining and turning to snow when we got to the cabin. It didn't take long for a fire in that big old cook

stove to heat the place up.

In the morning there was six inches of heavy wet snow. It was no problem with the Suburban. We departed for our first stop to ski Mt. Batchelor near Bend, Oregon.

We spent two nights in Bend and drove across Oregon to Boise. We stayed a couple of nights at Kathleen's apartment to ski Bogus Basin. Next was Sun Valley for a couple of nights to ski. We then headed to Salmon to visit the folks. It was cold and the roads were bad.

We rounded the big bend at Ellis and a car was coming at us on our side of the road. I had to take the borrow bit to miss him. Traveling that winter was not fun.

It was a relief to get to Idaho Falls and check into the Driftwood Inn where we stayed when we got back from Switzerland. I signed in with EG&G Monday morning and we worked on the house that week to clean and get ready to move in.

The morning of Friday, February 14 Julie woke us up early for a surprise. She had canned shrimp, Oreo cookies, and Coke set up for us. That is what we bought in Leadore the day we eloped to get married in Pocatello. What a surprise that was.

The Allied Moving father and son team moved us in the next day. They remembered where most things went, so it was easy. Everything came through in fine shape. They said they hoped to see us again.

David Long left FPS three months after me and Phil departed about a year later.

(Note FPS had a great concept and market niche with the FPS-164. However, the use of the TTL chip was a problem and it was not a success.*

They switched to a new design using ECL chips and called it the FPS-264. In 1986 they switched completely to massive parallel computing and named it the T series. It was a massive flop that cost the company 10's of millions of dollars. This led to filing bankruptcy and the selloff of assets.)

End chapter 9