

## Brian Eisenberg - Class of '62'. Recollections and *Life-after-Northview*

### School:

I have very fond memories of my school-days. It was a very formative environment where we grew up, formed opinions and were well educated.

I remember many teachers, but the two who had the most profound effect on me, and helped me shape my career-path were Miss Kagan and Mr Eitzman.

Miss Kagan instilled (or brought out) the love and magic of Maths and Mr Eitzman (who called me '*The Uncertainty-Man*' – referring to Werner Heisenberg, atomic physicist of The Uncertainty Principle) made me realise how fantastic the mysterious and, yet structured, the world of Physics was. Amongst many other things, he was the first to bring to my attention the threat of 'Carbon Emissions' (the term 'hot-house gasses' was not the vogue in 1962) and I find it ironic (interesting?) that today my daughter is one of the UK's leading scientists in that field and attended the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 as a member of the UK delegation.



Mr Lynsky and Lorna Gordon, putting me through the paces during rehearsals for the plays we put on, helped me harness the power of voice projection, something which was very useful during my career when I travelled the world and spoke at many conferences. I remember too standing outside Mr Dromer's workshop when he walked along the line bellowing '**Note-books**' (or '**no-books**') – which sounded the same and we got wacked with his stick if we interpreted it incorrectly. Nevertheless, I remain grateful to him for the woodworking he taught us – it is still useful today as I do my DIY chores at home.

Two stories about me at school:

1. I was a member of the Chess Team and one day, at school, we played a 16-board simultaneous game against a Grand-Master (could have been an International Master) from the Johannesburg Chess Club (which I visited on occasions with Leslie Lasker). In the morning assembly ahead of this event, Mr Harrison announced this important occasion and said that if anyone wins their game the school will have a day off. Well, I did win my match! (I remember it so well – it was Friday 13<sup>th</sup> – no idea of which year or month) but have absolutely no recollection whether or not the school, or our class, got the promised day off.



2. I was a Prefect and immensely proud of the fact. There was a school rule that the girls were not allowed to wear jewellery, a rule I thought unfair. So I took the law into my own hands and started returning confiscated jewellery (which was stored in a tin in the prefects' room) and of course became very popular amongst the girls as a consequence. (I would like to think I did it for popularity reasons, but am not sure that was the driver). Naturally this did not go unnoticed and I was eventually summoned into Harrison's office to explain myself. I was told that I was a *Prefect of the Staff* – *NOT a Prefect of the Pupils* and threatened with being the first prefect ever (it was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the school) to have his badge taken away. I repented on the spot! - another very useful life lesson - how to handle authority properly and not abuse it.

### **University:**

I attended Wits to study Electrical Engineering, but not realising that I had to actually do real work and study, failed my first year, although I excelled at social activity, chasing girls and playing bridge in the cafeteria. I had to beg my way to be allowed to return to take a place – another life lesson – and boy did I study hard for the next years!

I specialised in Computers and wrote my 'dissertation' (final year project) on the use of computers for controlling road traffic, which won be a bursary by the CBI (Confederation of British Industries) to go to London and work on their computer traffic control system, which, perhaps short-sightedly, I turned down.

### **Adult Life and Career:**

Computers played a very significant role in my life and career – although I started off by joining SIEMENS after graduation as Communications Engineer where my main customer responsibilities lay with SA Railways and I managed to travel extensively to remote places throughout So Africa.

I desperately wanted to work in the Computer field and as Siemens seemed unlikely to open such a division in S Africa I moved to ICT, which became ICL shortly after I joined. I worked in the Braamfontein offices and in my spare time (using ICL resources) developed the FIRST world-wide Bridge Computer Scoring System which was initially tested for the Transvaal Championships and then used for So African Championships in Seapoint in 1969.

In May 1970 I was transferred to ICL UK to become specialist in the use of computers in production control and whilst there (18 months) met a beautiful young, very British, lady - Sally Ann Shindler – who is now my wife. We were married in London in April '72.



In order to meet contractual commitments for the time I was in the UK, I spent 1 year back in So Africa (amongst other things, did computer control work for Ford Motor Co in East London where quite accidentally I ran into Madge Nettle just walking down a street!) and in 1973 I was transferred to ICL's office in New York City with the mission to help expand their USA operations.

Leslie Lasker (and his wife, from Krugersdorp) was also living in NYC at the time (working in Brookhaven Labs, Long Island) and we spent a great deal of time together.

Our daughter, Alyssa, was born in White Plains, NY in 1976 and shortly thereafter I left ICL to join a USA Fortune 50 Company – TRW - as part of their computer division based in Los Angeles. During our time in LA our son, Neville was born.

I worked with TRW for 7 years, involved in the embryonic days of the PC Revolution ('distributed processing' using intelligent terminals as it was at that time) and was relocated to Toronto where I ran the sales division.

In 1983 I decided to move more whole-heartedly into the growing PC world, moved to Silicon Valley and joined VisiCorp, the spreadsheet (aka: VisiCalc) pioneer. It was a very exciting and stimulating time as we competed with small, unknown and fledgling companies called

Microsoft and Apple (!!) – during which time I did meet with the young and unknown entrepreneurs Steve Jobs and Bill Gates a few times. Sadly VisiCorp was one of the casualties of those days and went bankrupt in late '84 – else, these days. I'd be flying around the world in my private jet or sunning myself on a private yacht in Bermuda.

With scars of that experience I moved back into more traditional computing (UNIX) and with the inflated title '*VP International Sales and Marketing*' worked out of Toronto where my family was still based and travelled extensively world-wide. Company eventually sold to Kodak whereupon I joined small Toronto-based specialist UNIX software Co as a senior executive and was instrumental in helping sell the company to Santa Cruz Operations, a USA based company.

More computing technology for me as I joined Phoenix Technologies (the BIOS company) as VP International Operations and was relocated to London to set up and manage European activities.

By 1993 I had enough of the Corporate-world and started my own consulting company – now > 20 years old!, successfully handling many large and profitable contracts, specialising in new and merging technologies, one of which was eventually sold to Microsoft, who have a penchant for buying guppies which threaten, gobbling them up, discarding the technology and spitting out the remains. I was such a 'spitee' and still have many colleagues inside the bowels of the whale, in Seattle.

I became seriously ill with bladder and prostate cancer in 1996 and underwent some advanced experimental surgery; as you see I am still here, albeit partly bionic, to talk about it and am now the longest surviving patient of that (then) trial surgery and often help people undergoing the same surgery (now far more advanced) to understand the outcomes and what they should expect.

Our daughter, married (August 2001) has 4 children, lives in London; is an environmental scientist looking after her companies' offices in London, Beijing and projects in Moscow. Our son, married (August 2010), lives in Johannesburg (!!!!) and is a principal for an



International Management consulting firm headquartered in Melrose Arches.

Today, as an outcome of my consulting practise, I am a **media literacy specialist** – helping Older People (i.e. those >65 years!) to understand how to use today's technology – computers, mobile phones, smart-phones, tablets etc. I do some related consulting with UK Government Dept's and Housing Associations.

Additionally I help the Boards of SMEs (turnover > £50 million) to be

more effective, and help young entrepreneurs set up and position their fledgling businesses.

Despite the activities listed above, I am now 'semi-retired' and do a great deal of charitable and pro-bono projects as well as helping look after our 4 grandchildren. I am a registered and qualified Tournament Director and play lots of bridge, enjoy making the most of London theatre, gardening and keep fit by swimming 1.5K swim almost every day.