



## Profiles in Computing

### Dave Walden

Retired Computing Professional

**Education:** BA, Math, San Francisco State College  
Graduate coursework, Computer science, MIT

**Advice to students:** Start reading the computing literature and find a way to begin building hardware or writing software now; don't wait until you start taking formal computer courses. Practice so you write prose fast and well; it will help your thinking and give you an advantage over all those computer people from whom writing is hard.



**Q: Please describe your path to becoming the computing professional you are today.**

**A:** I discovered an IBM 1620 computer while studying math, at which I was not very good, and thereafter I spent a lot of time writing programs. Upon graduation, I applied for jobs as a computer programmer and was hired by MIT Lincoln Lab. There, I evolved from a novice to a journeyman computer programmer under the mentorship of Will Crowther, the author of the first computer adventure game. I then moved to BBN where I had to good fortune to become part of the small team that developed the packet-switching technology for the ARPANET, the precursor of the Internet.

Read Dave's computing memoir for the IEEE History Center Global History Network:

<http://walden-family.com/cshc/archive/pubs/walden-memoir.pdf>

**Q: Why did you love your career in computing?**

**A:** As I became an experienced computer programmer and learned about designing overall computer systems, my career evolved step by step: programmer, software project leader, department leader, assistant division director, and general manager. In these latter jobs I was involved in sales and marketing as well as management. An important lesson was that I couldn't simultaneously be a manager and remain a top rank technical person. However, I could accomplish bigger things as a manager, and was able to see a variety of business situations: contract R&D, product start-up, growth system business, and business shut down. It was interesting and exciting.

**Q: Please describe 24 hours in your typical day as a computing professional.**

**A:** My typical day involved a few meetings, time thinking about business tactics and strategy, time researching issues, time designing and implementing, and time writing. Because of the culture of where I worked and my interest in my field, my personal time and work time were very intermingled: I sometimes working on personal projects at work, and I oftentimes took work home with me. The most important lesson I learned as my business life got busier and busier was the I had to always leave half of my normal work day unscheduled so I could deal with unexpected things that came up.

**Q: Please describe a computing-related project of which you are most proud**

**A:** Almost every project I have undertaken has been interesting, often fascinating. The most famous activity I was involved in was the early years of Internet development.

**Q: What are your hobbies/ interests/ passions beyond working in computing?**

**A:** I am a serial hobbyist, spending vast amounts of time on whatever hobby I have been interested in. Over the years these activities have included contract bridge, musical theater, postal chess, juggling, sailing, playing Irish traditional music, and now (in retirement) writing, editing, and self-publishing about computing history and business management. Curiously, the most recent area of interest involves lots of computing (website development, typesetting, publishing workflow, etc.). In addition I read a lot of fiction and try to see at least one movie a week: <http://walden-family.com/public/movie-index.htm>