



Geoff Beck - Ferndown Upper School Leaver - 1984

I started at FUS in Sept 1979, and left in 1984 after two additional years of Sixth Form, and one of the earliest candidates for the recently-introduced Computer Studies exams, something that was to influence my future career.

Computer programming was a subject that I was hooked on from my first year at FUS thanks to the encouragement of my maths teacher, Mrs Burrows, and Mr Stuart who ran the lunchtime computer club; the days of RM 380Zs, Sharp MZ-80Ks and BBC Model Bs, if you want to Google them... and probably laugh! In those days we wrote all sorts of code from games programs to Space Invaders emulators, or algorithms to solve the Rubik's Cube.

I went straight into retail management training after Sixth Form, and later tried another short career in finance, until going back to my true forte, computing, in the early 90s.

I started with the MoD Intelligence Services, and then onto the final projects to replace the defunct ARPAnet system with the UK's node routing for a new-fangled worldwide network.

That network is now known as "The Internet".

I moved on to work as a programme manager implementing new IT systems into the major UK banks, starting with Barclays, where I wrote the software code for their pensions admin system AND set up their new client-server setup.

As an added bonus, the woman who was the lead tester of my software became my wife, to whom I am is still happily married!

I went on to join Unisys, to head up systems architecture for the European Banking division; my first projects were the UK's very first Internet banking systems for the likes of Nationwide, NatWest and Coutts. I later joined PwC as a Consultant to the banking IT sector, again specialising in Internet Banking solutions.

Disillusioned with some aspects of working directly for large corporates, I set up my own consulting firm, to do the same roles, but now being able to choose the projects... and decide my own diary!

The work has taken me all over the World, particularly the USA, mainland Europe, and offshore banking centres like the Channel Islands, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands.

I decided to tick off a few 'bucket list' items, starting with designing and building our own house. Already a qualified private pilot, I took some time out to project-manage the restoration of several ex-military aircraft, including an ex-Red Arrows Folland Gnat jet, which was then flown in formation with the Red Arrows team at the first Bournemouth Air Festival in 2008.

After a very serious illness, I finally decided to leave the world of IT systems in 2014, and now consult in Data Protection law and cyber security.

During my Sixth Form days, me and my close friends raised a lot of money for several charities from, e.g. mufti days and the infamous Bristol Rotaract Stretcher Race – the photos of which are still classified! I've continued that ethos of fundraising throughout my life and have helped raise over £20m for many national and local charities in the last 35 years. In 2008, I helped set up the John Thornton Young Achievers Foundation with John's family, of which I am still a Trustee.

I now live in West Dorset, but still keep in regular touch with over 60 former FUS students, who continue to be some of my closest and most trusted friends.

If I were to give some areas of advice to students today, it would be these:

1. **Family**

Don't ever let your career outshine your family. Your parents (and possibly siblings) won't be around forever, and your own children will grow up faster than you can ever imagine – don't miss it. Your real legacy in life will be them and your grandchildren, not how much you were worth, how big your house was, or what your job title was.

2. **Career and Life Changes**

Never give up even when things are at (what you think is) the worst. You'll find out who your true friends are, so let them help you.

Don't let anyone dictate your path in life or career and don't worry about career or company changes. They often happen, and invariably for the better. Concentrate on the factors that you can control, not those you can't, and always trust your gut feeling, and (at least) listen to elders' advice, even if you don't act on it.

3. **Society and Humanity**

Don't be afraid to speak your considered opinion, and stick up for the little guy who has limited voice. If you're in a position to do so, try and put something back to those who really need the help, whether it's time, effort or contacts. It's not always money that helps.

Never think you know it all – you never will. We are all still learning and always will be.

Even your own children and grandchildren will say things that hit you between the eyes as the honest truth, or give you a wakeup call.

Learn, develop, teach, then learn some more... repeat ad infinitum.