PhD Pioneers:
The Living Experiences of The Open University's First PhD Graduates

Oral History interview transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Professor Bill Morris**
Interviewed by: **Elizabeth Currie**
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So my name's Liz Currie. I'm a visiting researcher with The Open University interviewing for the Looking Back the First OU PhD's Project on Thursday the 15th of April. Bill would you like to introduce yourself?

Sure. Good morning everyone. I'm Bill Morris. I was one of the first students to go through the OU programme as a grad student. I'm currently sitting in southern Ontario near Niagara Falls and we're going to learn a bit more about my career as we go through this thing.

That's great thank you. So the first question Bill is can you tell us about the area you were born and whether your family were familiar with higher education?

Thank you very much. Yeah. Well I was born in a little village called Coppull or as I can still go back to my old vernacular Coppull in Northern England. It's halfway between Chorley and Wigan. So we're up in Lancashire. At the time it was a small village and at the time it was probably five or six thousand people and it also was symptomatic about different things that have changed in our surrounding life and time. It was a very small town, small village in which the church was the centre of the community and the social centre of the organisation. So in that situation I was going to, started off by going to a local primary school which was actually two streets away from where I lived, very nice little situation. And went through the primary school system really with not very much problems at all. It was a very interesting time for me. I was always in competition with my neighbour and my neighbour and he was always a year ahead of me so it was always a challenge to see who was going to get to which situation.

There was no sense of higher education at all in my family, none. And in fact the thing that was striking about that was that as I said, I was going through this system and you get to the end of what I would, from my Canadian perspective now, was

going from junior school to high school. And the convention at that point in time was to go from junior school, Coppull Primary as it was called, to move on to a grammar school. Well that's really when the first step in this whole evolution of my career changed. Because the majority of my friends and cohort friends that I'd gone to school with actually went to Chorley Grammar School. I didn't go to Chorley Grammar School. I can't give you a reason why I ended up but I ended up going to this thing called, in Wigan. And in Wigan it was called Thomas Linacre Secondary School, Secondary Technical School.

And at the time the Thomas Linacre Secondary Technical School was this new innovation that was going on and it was really, looking back on it now from where I am now, it was what we call STEM here. The science technology and, you know, stuff like that. So there was a real emphasis on science and technology and math and there really wasn't very much emphasis on the social or language side of schools. So it was quite different from the Grammar School in the sense that you had this really strong science focus that was going on. So that was the first step. And then the next step was to say well, how did I do at that. Well again you've got a progression of steps there because you go through high school, and again it's changed since I left, but at that time you did A-levels, sorry O-levels and then A-levels and at the same school. Now I understand it's like a college system a little bit. You go to an A-level college sort of thing.

But you have to make a decision point right. And there's a decision point where you get to where you go through high school and you get to a decision point where you've done your O-levels and then you say OK, what do I do now. Do I go on and do A-levels? Because you're making decisions at each one of these points. I got through high school, the first part of high school with ups and downs. I struggle with languages. I struggled with trying to get to do German because I had to do a foreign language. Here's a nice little quote for you from this one. So you'll have a laugh at this one. The choices were German or Russian because nobody ever did any science in French. That was an honest to goodness quote from the school. I

couldn't believe it you know, I mean Madame Curie didn't count apparently. So anyway, if I applied myself I did OK at high school but it was always a matter I had to apply myself and I had to keep going at it.

So you get to the point where you're doing, you get to, I did O-levels and I think I got 10 or something like that. Quite a ridiculous number. So yeah, I'm going to carry on. So then I get to the next point and you're doing A-levels. Well I did five A-levels instead of the normal three. I did five for some crazy reason because it was there and it was a challenge and that's actually a key thing in a lot of things that we end up doing here is a challenge. And so that gets me to the point where I'm at the end of high school and the decision then comes where do you go next. Luckily I had parents, specifically my mother, who was very much pushing me to move to higher education. My father really was not really there, not really connected to it and he was passive about it. But my mother really was very much pushing for me to go further on. So that gets me to I think the end of the childhood part of the education.

Yeah it does thank you. So the next question is where you've nearly got to which is what did you study at undergraduate level and why did you decide to do that? And then in turn why you decided to do a PhD?

OK so the, what did you study at undergraduate level. Well let me start off. I've always wanted to be outside. I've always been, geologists for some reason are a breed apart. And a breed apart in the sense that we like, most of us tend to be isolated people. Most of us tend to want to be outside, to be out and feel they're walking around, be anywhere outside. So I applied to go to university and I applied to the choices, I can actually tell you. Environmental science at Lancaster. Civil engineering at Leeds. Geology at Leeds. And what was the other one? There was another one, environmental planning. So it was always the sort of like, on the edge of engineering, geology, rocks. Where did that come from? Where did that come

from is that it came from again at high school and in various points in the career I found that there are mentors.

And it's happened to me a series of times throughout my life where I've been at a point, a certain point and you end up with a specific mentor. Now this mentor in this particular case was a guy called Mr Grapes. And he was the geography teacher at Thomas Linacre High School. I waltzed through his course. I mean literally I waltzed through it. It was so easy for me to do and I couldn't believe it that I could actually do this thing. Now I'm doing the social geography at the same time but I'm doing the physical geography. But the physical geography, it was natural to me. It was like this is so easy. Why are people struggling with this? And yet I'm struggling with other courses but this one. And he was the guy who sort of said well, you know. And then he introduced me to, there was this book called Arthur Holmes which is the reference book at the time on geomorphology.

And in this book there was this introduction to this guy called Wade Wegner. Wegner was talking about how the continental, he called it continental drift at the time. And I thought this was just something else, this was magic. So anyway I ended up being, I ended up interviewing and I ended up at the University of Leeds. And the reason for that was, and again this is another interesting question that is a question and it's going on here in Canada at the moment, is this question of how do you decide which university to go to. And you decide in this case, at that point in time, Leeds had this incredible reputation for doing geology. It also had a very focused geology programme. In other words I go to university, in the first year of my university in Leeds I do two courses in geology. First term and second term. I've got a geology course. By the time I finished my second year in geology I've liked a whole raft of geology courses.

My first year was the trouble. My first year at the university was a major struggle. Putting it bluntly I'd been a big fish in a little pond and I was all of a sudden a much smaller fish in a much bigger pond. And it took me a year to learn to get the social

part of my life semi-organised and trying to get on track. But literally I failed two or three courses in the first year. And suddenly I found at the end of the second, towards the second year, all of a sudden I found my mojo again. I found this again, this urge to compete, this urge to be able to challenge it. And I got into this programme and it was a very interesting programme because the other part of that was that at the undergraduate level there were actually only seven of us in the undergraduate programme.

And funnily enough we all ended up specialising in our own little areas within geology. Because you say geology but we all have our little specialisations right. Of those seven of us, four of us ended up being university professors. Which is, when you think about it four out of seven ending up being university professors teaching geology at various universities is quite an astounding record. So it gives you an idea of the kind of class that I was in. It was competitive, it was a really competitive operation that was going on. Part of this at the time, again another mentor appeared at this point. And the second mentor that appeared at this point was a guy called Robert Shackleton. Now Robert Shackleton is this mythical character in geology. It was his uncle who was the Shackleton of the Antarctic. But this guy he, he was just this geologist that you looked up to. I remember, one of the things I remember about this is every, one of the things at Leeds was you always had to do fieldwork. You did a lot of fieldwork which is absolutely fantastic. We ended up in the Highlands of Scotland at the end of the fourth year with Robert Shackleton.

And we were up there and at this time I've done four years and I think I'm pretty smart. I know everything. Well boy did I get a really turn down there. We ended up looking at these rocks up in the Highland Thrust area. I couldn't understand half the stuff what was going on. And again, that was another eye opener for me that it's time to really fix in and focus and get an idea of what you're going to do. OK so that gets me to the end of the undergraduate degree. And at the end of the undergraduate degree you're sitting around and you're sort of saying well what am

I going to do. What am I going to do now. I had an offer of a job. It was an interesting job. The job was actually with a company that's still around today and that company was called Schlumberger. Schlumberger are based out of France and they're international. It was an interesting job. The job, the part of the deal in the job was that you would spend less than six months of the year in England.

The rest of the time you'd be travelling around the world somewhere. Anywhere around the world. The six months in England bit or less than six months in England bit was that they actually paid you in Guernsey. They didn't pay you in England. They paid you in Guernsey. So if you wanted to move, if you wanted to move your salary into England you had to pay tax. But you were avoiding tax by being paid in Guernsey right. I was, even at that point I'd started moving into geophysics and I sort of got some idea, the direction. And this is what this was all about. Schlumberger was this high flying group who were into geophysics. I really wasn't convinced that that's what I wanted to do. I really wasn't convinced that I wanted to get into a large company operation. I'd done some, I'd done a little bit of research at this point and I realised that I enjoyed the research because it's you that's chasing yourself.

And then what happened was, again through Robert Shackleton, again this is where he came in. I ended up getting a little job and the little job was to go to Anglesey. And it was to study this little area in Anglesey and the idea was that they were going to put these big tunnels in to store oil in the northern part of Anglesey because the estuary, the Liverpool Estuary was silting up and they couldn't get the big tankers in there anymore. And the idea was can you use this area to do it because it's deep water off Anglesey. So that took me to Anglesey for three weeks doing field work, doing the project and then I had to write a report and I ended up going down to London to Shell's main operation in London to give a presentation on what I'd done. Thinking my God this is a pretty sweet little deal this. They pay me to be out on the rocks walking around all day. They're paying my food and my hotel bill.

And now they're giving me a salary and now they're paying me to travel to London for the day. So I'm oh, this is kind of, I kind of like this, you know. So that was the first thing. So then at this point, the other thing I missed out here and I should go back to is at this point during this time, we're talking 1966 to 1970, OK. Part of what's also going on here is at the time this geology degree is happening geology is undergoing this transformation. We have gone from this idea of static geology and this thing called plate tectonics is there. And plate tectonics is completely changing everything we do about geology. It changes the mindset, it changes how you look for mineral deposits, it changes how you look for oil, it changes everything. And it's still an ongoing thing today, even now today. We, everything we do today now you think in terms of plate tectonics. So this transformation in our thinking is going on.

And at the point that this is going on, as I said we ended up in Northern Scotland. And Scotland was at one point on the opposite side of this big ocean. Like the Atlantic. There was an Atlantic between England and Scotland at one point in time that was consumed. But we didn't know a lot of the details of that. So again the next person appears in the system here. And the next person to appear in the system is a guy called Jim Brydon. And Jim Brydon was this new prof who had recently arrived at the University of Leeds and he was trying to set up this paleomagnetic game and this paleomagnetic project. And he said do you want to do a PhD? I've got a project for you looking at plate tectonics in the Canada lines and you can actually start doing mapping rotations and stuff like that. So that was the start of why I wanted to get into this PhD because it was this new area.

And as I said, even at high school continental drift had been this big deal. And, so that was the start of getting into the PhD. But it was a disaster. And it was a disaster because what happened was, and first of all I ended up going to Ireland, to Galway with Jim in that June. So again I'm in the field and he's turned me loose and I'm out there for two months walking around and having a jolly old time. Enjoying

myself walking around collecting rocks and things like that. And then I get back to England I'm going to start doing some measurements on these rocks but all of the instrumentation has broken down and nothing's working. So I'm sitting there and I can't do anything. So of course Bill being Bill, I take myself off the field again and find another area to go and work in. So I went up to the Lake District and spent another month up in the Lake District. So I've got another collection of rocks to work with.

So the following March, so this is June to March, the instrumentation is finally working so I'm working night shifts. Literally working 12 hours a day in this lab trying to get these measurements done. So that was the start of the PhD. What appealed about studying at The Open University. Actually to be honest it really wasn't an appeal at the time. It was there and it was an, it provided the opportunity but I think the point about it was and I'm probably answering three questions in one here, is it actually provided an opportunity of linkage. Because, I mean I realised very soon in my career that many times, as I said, you have to have mentors and you also have to have, what I've always said to my students is you also have to have face time. And face time is, you've got to remember this is 1960s, 1970s. When we're talking about computing we're talking about advanced HP calculators that we were using. Not computers. Computers didn't really exist or they were on punch cards. So really the key there was making contacts with people outside of your own particular environment.

So while I was based at Leeds, The Open University and the contacts through The Open University forced me to make a lot of other contacts with other people at other universities. Two in particular come to mind. One was a guy called Stuart McKerrell who was at Oxford at the time. And Stuart McKerrell was this guy who was doing a lot of palaeontology and a real leader in the area. And the other one was this guy called John Dewey, D-e-w-e-y. And John Dewey was another one of these, geology has these stars every now and then right. And the stars that appear and Dewey was this guy who for some reason completely grasped plate tectonics.

He really got the whole deal about it. He got, and he was publishing his papers like mad. And he was this young guy trying to keep up with these, for want of a better word, balls in the air yeah. And I was struggling. I mean these guys were running so fast and furious with this new technology and new ideas. Wow, it was fantastic. So yeah, a lot of that developed through that Open University connection.

Most enduring memories from studying for your Open University, oh gosh. Summer school. Because even when I finished my degree, I always used to teach, Open University at this point had started its undergraduate programme. And for geology it was online as everything else. But geology is a hands on thing. You really have to have field experience. You really have to know whether you want to be out on the rocks or not and some people just don't want to do it but if you do you feel like you're home. But The Open University always used to have these summer schools. So the students would come for a week again and there'd be a week of field trips and you'd be out in the field with all these people who have basically spent a year. And you get this, it was magic. And it was magic because you see some of these people, you see these people and they come there and they've been working on their books and they've been working on and you can see these ones who are actually…

And I've seen it when I've been teaching subsequently. Some people they get, they're on the rocks and they start feeling rocks and they start playing with rocks and it's like wow. I really can do this. I really can actually see. Yeah, it was really quite spectacular. It really was yeah. So that was, and as I said, even when I moved to Canada I would actually come back. I came back for three years just to teach summer school. Yeah because it was so much fun and a lot of enjoyment. And again, the other point was that coming back and teaching that it actually reinforced connections. Another thing, another connection at that point was a guy called John Ramsay. And John Ramsay moved from Imperial College up to Leeds and he was another superstar in this whole game. So you've got to be around some of these people to try and learn what's going on.

OK. Graduation. Actually I'd like to talk about something a little bit different before graduation and that's the external exam. Oh my God, I've only been to one external exam since that even compares to the torture that I went through because it's the only time I've ever been to an external exam where there were two externals. Not just one. And then I rolled up and I didn't, usually here now the student knows when they're finishing their degree who the external examiner's going to be. I didn't know who this was. So the external exam's done in Milton Keynes. Ian Gass I think it was, was around. And Ian Gass had been at Leeds and he'd moved down to The Open University. So I kind of still knew him so off we go and I meet, I'd moved from Leeds at this point and I was back home so I went down to Milton Keynes for the exam. I walk in the room and there's this guy called Fred Vine.

And I'm looking at this, because you know, there was this paper called Vine and Matthews by Vine and Matthews. Vine and Matthews at this point in time was one of two papers that you were absolutely compulsory reading if you did anything in plate tectonics. And there sitting across the table looking at my PhD thesis is Fred Vine. Well at this point I'm thinking this is getting over it because I'm not, I can't play in this league at all. Then the other side of the table there's this chap called Rod Wilson. Well Rod Wilson was at University of Liverpool at the time and Rod Wilson was like the man that you went to if you wanted to do palaeomagnetism. So not only do I have, not only do I have, not only am I facing Fred Vine I've got Rod Wilson on the other side of the table as well. Like oh my goodness. And then Ian Gass is in there as well asking questions. And Jim Brydon's in there asking questions.

And then my PhD, my actual Open University PhD supervisor, Peter Smith is there. And I'm thinking oh my, this is a terrible situation to be in. I got through the exam. Interestingly enough, I think being honest I will say I got through the exam more by what I had written than what I said I'm sure. Because at this point we had three papers in press. Now again this is 1960s. And in 1960s just the mechanics of

writing a paper is very different to the mechanics of writing a paper. There wasn't such thing as Google Docs sort of thing and you were typing and crossing out so it was all paperwork. But we had three, so in other words in three years we'd gone from zero to three, four papers. Which is pretty astounding actually I thought. So yeah, that whole part of it was, and it was important. And it was very important because what happened was it was credibility.

And you know, right at the beginning credibility is really important because you're starting off this new degree, this new degree programme and you've got all these people who start developing and trying to promote this university but the credibility depends on the students and the student acceptance. So if you have Joe Schmo as your external examiner really you know. And again, subsequently looking back on it now you realise and I'm sure some students must realise that when you get to a point and you see who your external examiner's going to be you're actually being told something. You're being told where your benchmark is sitting. You know, if you're, if somebody's putting me up against Fred Vine then there's some, they have some respect of what you're capable of doing right. Which again I felt was looking in hindsight, it really was an important step for me.

I didn't actually get to graduation. At this point, for the examination and by this point I'd actually started working in Canada. I'd actually flown back to England for my exam because I actually was still, I was in Canada and I had a position in Canada that was contingent upon finishing the PhD. Another point, I don't know, maybe it's not relevant. Going back to - at this point my father had died and my mother was on her own. But she was still pushing me to go further. But she didn't, she lost understanding at that point of just how, where you could go next. And I think it was also a realisation at that point for me that I had completely outgrown the village that I grew up in. And perhaps I'd actually done that when I'd finished my bachelor's degree. But it does sort of put you in a very different perspective and different situation.

Looking back over your time studying for a PhD how do you feel about The Open University. I'd like to flavour that answer. And I'd like to flavour that answer because I would have a different answer today than I would have had five years ago. And the reason I say that is that at the time five or six years ago I was still embedded completely into the university system and I couldn't see, I could see that the university system was not operating at the way I thought it should do. I could also see that the university system and specifically a Canadian bias I suppose, was being challenged. And it was being challenged by technology. And technology is changing our life. Geology when I started, you had to be an artist and a scientist. In other words you had to have some drawing skills. And the drawing skills were such that you had to be able to draw and sketch and understand diagrams and do things.

But geology has changed. Geology because technology has changed. Graphics, computer graphics has completely transformed things that we do now. There's still a very high emphasis on imagination. And imagination, and what I mean by that is you're seeing things when you're trying to look at things and you're trying to understand them. But if you can't see 3D, if you can't visualise something in 3D, it's hard to make things works. And for me I've always had that innate ability. For some reason, I can't explain it to you, I don't know why, but it's there. I can look at stuff and I see the 3D things all the time. If you're some of my friends, it's a standard joke actually because we have this thing called stereo nets. The stereo nets are how you represent vectors in 3D space right. And so the joke is if somebody else can't do it just give it to Bill, he'll fix it for you right. Because for some reason it's just, as I say, it's one of those things. It's easy for me.

So why am I equivocating? I'm not really equivocating. Why am I sort of saying [unclear 0:38:06] and change? Well because it's taken us a while but COVID has driven a complete transformation on us. And that transformation has been coming but a lot of universities, traditional universities have been fighting it. And they've been fighting it because they know that they've got a problem in delivery of

programmes. And they know that they've got, here in Canada there's a real problem in the sense that universities, all universities have tended to do geology. It's not sustainable. You can only have a few universities teaching specialised programmes. And then the other problem is that now because of technology change again the, you've got this transformation of how do you deliver content? Well The Open University was and is so far ahead of where we should have been for the last 20 years that only now are most other universities actually catching up.

Because I look at universities here, in the university system here, I don't think there's a single university in Canada that will go back to full face to face teaching even when COVID's completely over. It's just not going to happen. And it's not going to happen because the system the way it's working is not the way that people are going to learn anymore. People are learning very differently. So what The Open University and The Open University system brought in place, first of all it provided education for everybody who wants to try and that's important. Let people try it. Let people have a go at it. They may, if it's something like me who is just, I've been working on some stuff this morning before I was talking to you. I'm supposedly retired. I'm supposedly retired for five years and I'm still going at it like an idiot because I love doing it. And there are people out there who could succeed in this.

And there are people out there who can get the opportunity and there are people out there who this online delivery stuff is actually the way we have to go. And it's going to change the system. Because now you have to ask, and I'm aware of what's going on. Like in England there's the change where you, all of a sudden a lot of colleges became universities. Well I'm not sure how sustainable that is now because again you're all competing for the same dollar and there isn't that many dollars around. So it's a difficult question of what does that university become because now I can foresee a situation where you might end up having undergraduate programmes in graduate research institutes. That's what happens in Germany. In Germany there's a number of what they call research institutes.

GFZ in Potsdam for instance is one. It's a spectacular place. There's no undergraduates. It's all graduate school.

So you go there and you're interacting all the time with graduates. But the feed to that is from a series of undergraduate universities right. So how do I feel about The Open University. I feel, I really wasn't sure because I wasn't sure at first. Now I'm convinced it's the path. And it's the path that everybody else will be jumping in on. And now the problem is going to be who is actually going to deliver let's say metamorphic patrology which is one particular aspect of geology. Who's going to deliver the definitive lecture series on metamorphic patrology. Is it going to be The Open University which has an opening because it's already got a lot of material in place or is it going to be some other chap at some other university who develops that. So it's a dynamic that needs a lot of answers to a lot of questions that I think is going on, yeah.

I think that's very interesting. Thank you for that. I think there's a lot of good points there which we'll talk about in summary at the end. But just before that though if we could just talk about how your PhD, did it change your life? If so how? I know you touched on it a little bit but.

Oh gosh. What did you go on to after achieving your doctorate? Well I did a post doc at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario which is almost more English than England in some respects. Although it's changing a little bit. Then I did a post doc in Ottawa with the Federal Government. Desperately wanted to work for the Federal Government in Ottawa because I thought that was the bee's knees of a job. I mean somebody was paying you to do research and you're paid to go up in the high Arctic and wave your hat. So then that fell through. So I built a small consulting company. So I ran a small consulting company for eight years. And then again fortune smiled on me and I had another chap, a chap called Alf Latham, and Alf Latham and I sort of followed one another through. He was at Leeds when I

was and he came to Canada after me and anyway I ended up as a prof at Met Manchester in Hamilton, Ontario. I became chair of the department there.

As a result of that I studied rocks in, I did a safari in the middle of, went into the middle of the Sahara Desert to look at rocks. I flew to, by helicopter up to Victoria Island which is about, which is past, over the top of the Arctic Pole and lived on this island with one other guy for a month. And basically just the two of us up there looking at rocks. I went to the Maldives. Somebody actually paid for me to go scuba diving to look at rocks. Unreal.

I went to Mexico to look at meteorite impact traders. I went to South Africa to look at diamond pipes. None of that, going back to where we started. I was this kid from a very much blue collar family who'd never ever, I mean my parents had never been out of England ever. As a kid we did a holiday trip to Torquay one year. And this was a big excursion because we'd never been outside Lancashire. It was always Blackpool or Markham right. So we went to Torquay. So, coming from this background and you're all of a sudden all over the place, it was kind of incredible. I think the other thing was is that, if I can, the other thing is it put me or exposed me into a different group of people. And it put me in a very different situation. Some aspects of that have been challenging. Some aspects of that, because all of a sudden you're moving in a very different social milieu to the one that you're growing up with.

Your life experience up to that point has changed. Going to a dinner at Oxford after having been literally a farm boy. Not a farm boy, well I actually did run a farm. It's very different. I did a PhD defence in Finland at which I had to wear top hat and tails to actually partake in the defence. So again, it was like you've come so far in so many different ways and it puts a very different perspective on your whole life that you're going through. I have to say something else too which is difficult for me to say. A lot of it was possible because of my wife. I always suffered from some levels of self-confidence. Because, you're doing some of this stuff and you're out

there and you're often on what I call the bleeding edge. I'll give you an example. I mentioned to you before I went to this conference in Miami and I'd submitted this abstract and I'm telling the two guys making the statement that I know everybody else doesn't believe.

And I have these two people before me who are giving talks before me and they're much more senior than I am. I'm still a junior guy. And I get to this conference, this is a big conference, this is the American Geophysical Union so it's a really big deal right. So Ted Irving's there and Ted stands up and says yeah, Bill's right. Neil Opdyke's next and he stands up and says yeah Bill's right. And it was, but to get to that I wouldn't have been there without my wife behind me. My wife died five years ago, so yeah.

I'm sorry to hear that.

Yeah. It's been a hard five years.

Are you OK? Do you want to take a minute or?

Yeah.

Well, it's really important when you have somebody who supports you through your whole life and then, you know, That's very hard.

Yeah. She fell down the stairs and cracked her skull.

Oh my goodness.

And that was it. I'd retired the week before. So yeah, it was very difficult that.

Very difficult. And I guess it affects your perspective.

Yeah very much so. I'm in a very different space now. I openly admit I had some very serious mental challenges for about two years. Still have issues that I have to try and cope with. I found my way back into doing research again. And then through the contacts of back doing research again, I have made contacts with people and, that's my escape now. That's my, I moved out, I'm back on the conference circuit again. Back trying to be a scientist again, trying to keep up with the young people. Yeah so it's a difficult, it's been a difficult few years but it's, people have, a few people around me who have been very supportive and it's been good, yeah.

I'm glad to hear that.

Anything else you would like to add about your experience of being a PhD student at The Open University? Actually yes. Because when I came to writing up the thesis, when you write, again this is another experience again from, excuse me, just being a prof. And that is you realise there's two aspects to this whole game. There's the actual doing the science, and doing the science sometimes you get on a roll. Like I'm a roll at the moment with this little bit of stuff that I'm doing now. And it's all consuming because you're finding something new. Wow, nobody else has done this. It's like oh I can find something else out. Then you have to write it up and put all this thing onto paperwork. Well there's two things, first of all when you start writing something you realise that perhaps all this dream that you had when you were doing the research isn't quite the same that you think it really is and you have to fill in the individual parts. Then there's the actual part of just putting the words on paper.

And I don't know about you but for me I can either write or I can't write. On the days when I can write I just sit down and I can blurt out, almost blurt out a paper. But it's like I have to somehow get that thing in my head first and get it organised in my head first and then just let it flow out. But until I get to that I can't do it. Anyway, so when I was coming to the end of the PhD and I'm writing these papers

up I ended up down in Milton Keynes and there was a Patricia McCurry I think it is, who was there at the time. So she was off on fieldwork so I ended up staying in her house for a month. Basically it was to put me into isolation away from everybody else so I would actually sit down and write this darn thesis because otherwise it wasn't going to happen. So again it was all the right things and all the right stuff to do.

I really haven't said very much about my, Pete Smith, the actual PhD supervisor, The Open University supervisor. Most of my contact actually was with Brydon who was at Leeds. But Smith kept coming in. So I would report to him usually every six months about what we were doing and where we got to and he was quite happy with that and that's the way the system went at the time. You know, the way I see it, again going back to another comment from earlier on, there really is a big plus of moving around from one university to another university. Because if you're in one environment, I wouldn't say you get stale. Stale isn't the word. But what you do is you learn individual's preferences and nuances. In other words, each one of us has an experiential base that we bring to our own specific area right. And that experiential base whether we like it or not flavours how we see things.

And that flavouring of how you see things is going to be different for every person because we've all seen different things and we've all experienced different things. And they're always, there was always an interesting comment. And it actually has a lot of ring of truth to it. The best geologist is the one who's seen the most rocks. Because if you look at different rocks and you get exposed to different rocks you actually get a different experience, a different understanding of all these different little bits and pieces. You know, going back to what I said now, what I said to you earlier about going up to the Highlands with Bob Shackleton. That changed my life because I realised, I mean that was another point where it changed my life in the sense that I really understood that I thoroughly enjoyed this thing. Again, somebody's going to pay me to walk around outside and they're going to let me go and play around looking at rocks. I mean how could you not do that? For me

anyway you know. Other people I'm sure are thinking oh my God. You're going to end up sleeping in a tent. It's like oh you can't do that.

There was one year I left, I just started working for Ottawa and I made a deal with them because they wanted me to work on some specific rocks right. So the deal with them was they would let me work on my projects as long as I worked on their projects. I left southern Ontario in April, I went to southern British Columbia, I was in southern British Columbia for a month and then I went up to Alaska Yukon border. From the Alaska Yukon border I went over to Victoria Island. And then from Victoria Island then ended up in Labrador. So from the May until beginning of October, I never saw a car. I never saw a footpath. All I saw was tents and sleeping bags and stuff like that. So that's what I did for like four months. And then I have to say it could be a real shock sometimes when you come back to civilisation. Oh really, what am I doing here, yeah.

That's great. Thank you.

There you go.

Is there anything else you want to add before we?

No I think that about covers a lot of it.

Perfect. It was really comprehensive thank you. So I think there's a lot there about how important contacts are for you and mentors and contacts and how that really helped you and improved things in your studies.

The whole mentor thing, to me it just happened so many times through my career that you're going, I never ever applied for a job ever. Let me rephrase that. That's not actually, the wording isn't exact. I never ever had to go hunting for a job. That's the better way of saying it. There was always a job came up. And that job came up

and it was there and sort of do you want the job or don't you want the job. And it was always, usually it was through some contact that was there. So I'll throw in another little anecdote for you which is another funny one. So there was a job came up with the British Antarctic Survey. And there was an interview process and at this point in time I was in Canada. I was married and we weren't sure about moving. My wife was Canadian and I wasn't sure about moving back to England. However, this interview for the British Antarctic Survey was in Cambridge.

And I'm thinking yeah I can cope with Cambridge. I roll up at the interview for this job and it's weird because usually if you interview here for a job here it's a one day interview and you're the person and you go round and you visit all people. Well this was a one hour interview. First of all it's a one hour interview and then all the other candidates are sat in this room waiting to go in for the interview. So I'm looking around, OK. This is a bit weird. Anyway I go in for the interview and there's these three people in front of me. One chap, his name is Dom so I won't say any more than that. He says hey Bill how are you doing. You know the job's yours if you want it don't you. He said, but we have to do the formal interview anyway. So we go through the formal interview and then I'm coming out and he says by the way, are you going home to Coppull tonight. And I said yeah. He said well if you're going past Birmingham can you drop me off?

And this is in interview right. So I drop him off and away we go. Well it turns out that the actual job was in Birmingham not in Cambridge. So I'm looking at this, no my wife is not going to go to Birmingham. After all this we turned it down. Oh yeah. So that was my experience. There you go.

END OF INTERVIEW