

Oral History of Mary Pembroke Perlin

Interviewed by **Mario Juarez** for the Microsoft Alumni Network

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Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Mary Pembroke as conducted by Mario Juarez on August 29, 2024, at Microsoft Studios in Redmond, Washington. This interview is part of the Microsoft Alumni Network's Microsoft Alumni Voices initiative. The goal of this project is to record the institutional history of Microsoft through the recollections of its former employees, so that the information may inform and inspire future generations.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word captured through video rather than written prose. The content reflects the recollections of the interviewee. The following transcript was edited by the Microsoft Alumni Network, which holds the copyright to this work.

Interview

Mario Juarez: Okay, so begin with an introduction. Give us your name, tell us when you were at Microsoft and tell us what roles you had.

Mary Pembroke: My name is Mary Pembroke. I was hired in 1990 to join the Community Affairs team. At the time that I was hired, my addition brought the group to five. We were part of Law and Corporate Affairs, but Community Affairs was a very small part of that. My roles in Community Affairs, I was originally hired to manage employee programs, and that role grew over the years. At one point I was managing the entire group, and then in typical Microsoft fashion, I then hired my own boss. We were very much in need of a little gray hair in that group. And so the moment came where I did that. Do you want the whole story of my hiring?

Mario Juarez: We'll get there.

Mary Pembroke: Okay.

Mario Juarez: Who was that boss?

Mary Pembroke: That was Barbara Dingfield.

Mario Juarez: Yes. Good, good. Okay, terrific. 1990. What was your start date? What was your hire date?

Mary Pembroke: My hire date was in 1990. Michelle Weinberger-Glasser. Finally, we connected at 9:00 PM one night so that she could verbally give me the offer. And that should have been my first clue that this is a 24/7 job. So, I was hired in '90. My start date, I think, was January 1st or January 2nd, '91. But before I was hired when I first...

Mario Juarez: Two days after my start date.

Mary Pembroke: We were that close. That's why we were in the supply room together. I think that's why I remember your story. I like this guy. I get him.

Mario Juarez: And she wasn't Michelle Weinberger-Glasser then.

Mary Pembroke: She was only Weinberger then. That's right. Okay. Yeah, so I was, before I came to Microsoft, I was an Area Director at Washington Special Olympics, a job I loved. And prior to that I worked at one of the large law firms in town where I managed their United Way campaign and a lot of their community programs. So I think it was that combination of nonprofit expertise...

Mario Juarez: Okay, we're going to get to that expertise. Okay. But let's start at the beginning. Where are you from? Tell us about your, give us your origin story. Where were you born?

Mary Pembroke: When I was growing up, the land that we're on right now was called "80 Acres", and we would come out and ride motorbikes on it. So, I was born in Overlake Hospital in Bellevue. My father was born in Seattle. My grandfather was born in Seattle. My great grandfather was born in Seattle. So, I'm a fifth generation Seattleite.

Mario Juarez: Wow. You're the one fifth generation. Some of the gold rush stuff or something like that?

Mary Pembroke: My great-great-grandfather went to the Yukon. My sister was just up there two weeks ago and found his claim, researched his claim. He and his brother went up the chill coot and they had a log cabin. He went up. Then he came out. Yeah...

I have a little chunk of gold that he put in a tie pin. That might've been all the gold he got. I got the tie pin.

Mario Juarez: So you grew up in Seattle,

Mary Pembroke: Grew up in Bellevue. Yeah. My parents met at UW and in 1959. They migrated out to the suburbs in search of larger yards. Okay, cut that. I was going to say more Republicans, but let's not go there. They're now staunch Democrats.

Mario Juarez: She never does that for me. I like that.

Mary Pembroke: So historically, my family was in Seattle from the late eighteen hundreds, and then my parents moved out to suburbia, so went to school in Bellevue. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: So what kind of kid were you? What kind of childhood did you have?

Mary Pembroke: Oh, it was great. I was Campfire Girl and loved to be outside. We had a cabin on the beach on Puget Sound, as did my great-great-grandparents, had a cabin over by Bremerton. I have a picture of my great-great-grandmother, long Victorian skirts, and they're in this

white tent on the beach over by Bremerton. So outdoors was really important to my family, and community was very important to my family. My mom would be putting on a raincoat and then going door to door in the neighborhood to knock on doors for the Cancer Society drive, or any other cause that needed volunteers. So that role modeling was important for me.

Mario Juarez: Siblings?

Mary Pembroke: I have two sisters and a brother.

Mario Juarez: Where are you in the pecking order?

Mary Pembroke: I'm the third. I am the diplomat of the family, the middle child. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: Explains something, right?

Mary Pembroke: Yeah, I think so. I think it's a natural progression.

Mario Juarez: Okay. So happy kid, happy childhood it sounds like?

Mary Pembroke: Very happy. Very lucky, very blessed. And I think as we get older and look back over this time, we realize how fortunate we were to be born in this place, in this country, in this state, with parents that were loving and supportive and good schools and good friends. I still get together with my childhood friends. We go down to Palm Springs, and what we do down there now is a little different from when we were Campfire Girls and we sang the little high-low song. We go down to Palm Springs and celebrate together. But yeah, that's a 50-year friendship.

Mario Juarez: Or hanging out for keggers in 80s acres in the woods or...

Mary Pembroke: 80 acres, yeah. We did have red Solo cups back then...

Mario Juarez: That's good. That's good. Where'd you go to college? Tell me about your college and your early adulthood.

Mary Pembroke: So, my parents both went to University of Washington. My grandmother went to University of Washington. So naturally all of our kids went to Washington State University. You have to rebel at some point. So yeah, that's where I went. Followed my sister and my brother over to Pullman.

Mario Juarez: Oh, that's awesome.

Mary Pembroke: Yeah, I love the Palouse. I love Eastern Washington. My other grandparents lived in Wenatchee, so I grew up spending every other weekend over in Wenatchee, and I love the Palouse and the countryside over there.

Mario Juarez: It's beautiful. It's a totally different kind of place. So what did you study in college? What was your college experience?

Mary Pembroke: Oh, my college experience was I studied English and political science. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: What was the draw?

Mary Pembroke: Reading, always. I know, I was always in the library as a child and still am now. I was there yesterday, so always had my head in a book. Got lots of crazy ideas from having your head in a book. And at a certain point my advisor called me in and said, it's time to declare a major. What are you thinking? And she said, you pretty much are an English major now based on your transcript. So that was it. But political science too, I was really intrigued with the world of politics. I read a great book my senior year called The Media and the Presidency. I was thinking about it yesterday and I thought, "still applicable."

Mario Juarez: Who's the book by?

Mary Pembroke: I don't remember. I don't remember the author, it was 1983.

Mario Juarez: I remember the book.

Mary Pembroke: You might've read it too. Yeah, yeah.

Mario Juarez: I might have because I was an English and journalism major at about approximately the same time. So, for you, pretty standard?

Mary Pembroke: Yeah, bachelor's degree. Yeah. And then I did what most English majors do. I moved up to San Juan Island and got a job waiting tables and drank a lot of red wine and wrote bad poetry.

Mario Juarez: In that order?

Mary Pembroke: Sort of. Probably the last two for sure. No, I did a variety of things after college. And then I had maybe the first of several life-changing experiences. I had an uncle I was very close to and he was single and he was a director of a small private music school in Westport, Connecticut. He had been a concert pianist traveling around the world. Went to the Julliard when he was 17 out of Spokane, Washington and ended up being a world-class pianist and then was a director of the small music school. And we were very close. And when I was living on San Juan Island, writing my bad poetry, he was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer. And I thought, I can go, I can go help. So I called him from the dock, from the pay phone when they still had those on the dock and I said, do you want me to come? Would that help if I came to spend time with you? And he said, that would be wonderful because otherwise I have to go up to hospice. And what would I do with the dogs if I had to do that?

He had these two charming little dogs. So I packed my small bag and moved out of the little cabin on San Juan Island and went out to Connecticut and spent a year, took care of him while he died. And he was a consummate musician, but also a teacher. So he taught me so much in those months that we spent together all about life and what he learned and his lessons. And I'll never forget that he gave me so many gifts. And then I came home after that, after losing him and I was just fired up to just grab the world. You realize this is not a dress rehearsal, this is it. So I came home and

started working and connecting with people and dating and just really plunging into life. And eventually I think that led to Microsoft. I ended up at the law firm and then ended up at Microsoft.

Mario Juarez: We'll get to that. Tell me your uncle's, give me an overview of your uncle's dying, he's dying of cancer, it sounds like he still had joy in life and he imparted something to you. Can you a review of what those essential life lessons, because not many people at that age get that kind of education and I'm super interested in what was it that he showed you that surprised and changed you?

Mary Pembroke: My uncle taught me that when you're looking at death, look at it straight on. There's things you need to take care of and check off the list, but you also need to tend to your emotional and spiritual life. If there's folks you need to talk to, if you need to make amends, apologies, you just do it. You don't spend time in self pity. You share your stories. He shared so many stories with me. He was alone, he was gay and in the years that he was born in the twenties, so coming out of the closet was not something that one did, especially if you are a somewhat public person. And I'll never forget one night he was talking about that and he said, it's not a matter of saying, oh, I pick blue. This is not a choice. This is not a choice that I made. I didn't choose to live this way. I didn't choose to be alone, not have a spouse and family. That's just who I am. And I was 24 at the time, and that really impacted me in my understanding of now LGBTQ rights and folks in the world. And it was just one step in opening my mind in so many ways.

Mario Juarez: Thank you for sharing that. That's incredibly powerful. I always think about defining experiences and what makes a person, the person that they are, that feels like such an important counterbalance to sort of with this blessed idyllic white girl, hetero...

Mary Pembroke: White chick from Bellevue.

- Mario Juarez: White chick from Bellevue, got the world by the tail. And then you encounter that and yet the way you're talking about it, it doesn't sound morbid. Was it a morbid experience? What kind of experience was it watching him die?
- Mary Pembroke: It was a sad experience because I didn't want to let him go, but I would not describe it as morbid. That was not who he was. He was a very flamboyant performer. He was a huge social personality in Westport, Connecticut. His friends would come over. There was this woman, and I'm not kidding you, her name was Muffy, and she came waltzing into his room when he is in his last few days of life, literally throws off her fur coat off of her shoulders onto the floor, behind her mid-stride, "Richard Darling", she said. This was his social circle. They adored him. He was a gourmet cook. He was a collector of antiques, super knowledgeable about old English silver, and he was just the epitome of a renaissance man. So anytime I got with him, from the time I was a child, was so treasured. So that's how I knew when he was in his final months of his life, I really wanted to be there to help him with that.
- Mario Juarez: Mary, that's amazing. What an amazing story. So you come back utterly transformed.
- Mary Pembroke: Absolutely. This is it. Don't waste any time. Just get into it. Get to what's important. Figure out the most meaningful thing. What do you want to do? Plus date a lot of guys. I was 25 when I got home, came home around my 25th birthday.
- Mario Juarez: Which is like...
- Mary Pembroke: It's what you're supposed to be doing, right? You're supposed to date.
- Mario Juarez: Yeah, absolutely. So tell me what you did in terms of your personal growth and your professional growth. Give us a view of that phase

of your life and what was it that you did? What were the milestone events on the road to your arrival in Microsoft?

Mary Pembroke: Well, I did what every 24 or 25-year-old does when you return from a big adventure. I moved back into my parents' basement. Had to find a job. What was it? I had my English Political Science degree. I was ready.

Mario Juarez: You want fries with that?

Mary Pembroke: Exactly, exactly. I had a broad assortment of name tags and hair nets. Right? Okay. Not so much. But I did wait tables and then I signed on with a temp agency and temped at a law firm as a receptionist. And then they hired me. Because I was trying to decide if I was going to go to graduate school or not. That was always the dilemma, am I going to go? Am I not going to go? What am I going to do? And so I would tell the attorneys there, trying to decide. I said to one of 'em one day, if I go to grad school, I'll be 27 when I finish. And he said, how old will you be if you don't go? I'll never forget that. Peter Parsons. Thank you. And about that time, this was a tiny law firm, they said, hey, guess what we're merging.

This was the '80s. So law firms merging, merging. And so they said, we're merging with a bigger firm, mid-size firm, Shidler, McBroom, Gates & Lucas, 40 lawyers or so do you want to come along? And I thought, okay, still haven't decided. Yeah, I'll come along. So I go along. I'm still being a receptionist I think at that point. And one day an attorney who always sort of look like an absent-minded professor came walking down the hall and said, we need to computerize our files. Now, that sounded funny because there were no computers in the firm. There was a word processing department where everybody typed the handwritten yellow legal pad for the lawyers. Attorneys did not have computers, but this was David McDonald. He was chair of the Washington State Democrats I think at that point. But he had a double degree JD, Computer Science. So he was into computers and he said, we need to computerize.

So essentially I ended up at some point with a computer and going to computer classes to learn Our Base so I could build a relational database, which I did, which sounds so funny now. But I did that. That was fun. So they just kept handing me, and then they said, hey, guess what, we're merging with a big firm called Preston. Do you want to come along? And so I chatted with the people at Preston, and I'm not kidding you, when they were interviewing the staff to see who would come along, she gave me a set of index cards that had every letter of the alphabet. And she asked me, they were all mixed up and she asked me if I could alphabetize the cards. So I got hired. I ended up managing that office. They made me office manager. And then I was attorney recruiting manager, which is my second favorite job I ever had because when you're recruiting lawyers, they're coming into town for the summer to be summer associates, and you're showing off your city, this is my city. Let's go rafting. Let's go hiking, let's go take the ferry, let's go try, let's go eat at this new place called Emmett's down at the market. You take 'em to all the good restaurants. So they just kept giving me interesting jobs. And then one day Bill Gates Sr., I might get a little emotional here, said, will you help me with United Way campaign? And I said, yeah, sure. He was chairing the campaign that year. So...

Mario Juarez: Was that the first time I met him?

Mary Pembroke: No, I had met him a little bit around, but...

Mario Juarez: What kind of presence was he? Everybody talks about young Bill Gates. What's old Bill Gates like?

Mary Pembroke: Even better. He was just salt of the earth. Very committed to the community. A very thoughtful person. He had a terrific laugh. And literally when you say someone has a twinkle in their eye, that would be him. He had this twinkle in his eye and the first campaign I helped him with at the firm, he came in on the last day and he was an enormous man. I mean, you talk about what is his presence, his physical presence was enormous. Came in, framed in the doorway

and he said, how did we do? Did we reach our goal? And we had raised \$60,000. I remember that. And our goal had been like 59-something. And I said, we did. And he just burst out into this big grin and just enveloped me and this hug. And then the person that was helping, oh, he hugged her too, just he was ecstatic.

He was that committed. He used to come in and say... I remember one day he came back from a site visit with United Way to, I don't remember what nonprofit, maybe Child Haven. He came back and he started to get teary and he said if we could get every person in this law firm on a bus to go out and see the work that's going on, we would have a hundred percent participation. Everybody would want to give. So I was so inspired by him, I was so inspired by him and by helping him with the campaign and getting to know the nonprofits that I decided that's what I want to do. I want to work in a nonprofit. So I eventually did not go to grad school, but I went to Washington Special Olympics and was an area director.

Mario Juarez: Okay, so how did you get that job? Did you go look for that job? You were an employee?

Mary Pembroke: Yeah, I was an area director for Washington Special Olympics, and I honestly don't remember how I got that job, how it came my way. It wasn't through a personal connection. It just came along and I applied for it and I got it. And there's nothing like when you're working with Special Olympics. There is nothing like when you have planned an event, you've trained the volunteers, you've done the marketing, you've raised the funds to make it happen. You're standing on the finish line and a five-year-old down syndrome girl comes over that finish line. There is no feeling like that. It was a fantastic job.

Mario Juarez: Yeah. Oh, that's great. You may not remember, but when I was in those years in the '90s, John Murray and I started this thing called the Dawn to Dusk Softball Marathon where we raised money and we raised like \$750,000 for that organization.

- Mary Pembroke: Did you raise that much?
- Mario Juarez: Over a period of six years, yeah.
- Mary Pembroke: I remember the first softball tournament. You have should have more than a plaque.
- Mario Juarez: No, no. I just say that it resonates so much that because the highlight of it all was always we would have a team of special athletes and their families and it was just so unbelievably joyful. And these kids were just so, they were just sparkling presences, just so delightful. And the families, and the love, and the community.
- Mary Pembroke: And the determination in their sport.
- Mario Juarez: And just the pure willingness to just persevere and the kind of acceptance of themselves. It was just a super powerful thing. So how long did you work there? What did you do?
- Mary Pembroke: So you understand that. This is good because this, so I worked there for a year. And then a lawyer friend of mine called, and he said, there's a job out here at Microsoft.
- Mario Juarez: Say that again and say, I worked at Special Olympics for a year. Give me that one again.
- Mary Pembroke: I worked at Special Olympics for a year, loving it. And one day I got a phone call from a friend of mine who had been at the law firm, but had since gone out to Microsoft into the Legal department, Bob Gomochiwitz. I will be forever thankful for this phone call. Gomo, we called him because no one can say Gomochiwitz. "There's a job out here at Microsoft", he said, "running the Employee Campaign in Community Affairs with this woman named Bonnie Tabb. You should put your hat in the ring."
- Mario Juarez: What did you know about Microsoft? Describe to me how that landed of whatever perception you had or misperception.

Mary Pembroke: What I knew about Microsoft at that time was watching it grow in the mid-'80s. I grew up up the street from the Burgermaster, so from those original offices, and there was an article in the newspaper, which we were never supposed to talk about in Corporate Affairs. It was the Velvet Sweatshop article. And I read that article and I thought, this company sounds amazing. I mean, a lot of people were appalled by that article, but for me I was like, this sounds really interesting. These people are changing the world, but I'll never be able to work there. I have an English degree, I'm English-Political Science. I've never been a STEM. We didn't even know what STEM was then, but I've never been a STEM person. Not for me. So, Microsoft had sort of fleetingly moved through my view. It wasn't something that I ever thought was possible for me.

Mario Juarez: But there it came. So, you applied?

Mary Pembroke: So I got the phone call from Bob. I applied, I guess I sent my resume in paper, in the mail, I'm sure. Got the call for the interview, came into Building 8, met Bonnie Tabb, who is one of the most warm and gracious people you could ever know. Went into her office, sat down for my one hour interview, and anybody who knows Bonnie Tabb knows it was not going to be an hour. It was one hour, then it was two hours, then it was two and a half hours. And then suddenly she looked at her watch and she goes, oh, expletive, I got to go get my kids. Grabs her purse runs out the door.

I believe we hugged as she ran out the door and I left the campus. I left building eight and stopped at my parents' house on the way home. They still lived in Bellevue and happened to arrive there at the cocktail hour, about 5:30, have a glass of wine with my parents and told them about this wonderful woman that I just met and how I loved her and this job sounded amazing. And I said, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do if they offer me this job, I feel like the stars have lined up for this to happen. I don't know how I

could ever be so fortunate. I don't know what to do. What a decision. And my father was a banker in downtown Seattle, and he was a very practical man, and he gave me this bemused look and said, you're currently working for a nonprofit for peanuts.

That was the expression "for peanuts", and this amazing company might offer you a job, and I don't see where the decision is here, he said. So I went back to my little studio apartment in downtown Seattle and sat down and cried, honestly, because I knew if the offer came, and I kind of thought it might, because I would have to take it and I would want to take it, but it meant leaving behind those five-year-old down syndrome girls coming over the finish line. And I knew that would be hard. I knew it would be a different kind of experience with the nonprofit community.

Mario Juarez: And low and behold, the offer comes.

Mary Pembroke: Yeah, yeah. The offer comes nine o'clock at night.

Mario Juarez: Wow. Was it the same day? Was it just a couple days later?

Mary Pembroke: No. A lot of phone tag. A lot of phone tag with Michelle Weinberger-Glasser, yeah. Before that came, yeah. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: God, how fricking awesome. I remember all those people. So, you show up winter of...

Mary Pembroke: January of '91 was my start date. I still have my badge. I still have my little name tag from my interview.

Mario Juarez: Do you remember your employee number?

Mary Pembroke: I do, but I'm not going to say it out loud. But I do, I do remember it, yeah.

Mario Juarez: Okay. So tell me about your first job. Tell me about what was that phase of experience like for you? You come in and you take this job.

Was there a job? Did anyone know what was going on? Did anyone have a plan? Did you have to build something from scratch? Was it like, I've got buyers remorse or this is the coolest thing in the world?

Mary Pembroke: You did work at Microsoft. You know how it is when you come in. Well, I started at a time that was really pivotal in the world of workplace giving campaigns. I don't think we knew quite how pivotal it was, but there was unrest percolating. It was in 1989, there was an issue, a couple of issues that cropped up with United Way of King County. One of them was a certain faction of people saying United Way should not be funding Planned Parenthood anymore because they provide abortion services. So you should defund Planned Parenthood. There's another faction saying you should not be funding the Boy Scouts because the Boy Scouts do not let gay people be scouts or leaders. So you should defund the Boy Scouts. So there were changes brewing in the world of traditional United Way campaigns, and that's the time that I arrived at the company. So arriving at the company when this moment of change was brewing was a fabulous moment. And yes, I did create a large part of my job that was just common back then. You sort of cobbled together what you want to do, make your job. But I knew a big part of my job was running the employee campaign. So as we were beginning to plan the campaign, in my first initial weeks here, I had a request for a meeting.

And, I will tell you that I was more afraid of this meeting than I'd ever been for a meeting. So you might say, oh, was it a BillG meeting? Were you nervous about that? No, it was not a BillG meeting. It was a meeting with one of the early hires, female engineers. She was hired in the eighties and she had some ideas about changes we should make to the Microsoft campaign. She wanted the campaign to be completely open so that people could give to any nonprofit they wanted, and she wanted the matching gifts limit to be raised as well. At that time when I started, you had

to run the larger part of your match through United Way to get it. So that was not a restriction that was popular with Microsoft employees. Restrictions in general maybe were not very popular. So, Therese Stowell came to my office with a petition in her back pocket that had been signed by 600 people. Now, at that time, there were less than 6,000 people at the company. She was chairing the Women's Funding Alliance that year, which supports a lot of women's causes, amazing organization. And she wanted a change and she was going to push against the status quo and let me know what her vision was and she thought this should happen.

Leading up to that meeting, I will tell you, I was petrified of this meeting because I was brand new in my job just a few weeks. And I knew I was wearing the corporate hat, the corporate mantle, and I had to represent the company and do the programs as they maybe had been done, make some changes gradually. But I wasn't foreseeing a radical change in my first few weeks there. But of course as she presented it, I'm thinking in just my head, I'm thinking this totally makes sense. Yes, absolutely it should be this way. Why wouldn't it be this way? But I was walking a fine line because it had never been done that way before in any company. And so...

I think I was very much also, when I think about planning for that meeting, it wasn't just the topic of the meeting, but the group of women who had been hired in the eighties as engineers, I was a bit in awe of them and I still get a little shiver. They were amazing women and they were women who went on over the years to have a tremendous impact in my hometown, right? The Dawn Trudeau, Trish Millines, Liz Dunn did amazing things and they were some of those early engineers that started. So after my meeting with Therese, that actually led, that did lead to my first BillG meeting, and I maybe was just as nervous for that one. I don't know. I'm not sure.

Mario Juarez: So tell us about, so this is a BillG meeting where you're going in to say, we want to make some changes. So set the scene for me in the theater of my mind, describe this moment and what happened.

Mary Pembroke: So, the meeting with BillG to discuss changes to the campaign and the matching was inspired by the enthusiastic conversation I had had with Therese in my office. And we had worked up a proposal from the group trying to walk the line about what would work within the company, what should we do, what's right, what's right for the employees. There's never any doubt that the employees were driving the bulk of the charitable contributions for the company. And that was by design. That was the central value of the company. That's why we had the matching program. Matching was pretty radical back then. So a large part of our budget went to matching. So that part I knew was easy. Yes, support the employees where they want to give. On the other hand, Bill's family was very dedicated to United Way, and so that was a significant consideration.

So we went up and gave him our proposal and he listened and he listened, and I also proposed raising the matching limit all the way up. Forget all these restrictions, let's take it up to \$12,000 per employee per year. And then he looked at me and he said, have you done the math on that? And I had this moment, I was looking out the window at Lake Bill in the woods, and he said that I just had this moment of thinking, does anybody come in here not having done the math? That would be truly terrifying. Anyway, he had no problem with the numbers. It was really a discussion around what would this mean if we make these changes and let our employees give wherever they want and without necessarily running it through United Way. We had this discussion because that year, '91, '92, I think was the dawning of this time in the company where we realized this is not just a little suburban Seattle company making great products.

We had inspired, this company had inspired people all over the world, and the world was watching. This company had captured the imagination of other companies and other guys in garages all over the world. So we were coming into this moment in corporate affairs where we understood that what we did as a company was going to be watched, was going to be discussed, and was going to have a ripple effect. So let's tread carefully with the decisions that we make. So my role at that pivotal time was really more of a diplomat, more of a bridge to broker the steel going back and forth between United Way of King County and Microsoft, also United Way of America where we had a presence. I sat on the corporate committee there. And what would the ripple effect be throughout the nation?

Mario Juarez: What was the ripple effect of that throughout the nation?

Mary Pembroke: Campaigns changed pretty radically after that. I can't say we were the linchpin, but it did shift the paradigm from the 1950s' United Way workplace giving campaign to this idea of empowering employees to support whatever causes they cared the most about. And United Way took on more of a middleman role, still supporting and vetting their charities, which is very important. I do not downplay that for a minute. I love United Way and the work that they do, but being able to also support the burgeoning number of nonprofits in the United States at that time.

Mario Juarez: I remember that campaign.

Mary Pembroke: I'll bet you do. Yeah, that was pivotal. Yeah. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: It was actually one of those moments where you go, well, it's like when they would announce a stock split. It's like, well, this is a good thing.

Mary Pembroke: Yeah. I remember thinking, what does this mean? English major. Stock split? That's got to be a good thing.

- Mario Juarez: I'll always remember actually. I'm this dumb kid who's a journalist, and I'm just thinking my \$35,000 a year salary is just theft. I can't believe how much money I'm making.
- Mary Pembroke: I know, me too!
- Mario Juarez: Like fricking unbelievable. And I'm there for eight months, and I'm having lunch and [a friend] says, have you looked at your stock options? What are you talking about? Because when I took the job, I disregarded it. I thought, those are worthless. So I never even thought about it and people weren't talking about it. And he says, and he explains it to me. I'm like, that can't be right. So I went to this gal in HR and I was like, my friend told me this about stocks options. She's like, oh yeah, I'll look it up. And she points to this number and I'm like, that can't be right. Right?
- Mary Pembroke: You're off by a decimal point.
- Mario Juarez: Yeah. It's like all the money I've made in my whole life combined with the zero after it. It was just such a weird fricking time.
- Mary Pembroke: I think that sums it up. You should be the one sitting in this chair just saying, it was a weird fricking time.
- Mario Juarez: It was a weird fricking time. But no, I loved what you just said, that it was like we all had that moment of realizations like this isn't just a bunch of kids in the woods drinking free sodas and just pulling little rabbits out of their hats and out competing each other with little bits of magic with software. I mean, what even is software? Where before I came to Microsoft, I didn't even know this was a thing, much less something that had discreet value and it just blew the world away. Are we rolling? So tell me, were there moments for you when you realized this was big, that Microsoft, did you have any crystalline moments where you recognized that what was happening at Microsoft was actually bigger than you thought, or

that was bigger that was actually changing the world in some profound ways?

Mary Pembroke: I don't think I have a good answer for that one. I mean, we were in our silo in community affairs.

Mario Juarez: So you had the great thing where you upgrade giving, and that was actually, what do you think that that said about and informed in a way the culture of Microsoft? Talk to me about the culture of Microsoft with regard to giving.

Mary Pembroke: I saw the culture at Microsoft with regard to giving shift significantly in the years that I was here. And it's really funny that I still say here, but I'm here on the campus now. But in the early years, people gave to the campaign because that's just what one did. But as the years went by, the culture began to shift because there was wealth that was being accumulated that nobody had anticipated. And I saw people begin to wrestle with that, quite frankly. Yeah, there were a lot of new Porsches in the parking garage of building eight and all over the campus, but it was more the people that I saw who came to our group were trying to be really thoughtful about how to reconcile with this. These are engineers who would come and sit in my office and say, what should I be doing now to be doing the right thing?

What percentage of my salary should I be giving? Give me an equation. Give me an equation. Give me the math. What's the right thing to be doing here? Because a lot of the folks who landed here did not come from great wealth. They came from families that may have prized education, but a lot of people came from middle class backgrounds. And so when they were coming to terms with this sudden the stock would split and they would come in and sit down and say, what should I be doing? How should I be doing this? And so we counseled a lot of people, one-on-one on that. And then as the years went by, we started putting on larger events where we would bring in people from all over the country and talk about what

can you be doing? How could you be doing it? What kind of organized philanthropic vehicles exist that you might want to use? So it grew and much more sophisticated towards the end of my time. It was very satisfying to see people who were so committed to social justice and health and welfare and education and the environment come in and say, how can I make an impact with this now?

Mario Juarez: It sounds like what you're describing is that the existence of a really progressive, well-funded, enlightened giving program influenced the culture in a generative way that it in fact, it actually maybe inspired people to do things that they might not otherwise have done. Is that a fair statement? And can you talk about anybody that you saw who actually did take that ball and run with it and take this mantle of giving and turned it into a life? You mentioned a few names already.

Mary Pembroke: Probably won't get into individuals on that.

Mario Juarez: Culturally. Talk about the culture.

Mary Pembroke: I love the fact that you say that our program seemed well organized, making an impact. I'm really glad that it was perceived that way, but I will tell you, being Employee No. 5 coming into the group, and two of those people were support staff helping us answering the phones, and the phones were ringing because Microsoft was capturing the imagination around the world and the world was beginning to call back and say, well, what are you going to do for us? And so yeah, phones were ringing. I didn't answer my phone for how many years after? I still don't. After leaving Microsoft, because my first year we received 27,000 unsolicited proposals for charitable contributions. So Bonnie Tabb and I had many nights sitting on the floor of our offices or sitting in her office surrounded by stacks and stacks of paper. Bonnie and I were both native Washingtonians.

Bonnie grew up in Bremerton, and so we were deeply committed to our local community. And at that point, the company was, our mission statement was to support the communities where our employees live and work, which is very broad in the world of philanthropy, but most of the employees were here in Seattle. So we were deeply in discussion with the nonprofits around King County, but we were getting letters from all over the world. I got a letter from a nun at the Vatican asking me for money. And we felt it was incumbent on us to read all of these and try and reply. So we were working as hard as we could to be responsive, but it was nearly impossible. I mean, when I was working in that group in the first year or two and we were inundated by these proposals, I was inspired, I was excited.

I was intellectually just on fire. And then a lot of the times I felt like the coyote that had just run off the cliff and we were just trying to get some traction on this, and our group was, let's put it this way, we did not generate revenue in our group. In fact, quite the opposite. We were giving it away. So when we were having headcount discussions, we were usually not the top of the list to get headcount, but we were trying to work so hard and answer all those calls and respond to all those letters even from the nun in the Vatican to be compassionate and responsible in our role. So it's great that to at least some people, it appeared organized. But it was...

Mario Juarez:

I would say actually that would not be the word that comes to mind, not because it was disorganized. What I felt, and I'm crystallizing this based on this conversation, is that it was extremely well designed. It was well chartered, and I remember when the dollar, the campaign got lifted and that I could give money to anyone, and then later I could volunteer because I did a lot of volunteer work, and that translated in the money that was done, was that it felt like I was being empowered to directly give a little dose of Microsoft wealth onto the organizations that I love the

most, which was this very eclectic mix of everything from Planned Parenthood to dog shelters, to Big Brothers, to books for underprivileged kids, and it was like that. So it was designed well. It was something, it created its own energy. And one thing I'm hearing you say is this fundamental difference between saying, I'm thinking of all the stacks of letters and it's almost like I'm thinking of things like, well, you need to find somebody, Microsoft that you can make fall in love with you and they'll give you the money.

You basically created a situation where corporate wealth was distributed by employees. Give me your own statement of that.

Mary Pembroke: I think it was a fundamental value. I know it was at the company then that the employees should be distributing the charitable dollars, so the matching gifts program was set up to do that. So when we raised the limit up to \$12k, that really empowered people to give to the myriad of things that were important to them. And there was a huge variety of organizations. I will never forget the guy that wrote a check for \$10,000 to the International Society of Cryptozoology, and I thought, okay, just buckle up.

First of all, I had to see is this a valid 501 C3? And yes it is. I think it still is. So Sasquatch lovers unite. The passions of the employees were so inspiring. And we also were often the first group to know when somebody was getting ready to leave the company. It wasn't always HR. In fact, it was usually our group. The thoughtful people would come in and sit down and say, how much is left in my matching? Just wondering. And so we'd give them their total and they would make a plan to spend the rest of that matching.

Mario Juarez: What did you do with that information?

Mary Pembroke: In my first few weeks, also, I think one of my big lessons initially was when you're at this company now, let go of any preconceived notions. Just open your mind up. That whole saying about how minds are like umbrellas. They only function when open. Just let go

of any stereotypes, ideas that you have. Because I had a woman come in and she looked 14 and she said, I am going to leave the company. How much matching do I have left? I want to spend it. I said, oh, where are you going? She said, I'm going up to Galiano Island to a yoga meditation center. That was impressive. A lot of people didn't even know where Galiano Island was then, but she did. I thought, oh, okay. So I told her and I thought, she's going to give me her \$500 check to Greenpeace. That's what's going to happen.

She sat down on my floor crisscross. She had her jeans on, and she wrote out this check, and I take the check and she fills out the matching form, but she's spending a lot of time on the matching form. I thought, this is interesting. She's really spending a lot of time. Then she finally handed me the form and I looked at the check and it was for \$10,000 and she had very specifically itemized 10 different charities. So thoughtful, so interesting. And then she jumped up off the floor and she said, see you later! And that was one of my first brushes with employee giving and I thought, I'm really going to like this place.

Mario Juarez: So, great milestone. You're early on, one of your first big mountains that you climb is revamping, redefining the parameters of this program. Other career highlights for you, other summits of achievement at the company that come to mind you proud of?

Mary Pembroke: I think I'll just leave it with that one. That was, that was...

Mario Juarez: A pretty big one.

Mary Pembroke: That was a notable one. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: Yeah. That's really good. Yeah. Talk about the culture of the company at that time. If you had to describe Microsoft, and I'm talking even beyond the parameters of giving, just what kind of place was it in the nineties? Tell me about the Microsoft that you

encountered and the kind of people that were here and what they did.

Mary Pembroke: I think what I loved most about it, because I was fairly independent person, was that I could create my own job. I felt supported. I felt empowered. If I had an idea, I could run with it. And that was just in our little group. But I had a great moment that to me sort of epitomizes the culture of the nineties as our community affairs group was in touch with other groups. So we were kind of in a silo. We weren't in touch with product groups that much, but every campaign we needed good technology to help run the campaign and we would launch it in the Kingdome and it was a big deal. We'd have the theme and the T-shirts, and we also had to have a very robust data collection system so that we could capture all the pledges. And before one of the early campaigns, our IT person who had been assigned to us, his name was Clay, and he came into my office and he said, I have an idea. You guys hire all these temps every year for the campaign to do data entry of all of the paper pledge forms, which we did. That's so time consuming, he said, there's this thing we've been working on, it's called an electronic form, and people can fill 'em in on their desktops and then upload the data directly into a database.

Mario Juarez: Whoa.

Mary Pembroke: And Clay said, do you want us to try and come up with something like that for the campaign? Would that be helpful? And I said, that would be amazing. Can you do that? He said, I think we can do that. I think some of the guys, and they were all guys on my team can do that. So for the next couple of weeks they worked on that, and then the night before launch, they worked all night long banging on that form and uploading into the database and testing it. And it worked perfectly and was a huge step forward for our group. And I remember thinking that is just essential to this company, that feeling that he had this great idea and he wanted to run with it, and

he did, and he created this new paradigm, and it was a game changer for our little group. And that was what I was seeing all around me, what a lot of people were doing. They had a great idea, they could run with it, they could make change, they could shift paradigms. So e-forms are the future.

Mario Juarez: It's funny because listening to what you said, and there's actually, there's a parallel quality to it, is that actually was very fundamental to what life and the company was like then I think it kind of is now again actually. I'm actually in the trenches in AI and it's very similar. And there was that 20-year gap where it just turn off the microphones...

Mary Pembroke: Right? That Steve Palmer guy.

Just sayin'.

Mario Juarez: But it's also when the company's products are actually out in the world, they enable that very same thing.

Mary Pembroke: Right. One would hope so the culture inside the company is reflected out in what's being produced.

Mario Juarez: Yeah. It is kind of just an interesting harmony on that. What do you think your legacy in the company, I know it's a big word to use, but what I'm going to sit here and tell you that you definitely made a difference at the company. You wouldn't obviously be sitting here if you hadn't, and you're a humble person, so you're not inclined to dwell on that. But when you think about what you did or maybe a better way to put, it's what you participated in, what do you actually look at and go, I'm really glad I did that. I'm really proud I did that. What are the reflections for you?

Mary Pembroke: I'm proud of a lot of the things that we accomplished in that group. It was the whole group, obviously. I don't feel like I can lay claim to some big moments, some big change that I made, but a lot of it

was just the small changes. The people who came into my office and wanted to talk about how they could personally start to give. The information sessions and panel discussions that we put on and bringing in experts and connecting people to other people who are interested, oh, you're interested in cryptozoology? Well, let me connect you with this person who knows about that. I think that was a big part of our function, and I'm just proud of being part of that organization that did that. I'm really proud of where I stepped off when I left Microsoft actually, too. I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I left.

I knew it was the greatest job I was ever going to have, so it was a huge decision to leave. So I, as many people did, took Paul Brainerd to lunch. Paul had founded Aldis and had recently started the Brainerd Foundation with I think \$40 million endowment to help the environment. And I went out to lunch with them and I said, thinking about leaving the company, not really sure what I want to do yet. And he said, I'm having this idea. He said, I'm thinking of starting something that could help these other fledgling philanthropists learn more about how to give. I'm thinking we'll form a giving circle and have people put in a certain amount of money and then discuss with each other how they could allocate the money. And I said, oh, that sounds really cool. Inside I was kind of thinking, I don't know if that maybe that'll work, but he said, are you interested?

I said, yeah, I would help you out with that. And so we put our Rolodexes together and he called a few notable people like Scott Oki and Maggie and Doug Walker, and we put on an event in Seattle at the Ruins Supper Club, and everybody showed up and Paul and friends got up on stage and explained this idea, and they said, we want to try this using a venture capitalist approach to philanthropy where people are going to give their time, they're going to give their money, they're going to be really involved with the charities this way, who's in? And we had 37 people sign up that night to form what became Social Venture Partners, and we pulled

the board together right after that. I was on that board for about 10 years and committees started meeting and it took off. I think there is, I don't know, they're in 40 countries now around the world. Social Venture Partners are. So it an exciting time in philanthropy in Seattle the '90s, technology and philanthropy were intersecting on a lot of levels and that was an exciting place to be. So whatever part I played in encouraging people to give, that makes me feel good.

Mario Juarez: Amen. Are there things that you think about from your time at Microsoft that you believe to be timeless or universal that you would say to anybody that's coming into the company today? Both from an employee, but also a leadership perspective? As we think about this retrospective that we're working on here, looking at what made Microsoft, essentially Microsoft, what remains relevant to the company that sits here today?

Mary Pembroke: I think it's kind of like when they, you go to a meeting and they say, does anybody have any questions? And nobody's raising their hands and they say, oh, come on, several of you probably have the same question. You should just raise your hand. I think one of the takeaways I had was, if you have an idea, if you want to push back against a structure or an older paradigm, there's something that you want to achieve, but you don't know if there's anybody who's going to listen to you or be interested, go with that instinct and keep pushing forward. Meet with the people you have to meet with. If you don't get a response right away, try somewhere else. Follow those instincts that you have. I think I took that not only in the workplace but in life. Just go with that.

Mario Juarez: Awesome. Are there things on your notes that you wanted to talk about?

Mary Pembroke: Oh gosh. I don't know. I kind of forgot about them. Probably not.

Mario Juarez: You have a laugh.

Mary Pembroke: Okay. One.

Oh gosh. Sometimes you have to break some rules, too. Yeah. So just a memorable moment for me was one of the last giving campaigns. We would always do games at the end of a campaign. We'd celebrate, be a party with food and theme and games. And Bill always enjoyed the games. He's a little bit competitive, so games were good. And one year the people who came up with the games had an idea that they should have a tricycle race and public relations got wind of this. And they came to us and said, you can have your tricycle race, but do not under any circumstance let Bill get on a tricycle. We will not have that. That was before Instagram, that was before social media. But they were very sensitive about his image. Do not let him get on a tricycle. So you know what happened. Bill wanted to be in the race and who's going to tell him no? I'm not going to tell him no.

In fact, we sort of maybe encouraged him a little bit. So I have what might be the only surviving copy of an eight by ten color photo of Bill on a tricycle in this race. And my team member, Emily got such a chuckle out of all this that when I was leaving the company, she took that photograph upstairs in building eight and she took it to Bill and she asked him if he would sign it. So it says, thanks for all your great work, Mary, Bill. And that is one of my favorite professional possessions in my office. I had to share that story with you.

Mario Juarez: Oh, that's great. No, the Micro News, one of our annual staples was the executives making fools themselves at your parties.

Mary Pembroke: It was fun. Yeah.

Mario Juarez: Were you there the year that Mike Maples and Ballmer jumped into Lake Bill?

- Mary Pembroke: No, that was the year before I came. I remember the photos from the Micro News. Yeah.
- Mario Juarez: That was like, I was a contractor then, I thought, our executives are going to die of heart attacks.
- Mary Pembroke: I know, right? Is there still Lake Bill? Is it still there?
- Mario Juarez: They're rebuilding something there. What are the great moments? Any other good Bill moments?
- Mary Pembroke: Oh, that's one of my favorite ones. There were a lot of good ones. You'll have to wait for the book for that.
- Mario Juarez: I guess we will. Alright, well let's call that a wrap then.
- Mary Pembroke: Do you have what you need?
- Mario Juarez: I have what I need. This is so fantastic.
- Mary Pembroke: Okay. Thank you.
- Mario Juarez: Great. How freaking awesome to talk to you.