

Oral History of Patty Stonesifer

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 Patty Stonesifer as conducted by Mario Juarez on September 12, 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: Thank you so much for doing this.

Patty Stonesifer: I'm glad to be here.

Mario Juarez: Here. It's really fantastic.

Patty Stonesifer: I avoid most public/publicity things, but this seemed like it's a good idea. Something important happened and it's a good idea to memorialize it even if, just for my grandkids.

Mario Juarez: How many grandkids?

Patty Stonesifer: Five.

Mario Juarez: You have five grandkids?

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah. I only had two kids, but they each, one had three and one had two.

Mario Juarez: Oh, that is fantastic. Where do they live?

Patty Stonesifer: Missoula, Montana, the two oldest, and then the others live a block from me in Washington DC.

Mario Juarez: Wow. The cousin experiences there must be very cultural, clashy.

Patty Stonesifer: Oh, but wonderful. Actually, they both love the other's experience. Right? The country cousins and the city cousins. They're very good.

Speaker 3: That so cool.

Patty Stonesifer: I do Grammy camp every summer and they are together then and it's really great.

Mario Juarez: Oh, Grammy camp. So they all come together.

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah, my networks are called Grammy camp. Everything is Grammy camp every-

Mario Juarez: Do you it in DC or do you have-

Patty Stonesifer: I do it in DC but we generally also take a trip someplace and yeah.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, you go see the Smithsonian?

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah, a lot.

Mario Juarez: You know somebody there?

Patty Stonesifer: A few. A few.

Mario Juarez: That's fantastic.

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah.

Mario Juarez: Okay. First to begin, for the record, a 30 second statement, introduce yourself, explain when you worked at Microsoft and what you did. Just like, hi, I'm Patty.

Patty Stonesifer: Hi, I'm Patty Stonesifer and I started at Microsoft in 1988 and stayed until 1997. Went on from there to the Gates Foundation, so still had some connection to what was going on there, but my key years were '88 to '97.

Mario Juarez: And what did you do in that time? What was a very, very brief highlight of your roles?

Patty Stonesifer: Microsoft was changing so much during that period that I started out as a leader in Microsoft Press, moved to leading Microsoft Canada, moved to leading Microsoft Product Support and my end role was the head of, what was then the Consumer Division, ultimately the Interactive Media Division.

Mario Juarez: Great. We'll get to all of that. Thank you for that quick overview. I'd love to begin at the beginning. Tell us where were you born?

Patty Stonesifer: Oh goodness.

Mario Juarez: Give me the details about when and where were you born?

Patty Stonesifer: I'm the sixth of nine children born in Indianapolis, Indiana. My father was a car salesman. My mother was a physical therapist. I grew up across Indiana because as a car salesman, my dad moved around more than a little bit and started out going to school at Butler University and dropped out to get married young and moved across the country to California.

Mario Juarez: Okay. What kind of cars?

Patty Stonesifer: My dad sold Dodges at the beginning but then ultimately became a Toyota dealer.

Mario Juarez: Did he have his own company?

Patty Stonesifer: Off and on. He would have a dealership or lead a dealership. So it was an up and down kind of a career path.

Mario Juarez: So six of nine, you were the six of nine children. And there's this, I mean it seems like a very crowded house and car salesman are not known for their vast wealth. So what kind of life was it?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think in some ways being sixth of nine children prepared me for the time at Microsoft. I had five brothers, I had three sisters holding your own at the dinner table required a certain kind of confidence and assertion, so I learned those skills early. In Italian families, they call those kids in the middle in the sauce, but in Irish Catholic families, we don't really like to use that phrase. It means

something entirely different. But I was that in that messy middle and I think that was formative. I had to learn how to collaborate but also stand out and that was something that happened at the dinner table.

Mario Juarez: Did you say Irish Catholic?

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah.

Mario Juarez: So you're Irish Catholic?

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah.

Mario Juarez: What was the church that you went to?

Patty Stonesifer: When I was little, I went to St. Joan of Arc and every day we would do an homage to the statue of this woman in soldier's clothes with flames coming up from her feet. And it was in fact kind of a strange iconic emblem for a woman that was going to move into technology and try to compete in a man's world at that time.

Mario Juarez: I was going to say it sounds like that prepared you well for her.

Patty Stonesifer: I hate to say it, but it's true.

Mario Juarez: So true. That's great. So what was the span of ages? I mean, were your parents just like-producing-a child every two years and so you had the whole demographic spread at the dinner table?

Patty Stonesifer: The first six children of my family are within seven years of each other, so I'm the littlest of that big batch and then three more children that spread out over another decade. So there was only about 17 years from the oldest to the youngest, so we were quite a crew.

Mario Juarez: Tell me about your parents. So your dad's a salesman?

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah.

Mario Juarez: Tell me about what kind of man was he?

Patty Stonesifer: My dad was a big hearted but highly demanding Irish, Chicago born and bred. A man who loved his family, but worked around the clock to put food on the table, usually had two jobs. My mom was brilliant and if she was with us today, she would be on a track to be the CEO of something. But at that time she had a degree in music and then became a physical therapist. She was absolutely brilliant, but obviously raising nine kids and often we had foster kids. In addition to that was the majority of what she spent her time and life on, and she was beautiful, funny, and unforgiving. A very high-standards woman.

Mario Juarez: Wow. What kind of house did you live in? Did you grow up in one house, you said? Did you move a lot?

Patty Stonesifer: We moved a lot, but during my first 10 or 11 years we lived in Indianapolis in a big house on a corner lot, but even a big house at that point, you were lucky if you had two bathrooms. I think we had a little one on the first floor, but then we had one bathroom on the second floor that everyone had to share to get ready in the morning. And so my dad installed three sinks in my bedroom, which I shared with one other sister. And if you didn't need to use the bathroom, you used my room to brush your teeth, wash your face, do everything else. So it became a central hub for a big family.

Mario Juarez: What kind of kid were you?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, when I was young there was this doll called the Chatty Cathy and they pulled the string out the back and she spoke and that was a great technological phenomena to have this voice box inside of this doll and they often called me Chatty Patty because as the child in the middle, I was very articulate and wanted to make sure that you knew I was there. So I think I was a pretty expressive child, but I was a bit of a free-thinker because in a family of nine there's a lot of structure, there's a lot of rules, and there were two of us that really wanted to kind of go our own way. And I can remember my mother repeatedly saying, you're going to turn out just like Tim and Tim, I'm very, very close to lives around the corner from me now. And we both were just wondering whether all those rules and all those practices were necessary. So I was both very chatty, but also asking a lot of questions from day one.

Mario Juarez: Why? What were you seeing or what was happening that you felt that way? I grew up in Cleveland and big Catholic neighborhood and I know the gravity of those kind of culture, cultural, tribal standards. And so there's something that was powerful that must've been happening to stimulate you, to inspire you. What was it?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think I just always was that kid who thought, well, now that doesn't make sense, or that rule seems absolute when perhaps there's a middle way. For whatever reason, I just didn't see that the tight structures that were necessary at some level in a family that was that big, but also then applied in the Catholic schools that I went to in the community that I went to those structures of this is the way it should be. I never understood that should be question and that ability to question always is that really the whole story? Is that really what's right? I have a great anecdote of that. When I was in first grade and they were explaining again with statues all around the school about the Virgin Mary and I raised my hand and asked, so what is a virgin? And the nun hemmed and hawed and hemmed and hawed, and I said, no, no, no.

I don't understand what is a virgin and why is the virgin Mary so much better than all the rest of us? And so she finally said that she was cleaner, that she was more pure, that we were, none of us were as pure as the Virgin Mary. I went around and thought this through and looked at all the statues and everything and I decided given the statues and these long beautiful dresses she had on that she had no butt, that that was the difference. And so I declared to people that I wasn't a virgin because I really had to figure out what was it and how did that relate. Now that has nothing to do with what we're interviewing about today, but I thought you would appreciate that.

Mario Juarez: I just love that story. Yeah.

Patty Stonesifer: But that was my questioning from the beginning.

Mario Juarez: Oh God. What school was that? Do you remember?

Patty Stonesifer: Saint Joan of Arc.

Mario Juarez: Saint Joan of Arc, it was the Saint Joan of Arc school. Oh my goodness. That is, thank you. The golden little nugget. Has absolutely nothing to do with what we're talking about.

Patty Stonesifer: Absolutely nothing.

Mario Juarez: But actually quite interesting in the way that you, here's a girl who is, you remind me so much of my mother in the sense of being just looking at everything and saying, I refused to just take that. I was raised by a single mother who was one of the first women in data processing in the '60s, and it took a different kind of mindset. Where do you believe that you acquired those values? I guess I want to talk about what were the values that were instilled in you that really stuck and harmonized resonated for you out of those formative years of your childhood core values?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, certainly this idea of that you're part of a greater whole was one of the number one values. This idea of the idea that your community, your family, your community, the greater world. And that was one of the things that drew me to Microsoft, the idea of the democratization of computing and that it wasn't just for those who could access a mainframe or sat in a corporate desk, but it was for all. I loved that idea. That resonated with me and made a lot of sense to me. But so this idea of your responsibility is certainly to yourself, but always it's to the kid to your left and the kid to your right or the neighbor down the street or the family that doesn't have a high chair that needs your family's high chair. My parents were the kind of activist Catholics that always had a whole suite of social service things.

Today we call it volunteerism or service. We didn't call it any of that. It was just baked into our life and we were always working and leading at the soup kitchen, which is what they called it then on Sundays because all the other access points closed down or the food pantries or the cleaning up the church after mass, or my father who worked unbelievable hours driving a bus for deaf children to make sure they could get to the service on Sunday. And my sitting and participating and helping with that sense of the broader responsibility that we each had was just, it was never even articulated. It was just baked into every day. And that has been a guide to a lot of what I've done with my life.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, yeah. Thank you for that. It illuminates so much for me about what I know of your experience and from what I remember of you at Microsoft, which we'll get to. I want to question one thing to just explore one thing, foster kids. So here's a house with two bathrooms and you're bringing more people in. Tell me about the foster kids.

Patty Stonesifer: I think that my parents thought that they were already at scale, and so adding two more, adding three more. We had a family of three that lived with us, a significant part of my middle school and high school years where there had been a great family tragedy and the father was incarcerated and the mother had passed away. And there was just this sense that, well, we've already figured out how to do it with a big team, adding a few more is not that big a deal. It was actually very hard in many ways because these new personalities and new expectations were woven into a pretty tight system. So it was also a good lesson not only in the responsibility for the greater community, but also in the, well, you just got to figure it out. You got to change when change is needed and warranted. And they just built that into the way that they proceeded through life.

Mario Juarez: And it just seemed normal to you.

Patty Stonesifer: It did seem normal to me.

Mario Juarez: That's phenomenal. Wow. So you were in Indianapolis, Indiana. What kind of student were you, probably imagine you were a good student.

Patty Stonesifer: I was always a good student. I didn't go to the best schools ever. I was one of the, you know my parents, we went to the school that was a block away. And then in high school I went to the Catholic school and then I went to the other Catholic schools. I went to two different high schools and I was a strong student, but the schools were not very rigorous. And I look at some of my peers that came to Microsoft from more classic educations or even now looking at

young people coming out of schools that are really working every week on writing skills, really working on analytical skills. And I wish I'd been challenged more, but I did very well with the education that I was given.

Mario Juarez: And you went to tell us about your college experience. So you go to Butler?

Patty Stonesifer: I went to Butler because it was a couple of blocks away from my family's home and I didn't have any money for college. And I walked in and they gave me a scholarship based on both my grades and my potential. That was based on a sports writer in Indianapolis who had passed away named Anthony Angelopoulos. And they had a little bit of money and I was the Anthony Angelopoulos scholarship winner, and I edited the yearbook right away. I worked in the cafeteria. I really was scrambling to put together enough money to even stay in school. And so I made the donuts every morning and you were allowed to eat as many of the donuts as you could in process. And I survived on glazed donuts for a couple of years and then eventually did drop out and got married and moved to the west coast.

Speaker 3: So you were at Butler. Were you living at home during school?

Patty Stonesifer: No, I lived in an apartment near the University after I dropped out and moved to California. It was several years later, but after my first son was born, I went back. We had moved back to Indiana and I went to the Indiana University, Purdue University, Fort Wayne Extension and completed my degree in general studies just to get

the degree. They didn't have a journalism degree. My work at Butler was in journalism. I was always fascinated with journalism, but ended up writing in the technology space almost immediately because that was a better job and better money.

Mario Juarez: So you're back home or back at your home base?

Patty Stonesifer: Yes.

Mario Juarez: Got a couple of kids. What happened in that phase? Because I mean any standard telling, if we took the narrative arc that you just laid out for us, we don't see somebody who makes a phenomenal impact on the technology industry over the course of her life. We see somebody who continues on the same quite wonderful vein that you begun. What changed here? Can you give me a view of what you did in that phase of your life?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think one of the important choices I made was I had been learning. I started out as always a great writer. That's why I started in journalism. And so I entered the corporate world as a corporate writer, but technology was coming on fast and there weren't very many people with CS degrees and I had a very analytical mind. I just hadn't been trained in computer science and I found that they needed technology writers and began to write technology and then began to teach technology fairly quickly in Santa Barbara. I taught COBAL. I would literally learn what I needed to learn the week before I ended up teaching it because we were bringing in people from the community, from uc, Santa Barbara and other places who had music degrees or affinity in some ways to teach them to be

programmers because there was such an absence of the number of programmers we needed.

And it was some years before the universities were turning out enough supply to meet the demand for technology. So I was lucky in that I found it fascinating. I had some skills in writing that were necessary and I pretty much spent the rest of my career in technology, kind of walking the line between the people who were deeply embedded in the technical aspects and the people who were trying to utilize and understand and build businesses or families with technology. And that kind of middle path, middle way became the kind of contributing space that I was able to perform best in.

Mario Juarez: It's sort of a meta expression of the journalist, the one who builds the bridge between different realms and basically creates a kind of empowerment. Is that a fair statement?

Patty Stonesifer: Yes. I mean, again, that was what drove me to Microsoft was this idea of this wonderful emerging technology being democratized, accessible, affordable, not just to the few, but to the many. And that strong belief that Bill Gates articulated that Steve Bauer articulated about everyone everywhere having access to a computer. I mean, we didn't even think it'd be in our pockets or in our purses or in our eyeglasses for that matter at that time, just the idea of access to a computer for everyone was just empowering and wonderful. And the appealed to the girl who always asked, why, why, what? Because it meant that that kind of information was accessible to everyone.

Mario Juarez: But Microsoft wasn't your first job in the space. Tell me about your early career.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, my early career was as a Tech Writer, and then I became a Trainer in what was, I think they were called Information Centers. Again, the bridge between this new Microcom computing technology coming on and corporate use of it. And I was at United Technologies and writing how to and teaching courses for executives and finance folks, et cetera, about how to use mainframes or many computers to do everything from financial analysis to corporate bookkeeping of all kinds. And there was a computer book publisher in Indianapolis that came knocking and asked whether I would consider joining them. It was called Q Corporation. They made these black books about using PC DOS, using 1-2-3, using WordPerfect. And I thought that was a great way to even scale from the idea of helping dozens of executives or dozens of financial analysts to thousands and tens of thousands of people by taking what I did understand and helping publish books. So I became the Editor-in-Chief and then Publisher at Q Corporation in Indianapolis, and that's where I was when Microsoft decided to look for some grownups to add to their leadership suite in 1987, 88, and I was 30 years old and really thought of as a grownup at Microsoft.

Mario Juarez: How did the connection get made? Tell us the story of your first encounter.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, my first encounter was with Microsoft folks who we were at Q Corporation writing books about. So I was in touch with Product Managers. I was in touch with other people at Microsoft as we tried to write books or work with authors writing books about this

emerging Microsoft technology. But at that time, Microsoft was number two in almost everything. We were trying hard to get that word perfect book out first, trying to make sure we got the third tips, tricks and traps done for 1-2-3. And here was Microsoft trying to do a spreadsheet or doing a word processor or struggling to move from DOS to a new operating system. But I was really impressed with the folks at Microsoft and apparently someone there was impressed enough with me that they made that call and said, would you come run Microsoft Press?

Mario Juarez: So somebody actually called you up?

Patty Stonesifer: Someone called me up.

Mario Juarez: They didn't offer you a job right out of the gate, did they or?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I didn't really get the sense that there was anybody else being spoken to about the job. I think it was a bit of a thin recruiting base at that point. It wasn't a very big company. And when I flew out again, Microsoft was number two in almost everything. I flew out, I was really intrigued by the culture, but to be perfectly honest, I was also really intrigued by the Pacific Northwest. So the idea of both the beauty and the opportunity for what, I then had a three-year-old and a five-year-old, and I thought, this is a wonderful place to raise a family and a wonderful organization full of people who are asking the same kind of questions. Why not, how many, how big, how far can we go with all of this? And that just felt like it would be a good fit. So I came to join Microsoft Press as a leader in that effort to publish computer books, but I really came to join the

Pacific Northwest and this company that seemed like it was working and thinking in a new way.

Mario Juarez: Tell me about your first physical experience coming to Microsoft. Do you remember your first trip to, and I think at that point there would've been the initial six buildings and then Microsoft Press was over by the Burger Master. Tell me, do you have distinctive memories of that first encounter with the place, with the buildings, with the company physically?

Patty Stonesifer: I remember thinking, this is so green. It is so green and so wonderful. And I don't remember that much about the interview process. So that kind of famously difficult interview cycle that we became known for whatever reason, I don't think I really experienced it or if I experienced it, I just thought it was fun or interesting. But the Microsoft Press and a lot of the emerging products were run by a real character named Min-Yi and Min-Yi, I remember sitting down with him and thinking, whoa, this is going to be a wild ride, because he just was a very big free thinker and very different than most of the Microsoft Executives and that he came out of the publishing world, not out of the technology world or not out right out of college. He was an experienced executive, but just a free thinker in so many ways.

And I thought I had been the lead of most of the work at Q Corporation and I would be joining what I thought was a huge organization with under 2000 people at that time. But I liked this guy Min-Yi and thought this could be a really wonderful experience. And as it turned out, it was, and he was a wonderful, I don't know if you'd call him mentor, but maybe guide to me for how to fit into the Microsoft way. And I knew almost from the beginning that if I

was going to make that big leap, I would need a partner who was a great guide.

Mario Juarez: Tell me about your first phase of work at Microsoft. You work in Microsoft Press and you wound up in Canada. How did that happen?

Patty Stonesifer: I was at Microsoft Press a relatively short period of time, maybe a year and a half, and there was an executive retreat where the very top executives would each identify one person from their organization that they thought had future leadership potential in Microsoft was growing very fast. And so there was always a need to be moving people into new roles. And I was chosen as someone to go to this retreat, not as an exec, but as one of the people of promise I guess you'd say. And we went to this retreat probably out at Hood Canal, I can't remember exactly where we were. I know they put us all in a bus and we went and they would ask questions that the executives were struggling with in their strategy sessions and have this group of next level or two level down folks struggle with those same questions. And in that process, I got noticed enough that within a week after coming back from that retreat, they asked me about moving into the international area and taking over at that time, Microsoft, Soviet Union. But that ended up with so much change that I ended up in Microsoft, Canada, but that's kind of how things went. Then things moved very quickly, fluidly, and you had to be flexible, but if you were those things, there was a lot of opportunity. The company was growing so fast.

Mario Juarez: I think you dodged a bullet on the Soviet Union into Canada thing.

Patty Stonesifer: I think my family was going to live in Germany and I was going to be commuting back and forth.

Mario Juarez: Where'd you move to?

Patty Stonesifer: I did not end up moving there. I ended up moving to Toronto.

Mario Juarez: To Toronto, right. Yeah, I didn't mean in Soviet, I meant the Canada job.

Patty Stonesifer: I lived in Toronto, but I'll tell you the story about the retreat. It was interesting.

So this must've been 1989, Ronald Reagan was finishing his term as president. We were getting ready for, I'm guessing President Bush at that point, so 1990. And the questions were about what would we do if the economy changed suddenly, let's say there was a downturn in economy, people quit buying software, et cetera, and people were all like, here's how we'd cut costs and here's how we do this and here's how we do that. And I said, I thought that we should hold our breath, hold tight the very best distributors, we had cash if we needed to create new terms for when people owed us the money back. And because these things historically don't last that long and we had the cash and could come out the leader by holding people close, and everyone was like, but then they decided that's a really good idea. So that was again, just asking why not, why not? It was the impetus to people realizing that given how much was changing in the industry, I was a leader who could help

lead through change. And the constant asking what can be? Why not? Why not?

Mario Juarez: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. That would then say, here's a really important emerging international market that needs to be done. What did you do when you got there? What did you find, and what mark did you make?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, when I went to Microsoft Canada, the reason that it came up as an opportunity so quickly is that the general manager there was flaming out and he just was really struggling with both customers and employees and they needed to make a change fast. I was originally in repair mode to repair corporate relationships, repair employee culture, but then we were able to build, we literally built a new headquarters, we built new relationships. Microsoft's Software Suite was growing more and more important in the banking industry in Canada, but we were also going through an important shift from backing OS/2 to making the change to Windows. And the banking customers were really unhappy because change is not something if you're running a big bank that you want. And so I had to really learn how to lead through the kind of change that has enormous impact on people's businesses and people's reputations because the people who had insisted that OS/2 was the answer in that bank felt really bad when Microsoft changed its mind. And the answer was Windows and we had a lot of selling to do both on staff, but also in the greater business community across Canada.

Mario Juarez: How did you do it?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, even then, the technology teams would partner with the international leaders. So I was lucky enough to have a guy named Richard Tait fly in. A wonderful, wonderful man flew in and went with me to bank after bank after bank to talk about how Windows would be better for their business long term. And we took the heat, you have to learn to take the heat. That was certainly a part of being a leader at Microsoft as we took the heat from disappointed customers, but stayed with them long enough to have them listen to both the technical and business rationale for the change. And we eventually managed to retain and switch and build up all of those customers. But the partnership with the product group coming in to stand with the sales leadership, which is what really being a subsidiary manager is you're a sales leader and relationship leader at that point in the evolution of Microsoft was really important and was the ideal kind of Microsoft internal partnership.

Mario Juarez: Okay. You do great in Canada. You're successful. Tell me how you came back to the company. What was the next phase?

Patty Stonesifer: I remember Mike Hallman coming to Canada for our holiday party, and he was a lovely man, but spent the time I was driving him and I remember that my windshield wipers didn't work very well. Here I am driving the President of Microsoft around and it's sleeting and it's just horrible Canadian weather, but all he wanted to know was what did I want to do next? What was I thinking about? And I was so absorbed trying to really build up this Microsoft Canadian presence and traveling across this very wide but very narrow customer base across the Canada that I hadn't spent as much time on it as I should. So after he left, I really did think about what did I want to do next, but I never got a chance to really answer that question because there became very apparent that Microsoft product support was really a challenge for the company's

reputation and efforts and customers were routinely as we became more and more popular, we also had more and more novice consumers as well as high-end technical issues coming at us very, very rapidly.

And customers were routinely waiting sometimes an hour, two hours on the phone to reach product support. And Mike called me up and said, you probably need to take this job in product support because we need someone who will figure out how to change the customer experience rapidly and radically. And I thought, well, that's an interesting challenge and it would get me back to Seattle, which is where my husband and kids and others wanted to be rather than Toronto. In spite of the fact that Toronto was really great, it was far from the base that they had expected and we, so I came back to run product support and try to answer that puzzle about how can you scale support for customers as rapidly as Microsoft software presence was scaling. In addition, we began to ask the question, but how could we reduce the number of incidents of support because you don't want to just keep growing and ignore the fact that the ideal support experience is one that never happens, right? That the usage is more smooth. And so working with the product teams on that issue and with learning, how do you do customer service? How can we outsource customer service? How can we scale customer service? How do we hire for the perfect customer service was a really interesting challenge for the next two years.

Mario Juarez:

What are you proud of in the way that you fixed that? Because I remember that as such a dramatic shift. It was, I think when I arrived, given that product support sucked and that it was just this problem and pretty quickly emerged, the notion that this was something the company has turned into an asset and that accrued

to you. What are you proud of on what happened there? Tell me about that.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, again, I think my propensity to say what, why, and just keep asking questions of the really smart people that are around me, the really talented people around, but who sometimes get stuck in a way, this is the way we do it. This is the path we do it on. So for instance, when I got there, the way to deal with the long wait times and how angry people were was to take people off the phone a lot to give them a break a lot, and it was actually exacerbating the problem and we had to find ways that people felt empowered. One of the things that was so disempowering for the people on the support line was that nobody was fixing the software. They were just trying to patch, patch, patch the customer experience by helping them. And not only were the wait times long, but the resolution, the amount of time on a call was incredibly long and we were measuring, you were highly valued if you could make this call short.

Well, we needed to rethink this and put the value on yes, problem resolution, but also feedback to the software group. And so the dramatic linkage between what we heard from customers feeding into the software development process, both with fixes and patches, but also with the next version being radically different because of all those thousands and thousands of voices that we heard from customers, because remember, Microsoft didn't sell this software directly. We always had somebody else in between us, either a corporate customer or a retail partner, so we didn't have that direct customer experience. Product support was this wealth of that and having the people on the phone lines realize that they were that way that Microsoft could be connected directly to customer feedback and that the customer feedback was making it all the way

to the frontline of the person specking the product or the person fixing the product was very, very much a culture change within product support and helped everybody in the necessary effort to work harder, scale faster.

Speaker 3: Was it also a culture change in the product teams?

Patty Stonesifer: Oh my goodness. The product teams really had to accept that the customer's wisdom and the customer's frustration needed to be built into the product cycle very, very rapidly. But thankfully, Mike Maples believed in this same idea and had key technical leaders come put those headsets on and tried to answer questions for a couple of hours, and we had a lot of technical folks come and begin to experience the work in a different way and help us with coding so that every call was coded as to what the problem was, began to build up this product called Knowledge Base, which had the resolution so that customers could go online or go onto their computer and find a lot of the answers without ever getting in that queue. The partnership with the product leadership and the product teams took a bit of work from the top-down, and then it became a bottom-up effort where people really saw that this kind of knowledge exchange was a value and it made a big difference.

Mario Juarez: It is one of those things that it seems so obvious in the rear view mirror almost as though you would've just designed a company that way. It wasn't that way.

Patty Stonesifer: It wasn't.

Mario Juarez: Did you have to go pound on any desks or get anybody's attention? I mean, how did you as an executive forge that change that needed to be made in these standard very just concrete systems and ways of doing things?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, one of the challenges of Microsoft at that time was its blessing. The rapid rate of scaling, the rapid rate of going from it was a couple of hundred million dollars revenue when I joined in '88 and it was 10, 11, 12 billion when I left in 1997. That kind of scaling and reaching more and more consumers, not just corporate IT departments, but consumers really stressed the whole system. So it wasn't like people were ignoring the need for these things. There just were so many priority ones, and so distributed leadership and leadership that was empowered to take action and scale. That action was essential. And what I found was that things like knowledge base were already underway. Somebody was doing it, it just wasn't widespread, it just hadn't gotten to the right kind of scale. It hadn't been able to break through to get the attention or the feelings that we needed to add a support center in another location and outsource support to egghead and other corporate partners. Those were things that folks knew. It wasn't like I invented them, I just was able to surface and get the resources and scale them. And that was ability to kind of break through the many priorities of the organization and make critical priorities that you could see become shared priorities across the org.

Mario Juarez: Great, great. Fascinating. Then you move back into product. How did that shift happen? You go in, you build, you get things right in Canada, we got to put you over here in product support, and just as it seems like things are crystallizing there, you move on. What happened?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, we had built a great team of leaders in product support. I was very confident that we were opening operation in Dallas. We'd opened an operation in North Carolina, the Seattle team was world-class. The partnership with the product teams was very strong, and Mike Maples again came and said, we really could use you in the consumer, what was then the consumer division, and it had the hardware and consumer and small business products. And for me, it was a chance to go into product development as well as the marketing and take what I had learned by being exposed to many, many customers both in the setting and Canada, but also in product support and see how to translate that in the product development cycle. And the consumer division was a very, very special place at Microsoft. I always say that if you got a whole lot of important strategic corporate work done, those weren't my products, but if you had a lot of fun, those were mine because the consumer division, whether it was the mouse or the keyboard or the games work or the CD ROM and educational products or the small business products and Microsoft publisher was just a revelation with this idea of using wizards to allow us all to be great publishers.

Those were products that were really bringing the power of computing down to the individual level and coming into all aspects of our lives. And I thought that was a great opportunity, great privilege, and a great team.

Mario Juarez: What was the nature of creativity in that division? And I think of Microsoft as having many different brands of creativity, product development, business innovation, engineering markets, but there was a particular unique brand of creativity that imbued the magic of that team at that time. Can you highlight that for us? What was the brand of creativity that existed when you arrived and that you fostered?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think that across Microsoft in the office area, in the operating systems area, the driving question is what do people need? In the consumer division, it was what do people want? What do people want to be? What do they want to experience? What do they, it was a broader remit, right? So whether it was creating McZee to entice young kids to be creative on the computer, not just passive learners or it was the production of CD ROMs about music and wonderful ideas that could be translated on cooking and others, or it was the ability for all of us to become great newsletter publishers with Microsoft publisher, there was just this broader remit to the creativity that was what do people want to be? What do they want to learn? And by necessity, the people doing the business software were much more about need and productivity, and we were about fulfillment and enjoyment and kind of extending our natural skills by the use of these magic microcomputers that were becoming more and more prevalent in the home as well as in the office.

Mario Juarez: And it was a profitable business. It was a very successful business too wasn't it?

Patty Stonesifer: Was a profitable business. It was already a profitable business when I got there and then became even more profitable. But again, like most of the businesses at Microsoft, it was a blend of hardware with the different kinds of margins. Hardware never has the margins that the software has, but we were building joysticks and crazy things because the computer was becoming so much more of a gaming machine and so much more prevalent in the home. And we were working as fast as we could trying to maintain that profitability, but spending a lot of money on the research and development of new ways for people to interact with this amazing personal computer.

Mario Juarez: And at this point, you are joining the executive ranks. Tell me about the progression of you as a leader and the roles that you took toward the end of your career.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I first received the VP title in product support because of the necessity and importance and scale of what needed to be done there. But I think I really became a full-fledged Executive team member when I joined the Consumer Division because Microsoft was always a place that puts a very high value on invention and innovation. And so that was my first real opportunity to be present at that table where we were inventing and creating new ways for people to actually use these miraculous computers. And I was the only woman at the table at that time, which made it very interesting. But I was a woman who was raised in a family of nine with five brothers, and so I found my voice fairly quickly, but the Executive team was really small and tight and very technical for the most part. So I was one of the least technical members of that team and had to utilize the fact that I had always walked that line between those who were consuming the technology and those who were building the technology and became a kind of an expert bridge in that space and the voice often of the consumer of our product. In the Executive team discussions.

Mario Juarez: What do you view as your best contributions in that ladder? You left the company as a Senior VP?

Patty Stonesifer: Senior Vice President.

Mario Juarez: Senior Vice President. What do you consider to be your great contributions in that phase?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think one of my most important contributions was seeing that you could still be fierce and collaborative, community oriented, a mentor, really building the team and that you could hold onto that fierceness, that determination, that really hard work ethic while still having a workplace that considered the whole person and embraced different styles of leadership and management. I think the consumer division or the interactive media division had the widest range of types of leaders and managers who found their place, found their voice, found their strengths in building and innovating products at Microsoft.

Mario Juarez: It's interesting, those products were all revolutionary. Many of them were revolutionary, and I think really had powerful impact on the industry in this time of sort of breakneck-change. And the company was dabbling in media. You had MSNBC, which you were a huge part of. The parameters were pretty broad then about what was possible as a company. Is that a true statement? Do you have any reflections on that?

Patty Stonesifer: Yes. I mean, there was a bit of a land rush in that we knew that the internet went from being mostly a walled garden with AOL and even early efforts at Microsoft to this wide open idea where the idea of that information moving smoothly through. You think about the fact that IN Carta was revolutionary when it came out, but it wasn't that many years later, 2001 when Wikipedia came out, and that, again, these products at the beginning, people say there's no way. It was based on Funk & Wagnalls, that IN Carta will never make it. Encyclopedia Britannica has been around for 220 years.

What are you doing thinking you could create and encyclopedia on this CD-ROM? And then within a decade, Wikipedia, not even starting with Funk & Wagnalls, but starting with this kind of crowdsourcing actually ended up eclipsing the role of IN Carta over time.

So things were just moving so so rapidly that, that need to be inventors, and to ask constantly, how will travel change thus Expedia? How will access to news change? How will political commentary change the creation of Slate here? Which was a huge change for me personally as well as for the world of political dialogue. Those kinds of things were just wide open and we were out looking and talking to creative people around the country and around the world about what kind of information, what kind of products, would they see in the future that would empower people, engage people, delight people based on this idea of a computer on every desk and in every home.

Mario Juarez:

How do you feel about the fact that the world changed so much that many of the groundbreaking products that you were involved with aren't here anymore? That this is simply just, there's not a context for them in many ways. They're happy memories for a lot of people. I'm sure a lot of people that hear this are going to hear these product names. Oh, I remember those moments Christmas mornings where sometimes these would come out. It was a case in my house and kids were excited to see these, and it's a different company now. But what do you think, how do you view the contribution that that great work did to the company's ongoing ultimate success even after the world changed?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I think the idea of the personal computer as a creativity tool was probably the most important thing that came out of the interactive media division as a knowledge tool, not just a corporate productivity tool, but as this broader creative and knowledge tool and the constant need to be examining what kind of knowledge are we facilitating that knowledge, what kind of creativity are our tools as well as our products? Facilitating that creativity was a very big contribution made by the interactive media division.

Mario Juarez: That's fantastic. Great. Tell me about the last phase of your career and your departure from the company.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, one of the best stories of my latter part of my career at Microsoft was that this very geeky political editor named Michael Kinsley came for an interview. He had known Steve Ballmer from Harvard, and he had been on Crossfire, was still on Crossfire five nights a week, and the editor of the New Republic, and had this great reputation in the journalism community, but had thought that political analysis and culture were difficult to reach a broad audience with the high cost of print and distribution. And maybe there was something about this internet that he should be leading the way on. And Time Magazine or Time Inc. had talked to him about doing something. But he decided before joining with a traditional media company, he should contact this old friend named Steve Ballmer, or old colleague named Steve Ballmer. And he wrote Steve a letter and Steve said, come on out to Microsoft and tell us what you want to do.

And so he came out and thinking that he was going to sit at a conference table and people were going to spitball about this product, but instead they put him through an interview loop. And

he, because ultimately it was about this leader, not about the product, because we knew a lot of the products would fail, but the leaders would continue to make things that were valuable to Microsoft. And so suddenly this guy who's on TV five nights a week and renowned for his journalism was put through the traditional Microsoft interview process where people are drilling down, drilling down, drilling down, drilling down. And at the end of his day, at that time, there was always an opening on your calendar and it's listed as, "as appropriate." And if all these people who've been drilling down all day are saying, hire, hire, hire, in the email they send afterwards, then they send in an executive to turn you around.

And if you were thinking we were kind of jerks by that point to be very nice and very friendly and talk to you about what it would take to get you to join Microsoft. And I was Michael Kinsley's "as appropriate." And it was the first time that I met him and the first time that he met a nice person from Microsoft. And so he thought I was amazing. And it was years later before I explained to him that that was my job that day was to go in and be amazing so that he would decide to come and create Slate at Microsoft. So we were still adding products and ideas and efforts literally week by week, month by month, quarter by quarter. And Slate was created. Mike came and created Slate. But I was nearing my 40th birthday. I had started at Microsoft when I was 30.

I was headed to 40. I had a 13-year-old and a 16-year-old. And I realized that it was probably a very good time for me. I'd made more money than I ever expected to. I'd accomplished more, I'd had more different jobs than I ever thought I'd have in a lifetime, much less in a decade. And I realized it was time for me to move on. And I chose to do that at the end of 1997, giving lots of notice and realized that I still had a lot of creativity in me. And one of the

partnerships that we'd built in the Interactive Media Division was with the folks at Dreamworks, and they called and asked me to join them. As soon as I announced that I was leaving, they called and asked me to join them. So my intention was to go to Dreamworks and help them with their digital movie making.

Mario Juarez: Not a bad second act. And you've had, and then multiple subsequent things.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, as it turned out in my going away party, Bill was very emotional on stage about my departure. He'd been very perturbed with me. It wasn't an easy discussion, and he'd been very perturbed. But on stage at the going away, he said very nice things about me, but also said that the only good thing was that he didn't have to be the person in between Steve Ballmer and Patty Stonesifer anymore because Steve and I had more than our share of disagreements. But he was very sweet and very nice, and as he got off stage, I said, I hope someday we'll work together again. He said, could you come see me on Monday? I have an idea. And I couldn't go see him on Monday. I was doing stuff for Dreamworks already by that time. But when I did go, he said, Microsoft has been doing this thing with libraries and giving computers to libraries.

But Melinda and I were thinking that we could do something much bigger. And I'd been working with Melinda in the Interactive Media Division, and she had since retired and was getting ready to raise their family or raising their family. And I thought, this is really intriguing, and asked him, what if we were to do this at a completely different scale? Suppose we did it. Suppose we did 5,000, 10,000 libraries. And he just leaned in and said, suppose we did all of them, what would happen? And what his intention and

Melinda's intention was to take it outside of Microsoft and use it as a cornerstone of their interest in really beginning to scale their philanthropy. And so I joined Bill Gates Sr. and helping in the very early years of them figuring out their philanthropy and what eventually became the Gates Foundation.

Mario Juarez: Which you ran.

Patty Stonesifer: Yes.

Mario Juarez: Give me two minutes about your experience at the Gates Foundation. Pretty phenomenal.

Patty Stonesifer: It was an extraordinary opportunity to take many of the lessons of technology and do things differently in some cases, and use the very best of those lessons to try to address other questions of what do people need, what do people want, what do people need? And we did that with questioning US education system, what could be done here, but most importantly probably in the early decade, what about health around the world? What do people need? What do we want? We all want the same thing, a healthy and productive life for ourselves and our children. But what they needed was access to really basic health technologies that we took for granted here, and were absent in the communities around the world where resources and health were in scarce supply. And that focus, and that ability, to take a blank sheet of paper and say, given the resources that Bill and Melinda Gates have, and given the fact that we can attract talent from around the world, what would you do to bridge the gap between this value that everyone should have, the opportunity for

healthy and productive life, and the reality, which so many people didn't?

What would be the highest value things you would do? How would you do it? What talent would you assemble? And that's what we did at The Foundation, was literally take that blank sheet of paper and ask the questions that mirrored our values, that looked like the moment we were in, whether it was because of emerging biotechnology that could create new kinds of vaccines or distribution systems that could get the vaccines that we had. What could we do with incremental resources and a new strategy to change health around the world?

Mario Juarez: Yeah, I would love to just talk to you for an hour about that. But I think we have about, and we got about another half an hour and I would love to now go back to Microsoft. So thank you for the wonderful detail and I'm interested in every great story that you have to tell. An obvious factor is that you were the most senior woman at the company when you left, and a very small number of women in the executive ranks overall. Can you talk to me about what was it like to be a woman at Microsoft and that phase of the company?

Patty Stonesifer: People often said to me as if it was a point of pride while you were the highest ranking woman at Microsoft. And I said, this is not something to be proud of. This is something where you would hope there was a crowd, that there was competition for that designation that was incrementally, there were three women over here and three women over here, and who got the senior VP was just incremental or coincidental to the opportunity. But I was really standing alone for a period of time when there were no other

women in those very senior ranks and there was a certain loneliness to it. And it wasn't just gender, but it was style, it was commitment to different kinds of family responsibilities. Even in the time since I left in 1997, I think the role of the dad in the household has changed and become much more important.

But at the office I was trying to juggle a significant number of commitments to my family alongside the commitments to Microsoft and taking both of those very, very seriously. And it was almost more about style and familial responsibilities that caused stress than it was strictly about gender. There were other executives who believed in a more collaborative style, who believed in invention has to come from all levels of the organization and we need to hear from people in a different way and appreciate different voices. But I got a lot of credit for that. In part I got noticed because of my gender, so got a lot of credit for having a different management style. There were others who shared that style who were men, but the presence of a woman and the difference in style was very remarkable. I have many anecdotes about being the only woman. Like I said-

Mario Juarez: Please tell me.

Patty Stonesifer: When I entered this building today, I saw a little sign about a Microsoft shuttle call this number, and it made me remember that they had a special exec shuttle and I would call whatever the number was for the exec shuttle and then I would go to get on it and they would tell me, I'm sorry, this is for the executives. And I would have to every time say, but that would be me. So it's just the kinds of things that people were just trained to think in technology that equaled a white male. And thankfully that has modified

somewhat, not as fast or as thoroughly as we thought it would, but it has been modified since then. But at the time we thought that ceiling was going to break wide open and it was just going to be a real representation of women in leadership ranks in technology. But we were still few and far between for quite a long time afterwards and we still fighting that fight today.

Mario Juarez: Sounds pretty tough. Sounds like it must've, must've been lonely. Did it take a toll on you? How did you manage it?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, as much as I believe in creating a positive climate at work, I also really believed in never compromising and staying myself. And so I just went ahead and did that and figured I probably wouldn't be the next CEO of Microsoft. I probably wouldn't be seen as the greatest technical mind at Microsoft, but I would just be myself. All that was available to me and that was a source of strength in that rather than trying to compete on the terms that were there. And I think in some ways that really helped my success at Microsoft in that, Microsoft was a very internally competitive place in that if you were creating office software, you were often perturbed and competitive with folks creating the operating system because maybe they weren't working as well or different pieces of office were competitive with others. I just didn't bring that to the office. I didn't have that, I didn't have time for it. I didn't have the inclination to be internally competitive, so I was able to build bridges across the organization that served me and my team very well, I believe. And so it ended up being a bit of an asset that my way, was a different way.

Mario Juarez: Who were the important people? Who were the three most important people towards your success at Microsoft?

Patty Stonesifer: Bill Gates was always a big supporter of mine. I'm not even sure why. I think it really started with that first, okay, I would not start cost cutting. I would just extend credit to those who were the best customers that that very early management retreat where I was discovered after having run a book publishing operation before coming to Microsoft, you still had to be discovered at Microsoft. And Bill was a great supporter all the way through my career there and obviously in my opportunity to then go run the Gates Foundation. He and Melinda were great supporters, and Melinda had seen me close up as a manager and Bill had seen me as an executive decision maker. And though that combination was really important, but frankly, some of my best supporters were the folks that worked on my team, Charlotte Guyman, Melinda French Gates, the people like Richard Tait who Karen Freeze. There was just a wonderful group of people that provided each other that it wasn't classic mentor-mentee. There was just strength in these folks working together across and up, down, sideways in seeing opportunities, seeing ways to work around finding talent, building camaraderie and solving problems. And I got a lot of the strength and support at Microsoft out of both peers and the team that worked with me.

Mario Juarez: That's great. I love hearing those names. What a great answer. Thank you for that.

Mario Juarez: I was going to ask you about legacy. You tell me you're not a legacy girl. That's a highfalutin term. When you look back at that experience in your life, just broad question, how do you regard your Microsoft career? Where does it stand in your life? And I'll invite you to answer that on whatever terms feel right for you. But it's a phenomenal career from where I sit and you've had a phenomenal

life on many dimensions outside of it. What does your Microsoft experience mean to you in your life?

Patty Stonesifer: When young people ask me about what did I learn in those early years, I say that I have a bias towards yes, that the idea that in that less than a decade I moved countries, I moved jobs, I took on things I knew a great deal about to start and then nothing knew almost nothing about, I made incredible relationships. But having a bias towards yes, to go ahead and take the personal risk, because what's the worst thing that can happen, really is an important attribute of what I learned at Microsoft, what I was rewarded for at Microsoft, but most importantly what I then took out into the rest of my career, which is that new experiences, even those experiences with a lot of risk to them because you'd have to stretch and become in new ways are worth that because we only live once. We only get one shot at it. And coming into a place that is in great need and trying to see what you can do to fill those needs is a great opportunity and shouldn't be overlooked, just say yes.

Mario Juarez: Awesome. Thank you. That's so good. I'm going to package that one up. And I'm thinking about all of that against my memory of that company at that time and how it was just exactly the right attitude to have in there. What kind of company was it when you got there, and against that it was what you just said. Talk a little bit about what the culture was and what the vibe was, what some of the defining experiences were for you.

Patty Stonesifer: One of the things that appealed to me so much about Microsoft in 1988 was the sense of very little hierarchy. Bill Gates wasn't a guy in a corner office. He was a part of the team trying to figure out and build new solutions. John surely wasn't a remote president, came

from Texas Instruments, was running this vast effort, but was literally in there trying to help us become better managers, better thinkers, better business people. The "we are in this together" feel even at that size, Microsoft had already been around for 13 years, but still was a really small company in many ways under 3000 employees that kind of "we are in this together" feel at the beginning was very, very important. That hierarchy was not the measure of success. There was another measure. It was probably an overly IQ valuing, overly winners-take-all feeling, but that still had this idea that good ideas could come from any place. And that hierarchy was not the guiding influence for whose voice was heard,

Mario Juarez: Right. Engineering IQ.

Patty Stonesifer: Yes. I should have specifically said that. Not EQ for sure. Not EQ.

Mario Juarez: Very much an engineering culture, very much an engineering culture. Was there a moment when you realized that it was much bigger than you had thought it was or that it was going to be? I think everybody that we've talked to has had some moment or some series of moments where the company just became major. And in 1988, it wasn't major. It was promising, it was noteworthy. Anybody that had one of these PCs might have some awareness of it. But then there came a point somewhere in the nineties where it was a global force. That was my experience. What was your experience? Did you have any moments?

Patty Stonesifer: I wish I could remember what year it was, but the launch of Windows 3.1 was for me one of those moments when it was as if

we were, Bono at a U2 concert. The idea of this release of this new version of Windows was electrifying not just in the industry but in the business community at large, and the idea, and the importance, of this new suite of features and its new reliability, and being part of that launch, and part of that rollout, and part of the consideration of how this would then move the diaspora of impact that something like Windows 3.1 would have, was a real wake up call for me that we weren't a product company. We were actually a part of the greater infrastructure of how things got done in the home and in the business community. And with that came new levels of responsibility because we weren't about individual products, we really were about how things worked in this country and around the world.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, I remember Time Magazine had a story about Windows 3.1 and there was a picture of Bill wearing a leather jacket, which I'd never seen Bill wear a leather jacket. He actually looked borderline cool.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, borderline cool was as good as we could do, I'm afraid. We were never in spite of the products becoming cool. It was never a place that valued, put a high value on being cool. It put a very high value on being smart, on being right, on being fast, lots of things. But being cool was not one of our values.

Mario Juarez: I actually remember when Satya Nadella came in and I had worked for him as comms manager right when he was running the cloud business right before he became promoted. And he said in a meeting once he said, we're not cool. We're the ones that provide the things that cool people need to be cool.

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

Mario Juarez: What else were the essential, so you just reflected something that I think is really an interesting observation about the nature of the company and that still resonates today. Can you look back and think about the Microsoft that you knew that you helped build and that you feel are the essential tenets, the essential values, or standards, or mission goals of the company that you see the company still having today? And I'm asking you to do some reflection to resonate a little bit about with what your experience was with what you see of the company today, even recognizing that you're not close to it. Does that make sense?

Patty Stonesifer: One thing that I think came out of the very early years was, and that is reflected in the way that not just Microsoft today, but technology is thought of today, is this assumption that it should be accessible to everyone. And that just, it's hard to imagine that 50 years ago that was not a widely held assumption. And one of the gifts that Bill and the other leaders at Microsoft had was they were looking out, they were building today, but looking to the future. And I would say they were directionally correct and specifically wrong that things didn't happen quite as fast as we thought. But look at what has happened. That assumption, you have to start with the assumption that this technology should be available to everyone. And that idea has driven the smartphone, has driven the headsets, has driven your TV being brilliant. It's driven so much, but it's hard to understand that 50 years ago the idea that computing power should be accessible, affordable, and available to everyone just was not in the atmosphere. And having a group of people who believed that and began to build a company, and a product line, and an ethos, and then spread that changed everything at Microsoft even today, but also around the world where so much invention and innovation

started with this fairly revolutionary idea that there should be a computer on every desk and in every home and in every pocket and every purse and every glasses and every wall. And that change of thinking has transformed the world.

Mario Juarez: What do you dream for the company today and tomorrow? What is your hope for Microsoft?

Patty Stonesifer: I have one more memory that I want to make sure that we get on because it was important to me. I joined Microsoft two years after it went public and I became part of the Executive team a few years later than that. And I remember at an executive retreat, a lot of the executives had begun to accumulate money because of the stock price that they had never expected to have. They were there to build software, they were there to harness computing power for the future, but suddenly they were also getting rich. And I remember sitting in Hood Canal in Bill's home with the rest of the Executive team and him theorizing, there's only so many pairs of socks you can have after that. We have a responsibility to redeploy these funds in other ways that benefit society. That was just core to who he was.

And the discussion around the room, that was a common theme that we really ended up with. The majority of the people there chiming in with their own thoughts about how this wealth being present at the beginning of this micro-computing phenomena and what it had accrued to us personally was part of a kind of social responsibility for figuring out once you had enough socks, how to use those resources for the greater good. And it's another thing that I think started certainly with Bill's example, but is spread through Microsoft, Bill Gates Sr. being there at the beginning,

always pushing United Way, and challenging us to give more and consider our community the diaspora of that attitude that for each one of us, there is a responsibility to use our wealth, certainly to take care of our families, but to wisely figure out what we can do with society, I think comes out of that same ethos of a computer technology being released to everyone. It was the wealth and resources that we built also in theory doing the most good for others. And that for me was a really formative discussion. I had thought that from my own upbringing as a social activist family, but Bill came from a very different background, had that same, and seeing that happen in the technology industry starting I think in many ways with the example of Bill and Melinda Gates and seeing the amount of technology wealth that is helping improve society in other ways has been a really a rewarding part of this journey.

Mario Juarez: What do you think is the best contribution Microsoft has made to the world?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, again, I think it comes back to this idea that a computer on every desk and in every home is just the way it should be. That was a radical idea. And now it's not just a computer on every desk and in every home, but in every cloud, in every, the ability and the transformation of the democratization of technology is, to me, far and away the most important contribution that Microsoft in the early years and continuing today makes for the greater society.

Mario Juarez: Beautiful. Do you have any regrets in the time, things that you did or didn't do at Microsoft? The answer no is a fine answer.

Patty Stonesifer: No, I have a big regret and I was able to actualize change in behavior when I built the Gates Foundation and ensuring that from day one, a diversity of voices and backgrounds were present in the executive ranks. And I sat at that executive table as the exception at Microsoft, the female in the group. But instead of thinking about the fact that, well, wait a minute, we are also missing lots of other people and pushing hard for that, I was more conscious of my uniqueness than of the fact that we were still missing a lot of other people. And I did not push hard enough for a change in our leadership ranks that in those early years would've changed a lot of things that Microsoft in the decades that followed.

Mario Juarez: That's a big one.

Patty Stonesifer: I don't know that I said it quite right, but.

Mario Juarez: No, it was pretty, it was-

Patty Stonesifer: I fixed it in my next go-round, but I didn't fix it in that go-round.

Mario Juarez: Yeah. Well, how could, I mean.

Patty Stonesifer: I could have said we could have done more, and I probably had enough opportunity. I probably could have influenced that a bit because people were kind of afraid that there's only one woman, what's she going to do? So when people are a little bit afraid of what she might do, it's a good time to use it. You got to use it.

Mario Juarez: Okay. Quick lightning round. Best office you had.

Patty Stonesifer: The new Red West. When we built out the Red West, I got an office in the corner, but it was the best office because there was so many creative things happening across Red West. It just made it wonderful. I didn't spend much time in that office. I was always out learning and seeing things.

Mario Juarez: Favorite person.

Patty Stonesifer: That's a trick question. I don't know. I would say, yeah, I don't know the answer to that.

Speaker 3: Coolest experience.

Patty Stonesifer: I went to see LEGO in Scandinavia trying to convince them to do robotics with LEGOs. And we actually flew in commercially, but then we got on a LEGO plane that looked exactly like the LEGO plane at my house, and I was dying to know whether the pilot's legs stuck straight out because the little LEGO men never had any knees, they were just straight out. And flying into LEGO and trying to talk to their Executive team who was still, and we were trying to talk to them also about girls and LEGOs and technology because we were all trying to figure out how to increase the number of girls using gaming software and them saying that there's a LEGO boy, there's just a LEGO boy, and they've come a long way since then too, and they didn't end up doing the partnership with us, but a few years

later they began to see that technology and LEGOs would go together very well.

Mario Juarez: Thing that you sometimes think about and you ask yourself, did that actually really happen? Anything that you look back at and go just, it seemed too fantastical to have possibly been true anything like no is a fine answer.

Patty Stonesifer: Yeah. No, I can't think of anything I told you. I didn't have a very good memory.

Mario Juarez: Thing that you most wish for Microsoft in the future.

Patty Stonesifer: Well, I am very impressed by Satya Nadella taking the very best of the culture and pulling that forward and building that out. And I'm hoping that Microsoft continues to find ways to have that fierce belief and that fierceness around quality product and speed to market while humanizing and ensuring that there's space for everyone. Different kinds of voices, different kinds of backgrounds at the table.

Mario Juarez: What's next for you?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, let's see. I'm 68 years old and I am enjoying being Grammy to five amazing kids and at the same time enjoying my board work and nonprofit work. I head to Indonesia and I head to London this weekend, and Indonesia in two weeks. Again, based on some of the

work about global development and trying to see opportunities for others around the world. So I hope I get to continue this idea of democratization of opportunity moved away a little bit from it just being about technology to being all kinds of opportunity for people around the world. And so I hope I get to keep making that kind of contribution.

Mario Juarez: I hope so too. Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you wanted to talk about? Any other great stories? Is there a story you always tell about Microsoft when you go to a party?

Patty Stonesifer: Well, people always ask me about the culture. People always ask me about the culture.

Mario Juarez: What do you say?

Patty Stonesifer: I say that the culture had many, many positive attributes of, again, this fierceness, this idea-orientation, invention-orientation, shipping-orientation, it was very important to be able to ship. And that was one of the reasons I loved going to the consumer division because I wanted to ship things and be part of that cycle, but that it had a very significant achilles heel in the internal competition. The idea that in many ways, instead of being competitor focused, you might be focused more on the strengths or weaknesses of your neighboring product group or your neighboring division. That I think reduced accomplishment significantly at times at Microsoft. And ultimately, the internet showed us that all things are interwoven and that information, and you need to create an organization that thinks of itself first as a whole and then as

individual teams, you need those individual teams to speed innovation and speed productivity. But there has to be a level of cooperation and collaboration that I think sometimes in those early years in our competitive nature became far too competitive between teams.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, I always felt that was one of the great cultural shifts that Satya cemented.

Patty Stonesifer: That's what I think too.

Mario Juarez: Was it just suddenly changed the evaluation of rewards.

Patty Stonesifer: Oh, they did, interesting.

Mario Juarez: And so it became a different thing. I mean, many of the fundamentals were still there and there was still quietly calibration and things, but the notion that you were not your number one competitor was not the next office over, it was the next company over. And I think that was driven by where the company was at that point in time. But a lot of the core entrepreneurialism, it's kind of interesting to look at the company today and sort of see it in an upward path. That feels to me somewhat like those early 90 years with the wave on AI as the company being in the lead again. It's been a while since it felt like the company was in the lead. So I think that's a profound shift. Okay. That's me talking. Anything else?

Patty Stonesifer: I can't think of anything.

Mario Juarez: Alright. This has been such a treat.

Patty Stonesifer: Good.

Mario Juarez: Thank you so much. This was phenomenal.