# Oral History of Rosie Perera

Interviewed by **Becky Monk** for the Microsoft Alumni Network

October 10, 2024

## Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Rosie Perera as conducted by Becky Monk on October 10, 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

Becky Monk: Thank you so much for doing this and being part of our big Microsoft Alumni Voices project. I'd love to start the way we're starting everyone just by telling us your name and the years you worked at Microsoft.

Rosie Perera: My name is Rosie Perera, and I worked at Microsoft from 1985 in August of 1985 until 1996.

Becky Monk: Thank you. What was your role at Microsoft?

Rosie Perera: I was a software design engineer, otherwise known as a programmer or developer.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. Okay, so now I want to go way, way, way back. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Rosie Perera: I was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and grew up there and left for college when I was 18 or 17.

Becky Monk: So, you were growing up in Massachusetts. What was it like growing up there? What was your family like?

Rosie Perera: My dad was a doctor, and my mother was a teacher, and we had three kids in the family. I was the oldest and we grew up going to the public schools there. I had an opportunity to take a computer class in school, in high school programming in basic, and I was beyond what they could teach me there, so they suggested that I go and take a computer class at the nearby University Williams College. So I took a FORTRAN programming class there after BASIC.

Becky Monk: Wow. And you were doing that while you were in high school?

Rosie Perera: Yes.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. So what was it about those computer classes and learning to program that really sparked your imagination?

Rosie Perera: Well, I was a real math nerd at the time, and I thought that computer programming dovetailed well with the math stuff that I enjoyed and the kinds of people that I hung out with and the computer club, we had a computer club in my high school. They were fun and I enjoyed the kind of comradery that I had with them.

I graduated from high school in 1981, so I was getting involved in computers in the late ‘70s.

Becky Monk: When I talked to folks from other areas of the country, I feel like they might've been a little further behind you. Talk about a computer club in your high school. Was that unusual for you or that was just something that a lot of the Massachusetts schools had.

Rosie Perera: I really wasn't aware of what other high schools in Massachusetts were doing at the time. I was in a small city in western Massachusetts. Pittsfield

had a population of about 45,000 or 50,000, and so I guess in retrospect at the time, that probably was a pretty advanced thing. We weren't that far away from Dartmouth College, which is where the BASIC programming language was invented in the '70s. And so to have a class teaching BASIC programming to the kids there, I actually started it in summer school. They had a summer school program for our school department with some kids took classes there for remedial purposes, but they also had enrichment classes you could take, and I took a BASIC programming class one summer. Turned out that it was a more advanced level of BASIC, and I took it and did okay in it anyway, even though I had never had the beginning level class. And then after doing that, I went and took the regular introduction to BASIC programming in my high school, which was extraordinarily easy for me after I had already done the advanced one. But I don't recall thinking that any of this was unusual or that I was privileged to have access to these kinds of things. I did feel special going off to the college to Williams College and taking a FORTRAN class that was something that high school kids normally didn't do, so I felt privileged.

Becky Monk: Yeah. How did that opportunity come to you?

Rosie Perera: I think the computer teacher in my high school recognized that I had skills beyond what he could teach, and he thought I would need some more challenge. I think I was still a junior at the time, maybe a senior. I can't remember exactly what year I did it, but he was the one that recommended that I take a class at Williams and a friend of our family's was studying at Williams and commuting there at the time, so she was able to give me a ride. I wasn't even a licensed driver yet at the time, and it was 30 to 45 minutes drive away from Pittsfield. So I rode up with her and I had the class one evening a week. They would give us a homework assignment to write a little program, and we only had one shot at running it, so I'd have to work it out and simulate it by hand at home.

And then I'd go in the day of the class, no, I think we had two weeks to get our assignments done. So I would go in the day of the next class, get there a little bit early and turn in my type in all of my punched cards. This was

taught on punched cards back in the day, and I'd hand in my stack at the computer room where they would run it, and you'd have to wait until overnight to get your results back, and I couldn't get my results back until I came back again the following week for class. So it had better run correctly the first time, and that's how I was forced to be very meticulous about trying everything before I handed it to the computer to be run.

Becky Monk: I love that the circumstances really made you hone your craft early.

Rosie Perera: Indeed.

Becky Monk: So you're finishing up high school and you decide you're going to go to college. Where did you go and what did you study?

Rosie Perera: I applied to Brown University as my number one choice and I got in, so I went primarily not really having made up my mind, but thinking I would probably study math and I did enroll once the time came as a math major, but my second year there, I took a computer class and again, it was just something I thought I should have as a background along with being a math major and perhaps going into academia, but I found that I've just loved it so much. It came easily to me and it was fun and it felt like I could be creative, so I kept going and taking more classes and lo and behold, by the end of my sophomore year, I was considering changing my major and I think by junior year I had declared as a computer science major, and then around midway through my senior year, I was continuing to take math classes and all of the required computer classes, but there was a new major that they were preparing to put on the books for the following year, which was a combined math computer science degree, a bachelor of science as opposed to a Bachelor of Arts in math or computer science, which is what I had been considering before.

And I looked at the requirements for it and all but an independent study, I would've completed all of those requirements by the time I graduated. So I asked my advisor whether thought there was any way I could get that degree, and even though it wasn't really officially available until the next year after I graduated, and he said, well, you have a graduate level

computer science degree or you have a graduate level computer science class. I had taken the computer graphics class at Brown with Andy Van Dam, who is a well-known computer scientist who's actually done some consulting work for Microsoft, and he said, we could say that that counts as your independent study. So he granted me the privilege and I became the first graduate of Brown ever to get that degree in math, computer science of Bachelor of Science.

Becky Monk: Wow. Pretty groundbreaking.

Rosie Perera: Another interesting thing about my time as a student in computer science at Brown is that the year I graduated, which was 1985, they had the highest ratio of women graduating with a computer science degree ever, and then it declined after that. So I went during the peak years, there were almost 50% of us women in that department at that time.

Becky Monk: Well, that's what I was going to ask you, and that surprises me because I would've thought that it would've been a much lower percentage.

Rosie Perera: It is right now. Unfortunately, relatively few women are entering computer science degrees, and it has been in decline. I'm not sure whether it has leveled off, but I just know that I was in the peak years.

Becky Monk: When you graduated, what were you going to do with your math computer science degree?

Rosie Perera: Well, when I first decided to major in math, I thought that I would end up wanting to be teaching math somewhere. I had done a summer job as a teacher, junior staff member at a math camp, a math program for a summer math program for advanced high school students, which I had participated in when I was in high school, and I went back and taught there in between my freshmen and sophomore years at Brown. So I really thought I was heading towards maybe eventually an advanced degree in teaching math, but when I changed my major to computer science, and when I started seeing what people were doing with those kinds of degrees, it began to be obvious to me that I ought to consider a career in

software engineering. So that's what I decided to do, and I went and took interviews with several of the companies that were coming to campus to interview people I interviewed with IBM.

I actually had a summer job at IBM in between my junior and senior years, and I interviewed for a permanent job with them and interviewed with Kodak and at and t and a few other companies, and Microsoft was one of the ones on the list that I was interested in. I had heard of it, but I didn't know a huge amount. However, I researched it and it sounded like an interesting company to work for. So I interviewed on campus with Jeff Harbers and they chose some people to fly out for a full day of interviews, and I got selected and I was very impressed with the campus and with the people there, and ultimately got an offer that day, and I ultimately decided to take it, but it wasn't necessarily my ultimate plan when I was an undergraduate until really getting into the nitty gritty of making that decision.

Becky Monk: Yeah. So you were interviewing with a number of tech companies at the time. What was it about Microsoft, even though you said you didn't know much about it, you did the research and you met with Jeff. What was it about the company at the time that made you really excited to go work there?

Rosie Perera: Well, I was impressed that they would actually ask people to write code in an interview. I don't think any of the other companies I interviewed with did that, and it told me that they were really looking for people that knew their stuff. So I wanted to work with people who were smart, and I also felt that it was a smaller company than some of the others. Most of the others I was interviewing with. Now, small is relative of course, but at the time I thought I would be able to have more of an impact on the company's future by starting with a company that was relatively small, and there was a recruiting brochure that came out the year after I started that used some of us who were new hires that year as testimonials for why they came to Microsoft. And I was quoted in there as saying something about wanting to come to work for a small company, and I laughed at the time.

By the time that brochure came out, Microsoft had nearly 2,000 people, and that's not exactly a small company, but relative to IBM that had 100,000 or more at the time, it was small. So that was a big plus. I also was impressed with the company atmosphere when I came out to interview. I loved the casual feel of it. I'm not one for dressing in skirts and IBM was more stodgy. Microsoft felt more flexible and fun, and I really liked the Seattle vibe, so I figured I would go out and work in the Pacific Northwest. That seemed like a new venture for me, being from the east coast. But in the beginning, I did not foresee staying longer than a couple of years. I still was thinking that I would do that for a while, save up some money, and then come back East and go to grad school and do math. So it really took me a couple of years before I was sold on sticking with Microsoft for the long term.

Becky Monk: Well, I love it. It seems like that's a common theme from especially a lot of the folks that were there in the earlier days that, oh, maybe I'll be around for a couple of years and then you've got 11 years under your belt before you know it.

Rosie Perera: Yeah. Well, it's a common theme. Many of us started right out of college not really knowing what we wanted to do for the rest of our lives, and we soon got sucked into the well, the golden handcuffs and loving the work, too. We just found that we were enjoying it so much that the thought of whatever we might've been planning on doing in the future, paled in comparison. So I was having so much fun. I didn't really believe that they were paying me to do this, and the golden handcuffs, which that phrase has probably been used by others, but I'll explain it, it meant that we were given stock options that would be someday maybe worth significant amount of money, but no guarantee. And yet if we left before they were fully vested, we would leave a lot of money on the table. So it was kind of an incentive to stay with the company and each year, each six month review cycle, you would get another grant of stock options, which again would push out the possibility of you getting more money. So there was always a reason to stay financially. It was beneficial to stay, but as long as I

was having fun, the money really wasn't the reason I was staying. I was enjoying it.

Becky Monk: Yeah. Okay. So you came out for the interview, you got the offer, you accepted the offer. What was the role you were hired for?

Rosie Perera: I was hired as a software design engineer to work on Microsoft Word for Windows. So the operating system Windows was under development at the time, and they wanted to have a word processor for it when it first came out. As it turned out, what they produced at the beginning was a mini version of Word that was called Right, that Shipped in the box with Windows and Word for Windows came out in 1989, but I was hired to be on that team that created the first serious word processor for Windows,

Becky Monk: And I have to thank you because it's still my favorite application ever.

Rosie Perera: And I was looking back recently at the postmortem for Word, and it showed the dates of hire, the dates that all the developers came onto the team, and it looks like I was the second or maybe the third programmer to join the team, the full-time programmer. There was an intern there as well, but I started on August 1, 1985, and there was one other developer who joined sometime in August and I don't know when, but at least it could have been tied with me or later in the month. So I was either tied for second or clearly the second developer that joined the team.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. So were you at that time, were you in the Northup building?

Rosie Perera: Yes. When I started, Microsoft was in Bellevue in what was known as the Northup building because it was on Northup Way. Some people call it Northrop mistakenly, but it's Northup, and was when I was hired, that was where my office was. I was in an upstairs interior office, and I remember my first day there, which was a Thursday, was an unusual day to start because most people started on a Monday and they had orientation every Monday for all the new people that joined that week, and I hadn't had an orientation session yet, so I was just dumped into an office bewildered with a box, with an IBM PC in it and told to open it up and set it up on my

desk, and coming from the world of mainframes and not having had any experience with PCs at all, that was an interesting first challenge, but we managed to do that.

Becky Monk: I feel like that's the rite of passage. So you are one of the first people working on this new word processor that would become Word for Windows. What were the goals? What were the marching orders at the very beginning of this project?

Rosie Perera: Well, at the very beginning for me, it was just coming up to speed on programming for Windows, which was new for all of us because Windows hadn't even shipped yet. Remember at the time when I started in 1985, I believe it didn't ship until November of that year, so we were developing something from scratch for the first time ever, and a lot of it was just teaching ourselves from the manual, the API users guide, the application programmers interface and trying things and figuring them out as we went. I also relied a lot on the intern who had started before me because he actually read through the entire API guide to familiarize himself with all of the programming calls to make Windows do certain things on the screen, and so I was always asking him for help, but I wasn't really given much of an understanding of what the big picture was. I was given some tasks to do to get, my very first task was to hook up the function key so that they would execute certain commands, so press F1 and it would bring up the help F2 for various things like that.

So marching orders you asked about? Yeah, I guess it was just come up to speed and start working on implementing things as we throw them at you. We were in a fairly interesting time in the development of Word because the spec was constantly changing and it wasn't really fully fleshed out when I started, and it never really settled down until probably around 1988. So we were implementing things that then we had to redo because the spec changed and we were looking at our competitors and trying to put in the features that needed to compete with what Word Perfect was doing, and it was really hard also to estimate how long things were going to take because we were doing something that had never been done

before. So it ended up taking four and a half years to do this new word processor

During which time there was a lot of flux and a lot of thinking. We were within four months of finishing it and it actually being two years off, that sort of stuff.

Becky Monk: Yeah, I love it when things change on you. Sure.

Rosie Perera: Yeah. Your end goals change.

Becky Monk: What were some of the features, if people are thinking about the Word that we use today, what are some of the things that you and your colleagues would've created from Scratch back then that we still use today?

Rosie Perera: Well, I can tell you the features that I worked on. I was very involved in search and replace, and in particular, I turned the search feature around so that it could search backwards in the document. I also worked on selection, both mouse and keyboard selection, dragging the mouse and making a selection or holding the shift key down and using the arrow keys to select text. I also worked on tables. I didn't implement it from scratch. That feature came over from Word for the Macintosh, but I was the one who ported the code over to Windows and got it up and running and worked on that and owned that area of the product. I also implemented the automatic indexing and Table of Contents generation, but you asked what some of my other colleagues did. One friend of mine created the print preview feature, which was something new that no word processor had ever done before where you could see a preview on the screen of what the printout would look like and see where the margins were and everything. That was quite novel, and it was very exciting when he got printing at All to work for the first time, I remember him showing us a piece of paper that said, “Hello World,” which is the universal first sentence that any programmer learns how to make a computer type. So it was fun.

Becky Monk: It's so interesting to think that you guys were the ones in the early 1980s, late 1980s, creating these things that were still using today with as much change that happens and advancement that happens in technology, that these are the foundations that we're still using.

Rosie Perera: Yeah, it's pretty amazing to me that something that I haven't worked on in more than 30 years. I left the Word team in 1992, so that's 32 years ago, and the code that I worked on, some of it is still there in the product, and the features that I worked on are still, almost all of them are still functioning very similarly to the way they did when I worked on 'em. I went to visit the Word team a couple of years ago, and nobody that I had known when I was there was still on the team, but they had heard of me and were eager to meet me, and one fellow in particular who I had met through the Microsoft Old Timers group on Facebook, showed me around and introduced me to people, and they let me look into the code while they searched for my name, and sure enough, they found me in several of the comments. So it was gratifying to know that something I worked on is still making a difference in the world now.

Becky Monk: I love that. After you were working on Word, what was the next thing that you worked on?

Rosie Perera: Well, there was only one next thing after I left the Word group. I went to work on Microsoft Money, which was a brand new personal finance software meant to compete with Quicken. The first version had just released when I joined the team, so I started in working on version two, and I stayed on to work on versions three and four and 4.1, I believe. So I was part of a team of about four or five people. It was a very small, close-knit team, highly, highly skilled people, and it was a really fun project to work on.

Becky Monk: What was your favorite thing about working on Microsoft Money?

Rosie Perera: I think my favorite thing about working on Microsoft Money was working with Doug Klunder, who was legendary at Microsoft. He was, I think, a genius level programmer. He was, I think the first person hired out of

college to be a software engineer at Microsoft, and he was brilliant. He wrote amazing code, and it was an example for the rest of us to aspire to. He also made it a point of using a slower machine, a slower computer than the rest of us had as our standard issue development computer in order to empathize with users who might not have upgraded to the latest, greatest at the time. He wanted to make sure that money ran fast on even the lowest common denominator, and I really admired that about him.

Becky Monk: That seems like just the really smart thing to do to figure that. Yeah. I think,

Rosie Perera: Oh, go ahead. Yeah. I also think that money had a quality in terms of reduction of bugs and getting out the most perfect product we could. That excelled, no pun intended, any other product at Microsoft at the time. There were decisions we had to make to get word out the door by a certain date, and we had to cut, not cut corners. We had to make decisions to defer fixing some bugs until a future version, but money just seemed to be so, work so well and have all of the kinks out of it. It was really amazing.

Becky Monk: Was that a matter of knowing, having the right processes in place, or was that just having the right team together, the right clean code to begin with?

Rosie Perera: I think the fact that we had such a small clean team and also a relatively well-defined product, the spec was written and very well-defined from the beginning, helped us to make it a higher quality product.

Becky Monk: Great. I want to talk a little bit about the campus, because you got to move from Northup to the original corporate campus where there were just four buildings, right? What building did you end up moving into and what were your impressions of this new campus lifestyle?

Rosie Perera: Well, I started in the Northup building, and we moved, I think it was March of 1986 into the new corporate campus. And the first building that my office was in was building three, which was one of the original four buildings in this campus. It was a beautiful campus. It was surrounded by woods. There were trails that we could go walking in through the trees

around the campus, and there was this lovely pond, which we affectionately called Lake Bill in the middle of the four buildings, and it was a place where we could go outside and sit and have lunch or play Frisbee, watch the jugglers. There were a group of people at Microsoft that used to go out at lunchtime and juggle and ride on unicycles, and I learned to juggle from one of them. So that's something I carry to this day. I can still juggle, and it was an inspiring place to work. You could look out the window and see beautiful nature and want to be out there, but also it helped stay focused.

Becky Monk Yes. This was one of the earliest examples of a tech campus and did being out there in the woods and with all the people in that one area together, did that make it a more conducive place to be creative, to do business, to accomplish the things that you need to accomplish?

Rosie Perera: That's an interesting question. I will compare my experience starting at Microsoft with what I saw at the building, or several buildings together. I guess you would've called it a corporate campus that I interviewed at with at t Bell Labs where they had people working together in the same place and living also in the same apartment complex a few streets away. And I remember thinking to myself, I didn't want that. I wanted to have a workplace where I would go to and then go home and have different friends in my social life. I didn't want it. I didn't think I wanted to hang out with my work friends all the time. But as it turned out, when I got to Microsoft, my work life became my social life as well, and living close to Microsoft, which I did eventually after the first couple of years, and doing things with my Microsoft friends outside of work and doing fun things on the campus was all part of being creative.

One of the things that I think however, made that campus environment help me be more creative was the relaxed non-res code that I could dress and be who I was and not feel like I had to look like some kind of corporate person, which I did have to do when I was at IBM for my summer job. When I worked there, they had just relaxed the dress code for women, so women didn't have to wear dresses or skirts anymore. They

could wear slacks. This was 1984, and they had had that dress code in place up until that summer when I worked there, but nobody of the other women in my floor wanted to be the first woman to step out and wear pants to work. So I, as a summer intern, didn't want to be bucking the trend. So I wore skirt suits to work every day, but it felt stultifying, and I was really glad to be free from that at Microsoft. One more little anecdote. We used to joke that if we saw somebody coming in with wearing a tie, they must be having an interview or going to a funeral, and we used to think that ties would cut off the circulation to your brain. So yeah, we thought we could be more creative wearing relaxed clothing.

Becky Monk: I love that there's so many of the stories about the folks coming in for their interviews and being all dressed up because they thought that's what they needed to do, and seeing everybody running around with shorts and no shoes and hoodies and

Rosie Perera: Thinking, I even know one person who showed up for an interview and the person who interviewed him was wearing a gorilla costume.

Becky Monk: Wow, I haven't heard that one. That's a new one.

Rosie Perera: I could probably dig up who that was. It's been discussed on the Facebook group, but excuse me.

Becky Monk: I feel like Pete Higgins told us the stories about some of the things that they would do during interviews to try to throw people, but he never mentioned a gorilla suit.

Rosie Perera: That was really, really early days. That was in 1985 or four. Yeah. And I don't think it was to throw the person, I think it was seriously that this guy was just being silly that day, and it happened that he had an interview, and so what he was just going to do it in his costume.

Becky Monk: Of course, because that's what you do.

Rosie Perera: I have one other anecdote about my interview. This is backing up now, but one of the people who interviewed me was Richard Brody, who was

another early pioneer at Microsoft. He was the creator of Word from the beginning. He had a messed up Rubik's Cube on his desk, and when I first entered his room, his office, he had me sit there while he went to get us both a drink from the kitchenette, and he said he'd be right back. And I saw the cube, and I instinctively went to go solve it, which I could do in a couple of minutes. And by the time he was back, it was solved and back on his desk, and he looked at it and it was kind of surprised. I don't think he knew how to solve it, and I secretly think that that put me in good stead in his mind as I did the interview. It certainly gave me a feeling of confidence.

Solving the Rubik's cube gives you the leg up, and that was something I learned at that math summer program, so it all ties together. The math background led to my getting the job at Microsoft.

Becky Monk: I love that. So you were at Microsoft for 11 years, but when you got there, you had come from an environment where there were 50% women in your courses. What was the ratio like at Microsoft?

Rosie Perera: I would say it was closer to 10% or fewer women in the tech roles, and it didn't really dawn on me that that was an issue until I was invited by Mike Maples, who had just joined as a vice president of applications into a meeting with other women technical developers to give them advice about how Microsoft could be more attractive to women. And I must admit that at the time, I didn't really know what to say because whatever Microsoft had done, it had attracted me, so I didn't think there was a problem. I didn't really know why other women weren't coming, and I might be more of a nerdy, maybe stereotypically male oriented type of person who felt comfortable in that kind of environment, whereas a lot of other women don't want to be in an environment where everybody seems to have no social life and is just all work and play at work and has less of a work-life balance. That might've been part of it, but that's my only anecdote about the balance of gender at the time.

Becky Monk: Were you one of the only women in each group you worked in?

Rosie Perera: Well, in the Word group, I was one of only two women at the beginning. I was the first, but there was another woman who came over from Word for Dos who joined the team early on, but then in the money team, I was on a team that had more women than men, which is very unusual. At Microsoft, we had a small team of six people, four women and two men of the women, three of them were software design engineers, and one was a programmer's assistant, and the two men were software design engineers, and the manager was a woman. She was one of the develop one of those four. So that was an unusual experience, and I think it felt affirming as a woman to be in a team where there were other women that were contributing, but honestly, as a soul, even single only woman on a team, I just related to the guys, one of the guys, it didn't really bother me.

It probably gave me a harder edge to have to push back against men who were very abrupt in their form of communication and often used colorful language and all of that. I probably developed a bit of an edginess from that, which I've had to soften since. But it stood me in good stead while I was there.

Becky Monk: Just another developer, all the developers really on the same keel.

Rosie Perera: And I never got treated any differently. I don't feel like I was ever treated by the guys that I worked with as anything other than they're equal.

Becky Monk: Fantastic.

Rosie Perera: I know other women. I know that other women have had other experiences at Microsoft, but I never did.

Becky Monk: Well, I'm glad for that. I would love to ask a little more about when you were there. Had the Giving campaign started?

Rosie Perera: I don't really remember when it started. I doubt that it had started already in the early ‘80s when I was there, but it was there by the time I left. Yes.

Becky Monk: I know that it was a different program when it first started than it is today. It was mostly United Way focused. Yes? Was it something that you remember fondly?

Rosie Perera: Yes, I do. I do remember it fondly. I remember I probably participated in it every year that it was available, but I remember one particular year when they had a silent auction. I think it was a silent auction where people would donate things. And one of the things that was donated was a ride in a 767 Boeing flight simulator at Boeing Field. And the person who donated that was Mike Hallman, who was at the time the president of Microsoft. He had a background as an executive at Boeing, and so he still had contacts there and was able to arrange for this. And I, at the time was already a licensed private pilot, and so this was right up my alley, and I decided I was going to bid on this and really go for it. So I outbid the other people that were bidding on it, and I got that prize, that ride, and I went and Mike Hallman was in the flight simulator with me and an instructor, and I got to sit behind the controls and have a lesson, and the guy signed off on my pilot logbook, which I had with me, and I still have that as a record of that day.

So that was one fun story. The other thing that strikes me about Microsoft's Giving Campaign or philanthropy was the way they matched our giving, which was extraordinarily generous, and I don't know if any other companies in the industry at the time were doing this, but they would double any donation. We gave up to an amount, which I think if I recall, was $12,000 when I was there, plus we could buy things. We could buy software at the company store for employee prices, which were exceedingly lower than the market price, basically the cost of goods. So I could buy a package of Microsoft Windows for about five or $10, which was selling for $200 or 1 99 in the stores, and donate that to a nonprofit of my choice, and it would be matched by Microsoft. Thirdly, they also let us by site licenses through this program, so we could go to the store, buy a license for 10 copies of Microsoft Word for a ridiculously low price, like $10 or something for 10 them that would give the organization the right

to install 10 copies of Word from this one disc, and Microsoft would match that too.

So it would become 20 copies of Word for $10 of my money, and it would be worth many, many, many times that to the organization. And that was one of the things I did as my parting gift to use up the rest of my donation quota my last year at Microsoft was I donated a full suite of Windows and office to the graduate school that I would then go on to attend after I left Microsoft matched by Microsoft, and that was the way I went out.

Becky Monk: What a fantastic use of that benefit. That's wonderful.

Rosie Perera: Yeah. That was one of the things I missed most after I left Microsoft.

Becky Monk: One of the things that we've been asking people is to talk about what they're most proud of during their time at the company. What do you think that you're most proud of?

Rosie Perera: I'm most proud of being part of the team that created the first word processor for Windows, which is still being used today by hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Becky Monk: When you think about Microsoft today and the 50 plus years now, it'll be, it's going to keep going the 50 years. What do you think is the secret sauce for the company to have that kind of longevity?

Rosie Perera: Well, I think they've always been good at hiring great people. I have not been in touch with people who are doing interviewing there now, so I don't know if it's the same as it was when I was there, but Microsoft had an edge because we really got the cream of the crop, and we made it rewarding for them to be there. It felt like at the time, my salary was lower than some of the other offers, but the stock options made it very, very beneficial to be there, and the work environment made it fun, and it helped us balance out some of the intensity. It really was a very intense place to work, and now I'm rambling off on all kinds of things. Sorry, what

was the original question? What was I most proud of? And then you said something, what about Microsoft gives it its secret sauce?

Becky Monk: Yes.

Rosie Perera: Yeah, okay. Yeah, making it fun to work. Were you going to ask more questions about specific things that were fun about the work environment? Because I had some. You were. Okay. Yeah. Well, I'll get to that then.

Becky Monk: Well, let's go right into that though, because I know people have a lot of really fun stories about why they loved it and some fun anecdotes. Do you have some?

Rosie Perera: Yes. Microsoft was a really fun environment to work in. We knew how to play well. We worked hard, we played hard, and we mixed those together. Some of the things I remember were that people had bought video game consoles, those arcade video games and brought them into the office and would set them up in the hallways on free play, and so we could blow off steam and play video games for a little while. While we were working late hours. We also had this thing for bouncy balls. In those early days, people would collect, people would order 250 bags of 250 at a time of these little rubber bouncy balls, and you would see people having bouncy ball wars in the halls or leaving them on each other's desks, or a common thing was to leave them with your tip at a restaurant when a group of you went out to a restaurant.

Then the other thing that I remember that was the most fun was swing around the wing. That was a little mini golf tournament held inside the hallways in a building, I think it was in building three or building five on the old campus. On the second floor, it would go all the way around. The X shaped building hallways and people whose offices were on that hall would set up traps in advance before the start of this event, and you'd have to wind your way through all of the traps that would be overturned chairs and waist baskets and ramps with boxes that would be hazards and things like that. And if you knocked your ball down the stairs, there would

be a penalty for riding back up the elevator to get it back to the second floor. And the other thing was that Microsoft Upper Management supported this and was willing to pay to repair divots in the walls if that's what it took, because it was good for our morale. And Mike Maples, vice president, Mike Maples joined us at least once and played along with us.

Becky Monk: I love that story. When we had our Wrecking Ball reunion before they tore down buildings, 1, 2, 3, and four Ed Freeze set up.

Rosie Perera: Yep. I was there and I participated in that. Oh, that was so much fun. It was fun, and I think he brought back out of storage. The gumbos was the trophy awarded to the winner each week of Swing Around the Wing. It started out as a Gumby and pokey the Bendy toy, and then it got glued onto a pedestal, and each winner would add new things to this thing, and so it eventually became known as the Gumbos, and it had all kinds of attachments, so he still had it and brought it back to show people for that event.

Becky Monk: So much fun. So much fun. I feel like there was so much work that was being done, but there was so much fun and so much camaraderie and lifelong friends.

Rosie Perera: Absolutely.

There was the very first iteration of the Microsoft Museum, which existed on campus in probably the late eighties, early nineties, on what used to be known as East Tech, which was a part of the What's all been redeveloped as the new campus now, and they had a sample office set up in there of what it looked like for a Microsoft employee, and they had all kinds of soda cans, pop cans on the desk, and a wall of bouncy balls in between plexiglass to show that that was part of the culture back then, as well as to annoy the rest of the people in our building with. I still have a few of them.

Becky Monk: What do you think Microsoft's legacy is?

Rosie Perera: I think, well, Microsoft's motto, Microsoft's vision statement, when I worked there was "a computer on every desk and in every home" when I was there. During those 10 years, we pretty much achieved that. By the end of my time, 1996, almost everyone had a personal computer at home, if not then certainly within a few years afterwards. So I think Microsoft's legacy has been to bring personal computing into everyone's life, to make it accessible, to make it something that everyone learns growing up and takes for granted.

Becky Monk: When you think about the future, where do see Microsoft in the big picture of the future of technology?

Rosie Perera: I wish I had a crystal ball. I don't know where Microsoft will be in the future, but I am confident that it's going to be a big part of it for some years to come. It's going to be interesting to see where Microsoft takes advantage of ai. I think that's probably going to be the big cutting edge. I have some hesitations about the possibilities for ai, both. It's very powerful, but it has the potential to be misused in probably more ways than any other technology we've ever developed has. And so I'm nervous to see how well our understanding of ethics and humanity catches up to our ability to create things, and I hope that the right decisions are made. I think Microsoft is going to be well poised to be part of that conversation, and I hope they do well to protect what we treasure about being human.

Becky Monk: Yeah. I think that's going to be the big question, right? Going forward, is there anything else that you really wanted to touch on or that I've missed asking you about?

Rosie Perera: Well, you asked for unforgettable moments, and I was part of the team that when I was on the word team, Microsoft did something that they very rarely did, but it was part of the morale budget. They promised us a trip to Cancun if we would ship in time for COMDEX that year. COMDEX was the big tech trade show in Las Vegas, and that was 1989. It was crucial that we get it finished finally. It had been taking so many years, so they dangled that over us as an incentive, and we did get it done, and they did send the entire team, including our significant others to Cancun for five days, and

that was an amazing trip and something I will never forget. I think our trip to Cancun was probably one of the reasons behind the shrimp and Weenies memo, which came out some years later where Microsoft said, time to cut back on expenditures, on morale parties, things like that. Choose the weenies instead of the shrimp. But I'm really glad I was part of it when they were allowed to be lavished like that.

Becky Monk: How big was the team when you got to do that?

Rosie Perera: I think we had about 40 of us that went on that team, plus our spouses, significant others.

Becky Monk: That's a good party.

Rosie Perera: Yeah. It was.

Becky Monk: You were at the company when it held its initial public offering. What was it like on campus that day? I can't even imagine. Was it just business as usual or was it a party? What was happening on campus when Microsoft started trading on the exchange?

Rosie Perera: It was pretty exciting when Microsoft went public. I remember that our stock options the year that I began, and people around those years got stock options at a price of $3 per share, and Microsoft first opened on the market at $21 a share as I recall, and it shot up to 28 that day. You might have to fact check those figures, but it was pretty exciting to see that it was finally public when I first started and was given the offer letter that said I was going to get so many stock options. I didn't really know what that might be worth someday, and they didn't either. The human resources person who explained it to me said, well, yeah, maybe someday you'll be able to put a down payment on a car. And I thought that was great, fine. Had no idea it was going to end up being what it was.

And that day that it first started trading, I don't remember specifically anything from that day other than that, we were amazed at how much the jump was from what our stock option price was to what it closed that day.

But I do remember many days beyond that when we were following it, the stock price every day with a little ticker symbol program running along the bottom of our screen that somebody had written that would pull the stock prices in real time off the market, and people would create spreadsheets to see how much their stock options were worth at that time, given the daily, what the current price was at every moment of the day. It was kind of obscene.

Becky Monk: I love that when you started saying people watch it across the bottom of the screen. I'm like, well, no, I had to check the newspaper. But of course, somebody there wrote a program.

Rosie Perera: There was some feed that you could tap into that someone found out about that you could get downloaded the current prices at any given time. And so we didn't have to wait until the end of the day to see the newspaper. We could find out what it was trading at, and you could look at other prices of other stocks too, so people would put in Apple or IBM or whatever other tech stocks they were following and just see it chugging along on the bottom of their screen. And then there was, you would sometimes hear a big whoop in the hallway when Microsoft broke through a new boundary. So let's say the first time it hit a hundred, you'd hear excited hollers down the hall, so you knew something had happened

Becky Monk: On the day of going public, were there company-wide parties, or was it just everybody was sort of watching in their own time and celebrating in their own way?

Rosie Perera: I am afraid. I don't remember the exact day that day.

Becky Monk: Sure. Okay.

Rosie Perera: I remember sometime afterwards, also the year that at least 50% of the people on my hallway bought a house. That was around 19 90, 19 90. So the stock price had reached such an amount, and people had been around at the company long enough that they had enough vested shares and they were able to sell enough to put a down payment on a house. So lots of my

colleagues were in our twenties buying houses. It was very heady, I must say.

And we were so young, we were so cocky in some ways. There was one guy in my team who had never even graduated from high school. He got hired at Microsoft at age 18, I believe, without a high school diploma, because he was such a smart guy, and he went shopping for a house when he was about 22, and they didn't take him seriously. He looked like a kid. He had long hair and blue jeans, and so he said to the real estate agent, how about 20% cash down? And they suddenly looked up and went, okay, sure. We'll show you a house. And then I had other friends that would go window shopping and buy a car just on the spur of the moment, cash all paid down. So it just was a time of head spinning bizarreness. It felt like monopoly money to us at the time. It really did. It felt like this isn't even real. It's just such a strange feeling.

Becky Monk: Well, I've heard so many people talk about how it and just kind of a blink of an eye, their lives completely changed because of this newfound wealth, and wealth that they didn't really know what to do with or how to deal with.

Rosie Perera: I was fortunate that I had grown up in a family that had had some sort of an investing background. My father's father was a bank vice president, and he had passed down. I never met my grandfather, but he had passed down shares of stock in some old famous companies that had been around Xerox and IBM and Coca-Cola and stuff like that. And my father kept investing and had a fairly good salary from his job and taught us a little bit about investing. So I wasn't coming to it completely with a clean slate. Some of my colleagues were, but it was still a mind boggling experience to go from just graduating from college, having paid off all my school. I didn't have, I didn't have to take out school loans, but I had finished paying for college and was starting out on my own from scratch, and to suddenly have this kind of balloon of wealth, that was a bizarre experience, and it took me some while to get used to it and to figure out what that meant for me as a person.

Becky Monk: Yeah. So amazing to see the results of all of those long nights and crazy days of all that work paying off. I want to ask one last thing. If you were to go back and give Rosie who started in 1985, some advice about her time at Microsoft, what advice would that be?

Rosie Perera: I would give the Rosie of 1985 some advice about trying to keep life in balance with work. That was something that I never really considered when I was working there. And I put in retrospect too much of myself into the work. I mean, I don't regret it, but there was a way in which I pushed myself too hard and burned out. There was one week that I worked 97 hours and my average was probably closer to 70, to 75, and I did not learn how to take good care of myself. I should have been doing that all along, and I would give that 21-year-old Rosie, the advice to take it easy. You're not going to get to the end of your life and wish you had spent more time at the office. So develop yourself outside of work concurrently with what you're doing, be passionate about it, but also get enough rest and take care of your health.

Becky Monk: That is great advice. Alright, Rosie thank you so much for your time and your stories.