

DICK ANDERSON

(interviewed by Kenneth A. Ross)

This interview took place on August 11, 2006 in Knoxville, Tennessee, and January 5, 2007 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Tell me about your early years.

In the beginning I was born in Hamden, Connecticut, on February 17, 1922, just a few minutes after my older identical twin brother, Jack.

I went to public schools in Minneapolis and graduated from high school in 1939.

I was an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota and graduated in two years. I studied mathematics and I was in Naval ROTC. I took heavy loads and took 24.5 credit hours one term. A fellow student was Ed Spanier. I managed to beat him on one of nine finals. I took a mathematical statistics course from Dunham Jackson, and I took a course on statistics for biology from Alan Treloar who was from Australia.

When did you join the MAA?

While I was an undergraduate at Minnesota, John Olmsted took me to a section meeting in Minnesota where I joined the MAA. Olmsted was a neighbor as well as a faculty member at Minnesota. After I graduated, Olmsted took me to an AMS-MAA summer meeting in Chicago. Fortunately, this was at the same time that my father attended a psychological association meeting at Northwestern, so I traveled with my father. At this meeting, I met R. L. Moore who showed an interest in me and offered me a half-time instructorship at the University of Texas (UT) for the fall of 1941. I had applied to several schools in the spring of 1941, but I didn't get any responses because they didn't expect me to finish my undergraduate work so quickly.

In my first year at UT, I was one of four students in R. L. Moore's class. The others were Ed Burgess from Texas, Bob Adams from Ohio (I think), and Harry Cates from Texas. I shined in a course from

H. S. Vandiver when I was a first-year graduate student. Joe Diaz and Ed Moise were second-year students, and Gail Young was a fourth-year student. Gail Young got his Ph.D. in 1942. Of these four people, three served as MAA president, two served as AMS vice presidents, and Joe Diaz became an Einstein Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

I had been in Naval ROTC as an undergraduate, but I didn't complete the program because I finished my other undergraduate work too quickly. On December 8, 1941, I volunteered for the Navy, but I wasn't called up until April 15, 1942. For the first month, I did my officers' training at Notre Dame; the rest of the training was on a ship on the Hudson River near New York City. I met my wife, Jeanette Olliver, at a dance on June 12, 1942. She was from Henderson, Tennessee. We were married in Nashville on April 12, 1943.

I served in the Pacific and I was discharged from the service on December 21, 1945, but I was already back at the University of Texas by then. I obtained my Ph.D. in 1948 and my advisor was R. L. Moore. I then went to the University of Pennsylvania. In 1956, I took a position at Louisiana State University (LSU). I spent two years at the Institute for Advanced Study.

When were you at the Institute for Advanced Study?

I was there 1951-1952 and 1955-1956. I met Einstein as did my oldest son who is now at UCLA. However, Einstein was more interested in my son than my son was in him, because my son was about fifteen months old. I almost met Winston Churchill when I was at Penn. The university president, Harold Stassen, had invited Churchill, and the faculty were invited to a reception. However, Truman fired MacArthur at this time, so the invitation to Churchill was cancelled.

Did you ever consider fields other than mathematics as a vocation?

I thought I would be a lawyer, but it was easy and quick for me to graduate in two years if I studied mathematics. If I hadn't run into R. L. Moore at a meeting, I would have returned to Minnesota to study

mathematics. So it's not certain whether I would have pursued mathematics were it not for Moore's intervention.

What did your parents do?

My father was a child psychologist in Minneapolis. At one time, he was president of the American Psychological Association.

Did they influence your interest in math? How?

My parents weren't influential in my interest *in math*, but they were strong supporters of my academic pursuits as well as those of my siblings. My mother's father was an author in Chattanooga. He obtained an honorary degree at the University of the South at Sewanee. Much later I also obtained an honorary degree at the same university.

How many siblings did you have? What influence did they have on you?

I had a sister who was two years older; she died in 1995 of cancer. I already mentioned my twin brother, Jack. Six years later my parents had twins again, a boy and a girl. My younger brother died several years ago, also of cancer.

When did you become a Boyd Professor?

I went to LSU in 1956, and I became Boyd Professor in May 1959. This professorship was named after the Boyd brothers, David French (1834-1899) and Thomas Duckett (1854-1932), who were early faculty members and presidents of Louisiana State University and its predecessor, the Seminary of Learning of the State of Louisiana, located in the Alexandria area.

Tell me a little about LaSIP and LaCEPT. I found "History of LSU Mathematics Department Involvement in Education Projects" on the web: <http://www.math.lsu.edu/~cital/mathhistory.html>

DICK: What are LaSIP and LaCEPT abbreviations of?

LaSIP was an effort that began around 1990 to improve math & science education at the school level in Louisiana. I helped to organize this effort, but my role was unofficial because I was already retired. Four of us wrote the first proposal for this program. Later, LaCEPT was an effort to reform the preparation of math & science teachers in college which was organized by Lynne Tullos. She designed the courses for the teachers. She is now with the program that LaSIP has evolved into. Nell McAnnely followed up on her work and now directs a separate organization at LSU.

Were you involved with the Eisenhower Professional Development Program?

LaSIP is a Louisiana version of the Eisenhower Program.

What was your involvement with the R. L. Moore Legacy Project?

I was very much involved early on and helped organize the project.

What accomplishments in the MAA are you especially proud of?

During my leadership, the MAA broadened its responsibilities in pre-college education and, in particular, strengthened its relationship with NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics). Shirley Hill of NCTM had the greatest influence on mathematics education. She converted the NCTM from a “teachers’ special interest group” to a professional organization with a vision of the future, more like the MAA. Thanks to Shirley, the NCTM and MAA were better linked. One advantage that I probably had was that I’d been very active in professional organizations before I was MAA president in 1981-1982. For example, I was active in NRC (National Research Council), NSF (National Science Foundation) and the National Academy of Sciences.

During your career, what personalities have stood out in the mathematics community?

Throughout my career, I had the accidental great fortune of knowing the first four winners of the Abel Prize: J. P. Serre, Sir Michael

Atiyah, I. Singer, and Peter Lax. I have fond memories of playing tennis and chess with Serre, playing touch football with Singer, and of playing tennis with Peter Lax.