

Stephen L. Davis

Stephen L. Davis is Professor of Mathematics at Davidson College where he has been since 1982. He received his B.A. from Lindenwood College and his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. Stephen was North Carolina State Director from 1991-1994, Secretary-Treasurer from 1996-2002, Chair from 2003-2005, and Governor from 2009 – 2012. In 2006 he received the Section Distinguished Service Award.

Stephen Davis' Interview was on April 1, 2011 at the MAA SE Section Meeting in Tuscaloosa, AL

MAA SE: Where were you born?

SD: I was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa at a hospital adjacent to the campus of Coe College which gives me a connection with John Neff. He was at Coe College, and his high school was my junior high school.

MAA SE: What was your earliest experience with mathematics?

SD: I guess I remember a time in the car with my Mother making a comment about what might have been about Oldsmobile models or something, it was something numeric. She commented back to me that I had some sort of sense of numbers that impressed her at the moment. That's probably early on, that would have been elementary school because I remember where it was – it was in the Pittsburgh area. [I] moved around a lot as a child, so knowing where it was gives me a sense of when it was. I guess that is sort of the earliest memory of playing around with numbers. I don't know that I had a sense of mathematics yet.

MAA SE: Have you always liked mathematics?

SD: Yeah, when I went off to college I thought that I would probably major in math, but I wasn't sure. Then I hit Calculus. I hadn't had any experience with Calculus in high school, and then I really wasn't sure that math was what I wanted to do. It's sort of interesting because I keep getting sucked back into Calculus.

MAA SE: You do AP Calculus

SD: Yeah, so this year will be, I think, my 23rd reading with AP Calculus. It will be my ninth year in a row as Alternate Exam Leader. And I'm chair of the Development Committee for AP Calculus.

MAA SE: Is that challenging?

SD: That's fun. It's challenging but it's fun. It's a lot of work and it's a lot of fun. It's perhaps the most enjoyable committee to be on. It's a group of 6 or 7 people that have a common enterprise and really work well together. And [they] work hard and produce a product that you can go out and have validated by 300,000 students. That's an interesting thing because you go off to a reading [AP Calculus grading in June] and you come back and you say I spent a week grading tests. Folks say "why did you do that?" It's a very different experience at the reading. It's different now for me in a leadership role, but as a regular reader it's your chance to play mathematics in a sort of blue collar way. You grade, and then they blow the whistle, put your pen down, go break, and then you come back. And you know at the end of the day you don't take papers home. You go and talk with people that have a common interest.

It's different from going to a conference where generally you are talking to [...] folks in your same area or similar experience. At an AP reading you've got people from high school teachers up through university professors. It's that sort of vertical cross section of the profession that you get to interact with. And so that's a lot of fun. It's also very impressive to see the quality of some of the high school teachers out there. That's not an environment that I would want to teach in. And there are some really superb people out there and you get to meet them at the reading.

MAA SE: Who was your greatest mathematical influence when you were young?

SD: I guess there would be several. I think perhaps, I'm thinking of teachers but [also] other folks. I had a seventh grade teacher that thought very highly of what I was doing. We were on a track system and I think I was in more of the middle track. I remember going in and doing some sort of arithmetic test after school one day. He had sort of put me down as a challenge to some of his other students and so he wanted me to do it as a comparison. I don't know that I did all that well. But I think he thought I had some computational ability at that point. And then we

moved – we were living in the Pittsburgh area at that time – we moved back to Cedar Rapids for a couple of years. And that was between seventh and eighth grade.

The usual process was that you would be tracked to enter in at a sort of the middle track and then you would sink or rise to your appropriate track. I was just sort of plugging along doing some C work, probably, in my math class. My mother went in and did battle with the school, telling them that I was in the wrong class. I wouldn't have known any difference. But she won out and got me moved up probably by just pure belligerence – I can believe it – to the higher level math class. And by the end of the first semester then I was either first or second student in that class. I think a lot of her perseverance, because I don't know that I would have recognized that. My children have been fairly talented in different directions but I'm not sure I would have gone in and done what she did for me.

MAA SE: She must have recognized that maybe you needed challenging.

SD: Yeah, I guess she thought I was bored which was probably the case. So that was one aspect. And then I remember my geometry teacher which then was a couple of years later, because that was in Missouri. We had moved to St. Charles, MO. It was tenth grade geometry – Mrs. Robinson. That was the year that *The Graduate* came out – the movie *The Graduate* – so I bought her the single Mrs. Robinson and gave it to her.

It was a fun class because we were doing two column proofs and that sort of thing. I enjoyed doing that sort of stuff. And finding creative ways to prove things and maybe finding a way to prove these geometry theorems in a way that was a step or two shorter than what was in the book or what she was presenting. She was very encouraging of that and reflecting back it was a nice sort of interaction – “OK, I'll try this.” It wasn't “You're going off the standard route – OK let me get you back to the road.” No, she was willing to work with that.

MAA SE: So she was encouraging of your creativity?

SD: I thought that was a nice aspect of it. So I remember her and then eleventh grade – I don't even remember who I had in 11th grade for whatever it was that I was taking. Then I went to college out of 11th grade – to a local school called Lindenwood College [for] my undergraduate.

I was at Lindenwood except for one semester I spent at Wash U, Washington University in St. Louis. That [Lindenwood] is where I hit Calculus.

Lindenwood College was the oldest four year women's college west of the Mississippi. The year before I went they had 25 guys that were a trial class and my class was the first full class of men. So I like to say I helped integrate this women's college. And when I went there then they also had an influx in the math department. A guy named John Nichols and a fellow named Dominic Soda. Dominic Soda came over from Wash U, he was on the faculty at Washington University in St. Louis. John was, I believe, a graduate student at Wash U and I don't think he ever finished his degree. Dominic is sort of emeriti at Lindenwood and I think still somehow involved in administration and various things.

They were very important. I really enjoyed [learning from] them. I had Calculus, I think, from Nichols. I ended up doing an honors project under John Nichols. I have a copy of van der Waerden's *Algebra* that Dominic Soda gave me off his shelf as a prize for winning something. They were a lot of fun.

Like I said, I hit the Calculus and I really wasn't sure. In looking back, I was sort of a B student in calculus. I thought I was going to be a math major – I thought I would probably do mathematics but I didn't understand this stuff. They talked about “arbitrarily close” and arbitrarily wasn't in my vocabulary. So I went and looked it up in the dictionary. And if you look up the dictionary meaning of “arbitrarily” it doesn't help you for “arbitrarily close”. But the class had this long discussion about it, and they centered on it and that's what we should be talking about.

I really liked the algebra and fortunately those guys were very algebraically bent. For some reason they were [captivated] by Serge Lang as an author. So I had Lang's Calculus book, Lang's *Algebraic Structures* book and Lang's Linear Algebra book for those classes – and some other books for some other classes. [When I] went off to graduate school and there was Lang's Algebra book for our Algebra class. And people were complaining about it and I said well I've read this guy before – taught from the classics.

I guess there are kind of mentors all the way along. In graduate school I ended up with Richard Lyons as my advisor and my first TA job was with Joe Rosenstein, at Rutgers. He's still there and I see him on occasion really into Math Ed stuff but other things as well. I sort of think of Joe as kind of a teaching mentor in some sense since it was my first experience. He was the one that told me, you know, it may take you a while to grade the first few sets of papers but then you'll learn how to grade quickly. That was a situation where I was basically a recitation instructor and so he did the lectures and we would lead students through solutions and I graded the homework. Yeah, Joe's a great guy.

MAA SE: What hobbies or other interests did you have? Do you still have them?

SD: Well the knee surgery has meant I haven't been on the basketball court since December. But I'm hoping that maybe by May I'll be back on the court. We have a noon ball game that goes on Mondays and Fridays – twice a week. I try to participate in that, though for a long time at home I've been told that I shouldn't be doing such things at this age. So that activity is euphemistically referred to as “ballroom dancing” at our house. Sometimes when that discussion gets out in a more public arena people are impressed that I go ballroom dancing. [Ballroom dancing is] actually not my skill. So I enjoy doing that.

I've got my finger in a lot of different pies. I mentioned I work with the Charlotte Mathematics Club. That is pretty much a hobby. We meet once a month down in Charlotte mostly. And I take them on two trips a year, one up to Duke on a Saturday when we do a math meet up there and a [longer] one down to the College of Charleston that we go down on Friday and come back on Sunday.

MAA SE: Are these students?

SD: These are middle and high school students. Mostly I would say centered around tenth grade because when our really good kids get up into eleventh grade they go off to School of Science and Math so we no longer have them in Charlotte. [The] School of Science and Math is up in Durham. But we'll have a few seniors and we have a real whiz, well we have got two of them,

one is eleven the other is twelve. It's remarkable to see these young kids and to see what they do. That's a real avocation.

We had a faculty retreat at Davidson, oh a decade or so ago, and we went around the table in our little small group trying to describe what we are. I said well I sort of view myself as a mathematical evangelist. Some of the more humanities folks sitting around the table didn't quite understand that phrase. That's sort of what I think of myself as at least in the context of the math club and some of those aspects. I've got the math club activity, I've got the AP activity and I've got the MAA activity. And then I play some basketball. I try to enjoy my kids and now grandkids.

MAA SE: When did you have grandkids?

SD: We now have four. The oldest one started kindergarten this year. Unfortunately none of them [are] near, so we have three in Iowa and one in Florida. The last two were born within the last year. The one in Florida is about to have her first birthday in May – in another month she'll have her first birthday – and the youngest in Iowa was born at the end of the summer and isn't one [year old] yet.

MAA SE: What undergraduate school did you attend? What was your major?

SD: I went to Lindenwood College. It's in St. Charles MO. At the time – as I said I sort of integrated the place – we were known as the Lindenwood Colleges, because the men's college was Lindenwood College II – Roman numeral two. They went back to being Lindenwood College and now they are Lindenwood University, as all good small colleges want to be a university – except for Davidson. For good reason I think for Davidson. There was that round in South Carolina where all the small colleges became universities, like Lander College became Lander University, etc.

My major was mathematics. It was a liberal arts degree. I did a BA because I thought that was more impressive and I don't understand our students at Davidson that want a BS. We do it at Davidson by your major so if you take math major you are a BS candidate. But for me, the difference between BA and BS was for a BA you had to have a [foreign] language and for a BS

you didn't at Lindenwood at the time. I had the language so I said I should have a BA, it sounded more impressive.

I played basketball, on the men's basketball team. It was in the Greater St. Louis Small College Conference. The team existed my sophomore year – we didn't have a team my freshman year. For the first two years, our coach was a psychology professor and then he left to go someplace else. They hired a retired coach from one of the high schools to do it, except for there was one game where my father-in-law was our coach. That might require some explaining.

I was married in the middle of my junior year. (I used to scare my wife about that – of course, she was the one I married. But when our kids got that age I would say, you know, when I was that age I was married. She would say “Gosh, no”. And sometimes I scare my students about it.) It was an interesting time. At that time in Missouri my parents had to sign [since] I was 19 years old. I don't know what the rules are now, [but] I had to have permission to get married. It wasn't that you just asked the father of the bride-to-be – you had to ask the parents of the groom.

My wife Elisabeth graduated early, so she graduated right at the time that we got married. It was the middle of my junior year. She went to graduate school and got a master's degree in English from St. Louis University during that ensuing time. We lived in [faculty] houses [of professors who] were off on sabbatical or on leave. [Also], for three months we lived in an apartment in a dorm that was mostly vacant, over the campus security office. I had a hotplate in the corner and [we] had this big cooler. Every morning I would walk across campus and fill the cooler with ice, so we would keep our milk cold.

MAA SE: What were your favorite subjects in undergraduate school?

SD: Well, mathematics, I think, was a clear cut favorite. I dabbled in a few other things. I mean, I took the standard religion classes, etc.... I remember Esther Johnson was a religion professor. I took a course from her and knocked off a paper. This was junior or senior year. It was kind of funny because I didn't put a lot of effort into the paper. But I knew from the way that she lectured, that if locally within the paper I argued very strongly for whatever point I was making she would treat it well. I don't even remember the topic, but I remember arguing very

vociferously in the first page for something and by the second page I was on the opposite side of that argument arguing very vociferously for that. It was just like her lectures in class. I must have turned [sides] probably two or three times in the process of the paper. But it was well received I got a good grade for it.

But mostly I took a lot of mathematics. There's a limit within a liberal arts curriculum as to how many you should take and you should have other [courses]. I had to go get exemption to take a couple more. I spent a semester at Wash U (Washington University, St. Louis), but it wasn't a very successful semester. I started off taking 18 hours and I shouldn't have. It was the semester before I got married and so I knew I wasn't [staying at Wash U]. I actually knew I was coming back to Lindenwood even though officially I was a transfer student. So I peeled back my hours by dropping a Physics course. I ended up with an Advanced Calculus, Group Representations and a nine hour Russian course, Intro Russian – it concentrated a full year of Russian in one semester.

My wife-to-be said, "Why are you taking Russian?" I had French through high school, and had two years of German at Lindenwood. She said, "You know you don't do well at languages." I said, "I know I don't do well at languages, but I enjoy taking them." It was sort of mathematical. So I decided to take this course pass/fail not realizing that they were on an ABC/no credit system. So I had to pull a C. I had a chance for it going into the final, but I had to arrange to take the final early because it was conflicting with the wedding. My chance for that was really to study hard. The night that I was studying hard my brother threw a surprise bachelor's party. To say the least I probably disappointed the professor and I got my no credit for that course. I did get a little bit out of it.

I really struggled in the Advanced Calculus class – it was a Spanish professor and I was not used to trying to deal with somebody with an accent like that. The Group Representations course was probably the course I did the best in. It was a graduate level course. I did not get a very good grade in it but it was transferable.

And [so] I went back and took a course in Symbolic Logic at Wash U the next semester just to show I could do well in a course at Wash U. I got to play some basketball when I went back to Lindenwood – I wasn't going to play at Wash U. Reunited with my coach. It was great. I was happier and I was married too.

MAA SE: How did you decide on a career in mathematics?

SD: I haven't ever been all that intentional in what I do next. I got out of Lindenwood and I decided I was going to go on to graduate school, [although] I wasn't sure that was what I really wanted to do. I looked at a few schools. I really fell in love with Brown and I got really lucky they didn't accept me. I was accepted at Rutgers. One of the reasons for me to look at Rutgers was that during the time that I was at Lindenwood my parents had moved to New Jersey. That was one of their last big moves. I could actually claim in-state status. My first year I went to Rutgers as a graduate student without aid, but I was able to claim in-state tuition. I had some savings that my grandmother [had left each of the kids] when she passed away. (It was split with an older brother and a younger sister.)

So we had enough saved that I figured we could last a year. And I said, "Well, I'll go off to graduate school and if we can still afford to be in graduate school after a year, if I get support, then I will stay. And if not, maybe I should try something else." And I got support at midyear and we were halfway through our savings. So I figured that was where I belonged. We stayed there and I applied for positions at the end of that because that seemed to be the next thing to do. I had no idea what somebody might do with mathematics in industry and I'm definitely not an applied mathematician.

So I thought, "Well, I'll go apply for a job." It wasn't a really easy time for job seeking. I think I sent out 140 applications. And the position I got was one at a school I had applied to, but it was not the position I had applied for – essentially I got a job that I didn't apply for. I ended up at Ohio State for three years. I made some neat connections there.

A quasi-mentor there was Ron Solomon who I saw at the Joint Meetings [last January] in New Orleans. He was being feted by AMS for the role he's now playing there. My one real research

publication is coauthored with Ron Solomon and he is definitely the lead author on that publication. We've had some connections over the years that we've kept in touch.

I had another interview before [the Ohio State one] that was for a one-year sabbatical replacement at a good liberal arts college in the East that I'll choose not to mention because it was [an] interesting [situation]. My wife was visiting her parents in the St. Louis area and I got a call from these folks. The call was that the guy was empowered to offer me the job – if I would accept it. And I said, “Well, I can't really give you an answer, is that an offer or not? I need to talk to my wife.” He said, “Well, if you'll accept, I can offer you the position.” [I said,] “Does that mean you're offering me the position?” He said, “Well, if you will accept I can offer it.” I said, “Well, I can't give you an answer right now so I guess the answer is no.” And that was the end of that. I called my wife and I said I had this strange conversation but I turned them down. She said, “You what?” I talked to my adviser, Richard Lyons, and I said this is what transpired and he said, “You what?”

But it was a wise move because I went off to Ohio State to teach. I hadn't finished my degree – I hadn't finished my thesis. I don't think I would've had the support that I needed to finish it in the one year that I would've been at that other place since I would have had to look for another job at the end of that year, etc. I wasn't clued in that you actually went to national meetings to apply for jobs and things like that. I just sent out applications.

So Ohio State was very good for me in that way. I discovered near the end of that first year I said, “I'm almost done with my degree, but there's this big group theory conference out at Santa Cruz in California. My adviser is going to be there that's where I'm going to finish my thesis. You need to send me.” They said yes. It hadn't occurred to me even [to] ask for support to travel to something before then. It never occurred to me – nobody had told me.

I was on a one year contract [at Ohio State] that could be renewed through three years. At the end of three years I said, “You're not supposed to be able to renew me for next year. I need to get a job. You need to send me to the national meeting.” And they said yes. I said, “What?! Why didn't I come here last year?” So I interviewed for the Davidson position in San Francisco.

It was a neat meeting. I had a good time and enjoyed it. I roomed with a professor who was [a] tenure track professor at Ohio State. I got to meet some of my graduate school friends. But I also met the folks from Davidson and ended up at Davidson from there.

MAA SE: Which is when you came to the Southeastern Section?

SD: That's when I came to the Southeastern Section.

MAA SE: What year was that?

SD: That was 1981. Actually, truth be told, I wasn't their [Davidson's] first choice.

MAA SE: You didn't have to say that.

SD: My colleagues all know that.

MAA SE: We've already talked about who you considered to be your mentors. What graduate school(s) did you attend? You did everything at Rutgers.

SD: Yeah.

MAA SE: Why did you choose to go to Rutgers? You said that it was because your parents were there.

SD: Yeah they were in New Jersey. We stayed with them for a couple of months. My Dad is in college admissions. He was the Director of Admissions and Financial Aid at Rider College – now Rider University, which is down in Lawrenceville just north of Trenton. So it was about a 45 minute commute to Rutgers from there. We stayed with them for a while. It wasn't a good situation for my wife necessarily, to be staying in the same house with her in-laws, especially as she got a part-time job working in my dad's office. That wasn't all that good either because it was a different relationship. And it wasn't good for me, because I would go up [to Rutgers], visit class and then when class got out I would get in the car and drive back to the southern environment. [At that point] I was out of graduate school – when I got home, I was home. It wasn't a good way to start graduate school.

I found an apartment for us up in that area and we moved up to that apartment for the balance of that first year. Then we moved to a great place. We had a house on a farm that was about 4 or 5

miles off-campus. It was a little dairy farm and it had several little houses on it. Our front yard was whatever I mowed, and where I stop mowing was where the alfalfa fields started. Our first child was born there and that was just a wonderful place to be.

MAA SE: We've also done where was your first job, which was Ohio State. And we talked about why you chose that job, it was the only one available.

SD: Somebody offered it and it was really the Group Theory [group]. They were hiring some folks. They were hiring some positions for their sort of revamping of pseudo-remedial mathematics that Frank Demana and Bert Waits were working on. So I had gotten in on that. But the reason I was there was because of Ron Solomon who had visited at Rutgers previously and used the bank where my wife was working. So it was that research connection. Okay we'll bring this guy in that has some group theory and he'll work with Ron and he can teach in this area. And so I benefited from both ends of that.

Frank and Bert were great people. I haven't seen either one for a while, though I saw Frank at the readings occasionally. He has some health issues. They were using a calculator and I hadn't [used one] much – I think I saw my first calculator late in graduate school. [It was the] first handheld calculator that they could afford – that a person could afford. So that was an interesting aspect of that.

MAA SE: When and why did you first join the MAA?

SD: I joined the MAA because I went to Davidson College. The department, the entire department, went to section meetings. And so it seemed to be the thing to do. And so I went to my first section meeting in 1982 at Emory. It was really a neat experience. I enjoyed the book exhibits. I got a copy of the third edition of Fraleigh's Abstract Algebra book. I had a colleague in graduate school that had used Fraleigh's book as an undergraduate and spoke highly of it. I looked and I said I really enjoy this. So I adopted it for our algebra course. That was my introduction to the MAA. It was through the section and through the very high level of activity of my department. It was an annual road trip for the department. And there were stories of road trips of years past. I suppose we have some since too.

MAA SE: When and why did you come to the Southeastern Section? You did that because of Davidson.

SD: It was a job for me.

MAA SE: Who or what inspired you into service for the MAA?

SD: I suppose it was kind of natural. I have some real heroes among the early faculty at Davidson when I first came. [There was] Bruce Jackson, who probably didn't have much of a leadership role in the Section. [Also, there was] JB Stroud, who would have been probably more of a higher profile leadership role. Bruce passed away a few years ago. JB's still around, retired – I talk to him at church and that sort of thing. And I think that those folks, and Davidson in general, but mostly within the math department, [have a] high service ethic. I think that within that environment – it's one that I felt very comfortable with – is a great place to have service nurtured.

MAA SE: That's not always true at every place.

SD: Well it was sort of interesting because when we moved to Davidson my wife had a hard time in that transition – moving to a small Southern town from Columbus, Ohio where shopping was very convenient. At the time in Davidson [shopping wasn't convenient]. It is now, but at the time it wasn't. Also, everybody knew everybody else in special ways and she just didn't feel very comfortable with it. I did not appreciate what she was going through because I was in this wonderful nurturing environment in the math department.

I was having the time of my life. I really, really enjoyed my colleagues. It took me probably more than a year to stick my head up and see [that it wasn't] so much the small liberal arts college. It's not so much Davidson, though that's what I was sort of keying my applications to when I applied for the job. It really is the [math] department. I could look around and see [other] departments [where] I probably wouldn't be very happy. It was the people I was with. That was a special treat for me.

I think Elisabeth eventually accommodated herself to the town. I think it was Jean Jackson, Bruce's widow, who [really made the difference there]. [Jean] is a great friend of the family and

Elisabeth has lunch [with her] at least once a month – probably twice a month with her now. We had two kids when we moved to Davidson. We had two daughters already and then our third child was born. Our first child was born in New Jersey our second child in Ohio and our third child was born in North Carolina. And so my joke since then is, “Well, I have enough souvenirs, so I don’t need to move anymore.” Jean was the one that we called, when we needed to go to the hospital in the morning, to take care of the two girls. They had fun in that process.

Well I guess that really is the sense of service through my department. I don’t really know how I ended up being in my first role as State Director. And I suppose somehow JB had something to do with that. I think it also may well be that Marcellus [Waddill] had something to do with that. I taught Marcellus’ younger son in algebra, one of the first couple of years I was at Davidson. So there was a connection that way.

MAA SE: Because Marcellus was very big in the MAA. He was when I arrived. He was Secretary-Treasurer. And he was very welcoming of younger faculty.

SD: Yeah. I suspect it was sort of through that process that somehow I was tapped. Because I followed the first North Carolina State Director, Ellen Kirkman. It could well be that connection with Marcellus that got my name popped up there.

MAA SE: What leadership roles have you had in the MAA?

SD: I was the State Director and then I was Secretary-Treasurer. I succeeded Marcellus and at that time they split the job of Program Chair off from the Secretary-Treasurer. Marcellus was also constructing the program for the meetings. Tom Barr at Rhodes College was the Program Chair at that time and I was Secretary-Treasurer for six years or so. Then I was off for a while and I came back as Chair of the Section and now I’m Governor.

MAA SE: A lot of roles. Do you hold the longest time on the Executive Committee?

SD: That’s got to be David Stone.

MAA SE: What accomplishments are you most proud of with regard to the MAA?

SD: It's hard to say because I generally view my role as more of somebody who keeps things rolling. As State Director there was some money from the Exxon Foundation that was made available to Sections. And it wasn't very much. We bounced around [the conversation], "Well, that's not very much, we can't do anything with it." And I said, "Well, you know I could do something with that money." It was just a couple hundred dollars. Bucky Allen and I got together and did a conference on mathematics and the environment at Davidson College. That was a lot of fun. I enjoyed working with Bucky. I knew him through the AP stuff as well, but also through the section. That was a neat thing to do. If I think in terms of accomplishments, I don't know. I think I am happy to have supported or enabled some big initiatives from some other folks. Bob Fray, for example, was very big on creating that joint meeting that we had with AMS in Atlanta. And without his persistence that would not have happened. There was a lot of resistance and I have to say I was part of that resistance early on – to the idea of meeting with the AMS.

MAA SE: He was involved in the AMS at the time.

SD: He was involved, but he also knew the fellow in Florida that was chair of whatever was doing those regional meetings and it was through Bob's persistence – and very careful guidance – that we sort of hammered out an agreement of how we were going to do it. We had this big meeting – must've been after the UNC Charlotte thing where we also said these are the sorts of things we must think are going to be issues – and we ended up having a meeting at Georgia Tech with various people after that. I'm really impressed with the kind of perseverance and foresight that Bob had to put that meeting on. At that time I was Secretary-Treasurer and a lot of what I did [was related to] making the meeting work. I really enjoyed working with the woman [Donna Salter] who came down from the AMS to handle the meeting. I feel a sense of accomplishment at helping realize Bob's dream in having that meeting.

MAA SE: How did the jobs vary? They're very different jobs but was there a favorite?

SD: In some sense the Secretary-Treasurer is kind of a favorite, but mostly from the sense [that it is better defined as] a position. There is a lot of activity and a lot of work you do. I was very happy to hand that job off. It's neat how Project NExT is now taking over the book table, for example. I mean I went to meetings where I wasn't able to get to any talks, may be not even

plenaries. I was doing the table and I was doing other things, so I just wasn't all that involved in the regular meeting – I was helping put on the meeting.

I enjoyed doing that but it was a sort of frustrating at the end of the meeting to come back to Davidson saying, "Oh gee, I wish I had gone to that talk, or *a* talk." So it's kind of fun now to drop in, help out here and there, then let it go and visit something else. I can volunteer to be a presider or a judge for the undergraduate student sessions. I kind of enjoy playing that support role and you get to do a lot of that as the Secretary-Treasurer.

MAA SE: Who were the Southeastern Section "stars" when you first joined the Section?

SD: Well, Billy Bryant and Ivey Gentry. I remember a business meeting where Ivey spoke up. The site selection committee had included JB Stroud. There was a recommendation that the next meeting was to be in North Carolina. There was some sort of thing where Asheville wanted to put it on in concert with an NCTM meeting or something like that. So we were going back and forth because we [were concerned we] would get swamped by the NCTM. Davidson was under consideration and JB had indicated he was from Davidson during the discussion of this rather controversial topic. That was a case where the business meeting was really selecting between two options as opposed to "Okay, here's what the committee recommends." I forget what we ended up with. I don't think that was the year we went to Davidson, but it might have been. JB had stated that because he was from Davidson he recused himself from the vote. And Ivey stood up at the meeting and said, "JB, that's why we put you on that committee so you would vote for Davidson." I remember that well.

Certainly Marcellus is another. He was younger at the time, but he would have been a great person within the section. Then there were people that were developing at that time. Certainly Tina [Straley] and Sharon Ross and folks like that that I encountered early on. I don't think they were in leadership. [I think] David Stone was newsletter editor when I first came.

MAA SE: Do you have any favorite anecdotes about MAA Southeastern Section people, places or things?

SD: Well there's partly that Ivey Gentry story. The road trips for the Department, we had some interesting anecdotal things about incidents on the road. At the Rhodes meeting a young colleague [Todd Will] and I roomed together. He has now moved on from Davidson to a school in Wisconsin. He left me the job of getting the hotel. I indicated to him that "the cheaper the better" for me and he sort of agreed. So I got us a room at the Admiral Benbow in Memphis, which was across the street from the Hampton where a lot of people were staying. The Admiral Benbow probably made most of their money renting rooms by the hour. Most of the lampshades were sort of bashed in, there were cigarette burns on the furniture, etc. But it was very cheap. And I was perfectly happy – but Todd was a little concerned about the insect population in the room.

We had an opportunity to sort of leave a little bit early after the meeting concluded. We actually had flown – that was the only [section] meeting that I flew to. Todd had called the airport and somehow got us on an earlier flight and at that time without any penalty – I'm not sure how he managed to do it. But, he managed to do that. He went back to the hotel to check us out because I wasn't able to – I was too involved at the meeting. So, he went back to the hotel and checked us out and reported that they had no problems with him signing for my credit card. Also, the check out was [really quick, but] at the Hampton Inn, it was taking people a half-an-hour to check out over there. So it was a much better place. And the cost of our two nights at the Admiral Benbow was less than the cost of one night at the Hampton.

I do like to drive on our driving trips. So there are stories that the students may tell about my driving.

MAA SE: Is there anything else you would like to add?

SD: I'm sure. I don't know.

MAA SE: Well like you said it is hard thinking of yourself as history.

SD: After I get that joint replacement I'll feel more like it. Actually this was my third arthroscopic knee surgery. I've gone back and forth so I sort of know the process. It's kind of interesting. This isn't an MAA story. They called me up for the pre-surgery interview – they

wanted to know about my previous surgeries. I've had a bunch of hand surgeries as well, most of them related to basketball. With every one I'm told that you shouldn't be doing basketball anymore. So they asked me over the phone how many hand surgeries I had. I said well there's the one where I broke my hand riding my bike that was a year and a half ago. But before that yeah, I think, I think about three or so. How many hand surgeries were there? I don't know let me count the scars, yeah, I think it's three – that one is kind of faded. But anyway that's not MAA.

I think the world of the people that I work with and it started really with JB and Bruce. Bruce had a nickname among the students that wasn't all that kind, but I think it was affectionate. The last year he taught at Davidson I went and sat in on one of his classes every Wednesday just to see how he handled it. He had this way – he would call on students by name in class and he wouldn't let the student pass. But somehow, whatever he was asking that student, he found some way of getting some value out of the response and sticking with that student until there actually was something of value in their response. [He always handled] that student with such grace. I can't imagine – I'm so poor with names anyway – I can't imagine being able to do that. That was something that really, really impressed me about how he was able to do that.

And that was sort of the way that his life was. He was the guy that when my oldest child got her first speeding ticket, the only one I know of, when she was in high school, I went to him to say, well how should we do this, we haven't told her mother yet. She knew to come to Dad. Okay, so we said this is how we can go to mom, this is how it's going to be – and she accepted that and it worked out okay. It was that sort of relationship with Bruce – he was a real treat. He and JB were very close in age and their birthdays were days apart and there was three of them [Davidson math faculty] that sort of retired about the same time in the early 90s.

People that we've gotten since then – Don, John Swallow and Todd Will were the three that replaced Bruce, JB and Jerry Roberts. And then I was chair of the department at Davidson for five years. I did four searches and the middle year was a departmental review. That is sort of unusual for us to be searching that much. The first search ended [and] we didn't hire anybody. That's why we had to do a second search. We hired Laurie Heyer at that point.

The three hires that I made were Laurie and Mike Mossinghoff and Tim Chartier. I guess in some sense being able to take some credit for leadership during that process to get that kind of quality person within my department. I really, really enjoy working with Laurie and with Tim and with Mike. It's been a great pleasure of mine that Laurie has wanted to and been very active within the Section, and Tim has a more national exposure, and Mike through his Jeopardy work, etc. It's been nice that they have continued that tradition that I see from Bruce and JB in terms of MAA activity and service to the profession. You can see it up and down in various places. We had that great group that went through Georgia Tech and now we don't see much of them anymore. Of course Billy was at Vanderbilt. There are some wonderful people at Wake – I see it sort of resurging at Wake. I think it had sort of lulled a little bit, but you've got Marcellus and Ellen and now we have some young people, the two Sarahs and Jason. So that's good to see.

It can ebb and flow – it's nice to see that at least there's a mathematical generation that's following. Carl [Yerger] is a first year faculty member at Davidson this year. I'm very pleased with his interest in math competitions. He's been involved with me in the Charlotte Math Club which is something that I haven't been able to get [others involved with as much] – well, maybe Sarah Mason a little bit a couple of years ago before she went off to Wake Forest. So it's been fun for me to work with Carl in that way. [It's also fun] to have the sense that a couple of years ago I wasn't even contemplating retiring and now I'm starting to think, “Well, maybe in five or 10 years perhaps I'll be retired, I'll be more serious about it.” It's nice to see that there are some folks who will carry on in a service way in things that I have real interests in at Davidson. It's nice to see the tree nurtured.

MAA SE: Anything else?

SD: No

MAA SE: Thank you so much for agreeing to do this even though you don't see yourself as history yet.

SD: No I've been history for a long time, just not that kind of history.

MAA SE: You knew people that I didn't know because I came 10 years after you did. You knew Ivey and JB. I have a vague memory of Billy Bryant at one meeting.

SD: I remember Billy more for coming and giving a talk at Davidson. But I remember him of that time. That was also about the time when John Neff was involved in writing the history. I should've mentioned John Neff – he is a true giant in the Section. I mentioned him early on because we had this Coe College connection. At Executive Committee meetings, John, during break time, would go out and take a smoke and then regale me with fight songs from Coe College. We would have this memory thing and I, as I said, went to Franklin Junior High and he went to Franklin High School. We both knew exactly where that place was. It was sort of neat to have that Coe connection. My dad had worked at Coe in the admissions office when I was born and then when we moved back he was Director of Admissions at Coe for a couple of years. So we had that Coe College connection which was kind of neat. And I guess another person that you'll get a chance to talk to is Hugh Haynesworth and of course Ben [Klein]. You'll talk to him soon.

MAA SE: Thank you so much.