Peter Gordon

Peter Gordon is the editor at Addison Wesley for Donald Knuth's books and the company's TeX and LaTeX books.

[Interview completed 8 January 2008.]

Dave Walden, interviewer: Please tell me a bit about your personal history independent of TeX.

Peter Gordon, interviewee: Before settling into an editorial position at Addison-Wesley, where I've been for nearly 30 years, I had begun (just barely) a career in philosophy and enjoyed (rather extensively) a world of travel. I today live a distributed life between New York City, Tokyo, and New Hampshire, all with Sachiko, my wife of many years.

DW: I first heard your name as "the editor of Knuth's books" (e.g., in Barbara Beeton's introduction to your remarks reprinted in *TUGboat* 7:2 (1999), "Introducing Donald Knuth and *Computers and Typesetting*" (pp. 93–95). When and how did you first become involved with Donald Knuth and his books?

PG: I first became involved with Don in the early 1980's, just in time to help celebrate (in a limited, hexadecimally numbered, leather-bound edition) the first book composed with TeX, *The Art of Computer Programming, Volume 2: Seminumerical Algorithms, Second Edition*. I have been his editor ever since.

Knuth's books have been the bedrock of our computer science list, still selling well after all these years.

DW: I am interested in some of the details of how deeply you work with Knuth. Do you edit all of his books?

PG: I am the editor responsible, since the early 1980's, for all of Don's AW books, which includes all the TeX-related books he's published with us.

DW: Do you have an involvement in the translation and publication of Knuth's books into other languages?

PG: I have no direct involvement with the translation of his books into other languages (translations being handled through our foreign rights department), although I am sometimes consulted when decisions need to be made.

DW: Do you have direct dealings with Duane Bibby or does Knuth arrange that himself?

PG: Don generally works directly with Duane Bibby, although we have sometimes engaged him ourselves (e.g., to work on covers).

DW: When editing Knuth's books, do you have early and frequently involvement or only late and infrequent involvement, and involvement of what sort?

PG: When asked in another interview how I work with Don as his editor, I answered only half facetiously: I try to stay out of his way. I can advise him around the edges, but those edges are very slim. The same is true of our production staff's interactions with him. We see the end-product of Don's work, not the TEX markup.

DW: I think I read that article — in *Technology Review* in 1999. In that article you are referred to as Knuth's "publishing partner at AW" — what does "publishing partner" mean?

PG: Publishing Partner is my title at AW; there probably are many people within the company who also would like to know what the term means.

DW: I believe I remember you being acknowledged in one of the *LATEX Companion* books. Are there other people at AW also editing TEX-related books and books or do you do them all?

PG: I am the editor for them all.

DW: Please tell me about AW's relationship to TEX more generally — the market for TEX books, the typesetting of books in TEX, etc.?

PG: TEX and LATEX books probably serve as broad a cross-section of Pearson Education's markets as any others. Whereas most of the books published in my division address primarily the needs of programming and software development professionals, TEX/LATEX books are useful to people in virtually every scientific and technical discipline, and they are so throughout the world (one reader we heard from was a urologist in Kenya). TEX/ LATEX is also the system of choice for many of our authors who prefer to do their own typesetting (which is fine with us, as long as they know what they're doing and don't spend more time typesetting than writing). That said, most of our authors these days deliver their manuscripts in Word files, and TEX/LATEX is rarely used by our professional compositors to produce final pages.

DW: I believe the METAFONT trademark resides with AW. How did that come about and what responsibilities does it entail?

PG: It was a matter of convenience, inasmuch as we were about to publish *The META- FONTbook*. We are a caretaker of the name; that's all.

DW: Before we end this interview, are there any particularly memorable moments relating to Knuth and his books you'd like to share?

PG: There have been many memorable personal moments. What pops into my mind with regard to books, though, is standing with Don and his wife, Jill, in their garden, examining the board Jill had constructed to chart the publication schedule of at least two dozen Volume 4 fascicles. It was a great graphical representation of just how large a task Don had undertaken. I'm not sure the board still exists, and I can't recall what the projected completion date was (and probably don't want to ask), but the fascicles keep coming. Before too long, we'll have enough for the first full-sized Volume 4 hardcover.

DW: Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. I greatly appreciate your contributions to the world of TEX.