

Jeff Morrell

I was born just outside of New York City. While everyone thinks NYC is wall to wall buildings, my area was close to fishing and hiking and I grew up riding my bicycle all over Long Island. From the time I was old enough to think about careers, I wanted to be a forester. I thought I would save the planet. I somehow managed to get into the State University of New York College of Forestry at Syracuse (I still think it was a clerical error) and discovered that foresters did not get jobs. I changed to Forest Biology but still had no idea what I would do. That changed when I took a forest pathology course with Dr. Robert Zabel. Although I got a C in the course, I was hooked and took every Forest pathology course offered. I took a series of courses in wood science because they were interesting. I also enjoyed the heck out of my undergraduate career- playing hockey for the university, joining a fraternity (a nice drinking club) and getting involved in student government.



Following graduation, I looked for graduate programs. I was offered an assistantship in nematology at Penn State- not exactly what I wanted, but it paid the bills. I studied nematode/fungal disease complexes on tomatoes- about as far from Forest Pathology as I could get. I finished up and took a temporary job with an electric utility company inspecting wood poles. I ended up taking a trip from Syracuse to visit the utility with Dr. Zabel - and he ended up talking me into a PhD program studying the soft rot fungi that attack utility poles. I had no idea what I was doing (many people say that is still true) going for a PhD. I was the first person in my family to make it past 6 months at university. I should also mention that I reconnected with a friend from college and 8 months later, I was lucky that she was temporarily insane enough to marry me.



My PhD. went by quickly and I found myself defending just after I turned 25, just as the economy went into the tank. I spent 2 years in various post-doctoral positions. The most interesting was a one year position studying how cartilage forms in avian systems (think chickens here). It was tough learning animal systems, but it also taught me a lot about what I could do.

Things were not exactly looking good for the job market and I was resigned to being in the cell biology field when an ad appeared for a Professor position at Oregon State University. I was not qualified except that it involved utility pole research and I had both worked for a utility and had my PhD supported by the utility industry. I applied anyway. I had what could only be termed the interview from hell and the Department head did not build my confidence when he said that he "hoped I had a chance to visit OSU again someday". Despite my less than spectacular interview performance, I was offered the job and started at OSU in 1983. It was daunting at



first, I inherited a program from Robert Graham, who has a big reputation in the field.



However, I was really fortunate to have the chance to work with Ted Scheffer, Don Miller and a little with Bob Graham. They all helped me learn and they were incredibly patient (not one of my strengths). I also met this older scientist named Alan Preston who gave me the confidence to think bigger and be willing to take risks. I was encouraged to join IRG and went to my first IRG meeting at Honey Harbour in 1987. It was one of the best moves I ever made. I got to meet

all those people whose papers I had read. I was also fortunate in having done some work with marine wood preservation- which resulted in my being made Vice Chair of the Marine Working Group (it no longer exists- but it did have some of the most appropriate members in John Barnacle and Pete Fish). That led to moving up in the SPC and EC and eventually to Vice President and President (2004-2007). The best part of that was working with Joran, who could stay calm through almost anything (except for someone acquiring the Swedish flag at a meeting banquet). It is hard to believe how quickly time has passed.



I have been fortunate to have many talented people pass through our lab as visiting scientists, graduate students or staff. I am a strong proponent of recognizing that no one gets anywhere



without the help from others- I have been blessed with tremendous help over the years. We have had many outstanding grad students pass through our program- many of them IRG members. Watching them progress through their careers is one of the best parts of being a faculty



member. I have been at OSU for almost 35 years- but still find it pretty amazing that I get paid to do what I love.

On the home front Tisha (a Professor at a different university) and I have two boys. One studied music (Chris) and is still trying to figure out what he wants to be. The



other (Ian) just finished his MSc in timber engineering at Washington State University and will start a PhD at OSU studying Civil Engineering with an emphasis on wood science. I have to admit that I never saw that one coming. Many IRG members will have seen both boys at various IRG meetings, they've grown up with it, Chris was 6 months old at the IRG21 meeting in Rotorua. They do still get



embarrassed when their parents dance at the banquet (the wine helps), but they deal with it. We are looking forward to a post-IRG49 meeting safari near Kruger National Park this year where we will have a chance to be prey for some apex predators.

Some of you have seen me in my short green running togs and I do like to explore the areas around our meetings. I've had some knee issues (from an old softball injury- not running) and that has curtailed the running- we have



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moved on to bicycling. Not as much fun, but it is better than nothing and it mellows me.



On the outside, I serve on one county advisory committee and am active in Boy Scouts (soon to be just Scouts as it finally becomes coed in the U.S.). To conclude, I was fortunate enough to be able to visit Oregon again and could not have asked for more.