NORGE LARSON | President, Sea-Bird Electronics Inc. (NGL@seabird.com)

Degree: When, where, what, what in?

I received a Bachelor of Arts degree in physics from Augsburg College in 1977, and a PhD in physical oceanography from the University of Washington (UW) in 1988. The journey was fun. While at Augsburg, my advisor's research at the University of Minnesota provided the opportunity for summer and research jobs helping that group build electron guns and detectors for rockets to study the mechanics of the Aurora Borealis. For Masters work at UW, I got to help build pressure sensor systems that measured part-per-billion tilts in sea level across three choke points in the Antarctic Circumpolar Current to study what drives the current. For PhD work at UW, I had the chance to work on conductivity-temperature-depth sensors for towed systems, and several iterations of new free-fall turbulence sensors and profilers to study the relationship of turbulence to the fine-scale density field and large-scale forcing functions. I was fortunate to work with very smart advisors and students who shared their skills at solving problems and fueled my passions. Sprinkled throughout the school career was a host of "paying" jobs, from cook to draftsman, that rounded out my experience.

Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

No. I had accepted a joint postdoc with Dalhousie University and Bedford Institute of Oceanography, but I had also been offered a partnership position at Sea-Bird Electronics. From the earliest age, I knew that I wanted to be a scientist and had spent my life preparing for academia. But the projects I had worked on made it clear that I was truly happiest building instruments and improving measurements. After much soul-searching, I declined my postdoc and took the business offer. It felt terrifying to disregard counsel and switch career paths. But with 24 years of hindsight, I have no regret.

How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

For me, the experiences working on several research projects and jobs throughout college and graduate school turned out to be my job search. Being open about skills and seeking a sense of fulfillment shaped my decision. I had been working part time at Sea-Bird while I finished my dissertation, and they came to me with a job offer—that I finally accepted.

Is this the only job (post-academia) that you've had? If not what else did you do?

I've had several jobs, but all within Sea-Bird Electronics.

What is your current job? What path did you take to get there?

I am President of Sea-Bird Electronics. I get involved in daily business, the company's strategic directions, and policy decisions for customers. I am staff cheerleader for the company mission and promoter to our customers. What I particularly like is still being able to contribute to sensor design and problem solving, and getting involved with "our"

scientist's work. It's not a boring job, and a rule I've learned is that "the day rarely goes to plan."

The path through Sea-Bird started as a company scientist tackling analytic flow problems, sensor responses, and measurement errors, and acting as a liaison to the science community. As Vice President for Science, I began managing a group working on these problems and helped build a saltwater calibration facility and standards laboratory. As Executive VP, the company's strategy and senior management team came into my realm.

With the sale of Sea-Bird Electronics four years ago to Danaher Corporation, we are taking on the additional job of growing another company—Sea-Bird Scientific—comprised of top-tier instrument companies that serve ocean and freshwater scientists, responding to customers' demands for more integrated systems.

Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?

Yes, and I hope my enthusiasm shows. The best part of my job is helping people much smarter than me do great things. It is exciting every day to see what our

engineers can develop and our production staff can build with consistent care. They get very vocal if I make changes that they think might compromise quality—what a great challenge to have. But the biggest reward is watching what problems scientists are solving with our instruments. Ken Lawson, prior President and my mentor at Sea-Bird, said, "You gave up academia, but may have found a way to be more effective in academia than you planned."

What did your oceanographic job give you that is useful in your current job?

Problem-solving skills, experience managing projects, and telling a useful story with messy data. In many things, there is often no right answer but a family of solutions.

Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?

Take advantage of every opportunity early in your education to try out things. It is how you find your talents and passion. Then, follow them into a career. Because anything worthwhile takes a tremendous amount of work and dedication, it's easier when you are following your passion, and the result shows in your attitude. Coworkers rally, and employers respond with more interesting work and opportunities, which lead to financial security as well. Stay open—expect to do something different than you planned.