

Little Lessons From History

by *Bruce Taylor*

CHAPTER 2: *Once I had a BMW*

It was spring 1975 and my first year in TPF was coming to an end. IBM was telling me I had to move on to newer and better things to broaden my horizons and enhance my career prospects as a Systems Engineer, since the support work at BA was coming to a close. What I suspect the latter meant, was that BA was not willing to continue paying for support now that the system had stabilised. However, I had decided I really liked TPF and preferred to stay with it. In principle, I wanted to be a Specialist, not a Generalist. Since then, I have come to the conclusion that one of the great shortcomings in the whole of IT, is that there are too many Generalists and far too few Specialists. That problem just gets worse and worse as time goes by: everybody wants to be a Consultant; nobody wants to be an Expert and stick to the knitting. I think it has something to do with income.

Meanwhile, my Dutch wife and I were not enthralled by the way things were in the UK at that time, so we decided that I would apply for a job in TPF at KLM in Amsterdam, my wife's home city, and at Air NZ in Auckland. I grew up in New Zealand, although originally born in the UK, and still had this nagging feeling that I ultimately wanted to go back or that I should go back for my family's sake. My parents and my three brothers were there. It turned out that I was offered a job by both companies and thus we had a dilemma. My wife, however, had a very clever and persuasive proposal: I should take the job at KLM. Her logic was that after one year we would be entitled to cheap tickets and with those we could visit NZ to see if we both liked it. If we did, then we could always move on 'down under': TPF people were in demand everywhere. A return ticket to NZ in those days cost one arm plus one leg each, so I yielded to my wife's superior financial insight. From my perspective, Amsterdam is a lively, international city, speaking only English is no problem and the weather is no worse, though also no better, than the UK. Since I had lived a year in the south of The Netherlands in my previous ATC life and had acquired (or been acquired by) my wife there, I knew and liked the place. Hence, NL it was to be. Off we went, saying bye-bye and thank you to IBM for seven years of fun, and KLM welcomed us with open arms.

TPF Systems in KLM was in somewhat of a turmoil when I arrived. Their own cutover from ACP4 to ACP8 was only two months away, they had seen the pain BA went through and had no desire to suffer that themselves, but they had no choice other than to press on because of hardware support limitations in ACP4. They had their backs to the wall, just like BA a year and a half before them. Anyway, I was back in my element and got down to work helping with whatever I could and checking whether any of the

things which had hurt BA were a threat to KLM in its operation. Surprisingly, few were and those were easily fixed or bypassed and the cutover went extremely smoothly. Immediately thereafter I was assigned to be the TPF Systems support man for the implementation of the new CARGO package, bought from Alitalia (the FAST system, which is more or less the standard throughout the TPF Cargo world). This had been heavily modified by KLM, translated from Italian into English and I had to get everything ready in both the test and live systems for cutover. The project leader on that to whom I reported was a Mr. Leo van Wijk, currently KLM's CEO. On the home front, we were settled in Amsterdam, my wife was working in a job she enjoyed and we had bought a second hand BMW: a 2002 tii, my pride and joy.

In the spring of 1976 the Cargo system cutover, and the manager of the TPF Systems Department handed in his resignation: he had decided to go and become a Generalist, something you can do overnight simply by forgetting all you knew about the real world. I was asked to take over and, since it was a small group of about 8 excellent and capable people encompassing TPF Systems and Comms, whom I had come to like and respect, I agreed to do so. In that role I could remain technical and still get my hands dirty in the nitty-gritty. Since I had no desire or ambition to embark on a management career, it seemed a good compromise.

That day I was asked to take over TPF Systems was actually my last day at work before going off on a two-week camping holiday to France with my wife. In the evening we loaded most of the camping gear into the car, so that we could get off to an early start. Next morning we came down with the last items ready to hit the road, but the car had disappeared. There was no sign of it anywhere and we never saw it again, nor did we ever go camping again (much to my wife's relief, I suspect). Hence, after dealing with the police, we went to a travel agent and booked a 10 day all-inclusive package to Sicily departing the next day. For all 10 days that we were in Sicily it rained. Needless to say, we have never been back to Sicily either; rain we see quite enough of in Amsterdam.

However, of one thing I am convinced: when I grow up, I am going to buy another BMW...

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