

CONSULTANT: Needham Bass

AGE: 64

RESIDENCE: Durham, NC (lifelong)

OCCUPATION: Sales and marketing for independent grocery stores

INTERVIEW DATE: July 30, 2016, approx. 8:00 am

LOCATION: Durham Farmer Market @ Durham Central Park

Needham Bass was the first person to approach my table at the Durham Farmers Market. He saw the sign and got curious. We recorded the usual introduction (name, age, residence).

So you've seen the sign and it piqued your curiosity, hopefully. This is called the Millennium Memory Project. It's trying to get a better understanding of people's memories from the turn of the millennium. So let's just start on a personal level. Walk me back to that day and tell me what you remember about it.

I remember worrying about whether the computers were going to default because of the date situation. I mean, we'd spent a whole week prior to that getting everything ready, and trying to archive things, going through all kinds of stupid procedures, which turned out to be a whole lot to do about nothing. And I also remember very vividly, being part of history. I mean, when you're in your 20 and 30s, you don't really think about turning into a new millennium, and then, I thought, when it happened, I thought, "I'm going to be one of the few people that was born almost in the middle of the last century and with some luck I might make it close to the middle of this century. And that's a unique group to be in." And the actual day, my wife and I were glued to the TV -- I can't remember which channel it was -- but they covered celebrations, starting in Australia, going around the world. So we spent almost 24 hours enjoying the turn, and the most moving one was the Aborigines celebrating it in Australia.

Needham begins to cry.

I didn't know this was going to make me feel like this. So...it was just so moving to see all these different cultures celebrate something that really is a turning point in history. Because we're not going to live to see another one. There may be some of us out here, but I won't. I'm glad I was able to enjoy this one.

And when midnight approached, do you remember that vividly?

Um, I remember kissing my wife [laugh]. And drinking champagne; real fine, French champagne.

You already said this, but I just wanted to clarify: You were living in Durham at the time, right?

Yep.

What were you doing for a living then?

I am in sales and marketing for independent grocery stores. Everybody was worried that all of their cash registers and anything that was connected to computers was going to default. People don't really realize how many people were worried about that. People thought coffee-making machines and everything were going to default, and I don't think a single thing did [laughs]. Which is kind of silly.

It's not silly at all, and you're probably...nine out of ten people, that's been the salient memory that came from that. Now, you mentioned the sense that you felt privileged to have reached that milestone. What about it, other than the date changing, made it seem so special?

Well, you start thinking about, you're part of history. There's only certain number of people that are able to live in this. And it's all happenstance of when you're born. And there is a definite change between this century and the last century. Living in the 20th century, as progressive as people were, no one ever thought that a black man would ever become the president of the United States. And lo and behold, eight years later, things changed. And that's just one of the things. No one would have ever thought that people would be accepting of people of different sexual orientations. And now, it's passé. I mean, people are much more open, and it's not to say everything is great, but I do think there's just something about turning into the new century, that maybe people opened their minds just a bit, and became a little more accepting and open about the fact that we're progressing. And we should progress.

So you feel things have gotten better since then?

Yes, but I'm not wearing rose-colored glasses. They're not anywhere near where they should be. Everybody kicks and screams when changes come. But I do think the 21st century is the 21st century; it's not the 20th.

So do you think -- and you've touched on this -- but do you think the fact that it changed to a new millennium precipitated this change to some degree, or this would have, could have, happened at another point in history?

That's a tough question. I don't know. I would like to think that maybe there's just something about human nature that when we pass milestones, we get a little more open-minded, but who's to say?

So take me back – and this will be the last question – walk me through a day in 1999 and compare it to now, as far as technology, and your daily life, how it's changed.

Well, in 1999, you thought things were really, really advanced, but computers are so much faster...I mean, there's more computing power in a smart phone than there was in the computer I was using in my business, and I was managing close to \$2 million everyday. You look back on it, and I think, "Gee whiz, it's so antiquated." You know, we did very little on the Internet. It was just a novelty at that time, or nothing like it is.

In your line of work, is that when things sort of – the fulcrum point – is that when things changed toward Internet-based?

Yeah. I mean, I used to go out and drive miles to see people, and now, it's a click of a button, and it's like you're sitting there with them. And everybody is so dependent on it. That's what they want you to do. When you actually have to go see them face-to-face, it's a novelty. They enjoy it, and I enjoy it, but it's basically a waste of time.

Do you think it attracts different people in that line of work now?

Um, it does. And that has some good sides and some bad sides. At least in my line of business, you've got people that are very smart, but they haven't had the actual physical contact with what my job entails. And sometimes they know the technology, but they don't know the nuts and bolts of what it actually is. But you know, I'm on the end of my career, and I'll let the next crowd figure it out.

Last question: you got emotional there. You don't have to pick any wounds; I certainly don't want you to. But why do you think you got emotional about it?

Well, it's not picking...there's no wounds to pick.

Okay, I wasn't sure.

I did get very emotional, close to crying, and I think it's because, you know, I won't live to see the next one. I wish I could. And if I do, by some chance, live that long...

That'll be another conversation, right there. [laugh]

[laugh] I probably won't be aware of it. But you know, I lived at a certain point in history that *I own*. And it's something that I can talk about, and as long as I have a memory, I can talk about the memories of it. So it *is* kind of emotional.

Well said.

I thank Mr. Bass for his time and end the interview.