

TODD FRIEDMAN
Mr. Friedman's Home – Gurnee, IL

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Interviewer: Jodi Houlihan
Transcription: Jodi Houlihan, Xi Rao
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Transcription:

Jodi Houlihan [JH]: Hello Mr. Friedman, Thank you for accommodating our request to conduct this interview with you. As you may already know Xi and I are PhD Students studying game design with Dr. Carly Kocurek from the Lewis College of Humanities at Illinois Institute of Technology. This interview is part of our History of Video Game Oral Documentary project where we are charged with interviewing an individual connected with the Chicago coin-operated video game industry. You have kindly agreed to allow us to enter into your world of gaming and competitions, as well as to see and experience first-hand some of your personal gaming collection. We will be recording the interview with an audio recorder and will also need to take at least one photograph of you preferably outside to capture that natural light. Before we begin we need to request that you sign two copies of the Consent Form. One signed copy is yours, one signed copy is ours and it will be submitted to Illinois Institute of Technology to allow this interview to be posted to the Chicago Coin-Op Archive located at chicagocoinop.org. This archive collects interviews related to the history and culture of coin-op gaming in the greater Chicago area. Now, if you do not have any questions regarding the consent form, digital documentation, posting of the interview online at the chicagocoinop.org website, or context of why we are conducting the interview we can begin the interview.

My name is Jodi Houlihan. I am a PhD student in Technology and Humanities at the Illinois Institute of Technology. My PhD advisor is Dr. Carly Kocurek and I am studying the area of influencing behavior change through game design strategies.

This is my colleague.

Xi Rao [XR]: Hi, I'm Xi.

Todd Friedman [TF]: Hi.

XR: I'm in the PhD program in Technology and Humanities at Illinois Institute of Technology. I'm taking a game class with Dr. Carly Kocurek.

JH: And your advisor is?

XR: And my advisor is Libby Hemphill.

JH: So we can begin?

TF: You can begin.

JH: All right. So the first question I'm going to open up with is, what does a typical day look like for Todd Friedman?

TF: Depends on the day actually. But usually, typically during the week, I'm an EDI analyst at HubGroup, technology, HubGroup transportation, in Oak Brook. What is EDI, EDI is basically electronic data interchange. It's a programmable language to make purchase orders and invoices and information for the company electronically. So, that's my job and I've been there for almost three years. Before that I was at Medline Industries in Mundelein for about six years doing EDI. But typically my day's from

about 6 am I wake up, I drive to work in Oak Brook. So, it takes me about 45 to 50 minutes to get there. And work till about 3:30 and get home about, a little before 4:30. I'm a father of three. I have an older son. He's 23, so he's, he's on his own. But I do have nine-year-old twins that I'm a father with. And they keep me busy when I get home. So, I do the fatherly stuff, I coach soccer, baseball, my daughter's in poms this year, cheerleading, so I'm excited to be watching her cheerlead for the Warren High School in here in Gurnee. So, yeah that's pretty much my day, on weekends, it's more of the same with the children. I do a lot of like outside activities like we have passes to Six Flags. We go there quite a bit. If Six Flags is open like in the winter, we do a lot of outdoor activities and stuff like that. So, yeah, work and being a father is my typical day.

JH: That's your typical day.

TF: Yeah.

JH: How long have you been playing video games?

TF: I've been playing video games probably since 19- probably 1979. I was born in 1974 so I was about 5 years old when I first time started playing video games. I saw most of my friends had, I think it was an Atari 2600 at the time. And I was amazed by the technology and how you can play, organized, like technical gaming on the TV and I was just mesmerized by and addicted to it. I grew up in a family that we had a lot of technology, with my parents they always buy us the latest and greatest things, and my dad would always have the latest techie stuff so I was always grew up with technology and cool ideas so, probably, yeah probably 1979 my first video game systems that I'd actually owned, were probably in the early 80's, probably 1983 when I got my first system. So-

JH: You lead me to the next question which is really good. Why do you like to or not like to play some of your first games and what was that first game that you had that stands out in your memory.

Friedman: Oh, I've had many games before this game that I'm gonna mention, but the one that I've always stuck out with me that I'll never.. and I still play today, that I'd never forget is *The Legend of Zelda*. It's the original. It's the one, yeah, that we talked about when you got here. But it's basically was the first kind of role-playing game, if you wanna call it that back in the the early 80s, where you're kind of, there's an adventure, there's a story line, there's a princess that you have to save at the end, and there's dungeons and that game just got me addicted. It was also, like, one of the first Nintendo games back in the day where you can save your game. And not have to start over when you turn it off. So I was pretty addicted to that, where you can just play for a couple of hours, save it, and come back later. So that game will always be my number one game and favorite game to this day. I still play it. And they make it on different models now where you can play it on..(bell ringing) by the way, that's my clock, that goes off every hour, so on the tape, that's my clock. [laughs] So, yeah, *The Legend of Zelda* is my ultimate favorite.

JH: But what was like the first.. you told me why you liked it.

TF: Yhep.

JH: What I would like you to mention for the audio

TF: Sure.

JH: recorder is what your wife did with the original *Zelda*, which I thought was cool.

TF: Yeah. The original *Zelda* came out and when it came out it came out with two versions. There was a great boxed version, a great cartridge version, and then there was a gold version. And I stood in line, I think for two and a half hours back-in-the-day to get the gold version. And it was a little more expensive, not much more expensive. But I got the gold version. And it's the same game it's just at that time it was kind of if you got the gold version you're kind of the cool person on the block. And I had that game ever since, today, I still have the exact cartridge. About two years ago, for my birthday, my wife saw online, a cool idea to make a working desk clock out of your old video games. And she knew that *The Legend of Zelda* was my all-time favorite game so she wanted to surprise me and actually take the original cartridge and design it herself, and she made a working clock which we discussed. I was very surprised when I first opened it [laughs], very excited to see a working *Zelda* clock like this is the best gift ever! And I said, "Where did you get the cartridge?" And she said it was in the garage. And I was like, "Oh, .." "That's cool!" I was trying to be so nice. I think it's still sentimental, I'll always have the clock and I took out the, inside is the microchip, so that I could play that game in another cartridge. But it was the funny story that's my all-time favorite game. The original game that I got. I stood two and a half hours in line and then she drilled a hole in the back and put the clock in there [laughs]. So, yeah, it's a good story. I'm really excited she did it because I don't think any other game would mean the same to me if she did it to another game.

JH: So the first games that you played, you mentioned a little bit about *Zelda*. Can you talk a little bit more about what did these games look like? How they felt in regards to the types of consoles, interfaces, features or stories that they had? Can you talk a little bit more about that?

TF: Sure. The first games that, you know, came out, historically, you know, everyone talks about *Pong*, which is basically just two lines going back and forth kind of like a *Ping-Pong* game. So that was the most unique thing that came out back-in-the-day. And the progress of the graphics, and the technology, just amazed me. I could remember like, playing *Super Mario Brothers*, and you know, being able to like, go from side-to-side scroll from side-to-side and get like, mushrooms and get, you know the bad guys. And then after that, then they came out, you know, years later with the 3D graphics. So, my love for it is that every year there's just new technology that makes it more fun, and more challenging. Like when the *Wii* came out, it was cordless, you know, you could play a game just with a wand. And that was just the coolest thing for me and my children, they could play any game they wanted now, without having to have 17 buttons. And now they even have the wireless *Kinects* where you don't even need a joystick, you just use your body on the screen. And you can play games so. That's what my fascination is. It's just the amount of change that has grown since, jeez, I mean, it's only been, probably at its prime, it's only been 30 years really since gaming got big. And it's a billion-dollar industry.

JH: You play these games. I'm gonna go back to the feel of them. And you have these consoles. And some of the consoles you have to play almost on top of the TV, and then you mentioned with *Wii*, you can be away from it.

TF: Right.

JH: What was your experience like playing almost on top of the game versus that freedom of not having to be on top of the game?

[00:10:01]

TF: You know I didn't think anything of it at the time. Everyone, I mean, back then, it was just, everyone had one or two TVs, so you were used to kind of sitting on top of a TV or watching TV, with the old games. It was almost like you had to like be on the TV to feel like you were in the game. So if you were far away from the game back then, you felt like you know you weren't part of it. And, yeah, it's just the closer you were to the TV, the more you were into the game. It didn't bother me, I mean, it was part of the experience. I think as time went on, the remote's cords got longer and longer and wanted people to stay away from the TV. But, you know, still today, I sit really close a TV. Because I feel like it's part of the experience, you know, then you have the surround headphones now and you feel, to be in the game is more of the experience.

JH: My next question, which I believe you answered, but there might be a few others that you might want to discuss.

TF: OK.

JH: Your ultimate favorite classic game is *The Zelda*.

TF: Yeah.

JH: What are the other ones that are kind of runners up?

TF: My all-time favorite arcade game, in when I grew up, you know, also there was, arcades were huge. Everywhere you went there was an arcade, bowling alleys, gas stations, but the one that I always recall and love to this day is *Moon Patrol*? And that was basically an arcade game in the 80s where you're a car that would have to jump over crevices in the road. You'd have to shoot the people in front of you and you have a gun on top of your car where'd you shoot people above you. And it was kind of this alien, kind a, background, where you're on like a like a planet and you to shoot alien ships and then rocks in your way. And there was two joysticks. It was a unique setup, because most games just had a joystick and a button. This had two joysticks where you used one to drive back and forth, and one to shoot up or down. So, that one was just so unique for me and if I find that game ever, I play it all the time, still. Other games that stand out are obviously *Super Mario*. That's the most popular one, and I have it in my garage there we were looking at. I could still play that game like it was yesterday. It's really fun. Another one is *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* from Nintendo. I hold a few world records on that game. For some reason, I just, the patterns and knowing that different ways to punch the boxers and get passed to the next person. It's always fascinating to me and I've been really good at it. So that game is on my top five list. And then there's the *Final Fantasy* series. Those have been out since probably the late 80s, the first *Final Fantasy*, I think came out and, I've played pretty much all of them. But the one out of the whole series was *Final Fantasy 7* that got me hooked. As a role-playing *Final Fantasy* collector, that one just broke the barriers for graphics, for storyline, for music. I have the soundtrack, the music's unbelievable. That's another thing in video gaming that has taken over, is the music of video games and arcades is you can actually have symphonies that play in these games.

And I actually went to live concerts that play video game music, and I've met people who are in bands who play video game music. So it's just all around.

JH: Is that a huge industry?

TF: Yes, it's huge. There's actually and I can show you later, there's, and I have his photograph, but there's a guy called Tommy To., I don't want to mess up his name and I apologize. Tommy Vitola. But he's got a concert that he travels around the world called "Video Games Live", where they actually have a hundred to two hundred men's or women's symphony orchestra that play the soundtracks of games from *Sonic*, from *Super Mario*, to *Final Fantasy* to *World of Warcraft*, all these games on the computer. And it's huge. It's awesome to just sit and instead of listening to opera or just the kind of standard classical music you're listening to the video game music.

JH: When you listen to the video games like that, cause you've mentioned you've gone to them, do you picture yourself playing at certain times? What do you picture when you're listening and hearing that?

TF: I picture myself playing them. But what's amazing about the concerts, is they have wide screen and huge setups that actually show the games in the background while they're playing the music. As you are listening to the music, you are watching, and your memories are just flashing in front of you with the screen at the top. But yeah, I just, it just brings me back my childhood of all the old games. Yeah, music is definitely another number one attraction for me with video games.

JH: Have you ever been a full-time game competitor?

TF: Not full-time, I've never made money off of it. I have been in competitions. And, like I said, I have world records on console video gaming where I'd have to videotape my scores and submit them to a company, a website. And they'd have to verify my score and I hold world records. I've never been the big, competitive gaming right now is the fighting games, like *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Combat*, stuff like that, as well as the online *Call of Duty* shooter game systems. I've never been a big player of those. So I haven't entered those kind of competitions professionally. I know people who have. I know very good friends who have made a lot of money doing it, and still today do it. My big love is going to different like conventions, and stuff around the area, I've travelled as far as Iowa from here, you know, six hours just to competitively play against people. And I do it for the fun. I don't really need to do it for the money. It's just more about, a hobby for me.

JH: Is it also, like a community? Do you get to know certain people in it?

TF: Yes. And that's the best part of, probably my last, I would say ten to eleven years is the community of people I've met. We talked about the movie I watched, *The King of Kong*, that got me into this community. *Twin Galaxies* is one of the major players, of world record holders, arcade players, and console players. And there is a website and a community that you can go on to and meet all these people. I took it to the next level. I met Water Day, the founder; And I met I've met Billy Mitchell Rachel who's in *The King of Kong*; I've met Steve Weevie; I've met a lot of these players who started this group back in '82. And from there I just branched out and met so many different people. I've met arcade owners; I've met arcade designers; I've met *Pinball* designers; I've met people throughout the last thirty, thirty-five years that have been an influence in this industry. And I'm pretty proud of people that I can call my friend. If I need any advice, or if I need to go somewhere, or get some items

for my collection, that I can call them then. I think it's a good thing. I think now-a-days there's a lot of negativity in the world and a lot of things that I could be doing that aren't positive. Without this, I think I'd missed it. I'm glad I got involved.

JH: When you talk about *Twin Galaxies*, can you tell me a little bit more about *Twin Galaxies*?

TF: *Twin Galaxies* was founded back in 1982, by Walter Day. It was basically, there was, that's when the arcade boom, I should say, started where everywhere you went people were playing games competitively, trying to beat the high score of the screen. And,

JH: And these were arcade games, not consoles?

TF: These were arcade games. Console weren't as popular yet. I don't think consoles really hit households til about 85. And in 1982, the arcades were taking, you know, were mostly in the world. And people were setting these high scores and they were wondering if it's the best in the world, they're in the United States, or even in South America, Canada. And there wasn't an organization that kept track of all these scores, so Walter Day decided to come up with his own company, and he called it "Twin Galaxies" where you could submit your scores to him. And that would be the official high score. If you wanted to set a high score in an arcade, you would submit it to *Twin Galaxies*.

JH: How did you submit it? How did you document it to get it to him?

TF: There's many ways to do it. Now, it's more technical where you can actually do it digitally. You can upload it on like YouTube or something, but what I did for my DJ Hero records was I just took a tripod as you see here, and put my video camera and filmed this TV. And there's a lot of rules involved, you have to make sure you videotape is from start to finish, you have to turn on the console. They watch every video that you've done from start to finish to make sure there's no cheating, any editing of the data. So I submitted probably, my first submission was probably five or six different scores. And at the time that DJ Hero just came out. So there was no one to really set the bar. So I decided I would do it [laughs]. So I sent in all my scores. I think I first sent in the first DJ Hero game had about a hundred and something songs. And I did every song. I just wanted to set the bar for everybody. And to this day, there's still, I think, I still have about ninety something scores that haven't been beat. There are some scores that have been beat that I tried to beat and some I did, and some I couldn't, but, then, yeah, DJ Hero 2 came out, and I did the same thing. I set the bar. There's about 60, or 70 songs. And I still hold about 40 of those records. So, that's how I got involved. I went to twingalaxies.com when I heard about them, back in 2007. And I found out that Walter Day in the Twin Galaxy community is coming to Lombard. So I immediately went on the website of this community and I said I'd love to help out, I wanna be a part of this, I wanna meet Walter, I wanna, you know, get involved. And the person running the convention at the time said, we need some help, would you like to help and I did. And to this day, I'm going on my eighth year. I run a Video Game Summit as what we call it. But it's a convention in Lombard where we host vendors, competitors, world record holders, industry leaders, and we all get together once a year, and do gaming. And compete, trade games, sell games, talk about games. And I'd love to do that more. My goal is to get at least 2 or 3 a year instead of once a year.

[00:21:39]

JH: That was why I asked what you're typical day was. I was wondering where you fit in your gaming.

TF: Yeah. My gaming, I'd love to game more. It is just very difficult being, you know, in my life, being a father. And I wouldn't trade it for the world, it's just.. there're so much gaming out there. It's hard to keep up. So I just do as much as I can. My nine year old son is now involved, so we kind of set a limit for him, and we say this is how many hours you can play a week. And I sit down and play with him and I teach him. He's actually better than me at most games now. But I think the coolest thing is taking my old games from the 80s, and playing with him. Because I was his age when I started like that. And now he's playing my games from them. To recycle history like that is very fascinating to me.

JH: I would think, and you can correct me if I'm wrong. I would think that, when I hear music, it brings me back to a certain time in my life. If it was music I heard when I was in high school or grammar school. And I would think the same would come with the games. It seems to put a timeframe, you know, the initial time that you played that game when you were really good, when you played that game. When you play the games with your son, the older games, do you start telling him reminiscing about your life back then.

TF: I do. I do. In fact, there's a recent story where I would show him a game I played. And a few of my friends that I played those games with, I'm still friends with today. And when I see those friends with my younger son, I say, "Hey, you know, John, I just played *Mike Tyson Punch-out* with Aiden and he can beat me on this person!" And he's like, "Oh yeah, remember when we were playing in your bedroom back then. And we had the same problem." And then, like, my son would talk to my friend about the games we played when we were kids. It's really cool, and just happened recently. So, I really enjoy it. And I'd love to do it more if I had the time. And you know, as he gets older and he goes onto different things, I'm hoping maybe he could get more involved with the community like I'm doing. He just recently for the first time he helped me do the last one in July. We did the Video Game Summit in July. He came in and he stayed the whole time when got there 7 o'clock in the morning and we left at eight at night. He helped me setup; he sold tickets; he helped people set up the games; and he loved it. I thought he'd be out in like 2 or 3 hours and just be tired and want to leave. And he made it the whole day and he wanted to do it again. So,

JH: Do you think he'll be submitting any world record scores?

TF: Yeah. Funny you should say that. We went to an arcade which you might have heard in your class, but "Gallopings Ghosts" is an arcade in Brookfield, Illinois. And I took him there recently for another convention of video game, trading card convention. And he sat down at this arcade, it's a motorcycle.. no it was a, it wasn't a motorcycle, a helicopter, it was like an airplane game where you had to sit down and it moved while you moved. And he played for like two, three hours and he broke the high score for that day. He didn't break the world record but he broke the high score for that day. And he was so happy. So I told the guy at the counter, and they made me a signed world record holder for today. And he goes, "Dad I want to set, I wanna submit scores. I wanna be a world record holder. I wanna a video game card like you have." And I'm like, "You will, you will! Keep it up." (laugh) So, yeah, to answer your question, he's adamantly, wants to follow in my footsteps in that. He wants to be

a world record holder. He wants to set scores. And I think it's cool. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. There could be much worse things in the world he could be doing.

JH: We spoke about your wife. We spoke about your son. What about your daughter in gaming?

TF: My daughter in gaming is fun. To me, it's cute to see my daughter play games. I think we spoke briefly before the interview about the kind of gaming she loves. She loves the Nintendo *Wii* games. She loves to play like, the dance game where you can just hold the *Wii* remote and dance in front of the TV and keep track of your scores. She loves the *Mario* games. Any *Mario* game we have, she will play. She loves Princess Peach. So, nowadays the *Mario* games you can play as Princess Peach. So she always plays Princess Peach and we play as Mario, Luigi, and with the *Wii*, you can play with four players at once. So, the three of us can play, or even my wife joins in, then we have four people at one time. I know there's a lot of times we play more games than she does. She watches and.. stuff. But there's time where she'll be like, "I wanna play that game. I wanna play with you guys." And I welcome it. I don't say "Oh it's daddy son time." or anything like that. I just have her play.

JH: As far as you're concerned, it's a family event. Anybody in the family that wants to play.

TF: I would. You know, I try to get my wife more involved. She's more kind of the old-school PlayStation games. It's kind of a newer games with the graphics and stuff she's not really into. The handheld games, she plays a lot of those iPhone games. She's more of like an app games. She loves like playing *Candy Crash*, and those things are the hot things nowadays. So, she will do that. But as far as console games, she always says that she doesn't get the hobby, she doesn't get the collection. But she supports it. She thinks it's cool that her husband is at a video game convention.

JH: We talked about memorable experiences. Do you have any other memorable experiences in the competitive arena? And why were they so special to you? as a competitor?

TF: I did an event in Iowa. It was called *The Gauntlet*. This is one I'm proud of. I did not win. I think I came in third. But what was cool with about it is that they set up a, almost like a marathon gaming tournament. You start with a game and you get to a certain score and then when you're done, you move to the next screen and play a different game on a different system. And they had about seven or eight systems. You went from Atari to Nintendo to SEGA, to the *Wii*. And it was like a transformation of the history of gaming. And it was tournament. And I did really well and I was proud of myself. Cause I always consider myself as a retro console, kind of a more retro console tournament player, than a newer, like I said *Call of Duty*, or the newer *PS4* games. So when I entered I was really excited and I wanted to win. I didn't. But I got third. There was about probably 40 to 50 entrants. So, that was one of my good memories that happened I think about 3 years ago. Other things, like I said, I do mostly for fun. I don't have a lot of competitive, like I was an tournament. And I won money. But that one was one of my big memories, cause you just stop playing one game for two, three hours. You had to play each game at different, you know, consoles, throughout the generations. So you had to be good at all the different joysticks, and all the different kinds of hand-eye coordinations. So I was pretty proud of that.

JH: You mentioned that you hold some world records. Could you tell me which ones they were? Which ones they are?

TF: I hold..I should have done the research cause.. I should have expected this question. But I think there's about 86 *DJ Hero* records, probably 50 or 60 *DJ Hero II* records. And I hold..I don't hold the world records but I'm in the top 5 of three of the *Mike Tyson's Punch-out* records. I think I'm third in a few of them and fourth and fifth in the other ones. And then I hold the *Nintendo Wii Golf* world record for lowest score, for best score, for nine holes, which is 31 or a 30. So those are the ones that are documented. There's many ones that I have beat but I didn't submit. Or I kind of competitively played against someone who was a world record holder and won, but it's not official. So those are the ones that are documented on *Twin Galaxies* website under my name.

JH: I know that you've played for the fun of it, not so much the competition of it. But I'm just trying to garner your experience as a competitor and then I want to talk to you more about the competitions that you've run. When you do compete, is it individually, or do you like to compete on a team? Which one do you prefer?

[00:29:57]

TF: I'm more of an individual competitor. A lot of team events are, like I said, are the first person shooter games, or online, they called MMOs kind of like the *World of WarCraft* kind of tournament ones. So I am more individual. So I prefer the individual ones.

JH: This question I'm very interested in. When you play a game, such as one of the ones that you hold a world record for, when do you know the game well enough to feel confident to compete in a competition. When do you feel that you're at that level that you can compete in the competition?

TF: Well, *DJ Hero* is kind of like a no brainer because I've always been into music and DJ'ing. If I wasn't doing computer work or IT work, I always said I'd be a DJ growing up. I have done kid benefits like DJ music there. I've done a few weddings, like I play music at weddings and DJ'd. I've always been fascinated by professional DJs on TV. So I always knew that when *DJ Hero* came out, that there, it was a no brainer that I would play that game until I had all the world records, and enjoyed tremendously and I just felt like, "I can't play *Guitar Hero*. I was bad at rock band. I'm bad at the drums." And then when I saw *DJ Hero*. It was no brainer. I knew that that game would be my ticket to like world records. The *Mike Tyson's Punch-out* one, like I said, is in my top 5 favorite game of all time. So I wanted to at least, kind of, submit some world records there, because I always thought, "You couldn't do it back when I did it." So I might as well try now. There's just games where you just naturally are good at it based on your hand-eye coordination. I'm not a big sports player like, the *Maddens* or *NHL* games. I'm just really bad at with the buttons. But when it comes to like, more of like, kind of the side scrolling games or the shooting games, side scrolling shooting games not first person, I just have a natural ability to score high with my eye-hand coordination. That's why I like the retro games a lot better than the newer games, because of the, almost the simplicity of the joysticks. There's only two or three buttons. Nowadays the *Xbox's* or the *PS4's* have like 20 buttons. I'm all for the kids nowadays being good at those. I just, I'm just more about the simplicity, sit in front of the screen, know the patterns, get the scores.

JH: Is there..cause I have read this before, regarding people who are into e-sports. Is there a training that takes place for that? Do people train?

TF: Oh yeah. I know many people. And there's .. when we're done, I can give you a documentary, I have documentaries over there, of professional competitors who train. There's groups out there who twice, three, four times a week, go to someone's apartment, and play for eight, nine hours, and just practice and train, and get their skills down, and their buttons. You know, the more you play, the better you are is what they say. But I know a lot of people in that industry who, that's their life. Some people even work throughout the day, and then when they get home, from like five o'clock till the midnight. They're training, they practicing their gaming. It's a huge business. You can make a lot of money if you're a professional gamer, and very successful at it. There's a few names I through out there, one is Justin Wong. I don't know if you've heard of him. He's been in the competitive gaming business probably the last ten years where he's got sponsors. He's got t-shirts from him, He's got a documentary about himself. He's made tens, twenty, thirty thousand dollars just playing *Street Fighter* games. And maybe even more. I'll be honest he's probably made more. It's a big business and if you're good at it, you'd be training. And he's probably one of the biggest, probably the most successful ones recently in these days.

JH: So you're a record holder of several games. What are the perks that come along with being a world record holder or winning in a competition?

TF: Oh, I mean, it's like any sport, really. It's like anything that you're successful at. it's just having a good.. I don't want to say story, but it's a good memory. It's things where you can share with your children, and your parents, and grandchildren. I have awards that with my picture on it and I'm proud of those. You know, I'm a big bowler. I've been bowling since I was eight years old. I've had perfect games. I've had championships. I've won a lot of money and scholarships in bowling. But, I compare it to the video gaming, I have awards from video gaming. I have world records. And it's just the satisfaction of getting accepted in something like that.. you know, it's really thrilling to have people talk about you and look up to you when it comes to the doing stuff like games or, being part of a community where you can say it's a positive thing, never got into trouble with drugs or alcohol or stuff like that. I could honestly say that I'm proud to be a part of that. I don't wanna go down the negative path. I like to stay positive and this is what I do, just stay positive.

JH: When you talk about like drugs and alcohol, and things like that, those are negative things. But gaming, I see being fun and laughing, and memorable based on the things you have said already.

TF: Yeah! And it can be. Like I said, if you're competitive like that, and I'm not at that level. But there are people that are competitive. They drink, sleep, video gaming. And it's their life. They take it seriously. There's stress involved. There's lack of sleep. There's pressure. Like I said, like any sport, baseball, football, soccer, anything, if you're gonna be competitive, you have to.. you know there's gonna be ups and downs. It can be fun, and it is fun. But if you want to be successful, you have to deal with the pressure.

JH: When you found a game that you really liked, did you ever experience lack of sleep or stress from it?

TF: You know I'm the opposite. And I say this to my wife that, is "if I am stressed, I play games to calm me down." It's more like a stress reliever. Instead of people who go out and smoke a cigarette or drink alcohol, I play a game to calm me down. So for me, it relieves my stress. It doesn't increase it. And I think that's a good thing. Like I said, there's a lot worse things that I could do when I'm stressed out, I don't have any problem with having a busy day at work or a stressful time with family or friends, just sitting down and escaping with my game.

JH: Was there anytime that you worked in the game industry full-time? If so, what did you do?

TF: Not full-time. I mean it wasn't my job. I've never been paid to do anything video game related. I would love to. My dream job after high school I took programming classes, was to design video game characters, like animated on a computer. And it just didn't go that way. My life went in a different direction. So, I'm here today with what I do with my IT career, but if I could, that would be my dream job is to work at like an electronic arts, or some sort of studio that I would design games. That would be my passion.

JH: What kind of games would you develop/design?

TF: I'm on board with Nintendo. I'm more of kid-friendly game. I'm more of a guy who.. you can play with your family. You can sit down and play a game. And it's not hard or easy for any age. You can just sit down and enjoy it, and have a great experience with your family. So that would be my kind of gaming. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with shooting games, or fighting games, or sports games. But I think the family game is really are where the of money's at. And I think it's where the most popular creativity comes from in the world today. I think Nintendo has it right with the *Wii*, the *Wii uPad*. I think play for players at once with the family having different like, games you can play on there, activities. I think it's right where I wanna be if I was in the industry.

JH: Like a Miyamoto?

TF: Yes. (laugh) That's one guy I'd love to meet. I'm close. I know I could meet him one day if I really tried. He's a genius. He's come up with some classic games. He's made a lot of money over it.

JH: How do you allocate time for your love for gaming and your full-time cooperated career?

TF: (Cough) Yeah that's a tough one.

JH: I guess it probably depends on when..

[00:39:48]

TF: Yeah, it depends. I try to balance it. I feel like in my life I need to balance that. If I don't, I'll go like I said, stress level will be really high. So, I kind of do my job. I go to work. I focus on work. But when I come home, I kind of just decompress and play games, play with my kids, play games with my kids. So I kind of separate the two.

JH: Well you also mentioned that you had a birthday party as well.

TF: [laughs] I did.

JH: And how did that go?

TF: (Cough) Excuse my cough. My 40th birthday was last October. And I knew that it had to be video game related. I knew that that's what was in my life besides my family. So, it was a no brainer that I

would rent out the clubhouse. Decorate all the walls with my posters, with my figures, and set up all my TVs. We had about 20 systems setup, from Atari up to the *PlayStation*. And my wife made me a cake, it was an outline of *Super Mario* with cupcakes. So the cupcakes were black, red, white. But it was *Super Mario*. It's a cool picture. So that was really neat. And then I have my trading cards that I have that I'll show you later. We gave out like a chocolate *Wii* remotes. And on the *Wii* remotes were my little video game cards attached to those like party favors when people left. So, it was classic. It was I had all my friends from the 80s that I used to play the games with. They were there with their wives and children, and we played some games, just had a great time. It was a great memory. And it was exactly what was in my life at the time. It was a perfect birthday. I will always remember it.

JH: So, getting back to competitions. Now this is where you organized competitions. I also think you organize, I think I heard you say, that you organize conventions. Can you tell us a little bit about that as well?

TF: Like I said before, I saw this on the Internet. I saw a convention that was in 2007 in Lombard. And I wanted to get involved. And I dove in right away. They wanted me to help organize it, market it, bring people in. So I got involved and started off small. I think we had about 40 or 50 people that came. And now we're up to, I think we had almost 300 people that came last July. So basically it's open to everybody. We got arcade, arcade vendors, pinball, console players, computer, PC players. And we sent out the invitation. We charge a small fee for vendors to bring their stuff, to display their stuff to sell. And then we have competitors who come in and we run tournaments. We have trophies. We don't really typically do competitive gaming for money. But we give out awards. We give out t-shirts. We give out cool..what you call, like trinkets or kind of like-

JH: Swagbag items?

TF: Swag items!

JH: That's the question I was going to ask you.

TF: We are the king of swag for our video games. We have so much stuff that we give out. And it's cool stuff, very cool stuff. We do raffles. When people buy and entry to our convention, we enter them into a raffle. And they get great, great prizes just for showing up. So, we try to make everyone happy and have a great experience when they leave.

JH: What are some of those swag items?

TF: We have t-shirts, figurines, keychains, lanyards. We had games. We give out games. We gave out a signed *Atari 2600* game from someone who designed it. We have world record holders show up. And people have signed different items from that game, whether it's a manual or it's a system that they signed. It varies. We have had some cool items from people. A lot of the vendors donate items for those raffles too. They've given us some cool things.

JH: What is the life cycle of a competition? Like some competitions have regional competitions and lead up to a final competition. Is this every year? I mean, what is the life cycle like?

TF: Oh, there's competitions, if you look hard enough, there's competitions every month. And they're all over the place. I typically look in the midwest cause that's where I live honestly, traveling it can be expensive if you take a plane. I try to drive to these different places. But there's tournaments

everywhere, Mexico, Japan, China, Canada. And if you're competitive, you'll be there. You'll find a way to get there. There's a lot of tournaments, the most recent arcade tournament was the *King of, the Kong Off* it's called. And it had the ten best world record holders of *Donkey Kong*, the arcade. That was held in New Jersey. That one I could not attend but I knew a lot of the people who entered that tournament. That was a big draw. People from all over, I think a guy flew from England to be in that competition. That's a little arcade in New Jersey is bringing people from England. I think that's cool. I think that's amazing. So yeah, it could be all over. The life span, I mean, once a tournament is over you're onto the next one, there's not really.. I mean there's tournaments that go on for a couple of days where you start with qualifying. You get to the play-offs or the finals, semi-finals. Then they have yearly, I think there's yearly team tournaments for like the online shooting games where you have to qualify, then you travel to another city to get to the next qualifying round and those can go on for months, maybe two, three months.

JH: The different types of competitions and conventions that you host, do you want to say what their names are, and about what time that they actually happen throughout the year?

TF: Yeah. The one I personally run is called the "Video Game Summit". We have a website I can give you. It's kind of a long website I can't give you the whole url, but it's basically run in July every year. We do it for one day from probably 8 in the morning to about 6 at night. It's all ages. Ages 12 or under are free. And then the entry fee for adults or older than 12 it's about 10 bucks or 15 bucks. I think we did 15 last event. So it's not a huge entry fee but it's a lot of fun. Some of the other big ones though are Brookfield, Wisconsin, is the midwest gaming classic. That one's probably the biggest in the midwest, from Thursday to Sunday. That's pinball arcades and consoles and tournaments and vendors. And they bring in about, I know the guy who runs it, Dan. He probably brings about four to five thousand people for that weekend. People stay over night, they come from all over the United States. It's one of the biggest ones. There's a lot of different arcades like Doc owns Galloping Ghosts. He does tournaments probably once a month. You can set world records at his arcade. There's a gentleman, Pat, I think I mentioned to your teacher, at Star World's on Dekalb. He's got a small arcade there where he runs tournaments probably every weekend, I think he runs a tournament. If you look hard enough online, there's a lot of places you can enter tournaments. But the one I personally run and the one I've been from start to finish, is the "Video Game Summit".

JH: I've read somewhere that there are competitions, sometimes they bring their own equipment. They don't want to use the equipment that is provided. What does that look like? I mean.

TF: It's funny. I went to one recently. It's by the airport, kind of Midway Airport area. And there was a fighting game tournament, and everyone had their own joystick. They have.. it's almost like musicians walking with their guitar or their like trumpet or something. They had their joystick in their hand. And everyone had their own design, had their sponsors on the joysticks. And it was cool and I think that's neat cause that kind of, it doesn't label them but it symbolizes who they are based on their joystick. And when they sit down, they know how the joystick plays and it's pretty neat. There's certain games like the Xbox systems have certain specialty designed controllers. And I've seen people who have the

controllers designed just for them. And I'm not a big fan of personalizing that stuff but if you can do it, I say go for it cause it says who you are.

JH: Are there any restrictions on bringing your own equipment to the competition?

TF: No, I think it is fair game. I think the only rules basically for competition, is you know, are set in the game like the time limit. The, the lives on certain games that you can have and, kind of the players you can use are set within the game not the joystick.

JH: I know most people play video games for the love of video games and the appreciation but does it ever get so competitive that cheating takes place and if so, how does cheating take place what does that look like?

[00:49:46]

TF: Well, I could tell you first hand that I know people in the industry that have done that have cheated and I won't mention obviously names but, they've gotten a lot of flack from it, there's an online community nowadays with Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, a lot of things where you can instantly, contact these people and I'm I'm part of a lot of those communities where there's a lot of negativity. And I try to stay away from it, and I read it, I listen to it, but I don't get involved. And yeah, there are people who cheat, and there are people who submit scores, that aren't true, and there are people who, you know submit video tapes and edit the tapes to make it look like they scored higher.

TF: And I read about it and I listen, but I stay neutral, and I, I'm friends with a lot of those people and I go to different events where they talk about those people negatively, you know negatively, and I go to a different event with that person and they talk negative, but I don't spread it.

JH: But when you, when you're at an actual competition.

TF: If I see it .

JH: Yeah.

TF: Yeah it's brought up, yeah, it, it, it's not, it's frowned upon, I mean we would kick them out and we would disqualify them. It's not something that we, it's like any sport, if you cheat you you're not allowed to play. You can't, it's not, it's not fun if you cheat, it's it's it's not it's not what we are there for, we're there to have fun, but, if you cheat you're not, you're not part of the group, in my opinion.

JH: So you had brought up that you're also, that you also play, you also bowl,

TF: Yes.

JH: Right, and there's an etiquette coming to bowling, right, I, I don't bowl a lot, but I

TF: Yeah.

JH: As, as, as someone who does go to bowl, not competitively, I know that there's an etiquette that when someone's next to me on the other lane, that I wait until to their, they throw the ball.

TF: Oh yeah.

JH: Right, so what is etiquette look like in gaming.

TF: Well, you know again that all depends on the game. but a lot of the etiquette is you know positivity you know not name calling foul language that's frowned upon you know there's, there's times where there's competitions going on there's lots of people next to you, it's really crowded, you know, you want to stay to your space, there's you know people pushing, there's shovin, there's standing in front of

the monitor, the arcade, *pinball* machine, and you just gotta, it's it's it's it's like bowling, it's just natural etiquette that you gotta you know what is good for you and what's not you know you gotta stay, stay within your own your own game and if someone happens to do something that you don't like you have to just report them not to argue back or push them and stuff like that.

JH: You had mentioned, like the individuals that come in with their own joystick and they've got sponsors.

Todd Friedman Son [TFS]: Sorry

JH: What are the typical levels of sponsorship in gaming and what types of sponsors are they?

TF: Oh, boy, I mean I have a I have a brother in law, he works in the headphone business, the headphones are really popular now, the cordless headphones for video gaming and he, he works for a company called SteelSeries where he makes headphones and a lot of these competitive gaming, gamers have headphones where their shirts have this name SteelSeries on, they have sponsors on the shirts. They have sponsors on the on the joysticks on on their gloves, some people use gloves cause it hurts your hands if you play for a long time so they have personalized gloves with the sponsors on them. It is almost like Nascar like you see the cars with all the sponsors, gamers have that on their shirts and on all their equipment.

JH: What are the typical prizes and what levels receive prizes?

TF: um [affirmation]

JH: We talked a little bit about this but what about some of the competitions that you have been posting what are some of the typical prizes?

TF: Well like, you know. like, I.. my personal ones I give out like trophies and like reset swags items that they can have and keep forever. Typically prize funds for competitive gaming can go almost up to like the biggest prize fund tournament gaming today is I think \$500 grand for a team tournament for a for the shooting games, if you win that your team, you could win up to \$500 grand. I mean it's, it's big. I'm not quite at that level to be you know in that or to host something like that but I've seen it and it's incredible, it's it's like I said, it's competitive, it's it's serious stuff. But I like I'm a big believer on like trophies, like my son you know he gets trophies and I like I like giving out trophies for games and my events.

JH: So, you had mentioned that you, the competition that you run you grew the participation. How do you market to people? How do you keep your same base of people that come every year and then increase that base? of competitors?

TF: Just by word of mouth, and now social media. I mean, like you can just post something on there and it can go to thousands of people. I use like different medias like Craigslist or I use like, like Facebook or or Twitter or something like that, and I just, I kind of spread the word, and I've known so many different people in the industry that I have a big base of people throughout you know that can spread the word as well so it's just like a domino effect. You can just tell a few people, who will tell a few people, tell a few people.

JH: One of the interests that I have and we will be discussing this in our class in the next few weeks, is gaming as a sport, really being considered as a sport.

TF: Yeah

JH: Physically, intense, you know, the intensity, the hand eye movement all of that kind of stuff. What do you think about esports being compared to like physical football or basketball or volleyball?

TF: I, you know, I I'm gonna to go back to bowling on this cause there's a lot of people in the world that consider bowling not a sport. People think football, baseball or golf, basketball, you have to break a sweat you gotta do this you know but I always grew up knowing that bowling is a sport, it, it takes a mental focus, it takes you know, there's competition, you gotta beat the other person, and and I believe in video gaming is the same way. Yeah, you might not be, you not be breaking a sweat, or you you might not be, you know running or getting exercise but it's, it's your mental hand eye coordination and your focus it's just as serious as golf, baseball, or the other sports, bowling that I've played, and I, I, I kind of frown upon people who don't think video gaming competitively is a sport. It it, you have to be really good and talented, you have to practice, you have to spend a lot of time on it to be good at it. Just like anything, there's, there's a ton of sports on TV that you would never consider a sport, but, it's it's you're using your body, your mind, your, you know, your, your practice that you use, and, and playing against someone, that to me that's a sport.

JH: I also picture you earlier in a conversation you talked about being almost on top of the TV so that

TF: Yeah

JH: Being part of the sport

TF: Yeah, yeah, you're, you're, it, it's kind of, you know you hear it a lot but you're in the game, you're, it, when you're in a zone and you're competitive on a game, nothing around you like matters, you're in the game. and that's, that's how most sports are. You know, when you're golfing and there's two, three hundred people around the green, you know, you have to focus on the green, not the people. Same with gaming, you gotta focus on what you're doing not the people.

JH: That's interesting that you brought that up because when I think about golf, it's supposed to be quiet, right?

TF: Yeah.

JH: But gaming it always seems like it's loud. The fans behind you, and the people watching the game are kinda in the game, they'll go, you missed, or like, yes, keep going.

TF: Yeah, no, it's, it's the same with gaming. If you go to a competitive gaming convention, there's huge crowds, there's huge people cheering and, and, and getting involved with the person up there on the stage competing against someone. It's, it's amazing. It's, it's fun to watch. And I like meeting the people and I like seeing the different cultures, that's another thing about gaming, that, I've met people from all over the world. And it's not many places that I lived and in the north suburbs of Chicago you don't meet a lot of people, with your everyday life, but when you go to these conventions there's so many different cultures and people I meet. It's, it's awesome to hear the history of the different.

JH: We know you've played the games

TF: Yeah

JH: We know you throw conventions on, but how are you as, how, what is, the experience that you feel when you're watching someone else play the game?

TF: I, I'm more of, and I don't think I mentioned this either, I, I enjoy more watching

JH: Spectating.

TF: Spectating, because, I, I, I get a thrill watching someone win or someone like, trying their best and getting a score and beating it. I, I love watching it. I can watch that all day. I could sit all day long and watch someone try to, like, to compete with someone online, or on, like on a game, and that's why I like, that's why I love doing the Video Games Summit, because I love setting up all my systems and all my games and hosting tournaments so I can watch them enjoy it. That's why I did my birthday party, it wasn't really about me, it was about, the people coming and enjoying the old games and competing against each other, and being excited that they won, and, that's, that's a thrill for me. I, I enjoy that more than, being in the tournament. I think sometimes in the tournament there's so much stress and tension and, and, and seriousness that you lose the fun of it, you lose the feel.

[01:00:03]

JH: I saw an ESPN, when I was flipping through the stations and I found a very, interesting to see esports taking this turn. It was the Varsity Challenge with college students.

TF: mmm [affirmation]

JH: What? Do you know anything about that? About actual e-sports in colleges and where that might go?

TF: You know, I don't much about that part of it but I do know that you know we talked about Walter Day, who, founded *Twin Galaxies*, *Twin Galaxies*, and Walter Day are going to esports, segway. They're moving to that, that's like the new generation of, of gaming, is the esports, so that's, it, it, it's definitely gonna be the new norm of video gaming. And I've heard that term so many times lately, is esports that you know it's it's something that I'm, I'm learning more and more everyday about it. And, JH: Well, the, the first team that won, the, the team that placed number one, had thirty thousand dollars, I think, apiece in scholarship. Which I thought was interesting because when you go back and compare it to the physical sports, that everybody agrees, in the norm, that these are physical sports, these are real sports, but not so sure about esports being a real sports. When you sign on to a college team to be a basketball player you play that whole semester, that

TF: Right, right.

JH: Whole year for your scholarship, and here it's, you win this tournament, and you win thirty thousand dollars for a scholarship

TF: Right, right.

JH: What, what are your thoughts about that?

TF: You know, I, I guess I'm used to that, like, when I bowled, you know, most of the tournaments that I bowled in, were for scholarship money, so it was like one tournament, and you win scholarship money. I, I don't know, I, I think in my opinion, college students who can get scholarships in anyway, is a positive thing. I, I'm not opposed to, if it's one day or if it's a whole year, or if, if it's them working for it, or if they, you know they compete and they get it, with college scholar, you know, with college tuition now-a-days if they can get as much scholarship as they can, I'm, I'm all for it.

JH: What was one of the main challenges that you came across while planning a convention or a competition?

TF: Oh, [laughs] very recent, the last one I did in July, we, the hardest part, well, when, when you plan a convention you, you gotta reserve the, the space, that's the hardest part, is to find enough space. And when you get the space then the, then it's how do you fit everyone in there, how do you get it to where it's comfortable. And, just faced the challenge last July where we had so many people and so many vendors, that we, we, we filled it up, to where, it, it was very difficult, at last minute we had to make some changes to make everyone fit. We gotta, we actually we're talking now about finding a bigger place next year, so, my biggest challenge for stuff like that is, is, is getting enough setup so it's comfortable for everybody. Finding the the room is easy, but to, to setup the tables, the monitors, the, the arcades, the, the, even the elect, you know the electrical stuff, getting that where, you, people don't trip over the cords and, or people don't you know, unplug something while you're in the middle of the game and the plug comes out, that's the worse, and I've known, I know so many stories where people have played games, the newest thing now is marathon gaming, where you play one game for as long as you can, without turning it off. And, and I know people playing fifty, sixty, even up to eighty hours without stopping. And to, to hear stories where they're up to like thirty, forty hours and the plug comes out or that's just hard, so that's a huge, like, you don't, that's like the biggest night, you know, no, no, is if you don't have everything setup right, and that turns off.

JH: Are they allowed to pause the game? to take a drink or something?

TF: No, You can't pause, there's certain games where you can get a lot of lives, where you have so many lives, where you can actually maybe go to the washroom or get a drink and you can, you can die a few times, but you can't pause, that's, that, that will, that takes away the marathon. There's no pausing. And a lot of these arcade games, you can't pause an arcade games, there's no pause button. So, you gotta let it go. I was just at a guy's house, August, in Iowa, where he, he's the first person to get a billion points on an arcade game and he's still got the original game in his house, and he played, I think I watched a lot of it, I tried to stay up and stay up with him to be supportive, but he played for, I think forty-two hours straight, and he, he did it online on streaming online, you could watch him, so I'd sleep for a few hours, and, "hey he's still playing", it's, and so it's, it's kind of cool. He's got a documentary out, coming out the end of this month, which I'm looking forward to, cause he's, he's, he's a competitive gamer.

JH: Gaming has a community, and it also has a culture, and depending on where you are, in the world, it probably has a different type of culture, what does the Chicago culture, look like compared to the rest of the country, whether it be competitions, or just gaming,

TF: Yeah, it's, it's big it's I wouldn't say it's the biggest, but, it it's big, a, a lot of, I think the biggest area, probably in the States is, is with the Wisconsin Chicago area, probably the north, like, with the Kenosha, Racine, Brookfield area, and then, in the like, north suburbs, with the Chicagoland area, but but it's getting bigger, like like there's arcades now opening, like I said in Brookfield, there's there's a restaurant in Schaumburg in the Woodfield Mall that's just opened up and it's it's designed around *Pac-Man* and I, and I think your teacher is actually interviewing the owner, who's a Vice President of Namco, and he opened up a restaurant where there's there's bowling in there, there's *Pac-Man*, there's arcades, there's tables, when you sit down to eat have the games built into the tables where you can

play, so, it's it's getting even bigger. And so I would think, probably, the number one place to go to conventions and, and, and tournaments or like kind of in the California area. I haven't been to any of those, it's just, you know, the traveling is hard, but, I see a lot online of the, of the big competitions, in like California, but Chicago is right behind it, if you, if you, want to enter a tournament or, or be in some sort of competitive gaming, there's, and you've got McCormick Place, you got O'Hare, there's a huge, you know the banquet halls in O'Hare Airport are big, and then you got, you know the suburbs, where there, where we would reserve different hotels and banquet halls, so, I think we're, we're in like the top three or four, of, in the United States for, for, areas, for competitive gaming.

JH: What do you see as the future for the gaming industry overall, in comparison to the future of gaming industry in Chicago?

TF: I think we'll keep, I think Chicago's gonna it is going to keep up, I, I think, because of the population that it grows everyday in Chicago, I think, that, you know, the more people that live here the more, events you gonna see, the more gaming you're gonna see, I, I think, I see, you know world wide I think gaming is just gonna be even bigger. I think, you know already it's, it's, it's bigger than music, it's bigger than movies, it makes more money than probably both of those combined, I think with the technology and the kids growing up nowadays with iPhones and all that, I think them, going to school and, and knowing this technology and, and designing these games it's just gonna be insane. I'm curious how my son, you know, is my age, what what gaming is going to be like. I, I can't even fathom. I think as everything is going to be, it's going to be virtual, I think people are going to start going into the virtual worlds, which in my opinion is scary, if you want to ask me, tell me, ask me the truth but, it's, it's not going to be TVs anymore I think in the next ten years, I think everything is going to be virtual. I think you're going to have the game in front of you. I think you're gonna, you know, go into this new world, and we'll see, we'll see how, what happens, but I'm kind of proud that I'm, I've been part of the like the kind of the start of it all. And, and, and that's why my collection is so important to me because I can keep the the memories of of the old days and the new days together, and, and be able to talk about it and share it with my kids.

JH: This question I like to, how do you see yourself fitting into the future of gaming industry?

TF: Oh, I, I think I'll be doing a lot more actually, I, I think, I think, I would love to do more, and, and if I work hard at it I will, I just want to be more involved in, like I said, I want to do two or three more conventions rather than once a year. I want to host and be a part of as many as I can in the time, in a year. I want to travel more. I want to go to more places like California, or different parts of the country, even out of the United States, and spend my knowledge and my you know and my collections and my talent to other people. I do see myself doing that. I think when my kids get older and they're more sufficient on their own, and, and they're in their teens and I can travel more. I, I will be doing that because it's part of my life and I don't want it to really fade away.

[01:10:00]

JH: You mentioned that you go to different arcades. How often do you go to those arcades?

TF: I, shh, I try to go, I don't go as much as I used to. But if I go to any restaurant or any place that has an arcade game, I will play it [laughs]. I, I, I can't stay away from it. I, I go to probably the Galloping

Ghost Arcade, maybe, once, probably every other month or so, I go up there just to see what's going on or play a game, and stuff, like I bring my son there. When my son went to Northern in Dekalb, that arcade, Star Worlds was right there. I was going there like twice a month, three times a month. And then, we used to hold a lot of, conventions at his arcade, a couple of years ago. I was going quite a bit. It's, it's tapered off a little recently, but, you know I'd like to change that. I'd like to go to more.

JH: Do you have a favorite arcade?

TF: It's hard to say now-a-days, there's not that many. Like those are the two main ones, that are, you know in this area. You know I, I'd have to say that, you know, I, I know both people at both arcades that I've been to and, and I think they're both are different in both ways, like, Doc's arcade, he's, you know, he set a world record for most games in the single arcade he's got. He's got like over four hundred, I think, arcade games. And, you know that's, if you're into that, that's huge. Now Pat's, you know, arcade in Dekalb, is a lot smaller, but it's it's more of a community, and you can be with people, you know, because it's not so huge, and everyone's just spread out, you can be together and it is more of a community, so I like that part of it too. So I don't have a favorite, but those are the two that, that I go to the most. There's one, there's, the arcade in, in New Jersey, just closed recently. The owner closed it. And that one was the one I would have wanted to go to, before he closed it. That would have been my favorite. [laughs] But he closed it. But that's where the polymorphs, that's where all the different games from, he, he redesigned all the games from the seventies to today in arcades. He had, he's just amazing. He can take a, cabinet from scratch, and repaint it, re-decal it, fix it up, and make it look brand new from the seventies, and, I wish I could have made it to there before he closed it, but

JH: If you, were to become an owner of an arcade

TF: um [affirmation]

JH: what would that arcade look like and what would be the experience?

TF: That would, that's a, that would be awesome. In fact, my, if I had a dream, if it could come true, that would be a dream of mine, is to see, I would like to open up like a restaurant arcade, where which, which he's done actually in Schaumburg it's more of a *Pac-Man* themed, but I'd like to do more of everything, from the history, and it would be involved you know just having a restaurant and like a bar, but half of it showing the history of gaming, so having the games from the seventies, eighties, nineties, you know, two thousands to today and, and seeing you know sharing the history of people, plus I'd love to open up, my goal, in I don't know when it will be, hopefully soon, is to open up a museum to display and have all this stuff that I've been collecting, and be able to show people and have people talk about it and, and, and just like that where it's open everyday, where people can come in and see this. That would be my ultimate goal, is to have like a museum. They tried to do it in Iowa, back in two thousand ten and it just didn't, it, it didn't go over well. I, I wasn't able to help out with it. I live here and the people trying to run it there it didn't work, so I've talked to them and I've gotten ideas and I've gotten, advice and that would be my, my goal, is, I would hope at the next five years, is open up a museum where I can display all this, and have people donate stuff to the museum, as well, you know.

JH: Is there a museum for gaming that you've gone to that you were really,

TF: There's one in Saint Louis, there's an archive, I think there is a museum archive. I haven't been to it, but I have read about it, and I've, I've talked to people who've been there. But it's very small. It's more of, it's not really designed, it's more of a technology museum, not really video gaming, so they have phones, and they have TVs, old TVs, and they have old stuff with technology and the video game section is kind of small. I'd love to just focus the whole museum on video gaming. And, arcades and pinball and stuff like that, so, you know I've never been to one that I don't even think there is one just solely on video games. At least not that I know of. They have, you know they have different like, conventions and stuff where once a year they all display their old stuff, but then they take it done and bring it home. I want something that you know, stay there. Have people any day they wanted to, to come in and see it.

JH: You had mentioned that there was an arcade that closed and the gentleman that owned that arcade was able to redesign and re-machine those cabinets, are you able to do any of that on arcade games?

TF: No, what, but I, no, I wish I could. What I can do is the console stuff. I can fix and, and take apart the old consoles, the games, and, make them work again. And, that's my passion, the more of the console area, where, I, I can find an old system that's been in someone's basement for twenty years and it doesn't work, and I can fix it and make it work. I've gotten old games that are kind of broken and I've repaired them and fixed them, arcade's a whole different ballgame, I'd love to, in fact, I tried once, I bought an old cabinet and I put it in my garage here, and all I needed to buy was the board and get the decals and stuff and then I'd, it was a lot of work, I don't know if I can do it. [laughs] And so I, I just stuck with the consoles and everything else, and plus, for me, I don't have the space for arcades, this gentleman who had the arcade, had forty to fifty games in his house. He had enough space and then he opened up next door his arcade which is attached to the house. So, it was convenient for him. I just don't have the space. And, I'd love to, but, I just don't have that kind of time.

JH: We talked earlier, in the very beginning of the conversation, about the evolution of consoles,

TF: yeah

JH: Were there any milestones of those games? In the evolution that stand out to you?

TF: The one that stands out for me is the Sega DreamCast. That came out in ninety-nine. It was, it, it kind of went from, you know there's bins it went through the cartridge games, to the CD-ROM games and the DreamCast, it was way ahead of its time, because, now CD-ROM games are it's nothing, that's what they do. But in ninety-nine, that was, it was really high end stuff, and the gaming just took it in new, it just jumped to a new level. The graphics, the sound, the, the, the gameplay. And, I remember getting it as, that was another system I stood in line for and got it opening day. It came out nine, nine, of ninety-nine, September ninth of ninety-nine. It was just the coolest date to come out. The marketing was genius with the date and, that's the one that stands out for me that kind of turned around the technology, and, in fact, one of the books that I have over there too is the, the *Rise and Fall of Sega*, and, and one of the rises, was the DreamCast. And then right after that was when Sega fell and sold to Nintendo and the rest is history, but, the DreamCast was one of the, the pioneers, I

think, in the eighties was the Nintendo, obviously, the, the Nintendo Entertainment System, but in the late nineties was the DreamCast. That's the one that sticks out for me.

JH: I know you play games, you've done competitions.

TF: Yhep

JH: You've been to different arcades.

TF: Um-hum [affirmation]

JH: You, but you also research games and game history. I saw that

TF: A lot

JH: In your collection. Yeah, so, were there sometimes that, that the gaming industry had technology that they didn't release right away, that they might have held onto it for four or five years before they released that technology? And, why, why would they do that?

TF: You know, they didn't really, it's funny, there's not really something that they, they held onto for a long time, but what they did is they came out with kind of things that kind of failed, like for instance, the Virtual Boy, that I have in the garage was the first 3-D video game system. It came out, probably, early nineties, maybe, ninety three, ninety four, and it was one of those, you put on table you have this big thing you put on your head, and you were, and it was 3-D. It was like two colors, it was red and black. And it just failed. It just did not, no one was ready for 3-D. So, they had that technology they kind of put it off to the side, and now you have, you know, the Gameboys in 3-D without glasses. You can watch that Nintendo Gameboy 3-DS without glasses and the screen pops out at you. It's pretty sweet. I'll have to show you when we are done. So they had that technology for so long, they just, the world just wasn't ready for it. And, it was too expensive to do.

[01:19:50]

TF: Another thing that, you know obviously stood out is the CD-ROMs. They had that technology, probably in the eighties, but, it was just too expensive and, it was stuff that, you know, they didn't even have cds for music in the eighties. It was all you know VHS, or, tape cassette. And they didn't have DVD-ROMs. They had VHS and they didn't have Blu-Ray and just the world wasn't ready so that they held out for a long time. Other things, I mean, I think the joysticks like the *Wii*, with the, with the wireless wand, that technology was here, probably fifteen years ago, it's just, it didn't work. It, they were testing, beta testing and beta testing. And then finally when the *Wii* came out, you know whatever, when that came out. But yeah, there's a lot to, there's still today technology that is being built that they could probably come out with, that won't be ready for like ten years. I know there's like, the touch screen games, where, you know, they have the, they have the iPhone games where you can touch with the phone but I mean there will be gaming on TVs where you can just put your finger in the air and play the whole game. And it's going to be awesome.

JH: Many games have been re-released, in your opinion were the re-releases as successful as the original release and why?

TF: No, in my opinion they weren't. It depends on what kind of re-releases you're talking about, like, like the *Legend of Zelda*, for instance, my favorite game, they can, they re-released it on the *Gameboy*, or you can you can even download the original version on the *Wii*, this is not the same as

having the original joystick and cartridge in my opinion. There's games for, I mean like on the Graws right now I have *Pac-Man* they remastered for the *PlayStation* but it's not the same as an arcade, you can't play *Pac-Man* on your TV, it's you have to stand in front of an arcade and play *Pac-Man*. And there's hundreds of examples I would have, but in my opinion it's not better. That's why I'm, fascinated by the consoles, and the old games, like you can, there's things called MAME now-a-days, and ROMs, you can probably act like, almost like three thousand games you could probably download all those games on a ROM, and play 'em on your, you now iPad, but to me that's not the same game experience, so, I'm yeah, I'm not for re, re-remastering games.

JH: Many games have been offered as a series like *Pac-Man*, *Ms Pac-Man*, ect.. What do you feel about a series? Do you like the original games more? or the ones that came after in a series or do the series enhance your love for gaming?

TF: I think, I think the series is a good thing. I think it enhanced my love gaming. I think, you know playing one *Final Fantasy* I think they're on twenty, nineteen or twenty now, I think, [laughs] I think that, that enhances the game play because the storyline continues. The one, the one negative thing that they do, is sometimes they take like *Pac-Man*, and they make like triple *Pac-Man*, or like, *Pac-Man Land*, and it's like well that's not the same, that's kind of pushing the end ball up a little, or like, you know *Super Marios* probably that has changed the most, I think there's thirty something *Mario* games out there, one just came out last week which I got the *Mario Maker* where you can design your own *Mario* games and it's pretty cool. But, besides *Mario*, I think you know, I, I think, you know, changing games up and adding to the storyline is a good thing. You know like, there's, there's games out there, The *Uncharted* games, there's three of 'em. *Four* is coming out in February, I think, it's gonna be a hot seller. I think it's a good thing. Because you keep the story going, the character grows up and goes through different adventures. Sometimes like, you get like the, the *Madden Footballs*, and they come out with one every year. I'm a little against that, I think it's just kind of a money maker thing. It's the same game. Just, new players. I don't know, so, it depends on the game.

JH: When you start a new game, could be back when you first started playing games, or a new game now, does it take a lot for you to learn that game? Do you read up on it before you play it? Do ya, I don't know if they come with instructions, or do you just

TF: No

JH: figure it out as you go along?

TF: You know what's weird is that they don't come with instructions anymore because everything is paperless, like the *Go Green World*, so everything's like online now, so, there aren't really manuals anymore, you just kind of have to plug it in. I never had to do that. I just kind of picked up on them right away. Gaming nowadays, when you put in a game, it kind of walks you through on how to play. So, if you're new at it, you get to know, if you're really good at it and you don't need you could skip it. In the old days, back in when I was a kid, I was just naturally good at it. I, didn't have to read up on it. I would just be really good. I would just play and just be really good at it. I mean, I think, I kind of have gone backwards. I kind of now read the books about the games I played when I was a kid, to see

how I could get better, but not, I didn't do it when I was a kid, so, I think it is fun to go back and read about the games I used to play and see what I missed. You know what I didn't know about.

JH: Can you think of anything that you might have missed?

TF: [laughs] I mean it depends on the game, every game's different. There's a lot like, like, I mean *Pac-Man* I bring it up so I'll talk about it but there's so so many patterns in *Pac-Man*. You think you just go around, but to get a perfect *Pac-Man* score, which there's only a handful of people in the world that have done it. There's a pattern that the ghosts go in every level. And there's two hundred, which is the restaurant, two hundred and fifty seven levels. And every level has a pattern, so, when I grew up I was good at it, but, didn't realize that there was a new level of people who get to level two fifty seven and beat the game. And so now that I read up on it I, I'm trying to get better at it.

JH: What happens at two fifty seven when they actually reach that?

TF: Level two fifty seven, happens there's a split screen and you get *Pac-Man* on this side and then there's just gibberish on the right side, like, the code just, went berzerk and you play and then the game freezes and it is called the kill screen. And then you die. The, the memory of the game doesn't know what to do because you got so far it just your man dies and your game's over. It's the end.

JH: You have more than twenty eight hundred games? Is that what you said? You said you had over two thousand.

TF: I have two thousand eight hundred and forty.

JH: Forty

TF: And I have them inventoried, that's the only reason that I know.

JH: Why's it so important to you to have this collection?

TF: Well, it all started when I got, when I got the new systems, I just had good memories of the old systems and I still had a few games and I wanted to put 'em in and play 'em and I was like wow, I used to have that game and then back in the day you, you used to be able to trade games to like video game stores and get credit and then I traded so many games and now with, with eBay and thrift stores and Craigslist you can, I found a way you can get those games back, so I got a handful like of games I used to play, and, I started playing 'em like, mmm, this is fun I want to play more and then it just got to be, I wouldn't say an obsession but just like kind of a passion to get as many of the old games as I can and I mean here we are I just, I've always collected things like baseball cards, or, coins when I was a kid, or I collected *Garbage Pail Kids*, remember those, and, I was just always a collector but not to this magnitude, and, and I found something that I actually enjoyed collecting and playing. So I just kept it going. My goal, I've always set a goal, like every six months I would say on my forums, I'm gonna have this amount of games by this time, and then I made it a challenge for myself, [laughs], so, it almost became a game for me, like to see if I could get to this point. And, I think like we said before our interview, I don't really go online and pay for everything, like you can go on eBay and buy the complete set of Atari games for five thousand dollars, I don't do that. I get enjoyment out of trading, finding deals, going to conventions and, and getting these games at low prices. It, it, you know I, the newer games are sixty, seventy bucks, which is crazy, I try not to spend on the retro games more than five bucks. If it's more than five bucks, I'll find it somewhere else. So, when you look at my collection you

may think you know I've spent tens, twenties, thirty thousand dollars, I haven't. It's more of just finding a way of getting the games that I want at a reasonable price or a trade. And I, for me, that's, that's the best way to collect. I don't like to just go out and say well I have five thousand games and less week I bought four thousand of them, so, that's what I take passion in my collection is that I actually worked for it. [laughs] I just didn't go online and get 'em all. And, I don't know it's, it's almost a hobby, like, I, I love bowling that's my, my, my passion, my hobby since I was eight years old, but, I can't do it everyday, but I can do this everyday, if I wanted to. I can play a game or I can go to an arcade or a store and get a game. So, that's why I've kept it up.

[01:30:00]

JH: Have you played every game in your collection? And how frequently do you play?

TF: [laughs] I get that question a lot. From my friends and people who know my collection. The only thing I could say to that is I haven't necessarily played them all but I've actually made sure they've worked. So if I get a game from the store or if I've actually got a something from a convention, I'll plug them in and I'll turn them on, maybe play for a few minutes, if they work then I'll put them back. If they're broken and I'll either try to fix it or I'll get a working one, so, at one point everyone of those games has been in, plugged in and played. Not from start to finish but yes, verified that they were.

JH: So, across the different consoles that you have, do you have a game that plays each one of those consoles or at least plays one or two different consoles but it's the same game?

TF: So, your question is do I have *Pac-Man* on like four different consoles?

JH: Yeah

TF: Yeah, I have lots of versions like that. I have like *Donkey Kong*, like, I said a lot of the old games, got remanufactured to play a different systems, so like, the *Pac-Man* and my garage is on the *PlayStation 2* and *Donkey Kong* is on the Nintendo, I have *Donkey Kong* for *Atari 2600*, I have *Donkey Kong* for Intellivision, I have, you know, *Donkey Kong* for the *Xbox*. So I have many games that try to recreate the original but they're not the original. [laughs] But, for me my collection is more of as many games as I can. Like I said before our interview again, I don't have any doubles, my collection is all individual games. So, I have an inventory and spreadsheet of every game I own, so if I go to a convention or I look at my spreadsheet and if I already own it I don't take it. So, my two thousand eight hundred forty games are all single games. Some people have five, six, seven hundred games but they have doubles of every game. In my collection everything is different. Every game you look at is an individual.

JH: And is Nintendo your best console, your favorite console, or?

TF: The Nintendo Entertainment, that's a tough one, I go back and forth cause the *Nintendo Entertainment System* and the *Sega DreamCast* are my two favorites. I think my most memories and my most favorite games are on the *Nintendo Entertainment System*, so if I had to choose I would choose that one, I think the biggest, I think Sega if the *DreamCast* did better and lasted longer it would be my favorite, but it didn't last too long. Nintendo still to this day, [laughs], is popular with the world so I have to go with the Nintendo. I used to be, back when I was really in video gaming in the eighties, and nineties, I was a Sega fan. I was, it was like, team Sega or team Nintendo back in the day. There

wasn't *Xbox* or *PlayStation*, and I was always Sega. I was against Nintendo. I didn't get the Super Nintendo or the you know GameCube or any of that. And then, you know I think what changed for that, I, I think, I think, the *DreamCast*, after the *DreamCast*, there was a few systems after that, that failed, and then I went on Nintendo, [laughs], team Nintendo. But now, you can play *Sonic*, *Sonic* is on the Nintendo game. I think Sega, Nintendo bought Sega, so you can play *Sonic* on Nintendo. There's Sega characters in Nintendo games. It's all merged now. There's no

JH: Did your friends tease you when you went to Nintendo then?

TF: Yeah, when I was on Nintendo and not Sega?

JH: umhumm [affirmation]

TF: Yeah, yeah, they, they say I was like kinda like, tra, I was a traitor. I moved from Nintendo, or Sega, to Nintendo, from Nintendo to Sega, but, you know it's it's it was for the best, I mean, Sega was kind of going down hill and Nintendo was the way to go and now-a-days it doesn't matter. I, I, enjoy anything that people make you know I think now the big guys are Nintendo, you know Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony. I'll play 'em all. I like 'em all.

JH: When gamers are serious about playing they all spend exorbitant amounts of money to have the best equipment, even though the game can be played without this equipment. Are you one of those gamers and if yes, what drives you to purchase the additional equipment?

TF: Well, you know what a good example is, is, the newest fad right now is these portals like *Skylanders* or, the newest things now are these *Amiibos* for the Nintendo, where if you get the game you need the characters to play the game. I have some of those examples, over there on my table, but, I'm not, I'm not a fan of that marketing [laughs] scheme, I'm a fan of collecting the characters and I think they're cool, but, the way that they are kind of marketing kits where you have to buy like seventy of these characters to play the game. Which you don't but they market it on commercials that, you know you need this character to be in this, in this, in this, in this. I get it because they wanna make money, but I'm not a, I'm not a, I'm not a true believer that that's the way to sell video games. You know the *Wii's* different, like, you could play driving games. They have a *Wii Wheel*, you can drive with, you know, I get that, for some games, I don't need it but I think it adds to the realism. I think headphones like I was speaking with earlier, are very important because, with the sound in music now-a-days of games, I think you get the true experience on the headphone. I think if you're gonna buy a *PlayStation* for it nowadays and you want the true experience that you should get a headphone. It's not necessary, but, it doesn't make the game better, but it adds to the realism of it.

JH: We're getting to the end of the interview and it's been fascinating.

TF: I appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

JH: And I so want to make sure that I didn't miss out on something that was important that you wanted to share with us, so, I have two questions for you

TF: Go

JH: How have games influenced your life? and in what way, and how, in the way you live it? How have games influenced your life in the way you live it? and what are some other things that you would like to share with us in this interview that may not have been covered in our questions?

TF: Well I think, video games like, I always put video games in bowling in my life together because without bowling and video games I may have gone in different path in my life. I think, the friends I made in bowling and in video gaming, you know are, are unmatched, I, I, I don't think, I could find better people in the world, today, that I've met through my two hobbies that I've had. I think, video games changed the way that I, hang out with my children, I think it's a safe and fun environment to, to be with your children, and, and have fun times and laugh and have stories and share my memories with them. I think the growing up, you know, being the age that I am, and in the generation where video gaming began I think growing up with the technology is fascinating and has changed my life. Seeing how things have gone from you know big eighty pound tube TVs to two pound flat panel TVs, I'm kind of honored that I am a part of this growth in the world, and glad to share that with my son, and show him the old days on how how that works. You know in terms of, what haven't I covered, there's just, there's just I think we've dealt with a lot of topics, I think, I'm proud to, to be a part of the community that I am, in video gaming. I, I, I think, I don't think it's going to get any, you know, there's going to be no end to it. I don't think. And, I'm hoping one day that you know I could be remembered when I'm old and my grandchildren or great-grandchildren talk about me that they think they had a pretty cool dad, grandpa that got into this stuff, you know, my neighbors and friends who come over think it's kind of cool that Aiden's Dad and Hannah's dad have three thousand video games in their garage and they're pretty, you know it's something for my kids to talk about with their friends, so, I'm glad that it's part of my life and I'm glad I go to share with you and, and I'm hoping that one day ten years from now there could be more to talk about and this this will be will be a good archive what's to come in the future.

JH: Well, thank you very much for your time

TF: I really appreciate you two so much

XR: Thank you so much

TF: for coming here and doing this

JH: and opening your house to us. Showing us the games that you have.

TF: Oh, no problem. I, I'm honored.

XR: One last thing I have to include in the audio recorder is that um today Jodi Houlihan and me, Xi Rao, is doing an interview with Todd Friedman, um

TF: Friedman

XR: Friedman, sorry, Todd Friedman, um, today is September twenty-fifth, two thousand fifteen and it happens in Mr. Friedman's home, um, that's all.

JH: Thank you

TF: Thank you

XR: Thank you

[01:39:44]