

Podcast Name: *ACM ByteCast*

Episode: Margot Seltzer

Welcome to the *ACM ByteCast* podcast, a series from the Association for Computing Machinery! The podcast features conversations with researchers, practitioners, and innovators at the intersection of computing research and practice about their experiences, lessons learned, and visions for the future of computing. In this episode, host Rashmi Mohan interviews guest Margo Seltzer. Margo is the Canada 150 Research Chair in Computer Systems and the Cheriton Family Chair of Computer Science at the University of British Columbia. She was previously a Harvard faculty member, she is the recipient of several prestigious awards, and she is known for her investment in mentorship, contribution to computer systems, and work as an entrepreneur and open source contributor.

The conversation begins with a look at Margot's background and current work. She shares about the privilege and opportunity her upbringing offered, her time studying at Harvard, and the bold (or crazy?) research work she's involved in now at UBC. Margot is committed to pushing past boundaries between traditional areas of research, and to that end, she has fostered intellectual openness and an eye for the right people to collaborate with. She collaborates with other academics, as well as with people in industry, bringing together different fields and specialties to create remarkable projects. Key to her success in this area, she says, is the humility to keep learning and to ask the "stupid questions."

Margot offers thoughts on taking risks and on the value of academic and industry working together, before turning to the Berkeley DB. The Berkeley DB project began during Margot's graduate school years, and has grown to be a dual-licensed business that both generates revenue and functions as an open source project. All along, the project has been about excellent results rather than high profit margins. The project also required a great deal of effort; Margot herself spent evenings pouring into the Berkeley DB, even as she worked in the day toward tenure (and eventually became the second woman to gain tenure at Harvard!).

During this crazy season, and in general as she has functioned as a woman - and a woman growing a family - in the academic space, Margot has greatly appreciated the timely encouraging words of senior colleagues. Her own experience has driven her desire to advocate for institutional support, cultivate empathy, and invest in the junior faculty and students around her. As the conversation wraps up, Margot shares her realization about agency and saying "no" at the right times, her passion for soccer, and what she's excited about in her field.

Key Takeaways:

0:29 - Introduction to this episode and to Margot's background and current work.

8:25 - Rashmi and Margot discuss the topic of collaboration.

15:26 - Conversation shifts to the Berkeley DB.

23:12 - On balancing tasks, growing a family, and the importance of support.

34:31 - "It's all my fault," soccer, and a look to the future!

Links:

Learn more about [Margot Seltzer](#).

Learn more about [Berkeley DB](#) and its [background](#).

Learn more about the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) at [acm.org](#).

Learn more about the ACM ByteCast podcast at [acm.org/bytecast](#).

Tags:

Mentorship, computer systems, entrepreneur, open source, soccer, software systems, research, projects, collaboration, academia, industry, intellectual openness, humility, risk, dual-licensed, self-funded, tenure, inclusivity, institutional support, women, privilege, culture, empathy, agency