

Kenneth Thompson

Born February 4, 1943, New Orleans, Bell Telephone Laboratories developer with Dennis Ritchie of Unix; joint recipient of the 1983 ACM Turing Award.



Education: BS, University of California, Berkeley, 1965; MS, University of California, Berkeley, 1966.

Professional Experience: member, technical staff, Bell Telephone Laboratories, 1966-present.

Honors and Awards: member, National Academy of Engineering; A.M. Turing Award, ACM, 1983.

Thompson started work after his master's degree with Bell Telephone Laboratories. At that time BTL was involved with MIT and General Electric in the development of the Multics operating system through Project MAC, but when it became clear that the system was not going to meet the expectations of the laboratory, Thompson and Dennis Ritchie chose to build their own (lesser) version, which they named Unix as a "take-off" on the Multics name. After several years of development, Unix was made portable through the use of the programming language C that had been developed incidentally by Ritchie. This feature made Unix available on a variety of machines, and the decision by AT&T to make it freely available to academic institutions still furthered its acceptance.

QUOTATION

"I used to be an avid hacker in an electrical sense, building things. And ever since computers, I find it very similar. Computing is an addiction. Electronics is a similar addiction but not as clean. Much dirtier. Things burn out." (Slater 1987, p. 277)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biographical

Slater, Robert, *Portraits in Silicon*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

UPDATES