



Dean Falk

The Leakey Foundation Oral History of Human Origins Research

Interview conducted by
Bernard A. Wood
in 2024



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Interview: May 1, 2024

Dean Falk (00:00):

Yeah.

Bernard Wood (00:04):

So Dean, thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this. Because of my age, it's really difficult to find people that I don't really know in some sense. And although you and I have not really been, we've never done any research together, we've rubbed around the American Association for a long time. I'm not sure I can remember the first time that we came across each other, but I suspect it was one of those meetings. I don't know whether you have a better memory than me.

Dean Falk (00:51):

No, I would guess it also was at a physical meeting.

Bernard Wood (00:55):

Yes. Yeah. So what we do is to ask everybody, if they're still employed, to let us know what their current position is and then just to make sure that we have that correct. So if you could just let us know what your current situation is.

Dean Falk (01:14):

Sure. I'm still employed full-time. I'm a professor of anthropology at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Bernard Wood (01:27):

And I've never been to Tallahassee and I wish I had. So Dean, I used to be a clinician, and the first thing you do is to take a family history. So can you tell us where you grew up and something about your family and whether it was a family that was academic or what. Could you give us some sense of your family background?

Dean Falk (01:52):

Sure. I grew up in Seattle, Washington, in a middle class family. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. So there are three of us. I was the first person since forever to go to college.

Bernard Wood (02:19):

What did your mother do? Was she a stay at home mother or did she work?

Dean Falk (02:23):

My mother was a stay at home mother and my father had a wholesale hobby warehouse, so he was a distributor of hobby supplies.

Bernard Wood (02:37):

Wow, okay. So this must have been as kids... I mean, it's a dream come true that your father has a warehouse full of stuff that you could play with or do something with.

Dean Falk (02:53):

Well, they were kits like to make ships or airplanes or a lot of that, and I didn't actually engage with them that much. I worked from a very early age. From about 10 years old, I worked. I was raised with an extremely strong work ethic and I worked in the warehouse.

Bernard Wood (03:17):

Okay, okay. Well, my parents had a grocery store and I used to fill the shelves in the grocery store.

Dean Falk (03:22):

Exactly.

Bernard Wood (03:24):

So I can't remember being paid for it, but it was certainly expected.

Dean Falk (03:30):

Mm-hmm.

Bernard Wood (03:31):

Okay. So where did you go to high school?

Dean Falk (03:35):

I went to high school in Seattle to Shoreline High School, which doesn't exist anymore.

Bernard Wood (03:44):

Okay. And was that a good experience?

Dean Falk (03:48):

Yes, it was. It was a good experience. I achieved my life's goal at that time, I became a cheerleader.

Bernard Wood (03:56):

Oh, well you are the first cheerleader. Okay. Well, okay. Okay.

Dean Falk (04:06):

I'm the first person to admit to it.

Bernard Wood (04:12):

So were you a good student? I mean, was it obvious that you were going to go to college?

Dean Falk (04:19):

I would say it was. Yeah, I was a good student. I was really interested in what was being taught and I knew I would go to college.

Bernard Wood (04:34):

Okay. But did you know when you were in high school, if you went to college, what your major would be?

Dean Falk (04:41):

I did, but it didn't turn out being my major. I wanted to major in astronomy, but it wasn't available, so I majored in mathematics.

Bernard Wood (04:53):

Okay, there are an interesting number of people who were clearly interested in math and that wasn't me. I was the most un-mathematical soul. So which college did you go to?

Dean Falk (05:16):

I went to several. I started out at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. And then I went to University of Washington in Seattle, not your Washington University. And then I ended up at University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus as it was called then. And I actually managed to get a bachelor's degree at University of Illinois, The Circle.

Bernard Wood (05:45):

So is there a story behind this...

Dean Falk (05:50):

There is.

Bernard Wood (05:52):

Yeah. Is it a story you want to share?

Dean Falk (05:57):

Oh, why not? When I went to Antioch, I met a man who I married and we ended... I went back to Seattle before we married and then we ended up back in Yellow Springs. And then we ended up in Chicago where he went to graduate school. And I at that point had a young child and then we had another young child. And so I decided I wanted to continue my education and so I went to University of Illinois, The Circle. But anyway, it was a man that...

Bernard Wood (06:42):

It was a man.

Dean Falk (06:42):

Had me bouncing around the country to these different...

Bernard Wood (06:45):

Okay. Well you won't be surprised that you are not the first person with that sort of story. And so you've got your bachelor's degree. You've told us that by this time you had two children. And so what did you do next and why did you do what you did?

Dean Falk (07:10):

Well, I had two small children and I got my bachelor's degree in 1970 when I got my divorce, and the children and I then went to graduate school. My two little daughters and I then went to graduate school. So I was a single mom, graduate student. I got my masters in Chicago. So I was there for two years. And then I went up to Michigan to Ann Arbor. The girls and I went up to Michigan. So they bounced around the country with me.

Bernard Wood (07:48):

Okay, okay. And why did you go to Ann Arbor?

Dean Falk (07:56):

Because my mentor, the late, he died a long time ago, Charles A. Reed, he was a zoologist. He really mentored me from the moment I was an undergraduate, pregnant with my second child in his Intro to Biological Anthropology class. And he recognized that I was genuinely interested in the subject matter and he mentored me and he said... When I was about to get my bachelor's, he said, "Well Dean, now you're going to have your bachelor's and your divorce. What are you going to do next?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "I

think you should stay here and get a master's and go over to the medical school and study anatomy." And I said, "Okay."

Dean Falk (08:45):

And so I did that. And then I was about to get the masters two years later and Charles Reed said, "Well Dean, what are you going to do now?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "I think you should go up to Ann Arbor and get a PhD." And so being obedient, I did. So it was his advice and he said, Ann, Arbor is really a great place to study what you're interested in. So go up there.

Bernard Wood (09:12):

And what you were interested in at that time was what?

Dean Falk (09:16):

Brain evolution.

Bernard Wood (09:17):

Really?

Dean Falk (09:17):

Yep.

Bernard Wood (09:18):

Okay, and how did this come about? Maybe with his nudging, but nonetheless, you decided that it was important for you to get an education in anatomy, but how do you get from anatomy to the brain?

Dean Falk (09:35):

I also did neuroanatomy. I did human growth anatomy and I've studied human neuroanatomy. And I was already interested in the brain before I took anatomy. And why, I have no idea. I was interested from the moment I was in college.

Bernard Wood (09:53):

How interesting. Okay. Okay. And so you went to Ann Arbor and you were obviously successful. Why do you think they admitted you?

Dean Falk (10:09):

Because of my grades, my test scores. And also because Charles Reed, I'm sure, wrote a very, very strong recommendation.

Bernard Wood (10:19):

And who was your advisor of Michigan?

Dean Falk (10:23):

Loring Brace.

Bernard Wood (10:29):

I see. I have very fond memories of Loring Brace who always treated me with... He seemed to be interested, or even if he wasn't, he was very good at making it appear as if he was interested. And I just thought he was a gentleman.

Dean Falk (10:54):

He was. He was, and he was an iconoclast and he was kind and I'm sure he was really interested, Bernard. I'm sure he was. He was curious about the world and he was intensely interested in natural sciences.

Bernard Wood (11:15):

But if you were interested in the brain, was he interested in the brain or did he...

Dean Falk (11:22):

Not in particular, but Leonard Radinsky, who's no longer with us, was at University of Chicago. And I had met him when I lived in Chicago and he took a sabbatical in Ann Arbor. And he actually ended up mentoring my interest in brain evolution and my dissertation. He was my step advisor as Warren used to joke about. So L Leonard Radinsky really gave me very good guidance in terms of starting to do paleoneurology. He taught me to make endocasts. He suggested my dissertation topic. He was a great mentor.

Bernard Wood (12:10):

And just give us a two-minute version of Radinsky. What was his background and what was he doing at the time that he met you?

Dean Falk (12:19):

Radinsky was a paleontologist. I believe his PhD was from Yale. He was at University of Chicago. He did paleoneurology. He did endocasts. He died way too young. He died of pancreatic cancer. He might've been about 49.

Bernard Wood (12:39):

Oh my God.

Dean Falk (12:40):

But he was liberal. He would be out there now on the campus today with the students demonstrating. He was kind and he was brilliant. He was just a lovely human being.

Bernard Wood (12:57):

And what was his interest? I mean, was he like the Le Gros Clark, interested in the neurology of...

Dean Falk (13:07):

Vertebrate evolution. Vertebrate evolution. He was a paleontologist. He did endocasts, not a primate so much, although he also did primates, but he did a lot of other animals, sort of like Harry Jerison, in that same vein.

Bernard Wood (13:22):

Okay, and he was much the same generation?

Dean Falk (13:26):

No, Harry was older.

Bernard Wood (13:30):

Okay.

Dean Falk (13:30):

Leonard... No, was younger than Harry.

Bernard Wood (13:34):

Okay. So you decided to do a PhD. It was going to be in paleoneurology. What was the topic of your thesis?

Dean Falk (13:44):

It was endocasts of Old World monkeys, Cercopithecoidia. And I made endocasts. I went to these museums and made endocasts of all genera of cercopithecoids and studied the morphology on the endocasts. And that was my dissertation. It was very descriptive. It was good training. And Len taught me from that how to write and submit a paper.

Bernard Wood (14:16):

Okay. Was he a good writer? I mean, my knowledge of him is largely papers in invertebrate, paleontology, symposia and things of that sort. But he seemed an elegant writer.

Dean Falk (14:35):

He was. He did a nice little book on vertebrate evolution, which was elegant, separate from his scientific papers, which we were very, very good too.

Bernard Wood (14:45):

Right. So when did you get your PhD?

Dean Falk (14:50):

1976. Long, long ago.

Bernard Wood (14:54):

Okay. And who was in your cohort? Who were the other graduate students?

Dean Falk (14:59):

Okay. Tim White. Yes, you laugh. Wait, there's more. Wait till you hear this class. David Frayer.

Bernard Wood (15:14):

Right.

Dean Falk (15:16):

Margaret Schoeninger

Bernard Wood (15:18):

Oh, okay.

Dean Falk (15:19):

Bill Jungers. Ken Weiss. So we might've been a year off, but we were all hanging out together. Ken Weiss, Bill Babler, I don't know if you know him.

Bernard Wood (15:34):

That was a pretty impressive gaggle of people.

Dean Falk (15:39):

Wasn't it? When you look back, my peers, they all went on to do stuff. Yeah.

Bernard Wood (15:49):

So when I see pictures of Bill Jungers in your book, your link with Bill goes back a long way.

Dean Falk (15:58):

Oh yeah. Graduate school.

Bernard Wood (16:00):

Right. Okay. So my understanding is that the two little girls were now a little older. I don't know how long your PhD took.

Dean Falk (16:13):

Four years.

Bernard Wood (16:15):

Okay. Wow, that was pretty damn quick.

Dean Falk (16:18):

I really wanted the degree. I needed to make a living.

Bernard Wood (16:23):

Okay. So what happened after graduate school?

Dean Falk (16:29):

The girls and I moved to Florida where I had a one-year temporary job at Rollins College. And then after that we went up to Southern Illinois University for a year or two. Then we went to Boston University. And then... So I was bouncing around. Why you ask? I don't know, because it was there. I was always looking for, I don't know, something else. And then from BU where they had me teaching five days a week, and I was teaching anatomy

and anthropology, five days a week was too much. So I went down to University of Puerto Rico in San Juan and taught anatomy in the School of Medicine for six years. And the girls then were starting to become teenagers. They were very almost teenagers. And so they became immersed in Spanish as well as English. One actually became bilingual. And then I left Puerto Rico after six years and went to Purdue University briefly, then went to upstate New York to SUNY Albany for 13 years and then came down here to Tallahassee where I've been 20 years or 21 years here.

Bernard Wood (18:03):

Okay. And when did you publish your first paper and what was it?

Dean Falk (18:11):

1975, before I had my doctorate and it was on the larynx. It was on Neanderthal... The argument about could Neanderthals talk.

Bernard Wood (18:23):

Lieberman and Crelin.

Dean Falk (18:25):

Yes, it was an answer to Lieberman and Crelin, criticizing their reconstruction. And it was based on doing some comparative anatomy on the larynx. That was my first paper. Other than... Charles Reed and I presented something, co-presented something in a meeting, but my first publication was the larynx paper.

Bernard Wood (18:51):

And so when did you begin to get interested in the evolution of the early hominin brain as reflected in the morphology, in endocranial morphology?

Dean Falk (19:11):

Well, my dissertation was on Old World monkey endocasts, which I made. And from there I got a small grant, NFF grant, to go to Africa to look at endocasts and natural endocasts there of Old World monkeys. And I already knew I wanted to see those hominids, but I wasn't sure they'd let me. But while I was working on the Old World monkey endocasts, I was back in where all the dusty drawers are, going through the materials, and I found mixed in with the monkeys a fragment of an osteopath's endocast, natural. So I took it to-

Bernard Wood (20:03):

Oh no, this was at the Transvaal Museum.

Dean Falk (20:05):

Yes. So I took it to Elizabeth Vrba and Bob Green. I said, "This is not a monkey. It's too big, the curvature. This is I think an Australopith. May I describe it?" And they said, "Have at it." And I said, "Well, I need to see the others." And that was how I got access. And then they were so kind and then they allowed me to make copies of the australopithecines' endocast, which I did.

Dean Falk (20:39):

And I brought back with me, then that was southern Illinois, and that's when I wrote my first... Did a really thorough of all of the australopithecines endocasts, and wrote my first meaty paper. And what had happened was Len Radinsky had given me a piece of advice as I was setting out for Africa for the first time. He said, "Dean, when you're over there, keep your eyes open in the museum because you're going to find things that are not going to be as you were told they were, as you read they were. And you're going to be surprised." To this day I remember that, because he was so right. Because what I was expecting from the literature from you know who, was that these endocasts, these Australopith endocasts would look human-like, and they did not look human-like to me, they looked very ape-like. And that was an early paper that I wrote, I think in 1980 re-looking at the Australopith endocasts and making the case, these look ape-like these focal patterns look ape-like. They do not look human-like.

Bernard Wood (22:05):

But what strikes me, is the parallel between you and Raymond Dart who went down there and was looking at monkey, baboon endocast and then saw something that obviously wasn't a baboon [inaudible 00:22:25] to realize what it was.

Dean Falk (22:26):

I'm flattered you would think-

Bernard Wood (22:27):

[inaudible 00:22:32].

Dean Falk (22:31):

Well, Raymond Dart to me is one of my heroes, and I've studied him extensively, including the archives with his personal material and this unpublished monograph that still is unpublished. And so I'm very flattered that you would compare me to him. What we did share was a curiosity about the evolution of the brain and cognition in our ancestors. And he had that from early on. Also, he was raised on a farm and he was interested in anatomy and dissecting chickens. And he had his eyes open and somebody brought him a student, brought him this baboon endocast, and he said, "Oh, I wonder what else they have there."

And it's such a wonderful romantic story. His whole discovery of that and what he then endured, how he published it and what he then endured and how he prevailed. I mean, it really is a wonderful story.

Bernard Wood (23:37):

Well, the reason that I've become interested in this, is largely because of the death of Bill Kimbel who had a graduate student called Paige Madison. And I was on her committee, and Paige, thanks to your discovery about the manuscript, she has looked at that and she has researched the origin and what happened when he submitted the manuscript and how it was essentially rejected. So my world is converged on your world, and I know that you were very helpful in commenting on a manuscript that we wrote about the birth of Australopithecus and Dart.

Dean Falk (24:30):

Did you ever go back... One of the things... We corresponded at that point. Did you ever go back to the archives and look at Skepper's materials? Because I think some of Dart's probably migrated... He probably gave Skepper some important materials.

Bernard Wood (24:47):

Material... Yes, I think Paige did.

Dean Falk (24:50):

Yeah.

Bernard Wood (24:56):

So that meant that... And it's interesting that because of your interest in Old World monkeys and because there are many more Old World monkey endocasts available than there are ape endocasts, you were exposed to the variation, the natural variation you see in a population. And you just realized that maybe these things were not as human-like it as Ralph Holloway has suggested. So where does this bring us? I mean in terms of time, where are we now?

Dean Falk (25:43):

Early 1980s.

Bernard Wood (25:45):

Okay.

Dean Falk (25:46):

And on that first paper, Len Radinsky was still alive. And as I said, he taught me how to write a paper. He taught me how you do a legend for a figure, et cetera. And when I showed him the draft of my paper and I showed him the copies of my endocasts, he said, "You're really lucky." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you're right about this." And he said, "But Dean, you cannot ignore Holloway. He's out there. You can't not refer to him." So I refer to him what I thought was in a very gentle way, but that was the beginning of our disagreements.

Bernard Wood (26:29):

Okay, well maybe it's going to be a disappointment to the people who are looking at this interview, but that's not what I want to focus on.

Dean Falk (26:40):

Okay, that's fine. That's fine.

Bernard Wood (26:46):

What interests me, is your involvement with the endocast that you write about in the book, and I also want to ask you about what moved you to write books. In other words, when did you feel that you had something to say, and when did you feel that you were saying it well enough that it could be published as a book?

Dean Falk (27:21):

I'd have to look at my Vita to see when... Brain Dance was my first trade book. And it might've been 1990-ish. And I knew ever since I read, and I can't tell you when I read it, when I read the Naked Ape way back in the way back, I knew that I would like to be able to write something in that vein. So it was always a goal. And I don't know that I ever just one day said, "Oh, now I'm ready to write something."

Bernard Wood (27:55):

Okay, but you needed... I mean, it's one thing to write papers, but it's another thing to write a book like that. You have to write a book proposal, you have to know a publisher or have enough hutzpah to go to an agent. I mean, how did you do it?

Dean Falk (28:17):

You're right. Bill Calvin in Seattle encouraged me to get an agent and to go ahead with it. And so I just started, I didn't know enough to have reservations. It's just, "Okay, now I write a book." And I enjoy the process of trying to say things in a way that people that aren't in the field will understand. I think it's actually harder to do that than to write a paper for a scientific journal where you know the speak, because you have to stop and imagine

somebody who's curious, but they have no background, none of the vocabulary, et cetera. So it's a challenge, but it's fun. It's fun to do that.

Bernard Wood (29:19):

Yes, I think you need to have the emotional intelligence to realize where people are coming from. And there is the quote from Winston Churchill, which may or may not be true, where he said, "I'm sorry, I wrote you a long letter. I didn't have time to write you a short one."

Dean Falk (29:37):

Yeah, that's great. Exactly. Exactly.

Bernard Wood (29:41):

And a book is a really different challenge to try and do this. Do you think it came out of your experience with teaching? Was undergraduate teaching something you enjoyed or endured?

Dean Falk (30:03):

A little of both. I still do undergraduate teaching. In fact, this is the last... This is the end of the semester in two days. And I do enjoy the teaching, but it takes so much time. It's a time sink. And so I'm glad the semester is over and now I can work on what I'm really interested in. And yes, to teach, you use the same thing. You're teaching people who don't have your vocabulary and they'll let you know. If you're too hard, they'll let you know. And then you want to convey the excitement of the subject matter to them, and it's thrilling when you feel like you get through to them and they get excited about it.

Bernard Wood (30:47):

So to go to Fossil Chronicles, when you were thinking about that book, which largely focuses on the endocasts of two early hominins, what was the idea? When did you come up with the idea for that book and how did that emerge?

Dean Falk (31:13):

I don't remember explicitly the answer to that, but I think what it was, was after working on Hobbit and seeing the reaction of fellow academics, the negative reaction and the field in turmoil, I thought, "Oh, this is deja vu all over again. This is what happened with Taung, and it's what happened with Pithecanthropus, with Eugene Dubois. And isn't that interesting? And I've worked on Taung a lot and I've worked on Hobbit's Endocasts a lot. So that was the vehicle, that was the frame. So I'll compare these and the underlying theme is talking about what I call paleo politics. Why is it that the startling new discoveries that are really different than what's been seen before, why they generate this kind of reaction? So it was fun to

think about that. And then I had so much material from my colleagues and my own experience and watching my colleagues that it was fun to write that book.

Bernard Wood (32:34):

What struck me about the reaction to the Hobbit, was that how some individuals who seem to behave almost completely out of character in their response, in other words, individuals who have a long history of very careful publication and that sort of thing, suddenly seemed to have a rush of blood to the head.

Dean Falk (33:09):

Yes.

Bernard Wood (33:11):

I mean, what do you make of that?

Dean Falk (33:14):

Well, maybe we didn't know their true characters before. I mean, I do think they revealed something about themselves with a venomous venom.

Bernard Wood (33:27):

Not naming names, because...

Dean Falk (33:29):

We're not, but I bet we're thinking of the same people.

Bernard Wood (33:36):

Okay, but it does interest me that, especially with the Hobbit and as you were saying, the reaction to Neanderthals and the reaction to Homo erectus, these things have to be some sort of pathological creature. We cannot accept them for what they are. It's somehow more acceptable to interpret them as pathology than to confront the reality that they may be real.

Dean Falk (34:10):

Right. And Mike Morwood when he was alive, observed that there may be an element of academic competitiveness too in this from peers who perhaps were a little envious of the recognition of the discoverers of these. I think it's possible that that enters into it also.

Bernard Wood (34:33):

Okay. Would you have liked to have discovered a famous fossil?

Dean Falk (34:38):

Oh, yes.

Bernard Wood (34:39):

Or did you dodge the bullet?

Dean Falk (34:42):

I would've loved to.

Bernard Wood (34:43):

Okay.

Dean Falk (34:44):

But it didn't happen.

Bernard Wood (34:47):

Okay. Okay. Do you think you would've been able to resist the temptation to... I don't know.

Dean Falk (34:55):

To say, let me complete that sentence, to say, "Look, I discovered the earliest fossil on the line that eventually led to Homo sapiens."

Bernard Wood (35:10):

Okay.

Dean Falk (35:11):

"And forget those other fossils."

Bernard Wood (35:13):

Okay.

Dean Falk (35:15):

"Because this is the one." I do hope that I would have...

Bernard Wood (35:20):

Okay. I think we could have a whole week's discussion about what lies behind that.

Dean Falk (35:27):

Yes. But we're not naming names.

Bernard Wood (35:29):

But we're not naming names. Okay. So how were you mentored and how did that influence your mentoring style?

Dean Falk (35:49):

Well, as I said, Charles Reed took me under his wing. He saw here's this young woman, undergraduate, I probably was about a junior, and she's really interested in this subject matter, but she's totally green. I mean, she just doesn't, and he gave me things to read. He once asked me a genetics question, could I figure out the answer? And I couldn't. And he said, "Okay, you need to take a genetics course." I mean, he did this individual really careful mentoring, and then also set me up to Michigan just like, "Yes, you can go." It would never have crossed my mind. As I said, I'm the first person in my family to go to college. It was to get a PhD. I mean, I knew when I was in high school that I wanted to and would go to college, but to get a PhD, that was something that came... That ambition came much later. And that was thanks to Charles Reed.

Dean Falk (37:00):

And then Len Radinsky also was just a terrific mentor. So I was... Taught me to make endocasts, suggested a project, gave me advice, helped me when things got controversial, counseled me on that. Again, it was individual attention from people that were really, really good in their field. So I was very lucky to have that. Yes, they were both men, because back then there weren't many women around mentoring my generation. So I was very lucky. And I don't have that many students. Where I am, we don't have an active PhD program now. So I remember the advice that I was given, for instance, and I've repeated it to my students where Len said, "When you go to these museums, keep your eyes open because things are going to be different than you see in the literature." And then he said, "And P.S. take lots of photographs of famous scientists." That was the second part of his advice.

Bernard Wood (38:07):

Yes, I read that. That was one of the things I remember from the book. I mean, I think if you are teaching, it really helps to show students pictures of the people who write the papers that you're talking about. So what have you done with all these pictures of the famous scientists?

Dean Falk (38:37):

Actually, I didn't take that many of famous scientists. I did keep my eyes open. Somewhere I have a box in an attic of little slides. Remember those?

Bernard Wood (38:52):

Yes.

Dean Falk (38:52):

That's the state of my pictures from Africa. My favorite picture from Africa, it's not of a scientist, but it's of Trudy Turner and me. We'd gone into the savanna to camp with some people. There were maybe four of us, and Trudy and I put up our own tent, which we'd never done before, and it was totally lopsided. And we have a photograph of the two of us standing in front of it going, "Ta-da."

Bernard Wood (39:31):

So explain how you were in the bush in Africa with Trudy Turner.

Dean Falk (39:39):

I must have met her, I believe probably at the National Museum of Kenya. When I was there doing research, she was there doing research, and it was like, a couple of people said, "Hey, do you want to go on a safari, camera safari?" "Well, yeah."

Bernard Wood (39:57):

Okay. So to go back to your own work, what is the paper that if there was a fire that if you could only rescue one publication, what would that be?

Dean Falk (40:19):

That would be... Of my publications?

Bernard Wood (40:24):

Yeah.

Dean Falk (40:24):

That would be a behavioral and brain science target article I did in the early 2000s on motheries and early hominid evolution and infants and language origins. And I offered something called... I then called Putting the Baby Down hypothesis and argued that motheries itself emerged. It evolved, because no one else does it the way we do. And that bootstraps language acquisition. And I framed that within thinking about bipedalism and

mothers caring infants. That would be the one. And that paper has had a life, and I'm actually still working with that idea and updating it. That would be the paper.

Bernard Wood (41:23):

Something else interests me. One of your interests, which is the brain cooling. Where did that come from? Was that an interest in human physiology, or was that the anatomy that you were teaching and the neuroanatomy that you were teaching?

Dean Falk (41:45):

It must have come from studying hominid skulls and the foramina in the skulls. And also I was very interested in venous blood flow, cranial blood flow through the occipital marginal sinus.

Bernard Wood (42:05):

But if I may suggest, this is a pretty... This is not something that's widely perceived. So was this because you were teaching neuroanatomy and you had to teach about the venous sinuses?

Dean Falk (42:28):

No, it was from looking at endocasts and seeing that all of the *A. afarensis* endocasts that reproduce the area had an enlarged occipital marginal sinus. And so did *Paranthropus*, but not the others, not apes, not gracile *Australopithecines*. And starting to think about why and thinking about... And then reading literature and thinking about selective brain cooling, just reading the literature and putting it together. That's where that came from. And yes, of course, teaching anatomy and neuroanatomy and then seeing studying skulls all fit together. But there was no epiphany at one point. I do not think.

Bernard Wood (43:19):

Okay. And the other thing I would like to ask you about is the collaboration with the people at WashU.

Dean Falk (43:31):

Yeah.

Bernard Wood (43:31):

How did that come about?

Dean Falk (43:34):

I gave a talk there, and I don't remember if it was anthropology or at Mallenkraut Institute of Radiology, and it would've been on monkey endocasts. And Jim Shebert was a

collaborator on that, and we did some genetic stuff. Michael Veneer, who ran a lab there at Mallenkraut, came up to me afterwards and said, "Why are you hand measuring these things? I have equipment in my lab where you could do this so easily if you would like to." And it was like, "Okay." And that's where I met Scooter. Charles Hildebolt worked for him, and Charles and I then started working on digitizing endocasts. We digitized the sulci off of Endocasts. So it was through giving a talk and an invitation.

Bernard Wood (44:32):

Okay. So it was one of these things when... I mean, it's amazing to me how many collaborations come out of an invitation to go and give a talk. You go and give a talk to a department of radiology, and you think, "Why the hell are you going there, Dean?" And did you get a sense that something like this might come out of that, or did you just go because you were asked?

Dean Falk (45:03):

I'm sure I just went because I was asked, as you do. You go if you get a nice invitation somewhere and you know colleagues there. And no, it was serendipitous, but so much of what I've done, totally serendipity has entered into different directions I've veered off into.

Bernard Wood (45:25):

Okay. And you were saying that Charles Hildebolt has sadly recently died. Why did that collaboration work so well? What was it? His personality and your personality, his interest in yours? Why did it work so well?

Dean Falk (45:47):

I think... I've asked myself that recently because he died and he was such a dear friend, so it's really a shock. And I think what it was is... I would go to St. Louis over the years, stay with Charles and his wife, Louise. And then he and I would get up at 5:30 in the morning and grab some coffee and get in the car and cheerfully drive half an hour, 45 minutes into St. Louis, into Mallinckrodt and work all day.

Dean Falk (46:21):

We were both total workaholics and totally into the flow of doing the research. I spoke with him shortly before he died on the phone. As I said, it was quite sudden and we hadn't caught up for a while. And, "How are you doing Scooter?" "Oh," he said, "Fine. I'm retired, but I'm not really. I'm this professor at this school still and this professor." And he said, "And I work all day long on my papers. And Dean, I love it." And I totally get that. I totally get that. So I think there was a real rapport just in terms of our being keenly interested in mutual subject matter. And he was a crackerjack statistician.

Bernard Wood (47:15):

Okay. So he was a pretty quantitative person.

Dean Falk (47:19):

And beyond that, he was very knowledgeable about things medical and radiology in general. But he's a wonderful statistician. Fabulous.

Bernard Wood (47:34):

And to go back to these more general things, what advice would you give a young researcher in terms of... Based off your own experience? I mean, what would you say to somebody if they said, "Well, Dean, you are successful. Tell me one secret of your success." What...

Dean Falk (48:05):

It wouldn't be a secret of my success. It would be something I wish somebody had told me and didn't, which is, I would say, "Remember that doing science is not just an intellectual enterprise, it's also a social enterprise. And that's going to be very important during your career. Be careful. Be careful."

Bernard Wood (48:42):

Okay. Okay. Let me think about how deeply to dive into that. What do you think the role of competition is in science? In other words, healthy competition, presumably, can be constructive, but destructive competition, by definition, is not constructive. How do you think you can avoid that? I mean, how can you keep this light enough that it's constructive?

Dean Falk (49:31):

Which I did not do. What one would do is be aware that science is, I mean, it is competitive. Our field is competitive. There's no doubt about it. Be aware of that and just tread carefully and make your points, but don't get too much into the acrimony of it and be aware it's a social enterprise. And also, I think students don't know, for instance, when they first start going to meetings, maybe in graduate school, that these people you meet at these meetings, you're going to know them in 30 years. They're going to be part of your academic life.

Bernard Wood (50:15):

So what do you do when you're not being excited and writing books and that sort of thing? I mean, do you have... Do you have what the rest of the calls hobbies?

Dean Falk (50:30):

I do. I dance. I work out at a gym. I dance, and that's a hobby. I read a lot for fun. I read novels. I like to, but I have to give myself permission because I do work obsessively, but I like to entertain and cook for friends. So I'll do that. I'll give myself permission to have a dinner party. And that's covers several days because you have to plan it, get the ingredients, prepare it, clean up, etc. But those things are recreation for me.

Bernard Wood (51:15):

And where are the two young girls?

Dean Falk (51:22):

Who are now mature women. They are in the American Midwest, in Kentucky and in Indianapolis. And from those two little girls, I have six grandchildren, some of whom are... Half of them are dual British American citizens. So I have grandchildren in Glasgow and one in Bristol, and then a couple here.

Bernard Wood (51:51):

Okay. Okay. Well, you have as many grandchildren as I do. And the other thing I was going to ask you is that... Something's that's come up in your description of your mentors is the word kind. And it's a word that we don't use very much these days, but you used it in relation to both Charles Reed and Radinsky, I think.

Dean Falk (52:26):

Right.

Bernard Wood (52:29):

Oh, no, I think you used it in relation to Loring Brace.

Dean Falk (52:31):

Yes.

Bernard Wood (52:36):

That was obviously important. And the kindness in a sense encouraged and really empowered you. What was the atmosphere, leaving aside Loring Brace, but the cohort of your graduate student colleagues? There was Tim and there was Bill. I mean, they were both, and one of them still is large personalities. Was that obvious at the time that you were a graduate student?

Dean Falk (53:16):

Oh, yes. Yes, it was. And to all of us, if you ask them, they'd say the same thing I think. I wish Jungers was around to ask.

Bernard Wood (53:26):

Yes, yes, yes.

Dean Falk (53:28):

And Margaret Schoeninger, she would know too. She was there at the same time. So she would...

Bernard Wood (53:38):

Yes, I know. I mean, I did a sabbatical... Margaret invited me to San Diego, and I did a sabbatical there, and I got to know Margaret, and I'm very fond of Margaret, and I know she was there. So that's an interesting... So do you think there was... Do you think being a woman in that sort of environment was a particular challenge, or do you think it was not really of much significance?

Dean Falk (54:14):

At the time I didn't feel that it was of significance because again, my teachers were so kind. No, they were so mentoring and Michigan had great classes. So basically I didn't feel that that was a problem then.

Bernard Wood (54:38):

Okay. And we're getting towards the end, but if you were to go back over your career, is there anything that you wish you had done differently, other choices that you would've made differently, or are you content?

Dean Falk (55:04):

Basic answer is no, because I'm still full throttle into my career and enjoying it. I guess if I could do something differently, I'd go back to high school and take chemistry. Seriously. Seriously. But no, I've been very, I think very lucky. I think both of us who get to be professors and work at universities and make our living interacting with these bright students in college courses and studying the world and get paid for it, I mean, we're extraordinarily lucky. What do you think?

Bernard Wood (55:45):

Oh, I think exactly the same. I mean, I started wanting to be a doctor and a surgeon, and I went into the academic life. I mean, I think we are the most privileged people in the world.

We work in environments, which are reasonably safe. We work with smart people, we interact with smart people. Most colleges are in very congenial places. So I think we're very fortunate. And sometimes I think we don't reflect on that enough, but nonetheless, maybe we should. But no, I agree with you. Are there any points that you would like to raise that we haven't covered in this interview? And I apologize that I decided before we started that there were things I wanted to talk to you about because they are peculiar to you. But are there any things that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you about?

Dean Falk (57:11):

No, I've really enjoyed this conversation and thank you for it. I guess I would add on the last thing you said, that I hope that we continue to enjoy the freedom as academics. In the state I live in, there are some questions about how free we can be and what we talk about in the classroom now, but maybe that will pass, because it is an extraordinary way to make a living, and it would be a shame if it were lessened.

Bernard Wood (57:44):

Yes. Well, I just want to thank you for your openness and for just a very interesting conversation. And yeah, Dean, it was wonderful to talk with you.

Dean Falk (58:01):

Likewise, Bernard. Thank you so much.

Bernard Wood (58:03):

Okay, thank you very much.

Dean Falk (58:04):

Take care. Hope to see you at meetings one day.

Bernard Wood (58:07):

Yeah, well, I'm sort of getting on, and the problem with meetings is that my eyesight's not so good, and so I either have to sit in front of the lecture theater and then when I fall asleep, it's very obvious. Yeah, but I enjoy meetings because I enjoy meeting with my colleagues. You and I we don't work on the same things. We work in areas that are complimentary. But I mean, it's always interesting to talk with you and it's always interesting to catch up with you. And I'm sorry about Charles's death because I know how close you were.

Dean Falk (59:04):

Right. Thank you.

Bernard Wood (59:05):

So many thanks, Dean.

Dean Falk (59:07):

Okay, Bernard, thank you so much.

Bernard Wood (59:08):

Okay.

Dean Falk (59:10):

Take care. Bye-Bye. Happy May Day.