Doug and Gary Carlston
Cofounders, Brøderbund Software

**Doug Carlston** was the cofounder of Brøderbund Software where he was chairman and chief executive officer. Brøderbund published a number of notable products including The Print Shop, the Carmen Sandiego line, and other great game and educational products. Before Brøderbund, Doug earned a law degree at Harvard University, practiced law and built houses in Maine. During Doug’s tenure at Brøderbund, it became one of the most influential software development companies and went public in November 1991. Doug left Brøderbund after the 1998 sale to the Learning Company. After Brøderbund, he was chairman of ICplanet for two years, and thereafter was a director or chairman at Public Radio International, and A. H. Belo Corporation and still today, at MoveOn.org Political Action, and Tawala Systems, Inc.

**Gary Carlston**, also cofounder of Brøderbund Software, was raised in Iowa where he left one physical education credit short of a high-school degree to study German in Bavaria. He eventually graduated from Harvard University with a degree in Scandinavian Studies. Gary coached women’s basketball in Sweden for four years. He and his brother Doug started Brøderbund Software in the proverbial garage in 1980. Gary, whose initial role was marketing the programs his brother produced, initiated a distribution agreement with the Japanese Starcraft Group that
rapidly drove Brøderbund’s success and reputation. Among later responsibilities, he managed the entertainment and education division. He left in 1989 moving to New Zealand with his wife, Nancy. In 1991, he moved to Colorado, restored a ranch, built an ice rink, and adopted four children. Gary moved back to New Zealand in 2007 and started a vineyard. Now he lives in Mill Valley, California and tries to play as much guitar as possible.

Ramsay: What were you two doing before you started Brøderbund?

Doug: I had been practicing law and building houses in Maine. I learned programming in high school, and programming helped pay for college and law school. When the first personal computers came out, I bought a TRS-80 from RadioShack, and started programming the most boring parts of the legal business and job estimating. Neither set of programs used the full capabilities of even the early personal computers.

I wrote some games to develop my programming skills and for fun. I sold those games through a Florida company called Adventure International, and it wasn’t long before the revenue matched my other sources of income. The oil shocks of the 70s had dried up the housing market, and I was bored with practicing law, so I was looking for an alternative.

Gary: I had spent the previous three years trying to get a couple of other businesses started, one with a friend and one with my brother Doug. My brother had moved out to Oregon from Maine to share an apartment with me and had brought his TRS-80 computer with him.

Most of my work experience prior to Brøderbund was as a women’s basketball coach in Sweden. My degree was in Scandinavian Languages and Literature. I couldn’t imagine why Doug wanted a computer. I had played Pong in college and could not conceive of a more riveting technology.

Ramsay: When did you decide to start a software company?

Doug: When I visited Gary in Oregon, where he was running March of Dimes for the Eugene area. I broached the idea of starting a company.

Gary: I was completely broke when we started Brøderbund. Doug had written a couple of simulations that were being published by a Florida outfit. Doug decided that it might be fun to try to sell his own software and asked me to join him, but I responded that I was in enough debt from two earlier stillborn entrepreneurial efforts. “Well, you can pay your share of the rent,” he pointed out, so I agreed to take a stab at it.

Doug: Gary made the first sales call, which was unusually successful.