Interview with Jason Sanders

Jason Sanders
Utah State University

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Interview with: Jason Sanders  
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Riverwoods Conference Center, Logan, UT.  
Interviewer:  

Name: Jason Sanders  
Date of Birth: March 7, 1975  
Place of Birth: Ogden, Utah  

**Question:** Was there an event or events that led to a space career and perhaps to USU?  
   Nothing in particular.  

**Question:** When did you join the GAS team?  
   I first joined it in 1993 in the fall. I was on the team for a year and didn’t do much. Then I left for two years to go on a mission. I was on the team from ’96 until almost 2000.  

**Question:** When did you leave the USU GAS team?  
   In 2000. Well in 1999 I started my masters degree and I started phasing out then.  

**Question:** In the context of the GAS program how would you describe your skill set before joining the GAS team?  
   What skill set? You know the GAS program was cool because you have to figure things out. No one was there to tell you how to do it. You just have to show up and solve problems. From technical to managerial to document tracking. It was like being thrown in the deep end and you developed a skill set depending on the problems you had to solve.  

**Question:** Upon leaving the GAS team how had your skill set changed?  
   It’s different. I’ve actually worked and work now in places that have finances. It’s nice. It’s different problems, but if you look back at the GAS program a lot of the things I do now, initiative, the understanding, the problem solving really kind of motivated from the GAS program.  

**Question:** What was your USU major or degree?  
   I studied physics. I got a bachelors and masters degree in physics.  

**Question:** What GAS projects did you work on?  
   I worked on the G90 experiments. There were three of them. I was the payload manager and most of them were designed by high school students but we did all the integration, did the power systems, all the safety systems, worked on the control systems. Interfacing with high school students was interesting.  

**Question:** Do you recall names of GAS team members working on these projects with you?  
   Casey Hatch, Rick Rambo, Stephen [Fonnesbeck], Adam Margetts, Mike Anderson, David Hansen. Those are the major players.
Question: Did you get to experience GAS road trips?

I went to Salt Lake City for a couple of things. I went to Spokane, Washington to work with some schools. We flew popcorn in space and elementary kids got to do tests to see if the popcorn changed, based on the popcorn that stayed on the Earth, the same batch. So we went to Spokane, Washington to do that. I went to Moscow, Idaho to interface with some high school students there. I went to Idaho to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe High School. I went for integration and de-integration activities at Kennedy Space Flight Center and I went to Goddard Space Flight Center for some work as well as a conference.

Question: What is your most cherished recollection of your GAS days?

Cherished one? I have a lot of good recollections. There were a lot of fun integrations. We were just a bunch of “rag-tag” students there and there was a person from NASA there at the same time and they showed up with this multi-million dollar project. I think our total budget was probably $5,000 (actual money spent and a lot more stolen or borrowed). It was fun to show up with those guys. We were just guys in tee shirts, shorts, and flip flops the whole time. These guys were professionals and it was fun to see that difference. Interfacing with Jan and the other students was definitely fun. The road trips were always fun. All-nighters in the lab, I wouldn’t change that kind experience.

One of my favorite experiences was, I was in class and our experiment was in space and the secretary from the Physics office came down in the middle of the class and asked for me and pulled me out, actually it was an engineering class. She’s like NASA’s on the phone they want to talk to you about your experiment. So I ran upstairs to the office and talked to NASA for five minutes. They just wanted to see if they could delay turning on the experiment for twenty minutes, or two hours, it was two hours. I went back to class and everyone was what’s that all about. I said it was NASA and they wanted to know if my experiment could go later. That was really cool. I was in with a couple of hundred kids and I got pulled out because NASA needed to talk to me about my experiment flying on the space shuttle.

Question: What was your greatest frustration with the GAS Program?

NO MONEY! That was the biggest thing. I think also the hardest part was by the time I got involved, it was after the Challenger accident, nobody had flown a experiment in the GAS program for about ten years. We just didn’t have any institutional knowledge about safety reviews and such. So that was a challenge. Safety requirements had gone through the roof since the earlier program. So that was very difficult to work with. Not having any money it made everything hard.

Question: Please describe your present day career. Especially mention to what extend it follows a projectory dating back to school and USU GAS days.

I’m a patent attorney. You can definitely trace that projectory back to, somewhat back to. I have a couple of clients that are in the space industry and a couple of clients have said they chose me because they noticed I had a space experience. The very first patent that I wrote and followed all the way through for somebody was for Jan Sojka. That was kind of a cool thing. He got a great deal on that patent, of course. Having that know how and problem solving skills helps me everyday. You can’t replace that.

Thank you, Jason.