Olivia Ryan::  Okay it is June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006, and could you just state your name, please?

Myk Melez:  Myk Melez.

Olivia Ryan:  Okay and Myk, when did you begin using computers and when did you first develop your interest in technology?

Myk Melez:  Um, I was either 10 or 11, I'm not quite sure, it was 1982 or 83, and my mom bought me an Apple IIE. It was the first time I'd ever seen a computer.

Olivia Ryan:  And are you mainly self taught, or did you have formal programming training?

Myk Melez:  I'm mainly self taught, I did take a computer class in high school.  I went to a magnet school for science and technology, so we actually had a, well, what was at that time considered to be a super computer in our school, and I had—I  took a class in college as well.  But mainly I taught myself.

Olivia Ryan:  And when did you begin contributing to open source projects? How did you first connect to the open source community?

Myk Melez:  In 1995 or 96, I started running Linux as my operating system on my home computer and, at that point, I was merely a user of open source software, I didn't actually contribute anything back.  It—basically Mozilla was my first open source project that I contributed to.

Olivia Ryan:  And when did you start working with Mozilla?

Myk Melez:  I started working actually with Mozilla Technologies in 1999.  I had a start-up company back then, and we were planning to do what I guess is now called "Web 2.0" platform applications, but at the time, it was "DHTML" applications, and we also looked into using XUL as a front-end tool kit.  And then in 2000, I moved back to the States from Hungary, where I was living at the time, and in 2001, I got a job doing web tools development for Netscape.  I wasn't actually a significant contributor to the Mozilla project before then, I submitted bugs and the like, and so I was kind of on the QA side of things until then.

Olivia Ryan:  And what Mozilla projects have you worked on over time?

Myk Melez:  So, as a web tools developer, I contributed to Bugzilla in a pretty significant way.  I'm responsible for a number of its features.  And I also wrote an extension called FormZilla, which is basically a feed reader for Thunderbird.  It is what was eventually integrated into Thunderbird, and

became Thunderbird's feed reading feature.  And I've written a few extensions for Firefox as well.

Olivia Ryan:    When you work in groups, how is the division of labor generally determined?

Myk Melez:    That's a very good question. [laughs]  You know, it's interesting. I'm not sure—there's not, especially with this project, necessarily a very strict or obvious division of labor.  We don't have a highly segmented workforce of employees who get assigned by management to do certain tasks.  It's self-organizing, and I think that, for the most part, people work on the things that they are most interested in, or that they know the best.  So if something needs to be done and somebody knows how to do it better than everybody else, that's likely to be the person that does it, even if they're not necessarily interested in it.

Olivia Ryan:    And how do you generally communicate with those who you work with?

Myk Melez:    IRC, e-mail, newsgroups, Bugzilla comments, and occasionally in person.

Olivia Ryan:    What do you think works the best?  Or if you only had to use one or two things—or would you even want to do that?  Do you think that there are too many different ways of communicating with people so it gets confusing ever, or does this kind of work for you?

Myk Melez:    There are—yeah, it's confusing to, for example, figure out when you should send an email versus a Bugzilla comment, versus a newsgroup posting.  But in general, there at least a few different modes of communication that I think are absolutely necessary.  Some means of instant communication like IRC is really important. Some means of non-instant, written communication like emails, newsgroups, Bugzilla comments is also really important.  And I think face-to-face time is really crucial sometimes.  So, you know, I don't think you could take any one of these away, but it does occasionally get confusing to figure out which one to do when.  In particular, it's important to figure out when something should be public, and thus, should be posted to a newsgroup, versus something that you need to talk to somebody privately about, and thus should send email about.

Olivia Ryan:    How important are comments in the code to smooth development?

Myk Melez:    That's a good question. I think they're pretty significant. People tend to move from project to project within the larger Mozilla project and so people are frequently starting to work on code that somebody else worked on a long time ago and doesn't work on anymore,  And when the code isn't commented it's, you know, that much harder to figure out why it's

doing what it's doing, and what you should be doing to fix it, if you're fixing it.

Olivia Ryan: Do you ever wish there were more comments in the code, or do you think that—

Myk Melez: Sure! No, I think—somebody once said that good code should be two-thirds comment and one-third code. That's a truism, so I don't know how true it actually is. But I do think that some code is really self-documenting, and so it's obvious what goes on and, for that, it's duplicative and redundant to have a bunch a comments explaining it. But when code is not like that, or when there are unstated assumptions, it's really valuable to have a comment that explains why it works the way it does. So yeah, I'd like more comments in the code.

Olivia Ryan: And, would you say that strict ownership of specific areas in the code is enforced?

Myk Melez: Um, to some degree. I don't think that we have as clear a sense of ownership as we would like to. There are parts of the code that are effectively un-owned at this point, and there are other parts of the code where it's not clear who owns it, but so, not entirely.

Olivia Ryan: And in those instances, does an owner ever sort of arise and—

Myk Melez: Sure, sure. People start working on a piece of code, they get review from, say, you know, one of the module owners for the Firefox project as a whole, and eventually get recognized as an owner of that code.

Olivia Ryan: Do people ever sort of ask to be owner, like "I'm interested in this section, how about I take it over, since nobody else is," or is it a little more subtle than that?

Myk Melez: Yeah, I think people have asked to be made owners of code that they've been working on. You know, occasionally people will come into the project and say "I want to do this," and "will you make me the, you know, will you anoint me the person in charge of doing this?" In general, we don't do that because it's just not very likely that someone with that attitude is actually going to contribute something. It's much more likely for us to get contributors who come in and say I really want to do this, and so I've gone and done it, or you know, here's some code that represents what I want to do, and I'm going to keep on working in this direction. And for that person to ultimately get ownership of the code. That's also true in non-code areas as well. UI review and documentation. In general, when people have shown up in the documentation news group and said "hey, I want to help, what can I do?" Those people don't end up doing

anything.  People who show up and say I've written this document, because I noticed that there's this hole.

Olivia Ryan:  Have you ever clashed with another developer of a particular point of code and, if so, how do you generally resolve those disputes?

Myk Melez:  Um, sure. I can't recall a specific case right now, but I know it's happened.  You resolve the disputes through discussion.  You try to figure out where they're coming from, and they try to hopefully figure out where you're coming from, and either you realize that you don't really have a dispute at all, or you agree to disagree.

Olivia Ryan:  How much communication and coordination is there between those who work on the front-end and those that work on the back-end?

Myk Melez:  I think that there's a fair amount because as the front-end evolves, it requires changes to the back-end.  And it's really necessary for front-end developers to talk to the back-end guys about it in order to make that stuff happen.

Olivia Ryan:  Do you feel that there ever natural divisions or tensions between these two groups and, if so, how do they sort of get around that?

Myk Melez:  Um, to be honest with you, I haven't spent so much time focused on the Firefox front-end or back-end that I can say with any authority.

Olivia Ryan:  To what extent has Mozilla relied on the work of volunteers and has that reliance changed over time?

Myk Melez:  So, I think, obviously before we open sourced the code, before Netscape open sourced the code, there were no volunteers. I wasn't around for the first couple of years, so I don't know the trajectory, but by the time I showed up in about 2000, 2001, there was a significant body of volunteers working on the code.  Percentage-wise, I'm not sure.  After we founded the foundation—the foundation initially was a very small group of people, and I think we relied a great degree on volunteers, defined broadly as both people, you know, who just are interested and want to participate as a hobby, and also people who are paid to work on the project, but not paid by the foundation.  I don't know if you'd really call those volunteers. You know, the corporation is now larger than the foundation was when it was founded.  I think that we still, to a significant degree, rely on the contributions of volunteers in our community.  We're not obviously capable of taking on, you know the evolution of a project of this magnitude on our own, and I don't think that's our intention either.

Olivia Ryan:  Why do you think people volunteer?

Myk Melez:     Well, because it's fun, and because it has a high impact. It's a way of actually making a noticeable difference in the world.

Olivia Ryan:   Do you ever see that perhaps people who volunteer for different reasons and say that they have different motivations—does that—aare there conflicts among those groups? If someone just does it for fun, and somebody else is just doing it because they are passionate for open source, for example?

Myk Melez:     Well, sure. There are people who have a kind of an ethical or moral position on open source. They do it because they think it's the right thing to do. And there are other people for whom it is just practical, you know, a good way of developing software, and I think that people sometimes clash who have differing assumptions on about why one should do open-source in that regard.

Olivia Ryan:   And when that happens, do they sort of, do you see volunteers working with one another, or does the sort of like paid employee staff get involved to help resolve disputes?

Myk Melez:     Um, I don't think that there's such a clear line between volunteer and paid employee staff in the community. And I think that's a good thing. I think our intention as paid employees is to be treated as and perceived as regular members of the community, and to take seriously the meritocratic approach that the community takes towards granting authority. So, we're not authoritative in resolving disputes, or making decisions, because we're paid employees, but because we've developed esteem over time.

Olivia Ryan:   Why do you think Mozilla, and in particular Firefox, has been able to attract such a large number of users?

Myk Melez:     I think that it's a combination of factors. One is that we worked for a really long time to create a very good product. Starting in 1998 when they open sourced the software, we worked to build a browser, at one point to virtually rebuild it from scratch, and then improve on it until we reached a point where we had a very good product. And it just so happened that around that time, people were getting really frustrated with the, you know, monopoly product that they had been using, and we were in a good position to offer a very good alternative.

Olivia Ryan:   And what sets it apart, do you think, from other open source projects?

Myk Melez:     Well, certainly in size and scope, I think that we're much larger than many other open source projects. We're certainly relatively unique in the way in which we combine, you know, open source volunteerism with paid employment. And I think we have a relentless focus, maybe not yet

relentless enough, on making the most usable interface for our users, rather than merely scratching our own itches, and making something that we'd like to use.

Olivia Ryan: How would you list Mozilla's priorities today, and how do you think this might compare with its priorities in 1998? I know you didn't work here at the time, but from what you know, how do you think the priorities have shifted over time—or have they?

Myk Melez: That's a very good question. I don't think I really know the answer to that.

Olivia Ryan: Um. Do you think that open source principles have affected the marketing of Mozilla, in particular, of Firefox?

Myk Melex: To some degree. I don't think that in our marketing we particularly focus on that.

Olivia Ryan: What's the focus of the marketing?

Myk Melez: I think the focus is generally the usability, security, speed.

Olivia Ryan: I guess I mean like the manner in which things are marketed by, for example, the "Spread Firefox Campaign," where you ask volunteers to help out. Do you think that marketing is something that can be done largely by community, or do you think that professional marketers are sort of needed to take guide a community like that?

Myk Melez: Well, I'm not an expert on marketing. I don't really know. It's a very good question. I think that Firefox was a success in terms of its product, via combination of volunteers and paid professional staff. So, I'm not sure if that's necessarily, you know, you can make the same assumption about marketing, that it…it's also a success via combination, or whether the open-source community as a whole can mostly take over marketing. I just don't know. That's a very good question. Haven't thought much about that.

Olivia Ryan: How would you define—this is sort of a broad question—but how would you define a successful open-source project? What elements or practices do you see as necessary for a successful project?

Myk Melez: I think a successful project has regular development, releases and use. So, a stable base of users and regular development, and you know, periodic releases.

Olivia Ryan: Do you have experience working on commercial products—software products?

Myk Melez: I've worked on a number of software products, but not ones that were sold. Only projects that were used in-house, so proprietary, but not commercial.

Ken Albers: Did you find a difference on working on open-source? Did you find the work environment different, the process different, or—?

Myk Melez: Well obviously much smaller teams, and much clearer sense of authority through a management chain, as opposed to meritocracy, so yeah. Quite a bit different.

Ken Albers: And do you prefer one or another? Did you find one more efficient?

Myk Melez: I prefer working on open source projects. I find them vastly more enjoyable to work on. I much prefer working on them.

Olivia Ryan: Do you consider open source software a public service?

Myk Melez: Yes.

Olivia Ryan: And do you think that most people you work think about it in that way?

Myk Melez: I think it's a mixed bag. I think for some people, that matters, and for others it's not that important.

Olivia Ryan: What, if anything, do you think the popularity of Firefox will do for open-source, as a whole?

Myk Melez: I think that it is likely to make open source a more serious alternative to proprietary software in the eyes of corporate IT people. I don't think users, at this point unless and until open source is marketed seriously to them as a different way of building the software they use, will care that much. I don't think they know that much at this point.

Olivia Ryan: Would you like to see the marketing of it sort of explained a little bit better?

Myk Melez: Yes. I do think it actually could matter to consumers.

Olivia Ryan: And do you think that sort of open source techniques could be applied to other areas of production, like that we already sort of mentioned, marketing. Do you think it has the potential to be sort of a broader movement, reaching beyond software?

Myk Melez: So, apparently there are some efforts to do legal work in an open source fashion, I don't know how successful they've been. There certainly are

principles behind open source, like openness and collaboration, that could be beneficial to other areas of production. I don't know whether there's something unique to open source.

Olivia Ryan:     And this is really broad, but what do you think the future of open source is, for either Mozilla, or for just the broader movement?

Myk Melez:     I think we're going to take over software development. I think we'll be the dominant way of building software in the future.

Olivia Ryan:     Do you see like, kind of a time table, when you say it'll take over. Do you mean, like thinking of browsers, for example, are you thinking of market share, are you thinking of development?

Myk Melez:     I'm thinking of percentage of software in use world-wide, which is open-source. Which is developed to be an open source model.

Olivia Ryan:     So market share?

Myk Melez:     Market share of open-source software generally.

Olivia Ryan:     And do you see like a time table of a point where it's more than 50% for example, or not quite? [laugh]

Myk Melez:     No, I don't. I don't know. And it could go the other way too. We're not guaranteed victory, certainly.