Alumni Profile—Loren Woo ('93)

What have you been up to since you graduated?

I started grad school at the University of Colorado at Boulder eight weeks after graduating from Carleton. I was at CU for six years, earning my M.A. and Ph.D. in mathematics. After a six month hiatus back in the Twin Cities with my family, I moved to Silicon Valley and began work as a software developer at SAP, where I have employed for almost 11 years. I currently live in San Francisco with my wife Karen.

What do you do for a living?

I’m a Director of Product Management in the Product Design Group, which is part of the On-Demand application organization at SAP. I work in an interdisciplinary team with designers, engineers, and product managers to help the On-Demand organization embrace the mindset, methods, and approach necessary to define, build, and deliver products that redefine enterprise software and delight our customers. I started my career as a software developer in the HCM sector, where I was responsible for US Payroll Tax and Manager’s Self-Service. I later joined the Design Services Team as a solution architect and later as a project lead. In this role, I was working on projects dealing with corporate and product strategy using a Design Thinking approach.

How has being a math major helped you get where you are?

The most useful skill that I learned through the study of mathematics is the ability to analyze and solve very large and complex problems. Bringing an analytic mindset is valuable to solving many problems in enterprise software. It is also very helpful to apply the right side of the brain to generate innovative and creative solutions to these types of problems. Being able to bring both the analytic and creative approaches to solving problems has been a key to my success.

What were the steps involved in getting to where you are?

Some of it was hard work, some of it was dumb luck – being at the right place at the right time. One thing that I’ve learned is that you can create opportunities to be “at the right place at the right time” by being inclusive and sharing your work to help others.

Are there classes you wish you would have taken while you were at Carleton which you didn’t?

I wish that I had taken some more CS classes (didn’t know at the time that I was going into the software business) along with some more classes on the creative side (e.g. film studies, studio art, creative writing, etc.) It’s taken some time and effort to get comfortable with expressing myself in a creative way.
What advice would you give current math majors?

Do something that you like to do. You don’t have to love every moment of it (but it’s nice if there are such moments), but you definitely don’t want to hate it. Life is too short to spend half your waking hours making yourself miserable.