“Everything is worth learning,” asserts Penelope Bauer. From the books she reads to the instruments she picks up nowadays, Penny remains an avid learner. Born in 1942 in Kinder, Louisiana, Penny loved sneaking off to spy on alligators and snakes in the bayous with her youngest brother. “I loved the smell of the swamp,” she recalls. “A very organic smell.” She belonged to a family that conducted its own spelling bees and book discussions, and she even worked at the local library, earning fifty cents an hour. Still, she knew she wanted to become a scientist. Though her mother encouraged her pursuit, her father refused to pay for her college, unless she studied education. On a full ride scholarship, she studied Physical Science Education at Louisiana State University, transferring midway through to McNeese State University. “I loved studying,” she declares. “I would spend hours and hours and hours reading.”

After graduating, she earned her master’s in Botany at LSU. Her research used electron microscopy to study a fungal phytotoxin that affected oats. She remembers, “I was the only female student in the department at LSU ... In plant pathology, I don’t think a woman had ever gotten a degree... I was an odd bird.” When the head of her department, who was also the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, wanted to take her on as a doctoral student, she refused and chose to study in Kentucky instead. She graduated in 1968 after offering her dissertation on the use of uranyl ions instead of calcium to protect oats.

After a year of post-doc work at Kentucky, she accepted a position as assistant professor at CSU. “No one would take the job because there were no facilities, no labs to speak of,” she explains. Not only did she discover upon arrival that she had been placed in the meager Dirt Lab, but she was informed two weeks prior to arrival that she would be teaching a freshman biology class, which turned out to have over four hundred students. “I started teaching to this mob of people, never having taught before. I was terrified, absolutely terrified!” she exclaims. She grew to love teaching, though, and still feels drawn to the classroom. “The things that are lasting to me would be the experiences I had with students,” she recalls fondly. “That was the most important thing... I became friends with students.”

In her thirty-four years at CSU, Penny published several book chapters, one or two annual review papers, a paper in *Science*, and two textbooks. She was elected Chair of the Faculty Council and worked with the university lawyer to develop a legally solid Grievance Policy to protect the university. She also served as a state liaison for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and attended two or three NATO conferences in Italy. During the mid-70s, Penny began to attend the CSU Faculty Women’s Caucus, where she thoroughly enjoyed friendship with the brilliant women from whom she had been isolated in the science department.

Penny says that her biggest challenge was, “trying to avoid being bored – I needed something new to do at all times.” Accordingly, she asserts that the position of the university should be “exploring the limits of the mind,” not job training. She predicts, “I think there’s going to be a lot of competition... there will be businesses who decide they will teach these classes themselves... Research is going to be privatized outside the university... Unfortunately, people are going to be looking at the university in the liberal arts and say, ‘Why do we need it?’”

Because we, like Dr. Penelope Bauer, love to learn.