As a historian, Dr. David McComb never stopped learning or trying to expand his mind, his knowledge, and his research.

Born October 26, 1934, McComb grew up in Indiana, Michigan, and Houston, Texas. The moves meant that he had to start over in three different schools, and he used competitive swimming to “develop comradeship with my fellow students which had not been there before, and it was all because of that athletic ability.” When he wasn’t in the pool, he was working, shoveling snow, delivering newspapers, lifeguarding, and helping out at his father’s construction business. After finishing high school in Houston, he won a swimming scholarship to Southern Methodist University in Dallas and studied Social Sciences, specifically history.

Like many students, he didn’t have a clear vision of what he wanted to do. After graduating from SMU. He applied and was accepted at Stanford’s Master’s of Business Administration (MBA) program. It wasn’t until after he had his MBA that he found his calling. At a local junior college in Houston, he offered to teach a business course, and he says, “I thought it was so much fun. And then one of my students said to me one day, why don’t you teach history?” So he went back to school, earning another Master’s Degree in Business History from Rice University and his Ph.D. in History from the University of Texas. His dissertation was on the history of Houston. As he was finishing his Ph.D., his mentor was hired to direct an oral history program about Lyndon B. Johnson and he got a job interviewing “people that had anything to do with Lyndon Johnson, from youth to politics.” After a year, he wanted to get back into teaching, and a colleague from the junior college was working at Colorado State University and encouraged him to interview.

In 1969, McComb chose to come to CSU because he “would be more comfortable in the west” than he would in North Carolina, where he was also offered a job. 1969 was an exciting time of expansion on campus, and although the facilities weren’t the best, he thrived in the department. He headed the department for 5 years, from 1975-1980, but he didn’t enjoy being “caught between the faculty on one hand and the administration on the other.” What he did enjoy was teaching and writing. Over his 32 years as CSU, he published 14 books and 9 revised editions, many about Texas. “I also had the idea of writing in the area in which you taught,” he explains, “so I was teaching sports history, for example, and I wrote two books on sports history ... And what I wrote about often was used in the classroom in my lectures. So there’s this symbiotic relationship.” He also worked on a project in India, which pushed him towards becoming a world historian. “For example,” he says, “when I taught sports history, I made it global sports history, starting with the ancient Greeks and how the Olympics got started and stuff like that. So this experience in India stretched my mind a bit.”

To McComb, the role of the university is to “give students ideas of where they want to go in life, what they want to do, to grow up” and a professor’s part in that larger mission is “to do research and writing and go where no man or woman has gone before ... and to try and answer questions about the world and their own discipline.” He worries about the future of CSU and what the university is making of itself, and he hopes that it doesn’t lose “that sort of probing, supportive, experimental attitude,” like the one that sent him to India, because then it will have “lost its soul.”