“It was one of these perfect June days – blue skies, puffy white clouds.” The day that brought Robert Meroney to CSU sets the stage for his many years rich with life.

Born on October 4, 1937, Robert lived in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri, Washington D.C., and Maryland, all by the age of eleven. Because of his father’s job as a courthouse statistician and his mother’s dedication to experiential education, he gleaned from museums and points of interest in each of his homes. He recounts his mother’s unusual, yet wise, rule: If the kids wanted anything, they had to pay for half of it. He also remembers living in racially segregated Washington D.C., commenting, “It was almost like living with ghosts.” Blacks were there, but at the same time they weren’t.

“I’ve always understood that I would be going to college,” Robert recounts, explaining that both of his parents had earned master’s degrees. In high school, he took a skills identification test, but when he found the questions entirely ridiculous, he answered them with such outlandish interests that his career counselor, in an attempt to save society from his chaos, suggested he become a forest ranger. He knew he wanted to study science and technology, and he attended the University of Tennessee on a program that allowed him to alternate a quarter of work through a government engineering institution with a quarter of attending school. After finishing his undergraduate studies, Robert immediately began graduate work, turning down an offer from MIT in order to explore an appealing California life at Berkley. After completing both a master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation on protecting the vehicle of a rocket from being destroyed by the heat it generates, Robert turned down job offers at Cal Poly and the University of San Diego to come visit CSU.

At CSU, he discovered that he would be working with the civil engineering department, especially using wind tunnels to focus on wind engineering. The idea of working with engineering that was not related to the military and war appealed to Robert. He arrived in a Fort Collins when it held a mere population of 35,000. “I liked the community. I liked the fact that there was an older part of campus with the oval and historic buildings. At the same time, I could see that the campus was progressive and growing.”

After thirty-nine years at CSU, Robert’s accomplishments are outstanding. He recently discovered, after adjusting his records for inflation, that he had brought in over thirty million dollars of research during his career. He has written over 235 papers and 150 reports. “You can either figure I’ve written one 9,000 page book, or nine 1,000 page books!” he joked. He has visited London, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, and Egypt on sabbatical, and he has taught about thirty different courses. “I looked for ways to play in the classroom. I taught mechanics by using yo-yos and flying airplanes.”

Regarding the university, Robert reflects, “I think the biggest thing that’s changed is that the massive administrative infrastructure has grown.” He explains that the more control the government maintains over universities, the more personnel are required to satisfy the regulations. He predicts, “I think we’re going to see another major change as the cost of higher education causes a stumbling block... In many fields, higher education does not pay for itself.” However, he
appreciates that “the university provides a cultural foundation for the people in Fort Collins who are prepared to take advantage of it.”

Dr. Meroney's story is far from over. Next Saturday, he travels to the University of Western Sydney, Australia, to deliver a keynote address on the virtual reality of wind engineering being used to track fires. As his story began, may it continue under the blue sky of today.