

Podcast Transcript

# Risk Never Sleeps

## Episode 18

### Howard Scott Warshaw

**Ed Gaudet:** Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we discuss the people that are protecting patient care, usually. This time, we're going to take a completely different approach. I'm Ed Gaudet, and I am pleased to be joined today by Howard Scott Warshaw. Howard, welcome to the program.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Ed, thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Ed Gaudet:** I'm very excited and stoked to do this. I've got a lot of questions to ask you. We're going to take a couple of different approaches here, and we'll see where it takes us. So let's have some fun ...

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** ... It's all about the journey. And I want to say upfront, though, that I feel extremely protected and safe here on this.

**Ed Gaudet:** It's a bit like an audio prophylactic, right?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Completely encapsulated.

**Ed Gaudet:** And I loved your shirt. I remember seeing your shirt, how weird, and I've been often called Edweird, so I can relate to that.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Oh, okay. Perfect. You know how it is.

**Ed Gaudet:** I do. I do. And actually, for the next 30 minutes, I'm probably going to act like a nine-year-old, so hopefully, that'll be okay. Since my relationship started with you and your games when I was a young boy, a big fan, and obviously read your books, I saw the recent movie Atari: Game Over, which really inspired us to reach out to you and have you on the podcast. So again, appreciate your time. You are the author of several books, Once Upon Atari and all the way through to the Inspired Therapist, so we're going to cover a lot of ground today. Let's start off with how you got started in at Atari and games.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** My trip to Atari and games was a circuitous one, to say the least. It was a long and meandering journey that kind of ended up in games but never was moving towards it. It was a sudden left turn at the end of a long road that led to an even longer road. But I was, first, I avoided computers like the plague. I never wanted to have anything to do with computers, even though I could have started working with them as early as 10th grade, which back in the 70s was very unusual. Got to college, never did anything with computers, I was in economics, and then I added a math major and, but somewhere along the way, one of my econ advisors just said, you ought to have computers. You're not going to go anywhere in economics without computers. I said, okay, I took a computer course, and it was like a revelation. It was like a revelation. ... like, Oh my God, this is the greatest thing in the world to do because now I don't have to read long meandering books. I don't have to write these long, intense papers. I can solve puzzles, write programs, learn the kind of stuff I really enjoy, and totally grok, and it was just, it was the way for me, so then I got deep into computers.

**Ed Gaudet:** Do you remember your earliest program that you wrote when you joined Atari?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** I wrote a lot of programs in Forage. The first program I ever wrote was the first, I did a Hello World program, one of those, and I did a program where you had to take a bunch, generate a series of data, write it out to a mag tape unit, and then recover it and then do some stats on it. I remember that because what was one of the things that was so memorable about that was you had to use punch cards.

**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** I had to sit down on one of these ... and actually was an IBM 7044, an old computer, and you had to punch out your program on punch cards, get a deck of cards in the proper sequence, turn them over to the ... them through the card reader, then wait for your listing to come out with your code and your printout and catch that in the old cubby ... where they put them, look at that, then go back, modify some of the punch cards. That was the process. I do remember that very clearly.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's funny, they'd come around with those cards and pick up cards and give you cards and.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** No, actually, ... someplace ... We had was, had a bank of the card punches. Those card punch machines were pretty ... You'd go and type up your cards and get that in order. And then, there was a drop box where you would put your deck in order as the next one to be run. And they had an operator who just grabbed decks, run them through the card reader, put them in the execution queue, and then collect the readouts and put those in the output windows.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's great. That's great. Yeah, my earliest was inventory for a video store. So imagine a video ... a couple years later, obviously. So what led you to Atari, then? How did that all?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** I got into computers, got so into computers, day after I finished my bachelor's, I did a one-year master's in computer engineering; I was just so taken with computers. Then I went to work for Hewlett-Packard in all my passion. I was working on real-time control, microprocessor-based systems in college, which was very unusual at the time, and then I got to Hewlett-Packard and was working on mainframe protocol adaptation stuff, which is incredibly boring and challenging computer work, and I just wasn't very happy there. I was bored, and I lost the passion, the real deep passion that I had for intricate, intense computer programming; that wasn't happening at HP. And then I found out one day that, because I used to get up to a bunch of antics, I would act out a lot because I was so bored, and one of my colleagues came up and said, there's this place where they, the stuff that you do around here, they do it all the time there. That's just normal where they, I go, where's that? Atari. That was the first time I ever heard of Atari as a place to work.

**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** And so I just took the initiative, and I reached out to them, and I worked my way in, and I got a series of interviews. They rejected me. I did not accept their rejection. I pushed back and was able to get in on a significant salary cut and a probationary status, which I gladly accepted and got in there and thought, This is what I need. I just need to get in and have a chance to show what I can do.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, that persistence obviously, I'm sure, paid off for you, especially in that line of business. And you were, you went on to designing such successful games as Yars' Revenge and Raiders of the Lost Ark and things that I played for years. Then you got the call to do this game called E.T., and you had five weeks to do it, basically.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Exactly, five weeks, when games took, typically six months to do, I was given five weeks to do E.T., and again, I gratefully accepted that. I was looking for a challenge, and they say, be careful what you wish for, and there came E.T.

**Ed Gaudet:** What was that like? How did you even marshal the team together? What was the process?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** There was no team. This was just me. This was me and my graphics person. That was the team. I designed it, did all the coding, oversaw the graphics. I did, got a sound. The opening theme, I got the sounds for the opening theme from the sound department, but that was it. I generated all the other sounds and things like that. It was intense. If you really want to know what the E.T. project was like, there's my book, *Once Upon Atari: How I Made History by Killing an Industry*, which gives you some idea. And I go into all my exploits at Atari and deeply into E.T. and what went on with that project, as well as my life in general, and the many curves and twists that it took and the full development of Yars' Revenge, all the firsts I created, all of that stuff is covered in *Once Upon Atari: How I Made History by Killing an Industry*. It's also an audiobook, by the way, that I did narrate. I did it for myself because I just have to do these things just to experiment, just to keep expanding my repertoire of the things I've endeavored and tried to understand and see what to do with that. I'm always exploring that.



**Ed Gaudet:** That's great, and shout out to my listeners. That's a great read, highly recommended. If you spend any time on an Atari, pick up the book, read the book, listen to the book if you prefer the audio, but you'll learn more about Howard than you probably want to. Howard?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** That's what they say at first.

**Ed Gaudet:** Then they want more, right?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** It's fun. You wouldn't know what to talk to me, but I'm a fun guy. And what people tell me is that really comes through in the writing in the book. But thank you so much, Ed; I really appreciate it.

**Ed Gaudet:** No, you are a fun guy. In fact, we have a lot in common. We have a lot in common with other people, too. So here's a question for you. What does Slash from Guns N Roses?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Oh, yeah.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah. Slash, Jerry Garcia. Woody Harrelson, Mick Jagger, Madonna, Steve Martin, Robert De Niro, you, and I have in common. What are we all? Not ...

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** From New Jersey.

**Ed Gaudet:** We're all Leos.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** All Leos. Oh, that makes a lot of sense. That makes a lot of sense. Yeah, Leo is the sign where you're going to find a lot of entertainment people, that's for sure.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah. Why is that? Why do you think is that? It's the personality? It's the.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** If you go with the astrological stereotype about it, Leos are bravado, attention-seekers, performers. Leos have a lot of charisma, they command a lot of attention, and they like doing things that put themselves in the spotlight. Some people want to avoid the spotlight, some people want to be in the spotlight, and some people don't even know about the spotlight, they're just busy doing what they do.

**Ed Gaudet:** That explains a lot for me, anyway.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** There it is. But Leos generally tend to be people who don't go shy of, hopefully, they want to have something of value to do while they're in the spotlight.

**Ed Gaudet:** Exactly.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** But it's, yeah, I just think it is fun to put media out in the world of all forms. First and foremost, I'm a media producer. I like to take something, create something tangible on some level, something that has entertainment value, something that has good information and lesson value, and put that package together, info-tainment kind of thing. I love that sort of thing. When you have real good info, real useful information packaged in a fun and entertaining way, to me, that's the greatest thing to deliver to people because you give them both fun.

**Ed Gaudet:** Absolutely, and it was Marshall McLuhan.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Said Marshall McLuhan, yeah.

**Ed Gaudet:** The message is the media, right? And the media is me.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Or the medium is the.

**Ed Gaudet:** Message is the medium, right? So coin-based games, did you play a lot growing up?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Not until I got to Atari. So the interesting thing about me going to Atari was I went to Atari because it was a wacky place to work and where the other places I'd worked weren't wacky enough for me. And they did the kind of intricate, really nitty gritty kind of programming and challenging programming applications that I like to do, and games were third. I like games, I always played games, but I was never that into video games. I used to play a lot of board games, I'd make up games. I like the idea of games a lot, but video games never really drew me or compelled me. I had played some Pong here and there, all my friends were. I would go to the arcades with my friends and watch them play. I just never really got that involved with it. It just didn't call to me. But once I got to Atari, I realized this really where, it was where things were at for me, and then I started to play a great deal more. So I will tell you one thing that's interesting, and I do talk about this in the book, the first time I really designed a video game was before I even had taken a computer course. I was still completely not involved with video, with computers, with any of that. I was in a calculus three-course. And for some, and I don't even know why I was thinking about this, but I was taking a calculus three-course, and we learned about the geometry of surfaces, like calculus on 3D surfaces and the functions you can use to generate a three-dimensional contoured surface. I'm sitting in that class, and all of a sudden, in my mind, this whole thought occurs to me, is that you could use this function to describe a landscape, and it would be an interesting contoured landscape, and then you could have these tanks, you could have a bunch of tanks that are going around, and you could go up on the high ground, and you could see where everyone is, but they couldn't see you or you could stay in the valleys and heights, but you could run around with your tank and all you would need for anybody else to know what's going on is where you are and what your position is. And if you fired something where that is and the function, the overall function that describes the whole thing, it's like really not that much information. And that's all the information you need to completely run this interactive multi-user version of a tank battle game, and this was before battle tanks or combat, any of these things. Like combat existed on the VCS already at this point, but I'd never played it, I wasn't aware of it. But Battlezone definitely did not exist yet, and I just, for some reason, in that class, oh, maybe I actually, it didn't, because this is probably '76. This is probably 1976 when this happened. So even combat wasn't out yet. The VCS wasn't out yet. I just, it was just this weird moment of revelation. I just realized, here's this thing, and you could have multiple places, and there not much information that goes by. I didn't even think about computers or networking. It just came in my head.



**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** That was the first time I designed a video game with the idea of implementing.

**Ed Gaudet:** Okay, interesting.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And so winding up at Atari was, in some ways, the natural place for me to be. I was raised to be an entertainer. Not that I had showbiz parents, mind you, my parents just made sure I had enough insecurities and need for approval and disregard for boundaries and reasonability. That's what really makes an entertainer.

**Ed Gaudet:** Exactly. Anybody creative.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Right, I always had the need to express myself, the need to create, to do something groundbreaking and interesting to people. Atari was a very natural place for me to wind up, but I was always looking elsewhere. I just fell into it.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, I was a big Tempest. Do you remember Tempest the game?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Oh, yeah.

**Ed Gaudet:** I love Tempest. And, of course, I'm going to, now I'm going to take my shirt off for you, okay? This, I don't normally do this for everybody, but.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Okay, we're going to have to play the music now.

**Ed Gaudet:** I wore this for you. I wore.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Excellent. What do you got?

**Ed Gaudet:** I'm going to show you in a second. All right, let me just get this off here.



**Howard Scott Warshaw:** All right, looks like low-res graphics.

**Ed Gaudet:** All right, let's see if we can see this here, let me move this over here.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Oh, it almost looks like a Raiders. Oh, it's Adventure.

**Ed Gaudet:** It's Adventure.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** It's the duck. It's really the dragon, but we always called it the duck.

**Ed Gaudet:** We call it the duck too; favorite game growing up.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** That's a brilliant game. That game was groundbreaking in so many ways.

**Ed Gaudet:** It was.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Warren Robinett, it was a genius move, right? He made, he established a new genre, right? The idea of an adventure game that you can play as opposed, there were text adventures that I used to play in college ... that's, a video graphic adventure game was huge. That was new, and the Easter Egg, the signature Easter Egg that he's famous for.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's right.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** That was the first Easter egg in a video game, and that was huge.

**Ed Gaudet:** In the Adventure one.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Yeah, the Adventure one. And it wasn't about just like metagaming or just having something a little extra for someone to find. The reason that Easter Eggs originally started, the reason Warren Robinett put his name in the game, was about professional protection. It was because Atari did not want anyone to know who made the games. They didn't want anyone having any contact with their programmers, they wanted to keep their programs, but they also didn't really want to pay their people. They didn't want anyone coming in off making offers to them and stuff, and it posed a problem because Atari would never acknowledge who did a game. So the problem was you do some games for Atari, then you go somewhere else. And what did they say? So what have you done? You say, I did Adventure for Atari. I did Yars' Revenge for Atari. And they go, yeah, sure, you did that. Can you prove it? How do you, how do we know you did it? And so the thing is, if I can go in, I'd say, show me the game, Let me show you something. I bring up the game, and if I can show you something in the game that points directly to me. But worst case, it said created by Warren Robinett, it actually wrote that down the screen. The point of that is to be able to prove your authorship because Atari won't necessarily back you up on there.

**Ed Gaudet:** The first digital signature.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Yeah, that's what Easter eggs were all about. They became, and I'm one of the people who really contributed; I didn't invent the Easter egg, Warren Robinett invented the Easter Egg, what I did was turn it into a marketing phenomenon. I was the first one to go to marketing and say, look, we're putting this stuff in the game, and let's put it in the manual, and let's make it a focus. Let's make it a thing about the games that increases the interest in the game and the marketability of the game, and they were into it. And then, in my subsequent games, I took Easter Eggs to a whole nother level. And but that's what, like Todd Frye says, the guy who made Pac-Man for the 2600 and the Swordquest series, that's what engineers do. We take a system, we explore its capabilities, and then we try to enhance or expand the capabilities and see what can we do with this system that nobody has done before. That's what the 2600 was all about. That's what the programming, the VCS, because the VCS wasn't going to change, right? The VCS was a frozen technology, the coin-op technology, every point-out machine is better technology than the last. So the VCS was never going to keep up with the coin-op market.

**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** But the VCS had its own world of little tricks, and things you could do, and the challenge for the VCS was not to just make up bigger and bigger games and then try and do that because you can't. But the challenge for the VCS was to figure out, because it was such an open architecture in some ways, because they were trying to be as cheap as possible, they put as few restrictions as possible on it, which came back to bite them in some ways. But as an engineer, it meant there were lots of unexplored little alleyways and paths that you could walk down and play with and poke at and see what you could find and come up with. It's interesting to think that when the VCS was created, the hardware designers of the VCS originally figured you could probably do 9 or 10 games, basically 9 or 10 games on the VCS. That was the original vision. Be able to get that many different cartridges and just be able to do that. And ultimately, over, I think over 1500 games were produced for the 2600, and people are still making games for the 2600. That's an amazing reach that goes way beyond the designers' intent. But the designers did create an environment that would support, that was rich enough and full enough and had enough blind corners and dark little unexplored rooms that you could bust into at some point. It was an amazing capability. And our job that VCS has been, the first and second generation and ultimately third-generation game developers on that hardware, was to find new ways to exploit it, not just to do the same old stuff, but to find something new. I've always been very proud of someone who was able to do some of those things. A lot of the things like Yars' Revenge, my first game, established a lot of standards because I came on and did things no one had ever seen on the VCS before. And sometimes you do that, and it bombs, and sometimes you do it, and people go, wow, that's cool.

**Ed Gaudet:** We went, wow. We went, wow.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Thank you, it was.

**Ed Gaudet:** And you didn't have to worry about a lot of security issues back then. How did you think about security? This is a cybersecurity podcast. So did you think about even anything around security at all?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** The question of security is very interesting at Atari, because it depends on what you mean. Like most of the engineers were extremely insecure, so that kind of security was a real problem. But the security of the system, one of the biggest issues on the whole VCS, and I talk about this a lot in the Once Upon Atari book, is the fact that they did never lock the system. So the VCS system didn't have security on it from the point of view of, now, if you want to put out a PS5 game, you can't just do what, put out like the software, and put it out on a disk and give it to people and have them run it; they won't run it, right? Their system is smart enough to know, to look at the software, find a key, get approved, get the licensing stuff. They put that lock on it. The VCS was the first video game console system to leave the stratosphere, right? It wasn't the first console, but it was the first one that really took off. And, but they still thought of consoles like phonographs instead of like game consoles because a phonograph doesn't know how to decide if the record is a good record or not. If the record fits and if you can put the groove, if the groove on the record will hold a needle, you can play the record, and the record player doesn't care where the record came from.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's right.

Howard Scott Warshaw: And that's the way they looked at the VCS. But a video game system is smarter than a phonograph, and if it wants, it can decide if it should play this game or not. But they didn't do that, and that's what allowed the glut of crap and all these other people to jump into the market, and they never did that. So Atari initially was extremely tactically creative, but a little legally naive, but nobody knew. Who knows? It's the first time around. So security at Atari was about finding what you're developing and not letting other people see that. It wasn't about keeping people off the system, which is the way, or keeping people from hacking the system, which is what a lot of software security today is about, right? Software and hardware. Now, if you're better, that's right. Technology security is a huge issue. It wasn't even a thought, yeah.

**Ed Gaudet:** Job number one.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And it's important. One of the reasons they never even thought about it was because, who's going to reverse engineer this? The first console, it was such a complicated machine. Nobody who's not already here and intimately involved with the hardware is going to know how to do this in the first place.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, that's great.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And who's going to reverse-engineer it, right? It's just too involved. That was the initial thinking. The thing is, though, that some of the first people who then challenged this, which was Activision. Quote, reverse-engineered, unquote, the system. But in reality, the people who were supposedly reverse engineering the system happened to be people who were programmers from Atari who had written some of the programming manuals for Atari, so they knew what the system was, but they had to present a credible example. So the irony, an independent person to, quote, reverse engineer it, and find some stuff, and then as soon as they gave some output, they were able to interpret the reverse engineering incredibly accurately and go ahead and proceed, and then Atari lost the court battle. Because, like I said, initially, Atari was technologically, amazingly innovative, and legally very naive, and then the later generation of Atari, because the whole story of Atari is a story of corporate cultural transition that killed them. But the latter one was much less technically savvy, but very legally sophisticated, but it turns out they came into the game too late. They couldn't put the bottle, the genie back in the bottle, and once they got out, they realized they didn't lock the system, and then legally, it turned out they couldn't lock the system at that point, and they lost that legal battle and that led to a lot more legal machinations. So security was about, and trying to keep secrets from filtering out before you release the game. Once you release the game, most people can look at VCS a game, they can figure out how you did what you did, and so I hope that answers the question.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, it does. So after leaving Atari, you end up at 3DO. What was it like working with Trip?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Working with Trip was a trip, that's for sure. Trip Hawkins is an amazing person, he's a very intense guy. He, like most real fundamental innovators and leaders, is a person who is profoundly committed to their vision, right or wrong. And usually, they're committed, and they believe in it because it's worked for them, but they believe. Some people will say, I think we can go this way, but we can also go that way, this might work, here's something, let's try it. And some people are like, don't even talk to me about anything else. This is where we're going, this is what we're doing, this is the right answer, and Trip is much more that guy. And then if it turns out it's the wrong avenue, they'll say, make it right, you know, because I know this is the right thing. He is someone who is very affirmative about his beliefs and where he's at, and it gives him a charisma and a personal strength that's very compelling, and people do follow him. And he's had many successful endeavors, and he's a very smart guy.

**Ed Gaudet:** So how did you end up in psychotherapy? Like, where's the connection there?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** You mean as a practitioner or as a client?

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, no. Did it start off first being that being a client, and then the interest grew from there or?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** The interest I've had all along. Honestly, when I was in high school, a very good friend of mine who's still a good friend to this day, we were going to create our own personality theory. That's when I was first interested in getting into psychology and therapy and stuff like that.

**Ed Gaudet:** Myers-Briggs or like a.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Yeah, that sort of thing. Having our own typology, our own way of doing personality assessment or theory of personality. And then after high school, we went in very divergent directions, completely different, neither of us anywhere near psychology. But what's interesting is ultimately he ended up marrying a therapist, and I ended up becoming a therapist, but many years later, so it was interesting.

**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** So the idea that was always there, but it also never seemed like a practical thing for me to do until, and this is also something I'd go into very deeply in the book, the transition from programmer to therapist. Well, it came to a point where technology wasn't particularly working for me anymore, and I realized what I'd wanted to do, but I believe was still totally impractical and unreachable, was to become a therapist. And a very wise woman who I was dating at the time said to me, you know, why is it so unreachable? She said, what do you want to do? What are you? If you could just do anything, what are you? If you really could do anything, what do you want to do? I said instantly, I want to be a psychotherapist. I just, I've always wanted to do that; I think that would be great. And I said, but it just seems ridiculous at this point, it doesn't seem doable. And she said, why don't you look into it? Why don't you just start to look into it and see what it takes? You have to do it, just see what it is. And the weird thing was, as soon as I started to look into being a therapist, seems like magically aligned in my life. And suddenly things that for years I was unable to get to or have happened, suddenly came out and sought me out. I'd been applying for jobs for a while, and nothing had taken, I've done many careers and I was, after having spent several years doing video production, just getting completely away from tech, and then I tried to get back into tech, and apply, and I was really having a lot of trouble getting back into tech, I couldn't get anywhere. Then I started finding jobs relating to, moving in a direction of becoming therapy, and then suddenly somebody came and offered me a job in tech. So I got a job managing, this job, like I couldn't find to save my life. Suddenly, it found me right at the moment where I needed a good way to pay for school, and that came in and helped, and it just, that launched me through school. And then right at the time, we're at the start transitioning out, because we're going to have to do my intern hours and do the, because you need 3000 hours of supervised experience to become a therapist in California, which is that's a lot of hours. So I didn't want that process to take another 10 or 15 years. So I thought, you know, I'm working full time. How am I going to get there? And then I got laid off. Laid off right at the time where ... to start my more intense internships and things like that. Everything just magically fell into place with me becoming a therapist. And as I went deeper into it, I realized I loved it more and more, and I love it. I'm super passionate...

**Ed Gaudet:** What is it about? What do you love about it? What is it about that profession that you love that's so different?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** So being a psychotherapist is not about telling people what to do. It's really about helping people see, open their eyes, and understand where they're at and what their possibilities are, and then letting them choose from a richer palette. Okay, that's the way I see psychotherapy. So the idea of helping people, of genuinely helping people, that's important to me. I do like that. The idea of getting paid to talk to people, that's really appealing to me because I love to talk to people. You know, I just do, I'm a big talker, and I love that, and the idea that I can get paid to do that is fabulous. And the idea of opening and expanding perspective in general. I always liked the idea of finding the alternate way, a new way, a fresh way of looking it was the cup half empty or half full, maybe the cup is too big.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's right. I love that, yeah.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And it's there's always another way to see things, and I'm always looking for that. Another thing is that it's an incredible amount of intimacy because the relationship between a therapist and a client is an incredibly intimate relationship, and I value that too. I value deep connection with people, and you can really connect with people as a therapist for sure. Hopefully, if you're, if you can't, you're not a very good therapist.

Ed Gaudet: That's probably the deepest you can connect with anybody at that level, right?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** I think that's true, and as I explore things with people, I learn things too. I get so much from being out there. I try to give a tremendous amount to my clients, but I also, I get a tremendous amount from my clients. And just in terms of understanding and value and clean perspectives and alternative ways of viewing things, it just it's an incredibly rich experience. And a lot of people ask me, though, isn't it weird for a programmer to have become a therapist? Most people don't see that as a smooth transition, and I understand that. What they're really saying is nerds have no people skills, how do you think of being a therapist, which is a job that really needs people skills? And so what I tell people is, I don't really see the job of programmer and therapist as that different. The way I see it is programmers and therapists, we're all systems analysts, right? It's just that I've moved on to much more sophisticated hardware, the human brain.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's right.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And that's the way I see the transition.

**Ed Gaudet:** I would agree with that 100%. Two last questions, and we'll wrap up here, and then I'll introduce my brother. So what would you tell your 20-year-old self?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Honestly, if I could encounter my 20-year-old self again, I would say get to Atari sooner and buy Apple.

**Ed Gaudet:** Love that, love that. All right. And of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you this question because this is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. Howard, what's the riskiest thing you've ever done?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** What's the riskiest thing I've ever done? Wow, that's a tough one because that goes in so many categories. I have literally jumped off cliffs. I have done some things while driving that probably were not smart ideas over 60 miles an hour. Often I have made investments that cost me incredible amounts of money. So in terms of taking risks financially, I have done that not wisely, but too well at times. What's the riskiest thing I ever did? But one of the riskiest things I ever did was to guarantee that I could deliver the E.T. cartridge in five weeks. That was a big risk. And to tell you the truth, well, four decades later, I'm still not sure which way that went.

**Ed Gaudet:** What was it like for you to be there at the dig site when they were unearthing that? That must have been so emotional.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** It was amazingly ..., it was overwhelming emotionally eventually. At first, it was just interesting because I was always so sure there was nothing there because it made no sense that anything would be there. But as I like to say, when you expect things to make sense, you're losing touch with Atari, right? Because the Atari was never about making sense.

**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** Atari was about making fun and incredibly outrageously creative and extraordinary environment with wild and innovative people, and it was amazing. So I never believed, it didn't make any sense that they would actually be up-buried out there. I thought this was going to be a big zero, but they were making this movie, and I thought, This is going to be a much better movie if they find something. So the early part of the day, I'm thinking, boy, this seems like a waste of time, but I really hope I'm wrong. But when it came up, and they found the stuff, first of all, when we first approached the dump site, because it wasn't a dump, right, it's in the Alamogordo City dump, and there was a line of hundreds and hundreds of people waiting to get into the dump. I have never seen people lined up waiting to get into a garbage dump. I've seen a truck or two waiting to dump stuff. I've never seen a line of people like in a movie waiting to get into a dump, it was just amazing. And after a whole day and sandstorms, it was really, and this is another thing I go into deeply in the book, deep enough to get the cartridges back, at least. When they actually found an E.T. cartridge and they're able to present it, and the excitement and the drama and all the camera clicks and all the stuff that went on in that moment, because here was these hundreds and hundreds of people who had weathered a sandstorm literally in the middle of a desert to see about if this thing here is that there. And I was overwhelmed, in that moment, because what I realized was that, I was saying earlier, media, producing media, I always look video game as many things, but it's also, to me, I always looked at it as a piece of broadcast media. That's the way I looked at it. And, you know, to me, the hope, what's the goal? What's the best thing you can do with a piece of broadcast media? And I'd say it's three things, right? You know, the, a great piece of broadcast media will entertain, it will inform, and it will generate social discourse. To me, that's the ultimate piece, right? Something that people learn something real from, they enjoy it, and then they want to talk about it with other people so people are buzzing about it. To me, that's the ultimate piece. And at that moment, there were international news crews, there were all kinds of people there, and hundreds of fans. And when everybody going wild, because this is what it is, I realized, in that moment, that this little piece of software, this thing that I had given my soul to, spent the hardest five weeks of my life composing over 30 years before, was still generating the kind of excitement and experience that people were engaged in. And people were there, and they were so passionate about what was going on. The idea that I was at the center of that, that something I had done was still creating this kind of ..., it was so fulfilling, it literally brought tears to my eyes. It was just, people were so excited and so happy.



**Howard Scott Warshaw (cont'd):** I thought, This is a good thing. I'm so glad that I had a part in this, and that was overwhelming. So I'd say that's what that moment was like, and I literally, which most people who know me cannot believe that I was speechless for a minute, even for a moment.

**Ed Gaudet:** I saw it on the film. I saw it. I saw it on the film. It was very touching. And I just, I spent the last week following around one of my favorite groups here, and this is their final tour. So again, another final tour, but it was during one of the songs I literally just started bawling because it was all coming to an end.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Yeah, there's so much meaning, so much value, so much history there in those moments.

**Ed Gaudet:** Exactly.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And I'll tell you, it was, thank you, first of all, I'm glad. To tell you the honest truth, even when I watch Atari: Game Over again, when it gets to that point, when they see me reacting in there, I get choked up, I still get choked up all over again just because I re-experience that moment. And it's just one of the greatest things in my life that I remember so clearly and so cleanly and will carry forever. That's just.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah, thank you for that. You're a part of my life, my history, and my brother's history. This is Mark. I would like to introduce you to my brother Mark. He's a huge fan of yours. ... You're here. I figured I'd get him on here.

**Mark Gaudet:** Hi Howard!

**Ed Gaudet:** Say hello.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Yeah, Mark was the person I originally talked to in setting up the.

**Ed Gaudet:** That's right.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** The interview in the first place.

**Ed Gaudet:** Yeah.

**Mark Gaudet:** I did, yeah, big fan, pretty speechless right now, just loving, listening to the stories, and so.

**Ed Gaudet:** You want to ask Howard a question?

**Mark Gaudet:** I will not gush too much, but I'm gushing inside.

**Ed Gaudet:** You want to ask Howard?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Thank you, Mark. Any questions?

**Mark Gaudet:** Oh, my God. There's so many things that were going through my head when you were talking. I was going to go into Magnavox and Odyssey because that was like the first, like, lawsuit between them and, yeah, Nolan Bushnell, and what was it like to work with Nolan? And it's just, yeah.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** He was an amazing character.

**Mark Gaudet:** ... was there making Breakout?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** I was not there. I got there after that. But it's true, a lot of people don't know that Jobs and Wozniak worked at Atari before they started Apple, which was one of the things that's really amazing about Atari is the things they didn't do. Atari so wanted to branch out and do other things, they wanted to do a, one of the first handheld dictionaries; that was a big project there, but they couldn't really deliver that.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** They had one of the most amazing holography labs in the world at that time, but didn't really do anything with it. But the projects they said no to, that's one of the great stories of Atari that a lot of people don't know, because at one point, Jobs and Wozniak wanted Atari to do this computer, they were going to do a computer, said, hey, why don't you do it? Why don't, let's do it for you, let's put this thing together. And they said, no, that's not what we do. We make games. The first spreadsheet, what was originally what became Visicalc.

**Mark Gaudet:** Visicalc, yeah. Dan Bricklin.

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Atari, I remember seeing a presentation, a bunch of the game engineers got a presentation of this and said, hey, what is this? And we're like, Who's going to play a game with that? And that's not, you can't play a game with that. So Atari rejected Visicalc, and one of the great ones was, after things had gotten ugly, Nintendo wanted to launch their system in the US and they offered Atari the opportunity to be the exclusive North American distributor of Nintendo system, and Atari said no, they refused them. It's like, wow, some amazing bad moves here and there. So there's an old saying in Hollywood that says nobody ever got fired for saying no. And people at Atari, I think, believed that also, but it was amazing the things that we blew off that would have been huge. But Atari was already huge at the time, and I think they felt more indestructible than it turned out they were.

**Ed Gaudet:** Howard, any last comments to the listeners? You want to hold up your book again so I can go?

**Howard Scott Warshaw:** Oh, absolutely. Mark, I just want to say it's a pleasure to meet you and actually see you and be able to talk with you. Thank you for your help with this.

**Mark Gaudet:** Yeah, big fan, huge fan.



**Howard Scott Warshaw:** And I'd like to say, here's Once Upon Atari: How I Made History by Killing an Industry. And that's me on my 25th birthday, you can see that I haven't changed at all. But at this book, you can, if you want an autographed copy, you can go to [OnceUponAtari.com](http://OnceUponAtari.com) and you can get autographed copies, or the book or the DVD, or you can go to Amazon or Audible and get an e-book, this book, or the audiobook. I narrated the audiobook, that's available on Audible and Amazon, and I just want to say thank you both so much for the time, and it's a pleasure talking with you, and I'd do it again.

**Ed Gaudet:** Thank you very much, Howard. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, and if you're on the front lines of patient care, remember, stay vigilant because risk never sleeps.



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