Personal Computers â€“ 25 Years and Counting â€“ Part V

Description

>Part IV concluded the story of TAGG and adventures into the BASIC and HP-GL programming launguagesâ€¦.

The Tidewater Apple Worms club helped me learn more. One day I mentioned I was considering getting a modem. Bill, who I knew by aquaintance only, said I couls borrow his for a week, and see how I liked it. It was a Hayes 300 baud modem, the internal card type. I was amazed at the offer, and later in the week, went over to his house and he pulled it out and handed it to me. Back home to begin the inderstanding of serial digital to analog communications. I got to where I knew what â€œATDTâ€• menat and how to change the volume of the modemâ€™s speaker and other important things.

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I broke down, after I took it back to Bill, and bought one myself. In 1982 dollars, we were talking $250 for the priveledge of communication at 300 bits per second, but it opened a whole new world. baout this time, I also decided, when the price dropped to $99, to buy a â€œLanguage Cardâ€• for the Apple][+, which was a fancy name for an extra 16K (yes, K, no type here) of memory, bringing me to a whopping 64K of RAM.

One of my neighbors came over and asked if I could help them at work, beacuse Peachtree (one of the very first accounting pacakages) seemed to have a bug. I told her Iâ€™d give it a try, and, upon arriving at their office, found out Peachtree was written in Apple BASIC, and I could look at the listing, as it wasnâ€™t compiled. I tracked the problem down and was able to successfully patch the bug out of existence. I wasnâ€™t smart enough back then to know I shold have sent off a report to Peachtree. As a result of my work, not only did they pay me, but they asked if Iâ€™d like â€œthis.â€• â€œThisâ€• was the entire, unopened copy of Apple PASCAL, which was sold to them when they got the computer (even thought they didnâ€™t need it). I seem to recall the list price was $475, so I nodded and said I thought I might find a use for it. I did. I went and took a course in PASCAL at the local community college. While I didnâ€™t ever use PASCAL directly for anything, shortly after this, I started working the dBase II, and the programming language was essentially PASCAL beefed up for doing datbase programming.

Along with dBase II, I had to get a â€œco-processorâ€• card, which, as most people are aware of now, is like plugging a second computer in. I got a board with the Zilog Z-80 chip and was then able to boot up in CP/M, an newere operating system, which was very much like the PC-DOS/IBM-DOS/MS-DOS that came into wide use later.

I heard you could make money compiling mailing lists and being able to sort them for customers. I set out learning dBase II building an application to enter and printout labels, customized to do a selectable amount of columns of labels. Never did make money on that, but I learned database design and report building well.

By this time, it was getting harder and harder to find people in the club to answer questions, now mostly about software, for few were building applications. Most were using their machines to prduce word

processing or use pre-packaged applications, so I was running ahead of the pack I had been running with. Now I had to start digging up books on the subject.

Next stop: Lobbying for Z-248s from the Supply Corps, the POA&M Application and how the Senior Watch Officer could balance watchstanding sections in a few keystrokes.

Category

1. History
2. Technology

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