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

Description

The story begins here.

The Tidewater Apple Worms (TAW) club opened up an entire new world. They produced a newsletter, bought large quantities of 5 1/4â€³ floppies, then split them up as people had ordered them. The tutorials were excellent, as members who had owned Apples freely shared their knowledge of hardware and software. Far better than the salespeople in the few computer stores around the area, it was drinking from a firehose, but I gulped as hard as I could, and it paid off.

Byte Magazine was about all there was to read, unless you were a real hobbist in the computer field and built your own â€œhome brewâ€• systems using empty chassis and adding your own processor and interface cards. That was too deep for me, even while on shore duty. Much of the education I focused on was programming the computer, and I spent many hours typing in program listings in assembler and Apple BASIC languages. By entering these listings from Byte and a few other sources, mostly for games, I picked up the programming concepts. In addition to the programming to get some games to play, I also spent time with the EZ Write Pro word processing software. My wife picked up some typing jobs, and was able to make the computer make money, certainly, I wasnâ€™t at the beginning.

default watermark

I â€œflewâ€• my first flight sim on the Apple. It prvided an X/Y/Z readout on the screen, as you used keys to steer and accellerate/decellerate, while consulting the map in from a page in Byte. I guess I began â€œflyingâ€• IFR, before progressing the the VFR stuff later, when the still surviving early version of Microsoft Flight Simulator came out.

In EZ Writer, if you wanted to make a part of your text bold, you would â€œmarkâ€• the text with a (I canâ€™t get them to just plain print here) set of characters we now know and love as HTML. Same for italizied and larger print for headings. So, in 1981, I was using HTML, not realizing it would come back to me in 1996, when I was asked to take over webmaster for my company.

I also learned how to *ahem* secure my investments by archiving programs. Copy][+ and Locksmith seem to come to mind as some programs that were useful. Given there were no well stocked software stores, it was useful to know if a program, despite the writing on the box, would do the job. On the other hand, one of the assets of the TAW was the â€œpublic domainâ€• library of programs.

Back in the day, people actually would write software and publish it in the public domain. Read: FREEWARE, and mountains of it. The Washington, DC and Dallas Apple clubs were well developed and also had amassed very large software libraries. The clubs would graciously share their stuff, if you shared yours. It didnâ€™t matter too much that you couldnâ€™t provide the same volume or quality, but if you were making an effort, you got help. There were many programs, some very polished, some that worked fine, so long as you didnâ€™t strike a wrong key, and some that was just plain buggy beyond belief. But, people shared their work and it wasnâ€™t until many, many years later I came across the term â€œshareware.â€•

In that first year of ownership of a â€œPC,â€• I learned much in the weekly Saturday meetings. I actually felt bad, for I was taking all this help, and really didnâ€™t know enought o reciprocate. Part way thru the year, the newletter editor announced they had to resign. I looked at the spouse and said: We can do that. She agreed. I volunteered us to take the duty.

Next episode: Davy Jones and the Manpower Auditors meet Stoneware

Category

1. History
2. Technology

Date Created
October 4, 2006
Author
admin

default watermark