

A WHOLE DIFFERENT BALLGAME

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8 September 1998

LET YOUR GUT FEELINGS LEAD YOU

I decided to ignore what my neighborhood pals were saying and choose door number three. Unfortunately there would be no appearance by Monty Hall to show me what was behind doors one and two. My choice led me down the road of computers and electronics. A journey I have enjoyed even though I often question what doors one and two held. Below is a small piece of my computer journey during the 1980's.

IF THEY HAVE WHAT YOU WANT YOU WILL DO WHAT THEY SAY (Early 1980's)

One of my neighborhood pals (Seth) had an Atari 800. Well, actually it was the family's computer. Whenever us gang of kids were hanging out I often recommended playing games on Seth's computer. Most of the time I was unsuccessful. I think after awhile Seth felt we were using him to play those excellent Atari 800 games as opposed to our Atari 2600 crap.

Seth's dad knew a guy in New York so he had all the latest and greatest games--most, if not all, were pirated. I recall one of my favorite games being "Journey to the Planets" and some castle trivia game. I guess I was tired of the shoot em ups and needed something more challenging. Unfortunately none of us ever ended up solving "Journey to the Planets" as Seth was always limiting our computer time.

Once I got a C-128 my trips to Seth's place became almost nonexistent. Sadly this drifting of friendship became a common thread once I had a computer. The computer and cyber friends replaced my neighborhood friends but it was never the same. My Commodore opened up a whole new world but also shut a few doors in the process.

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU ARE NOW OFFICIALLY A NERD

Christmas day 1985 I opened my presents and found one of them to be a Commodore 128. I also got a monitor, 1571 disk drive, and Okimate 10 (color printer). The total cost (I later discovered) was just over a thousand dollars (ouch).

I had wanted a computer for some time but really wasn't sure which I should get. The schools were using the Apple IIe and I knew a couple people with the Atari 800 yet somehow my parents decided to get me the Commodore 128. At fourteen I finally had a system I could call my own.

I remember going back to school after the Christmas break and having my tenth grade computer teacher (APPLE BASIC) ask the class if anyone got a computer over Christmas. No one raised their hand, not even me. Computers were for nerds--everyone knew that--and I didn't want to admit I was a nerd.

GAMES GALORE (Mid 1980's)

Initially I didn't have any software contacts so I ended up buying my first few games--"Karate Champ" and "The Great American Road Race." I did a little bit of programming but mainly treated the C-128 as a game machine (C-64 mode with the EPYX fastload cartridge). Eventually I made a contact (Naveen) in school who I traded games with and hung around with for the next several years. Initially Naveen required one blank 5.25 disk for a 5.25 disk full of games--since I had nothing to offer him. After a long while he let me copy whatever I wanted.

It wasn't long before I had more games than I knew what to do with. I became desensitized and often found myself only spending a few minutes checking out each new game. Perhaps this information overload helped contribute to my short attention span. Had I continued to purchase games or not gotten them in such quantity I believe I would have appreciated them more. So, on that note, too much of a good thing is not always a good thing.

THE BBS FACTOR--TIME KILLER OR USEFUL TOOL?

After the summer of 1986 I bought a used 300 baud modem and got my first taste of BBSing. I was hooked, BBSing was an addiction and that is about all I would do when I got home from school for about an hour or two every day. I met new friends, traders, and learned about demos.

I discovered that there were also a ton of pirate Bulletin Board Systems but they often didn't allow 300 baud lamers or people who didn't have the latest warez. If you couldn't supply a 0-3 day old game to the site or didn't know any big name people then you had no

chance of being granted access.

The BBS world opened more doors and I eventually was trading games through the mail to various people. I also got my name in the RUN magazine pen pal section. This opened the door to traders outside the local area. In fact, to this day, I still talk with two people I met thanks to my name being in RUN magazine back in 1986.

Multi line D&D games (MUDs) were in their infancy and tons of people were hooked--including myself. Imagine talking to all these people with the same interests (computers) as you and doing it LIVE and LOCAL. These were great times indeed but I missed out on a lot of normal High School activities like sports, dances, and proms. Being abnormal, the computer and friends I met via BBSing were my "real world."

HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

What I found to be amazing (and slightly depressing) is that when the trading stopped so did most of the friendships. The whole scene seemed to be very loosely built with people coming and going all the time.

I became "friends" with a couple people who were pretty big in the South Florida scene. One called himself The Whizard (Mitch) and the other was known as Badd Boy (Ern). The Whizard had an Elite BBS and was a member of an up and coming cracking group. He ended up getting busted for selling credit card numbers. Badd Boy was a courier for a group called The Survivors. He was a big time Phreaker who downloaded 0 day wares and chatted with people all over the world on a daily basis. He ended up getting busted two days before a massive C-64 copy party he organized. His picture and an article were in the paper a few days later (\$50k worth of phone calls made). Badd Boy ended up vanishing from the scene for about six months. When he came back he had an Amiga 500 but never seemed the same. I never did find out where he vanished to but I suspect he was in jail/prison. "Seven days with no warez makes one weak" was the only thing I can remember Badd Boy saying.

PROGRAMMING (Late 1980's)

In the late 80's (1987-1989) I became caught up in the demo scene. I actually programmed a disk full of stuff (nothing very impressive). I also traded with a few Europeans and was even greeted in a demo by

the group FRONT. I probably spent more time programming/hacking out code for another demo than playing games during these years. Heck, I had over 300 disk of games by 1988 so I had pretty much been there and done that.

THOSE CLASSIC GAMES

There were a ton of great games created for the 8 bit Commodore market. Some of my favorites were and still are: Super Cycle, Jumpman Jr., California Games, Zak McCrackin, Beach Head II, Lords of Conquest, Archon, Ultima IV, Racing Destruction Disk, and Gyruss. Of course there are many other great games but these are few of the ones I enjoyed and played the most.

THE END OF AN ERA

I kept my C-128 setup until I moved to Oregon in 1997. I wasn't using it anymore plus the IBM PC C64S emulator I have works pretty well. Less baggage to carry around although it was hard giving it up after so much time spent at the keyboard.

SPEND YOUR TIME WISELY AND BE AWARE OF THE TRADEOFFS

I spent a ton of time from age 14 to 18 using my Commodore 128. Perhaps too much time. I probably averaged two hours a day over four years on the machine. So I gave up over 128 straight days of my time to the Commodore computer over the years. The time was often entertaining and fun especially for an introvert like me.

Looking back it would have been nice to have had some balance in my life between computer and school activities. However, it is much easier to talk the talk then walk the walk.