

What does a 100-year-old do with a computer?



What does a 100-year-old do with a computer? The same thing a 99-year-old does. Though the hands are not as nimble and the eyes are not as sharp, Dad was happy to see his “friend” arrive in his healthcare facility room, where he is recouping from a hospital misadventure. His friend, of course, is his iMac.

Dad’s computer journey began when he accompanied his son, Fred, 35 years earlier to purchase Fred’s first computer, a cassette-based Radio Shack TRS-80 Model I. That’s a story in itself. Fred bought one share of Tandy stock to get a 10% shareholder discount and traveled to Delaware to circumvent the then 6% New Jersey sales tax. Dad always liked gadgets and seemed curious, if not jealous, of Fred’s new toy. Subsequent visits to Dad were often sprinkled with musings of “What would I do with a computer?”

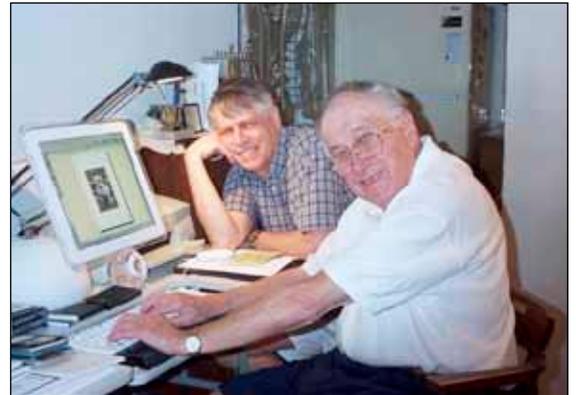
So several years later when Dad was in his 70s, Fred bought Dad a Tandy Model 100, a true portable, for Father’s Day. Damn if he didn’t figure it out on his own, sufficiently well enough to maintain price lists and color paint formulas for the Kagel Paint Store, which he owned.

Dad gets the Apple

But Dad didn’t stop there. Enter the 1980s with super inflation and high interest rates of 13% on CDs. Remember when banks offered all kinds of gimmicks to get new depositors? Well, Dad took the bait and got an Apple IIe by purchasing a new CD for a miserly 12%, thus sacrificing a whopping 1%.

For years, he had been typing up Mom’s recipes on a typewriter. Now Dad was typing up Mom’s recipes on a computer, because she was always changing her recipes. What a perfect way to describe Word-processing — the changing of a recipe, or just the changing of one’s mind. That’s the way he saw the computer — as a glorified typewriter.

The typewriter was symbolic of Dad’s own education at Girard College, a prep school in Philadelphia for orphaned males. Dad later ‘punished’ his son Fred by buying him a typewriter for his 16th birthday, while other kids were sporting cars for their big 16th. Dad used masking tape to cover over the keys, thus forcing Fred to learn touch typing. He likewise talked



his other son, Allen, into taking Typing instead of German in high school; that eventually landed him a communications job in the Navy.

Dad would go on to own four computers, the latest being his “sexy” dome shaped iMac, thanks to BCUG member, Tom Reu, who generously donated a 17-inch model to replace Dad’s 15-inch model as his eyes started to dim.

Weekly calls always got a laugh after an initial worry. “Dad, ‘How ya doing?’”

“Not so good; my computer’s not working.”

“No, Dad, how are you?”

“I had a problem with the computer, but I fixed it.”

When Dad complained that PC-bred Fred ‘messed up’ his computer, he bought Fred a Mac mini to sharpen Fred’s Apple skills. When Dad wasn’t able to ‘fix’ his computer problem, he wasn’t shy about calling for support.

Dad grabs the ear of Jobs

Story has it that somehow he reached the personal secretary of Steve Jobs, who invited him, if he had any further problems, to contact his office directly. So somewhere in Dad’s floppy disk archives yet-to-be-discovered is an email from Mr. Apple himself.

Over the ensuing years, Dad mastered EasyCalc, PractiCalc, AppleWorks, Quicken, and his all-time favorite, PrintShop. When Dad retired, he filled his time by retyping interesting articles that he found in newspapers and magazines. He scanned in pictures that he would later use for signs and banners. Remember those 20-footers strung together from a dot matrix printer? Nostalgically, but not surprisingly, regularly mailed letters and newspaper clippings

Continued on page 9

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