THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

By Lenard R. Roach

A SALE LOST; A LESSON LEARNED

I have been trying to get a handle on one skill – how to make a sale. My failure to grasp this concept is one of the reasons why my book sales, both Commodore and non-Commodore publications, have been so weak, though my Commodore book sales have been considerably better than my skit and play books. For some reason, I thought I could make some sort of Commodore transaction when it came to dealing with the two churches that I attend, but it all fell apart due to the lack of this skill of making a sale.

However, I am getting well ahead of myself, so allow me to try and start from the beginning…

Towards the end of 2021, I ordered a couple of books from separate book dealers who advertised over the Internet. Both books were the same, "Computer Bible Games Book 2," especially written for Applesoft BASIC, Microsoft MBASIC, and Commodore BASIC, as well as other machines of the day which ran on the BASIC routines found on one of these three formats. The books were copyrighted 1984, which means to me they were written at the very beginning of the home computer spike. The author only identifies himself as J. Conrod. There were approximately eighteen games written as type-in programs, so a user could type in which games he/she wished to try.

At that time I spent two complete weekends typing in and testing all of the programs listed in the books. Many of the programs were easy to enter and worked fine on the first alpha test. Some of the games, however, needed extra eyes other than my own to see the errors that I had made in typing in the code. At first, I tried to debug each of the offending programs by using my Commodore MPS-802 printer to print the extremely long text. I was successful for the most part in fixing the bugs, but there were at least two programs in the entire collection that I could not debug. I was quickly frustrated after looking for weeks to find the offending code, so I did what Ecclesiastes said, "Two are better than one ... a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (4:9, 12).

Enter Robert Bernardo and his Internet gang of Commodore enthusiasts. I told Robert what I was trying to do, how I was doing it, and where I was stumped. I tried the best I could via email to describe the situation. Robert was honest and told me that I needed to make copies of the program and send them to him via the postal service in order for him to physically look at the programs on his own Commodore computer and see for himself where the problems might be. I made disk copies for him and even photocopied off the original text out of the book so that he could have a better idea of what I was up against.

It took at least a week for the packet to be transported from Kansas City, Kansas to California. When the packet arrived, Robert had difficulty reading the program disks, due to the trip and the poor handling done by the United States Postal Service. Robert began the task of trying to rescue the programs off of my disks and put them onto a disk that he knew would work in his Commodore machine.

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My father has schizophrenia,
     but he's good people.
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While he was immersed in this project, I went on with the task of determining which of my two churches would be able to use my work. I took the two copies of the Bible program books and gave one of each to two different people. One copy went to Tammy, the Sunday School superintendent of Glad Tidings Assembly of God, and the other went to Pastor Barbara of the Bonner Springs Church of the Nazarene where she reposed as the Children's Church pastor. They would look at the books, and after about two weeks, they would make a decision whether they were interested in seeing the work.

During those two weeks of pacing and waiting, I stayed in contact with Robert via email to check on his progress. I let him know that I had baited a couple of hooks, trying to be patient and see if any church fish would bite. In the meantime, Robert and his online friends took the programs, dissected them, found the offending codes, made repairs, and added PETSCII graphics. Robert put the updated programs onto a disk and mailed the disk back to me. Naturally, the same damage that occurred during the shipment to California was repeated on the return trip to Kansas. I had trouble loading the disk programs to my Commodore, and when the programs did load, the programs would not run. This was my first disappointment.

My second disappointment came when I got word from Tammy that she was uninterested in using the programs in her classes for the simple reason that she could not understand the code. I assured her that I was working on putting the code into a working program and that there would be no need for her to understand what she was looking at in the book. Still, Tammy was adamant in stating her disinterest in the work, telling me that the church's Sunday School class would have no room for a bulky Commodore computer, especially since it needed an old-style television that required either a RF or composite hookup. I no longer persisted with Tammy, but I was so enraged that I was ready to write the pastor to ask

for a meeting of the deacon's board in order to demonstrate the program to them and force Tammy to look at the programs more intently. However, second thoughts told me to cool my hot temper and just let the matter go. The whole point behind converting the programs to the Commodore was to present them to children, to allow the children to learn the scriptures, and possibly to have the children have a little fun while using the programs. I guess it didn't matter. The disk that Robert mailed me from California didn't work anyway.

I got onto the PC and emailed Robert the news of what Tammy said about the programs and the Commodore. Instead of a usual reply on the subject at hand, Robert emailed me and told me about a device that he had been using – the SD2IEC which would allow Commodore programs to be transferred onto an SD card. Then the card could be put into a standard PC, and the Commodore image files could be sent over the Internet. Robert was gracious enough to purchase a SD2IEC device for me and programmed a SD card with all the necessary files to make the device work well. I thanked Robert for the device profusely and sent him the repayment for the SD2IEC. This would eliminate the USPS from their gorilla handling of the packages that I was sending. The problems were solved with 21st century technology.

Robert coached me through e-mail and sent some documents that he wrote which explained the ins-and-outs of creating and transferring Commodore files to the micro SD card used in the SD2IEC device. After learning on how to e-mail those files, I soon was e-mailing Robert all the necessary files needed to help me with the work in progress.

I remembered that I still had one more line in the water. I would see what Pastor Barb had to say about the work. I had an extra crowbar in the wedge of this deal; her husband Jon was my best friend. At least out of courtesy, I knew that she

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would have to look at the programs. Barbara acquiesced to my request and allowed me one Sunday in February to see what I had done on the Commodore 64.

During the weeks of waiting for the selected Sunday, I made sure that Commodore SX64 was in perfect working order. I took a few extra hours on the Saturday before the debut and gave the SX64 a good dusting and a spray down. The ol' girl had to look her best for the demonstration.

Sunday came. Grabbing power cords, bus cables, and a newly acquired AV2HDMI imaging device, I put all of it in the back of my SUV and roared off to the the Nazarene church in Bonner Springs, Kansas, in hopes that the Commodore would make a comeback.

I sat in on the children's service. As I listened to Jon and Barbara deliver a message that would be useful to the children's Christian development, the service seemed to last a lot longer than it should have. When service was over Jon, Barb, and I went into a small room just down the hall of the Children's Church.

Finding a table close to the HDMI flatscreen monitor mounted on the wall, I set up the SX64, and with Jon's help, got the Commodore to send a clear image to that monitor. I put a 5.25 disk in the SX64's disk drive and called up the directory. There were only two sections on this disk, Bible Games and Bible Scramble.

"Which one to you want to look at first?" I asked them.

By this time Jon and Barb's adult daughter, Dayna, had come into the room and had sat down next to her dad. Dayna spoke up for the family, "Bible Games, naturally."

I typed in the load command, and after a ninety second wait, Bible Games was up on the monitor. Bible Games gave a list of nine games that a person could play.

I won't go into details about how to play each

game. If you, dear reader, are interested in obtaining a copy of the Bible Games disk, then please contact The Vector at The_Tech_Shop@live.com , and he will send you a copy.

"How about my favorite and the most frustrating game in the whole collection, The Quail Game?" I suggested.

All three nodded yes, I pressed the properly numbered selection, and The Quail Game quickly came up on the monitor. When the game began, it was Jon versus Dayna.

The Quail Game is basically a game of Hide and Seek. The Commodore "hides" a randomly selected number of "quail" (represented by the letter V in the game). The object is to find all the quail in the shortest amount of guesses. Even though The Quail Game was made for only one player, you can easily have a head-to-head competition, but the total score in the game is added together on the Commodore. In order to choose a winner, you would have to use a tally sheet in order to keep track of who made the most correct guesses.

Jon and Dayna had a hard time locating all the quail in the game, but they found all of them in around one hundred guesses. With Jon and Dayna currently tied, there was no winner.

Everyone looked at me as I waited for the verdict on whether the Commodore would be a viable instrument in helping the Children's Church kids learn a little more about the Bible and the Christian life.

Being in charge of the class, Barbara spoke up first, "I think the kids would have a blast playing the games, but I would like to get more into education than just having games to play."

I countered. "That's where Bible Scramble would come in. You can put down verses in the scrambler, and the kids could try and reassemble the verses, thus hopefully helping them to

memorize the verse that you want them to know."

Barb nodded. She looked square at me and asked, "How much for one of these units?" she asked.

Great Caesar's salad! I was about to make a Commodore computer sale! This was something that I wasn't expecting. I had to think quickly. An SX64 was running anywhere between $400 and $1,000 on the Internet. I quickly came up with a number that was low ball but one I thought was fair.

"How about $500?"

Barb's face fell. I knew there would be no way for her to convince the Board of Deacons to approve on her buying a Commodore SX64 unit for $500, especially since that unit is over forty years old and still was working on OEM parts with few chances of repair locally if the unit broke down in any way. I had to think fast.

"How about this," I countered myself," I have a complete desktop system that I am not using, with keyboard and drive and all the necessary cables. I can sell that to you for $100. Does that sound better?"

Barb perked up. "I'd like to see that set-up in action before I bring it to the board for approval."

"I'll work on finding a keyboard and drive, test it for reliability, and report back to you next Sunday."

"Perfect," she said. "If that set-up works, then I'll bring it up with the board."

We said our good-byes at that moment and while I was packing up the SX64 and all the necessary cables, Barb, Jon, and Dayna worked on picking up the mess of papers, pens, and coloring pencils that were scattered all over the Fellowship Hall where class was held.

I had almost sold one of my SX64s, but my quote was too high. Maybe in my vast collection of Commodore gear, I could scavenge a working desktop Commodore 64, a functional 1541 disk drive, and all the necessary bus cables and power cords to make the system perform properly and thus make a $100 sale instead.

Once back to my digs on Corona Avenue, I wasted no time in going through all my Commodore equipment from the various closets around the house. It wasn't long before I had found a few C64s and a couple of disk drives. Going to the 32" monitor I had in my living room, I took my spare AV2HDMI (you can never have more than one) and connected all the necessary plugs and cables. I tried one breadbox C64. No image. That wouldn't do. It would have to go off for repair when I got to Burbank and the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show later in June 2022. I tested the next C64. Good... an image... but would it accept data from a disk? Time to try out one of the 1541s; this should kill two birds with one stone. I had my Five Program Bonus Disk in hand. I gave a simple LOAD command. Upon READY, I typed in the RUN command and crossed my fingers.

What the actual ... ?

On the screen was a collage of colors and sound but nothing that remotely looked close to the menu screen of the program I loaded. At least I knew that the drive was working, so that part of the equation was solved. Now the mission was to find a working keyboard. One by one, I went through my stack of four or five Commodore 64s and found problems with each one. Most of them had no image, just a blue screen. One of them didn't boot at all. I was getting desperate. A Commodore sale was hanging in the balance. I went to my bedroom closet where my personal, streamlined C64 resided in its original box. I pulled it out and added it to the mix of the various C64s that I already had. After hookup and boot, the breadbox Commodore 64 seemed to work perfectly, but after warm up, this computer also displayed crazy colors and images. In this case, it wasn't after loading a program; she went haywire on her own. Great! My last C64 in stock was

broken, too. Now what was I going to do? I knew that I had until next week to find a solution. My personal Commodore 128 and my SX64 were the only working Commodore units I had in the house. The rest of the machines had to go off to CLASS 2022 where Robert would take them to Ray Carlsen in Washington state for repairs. At least I knew where I stood on working computers.

It was time to do some serious searching and praying. Checking the Internet for working C64s, I discovered that many of the sellers of working units wanted close if not over $100 for the machines. This would put me into negative sales bracket, which is never acceptable in any transaction. By Wednesday, I knew that I was running out of time. I needed to have a buffer of time to make sure I had everything in working order. By Friday night, I had an idea.

WinVICE. No computer to set up, runs on any PC platform, can be installed on a flash drive, and is very portable. But what would I charge for the work and flash drive? Plus Barb and Jon would need to learn how to load and run the software off the flash drive. The Fellowship Hall had only a PC desktop that ran Windows 7. Would that OS work with the current version of WinVICE? First in order to find out, I had to attempt to relearn WinVICE. I hadn't used the program since the late 90s. A quick search for WinVICE on Google turned up the VICE.org website where various versions of the program existed for almost all formats, both old and up-to-date OS packages. I found the one that would best fit my Windows 10 laptop and downloaded the program.

"THIS MAY BE MALICIOUS SOFTWARE," my AVG security program on my HP laptop warned me. "DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE WITH THE DOWNLOAD?" This was a new twist since my use of the program in the 90s. Taking the chance of possibly damaging my PC, I hit Y on the keyboard, and the machine went ahead to finish the download. When the PC put the downloaded folder onto my desktop, I opened

it up expecting the worst, but nothing happened. AVG was doing its job.

Upon looking over the different file options, I first realized that this version of WinVICE was set up similar to the opening program that Robert installed on my SD card for the SD2IEC device. It didn't take me long before I had a D64 image (created with the use of DRACopy v1.0) transferred from my Commodore 64 into WinVICE. Since WinVICE was a 100% emulation of an original C64, whatever I created in a .D64 was usable with a simple LOAD"file name",8. I had to do a little poking around on the PC keyboard to try and locate where some of the Commodore keys, like RUN/STOP and RESTORE, were relocated, but I found them. I was ready to make a presentation to Pastor Barb and Jon at their church.

After class was over on Sunday, Pastor Barb approached me and asked the expected question, "Where's the Commodore 64 at?"

I reached into the pocket of my fall jacket and pulled out the red and gray flash drive that contained WinVICE and all the programs that had been on my Commodore 64 disks which were necessary to do the job.

"Right here," I said.

Barb gave me a puzzled look.

"If I may use the PC down here in the Fellowship Hall, I will demonstrate."

Jon, who knew the ins and outs of the Windows 7 PC in the corner of the room, was nice enough to boot the PC and turn on the sound system that accompanied the unit. The PC was connected to a ceiling-mounted projector which projected to a screen on the wall. Barb stared at the screen. I put the flash drive into the USB port of the computer desktop case and went into accessing the files that were on the drive. Very soon she saw the PC image of a C64.

"Very cool," she said.

My father has schizophrenia, but he's good people.

"I'm not done yet," I responded.

I called up a disk image to WinVICE and LOADed a program that we viewed last week – the Bible Games from the J. Conrod book of programs. Barb also looked at the Bible Scramble set of programs. With me running the keyboard, she played a round or two. Afterwards, she walked up to me at the PC desk and gave me some suggestions as to what she would like to see in a future rewrite of the games. Since the programs were completely written in BASIC, it should be possible to get into the source code and make the proper changes.

I powered down the PC and removed the flash drive. I handed the flash drive to Pastor Barb. She looked at it closely.

"All of a Commodore 64 brought down to the size of a flash drive?" she asked.

"It's amazing what coders can do these days, isn't it?"

Looking up at me, she asked, "How much is this?"

What was I to say? $100? $50? $25? $10? I had lost nothing but time, and everyone else had done all the work in making the project a success. Sure, I added my own brain power to the mix, but how was I going to charge for that?

"Freely you have received, freely give," Matthew 10:8 said. I folded Pastor Barb's fingers over the flash drive.

"With my compliments," I said.

"What?" she responded. "You don't want anything for your work?"

"There was nothing to trade," I answered. "You were wanting to buy a C64 system. All of this stuff was a free download. The WinVICE program, the software, everything. Sure, I put some brainpower behind it but consider – a collector buys. I'm a collector. To share my passions with another is more of an art than a

transaction. Please, enjoy this with the kids in class."

"But I don't know how to run WinVICE," she said.

"I can teach you over the next few Sundays how to access WinVICE and all the files on the flash drive. Besides, this flash drive is a lot easier to manage than a Commodore 64 setup."

"I can't argue with that." She smiled. "Thanks."

#@$&*!! I started out with the chance to sell an SX64 setup, but the cost was too high for such a small struggling church. I lost out on a $500 sale. When I tried to downgrade to selling a Commodore 64 desktop, I couldn't find a functioning unit in my collection. I lost out on a $100 sale. However, everything worked out in the end. It did show me that all my C64 desktop units were bad and in need of maintenance. Now, I've reduced everything down to a small flash drive – something that Pastor Barb can manage and carry with her whenever she wants to take it to church. I lost out on a complete sale but may have gained a new user of the Commodore machine, even though the Commodore she was using was emulated. What I did learn from the experience was to make sure that I had a working system before offering to make a sale. A sale lost; a lesson learned.

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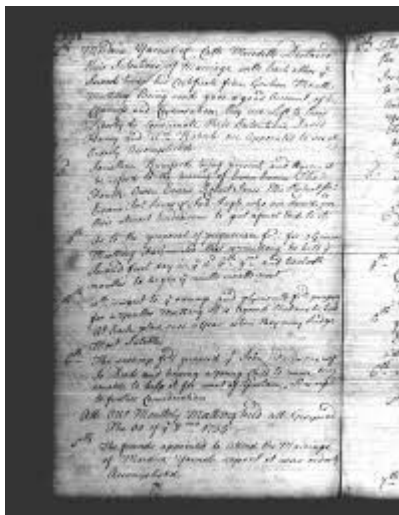
MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

By Robert Bernardo

September 2022

Members Robert, Roger, David, Bruce, and Michael attended the September meeting. As usual, the first part of the meeting was devoted to setting up the equipment, the club C128 system and Robert's Ultimate 64. As usual, then the members ordered their lunch and had their small talk while eating the food. All during lunch, the new multi-color picture, Kaos, was displayed on the Ultimate 64's Dell monitor.

Michael was eager to get on with the presentations, but first Robert had to go through old and new business. In old business, he reminded the members that the Amiwest Show was coming to Sacramento on Oct. 20-23. In new business, he would be leaving on a 4-week trip to Europe, visiting Commodore/Amiga clubs, computer museums, and even a show – the Netherlands Commodore Show. When he returned, he would almost immediately go to the Amiwest Show in order to film the presentations. Because of the trip and Amiwest, the club "picnic" dinner was moved to October 30, the fourth Sunday of the month instead of the usual third of the month gathering.

In honor of Queen Elizabeth's passing, the first software presentations had a royal emphasis. There were the classic C64 games, Flunky and Spitting Image (both with Queen Elizabeth II in them), and other royal games, Split Personalities, Di's Baby, and Henry's House. Michael had problems with the eBay gamepads used on the U64; the gamepads were not responding correctly. Robert verified this and said that new, better gamepads or joysticks would have to be bought.

For the C128, Robert and Roger tried to run Quest for Lubok, a new text adventure. Unfortunately, the game kept crashing. No matter what they did, whether the C128 was in 40-column or 80-column mode, the game would hang in loading its very large data file. They did not try out the C64 version of the adventure.

Instead of using the Amiga 600, the members decided to investigate why Bruce's Amiga 2000 was not running certain WHDload games. His A2000 had been upgraded recently by Duncan MacDougall of Santa Clara, and Duncan had put a full suite of games on the computer's hard drive. Bruce said that only certain games would be displayed through his CRT monitor.

Bruce went to his car, pulled out the A2000, and placed the heavy machine on table where the U64 had been. Then Robert connected the Dell multi-scan LCD monitor to the A2000. Robert had no problem running games through the Dell. Robert showed that he was using a buffered RGB-to-VGA cable to go from the Amiga to the monitor. Bruce had been using a VGA cable to go from his Amiga's hi-res video card to his monitor, and therein was the problem. Most games couldn't be displayed in hi-res but only in their normal lower resolution. Bruce would have to buy a multi-scan

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monitor and a RGB-to-VGA cable or adapter so that he could display the games correctly.

With the problem diagnosed, the members played a few games on Bruce's computer before the meeting was adjourned.

October 2022

By Robert Bernardo and Dick Estel

The Fresno Commodore User Group will be eternally grateful to our late friend Sandy Dippollet and his wife. Not long after Sandy joined the club, he offered to host a potluck picnic at his home east of Clovis. Having first purchased ten acres, the Dippollet's added a second ten-acre plot, to keep their delightful views of the Sierra foothills unobstructed. Sandy and Ingrid were gracious hosts, and the club enjoyed the annual event for a number of years.

Once Sandy and Ingrid passed away, we held a couple of lesser quality picnics at the home of another member, but we eventually settled on having an annual lunch in place of the October meeting.

Of course, we get together every month for lunch, since our meetings are held at a Panera Bread Restaurant. But one of the rules for the October event is that we go to a DIFFERENT restaurant. The other rules are:

No formal business and no demonstrations are given.

Family members are invited.

The club pays.

This year's event was held at El Rodeo Mexican Restaurant in Clovis. For our readers who are not familiar with this region, Clovis is a city of 120,000 located more or less northeast of Fresno.

We say "more or less" because over the years the two towns have grown together. We tell visitors that the way you know you have entered Clovis is that the street signs change from green to brown.

Attending were Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Pelt and his brother Aaron, Dave Smith, Bruce Nieman, and Dick Estel. All were satisfied with the food and service.

Conversation ranged over a variety of topics, most notably Robert's recent visit to Europe with stops in England, Wales, Germany and the Netherlands. As usual, his goal was to visit Commodore and Amiga-related clubs, businesses, shows, and museums, and throw in a bit of tourism as well. As usual, Robert returned with a few "goodies." Although these included Commodore items, our favorite was a large bar of Lovett's chocolate, which Robert presented to each person at the lunch. This item is sold at Sainsbury's supermarkets in England but is packed in Germany.

We're not sure how long we've been having this annual picnic, but my older grandson attended the first ones when he was about six, which was more than 30 years ago. With the club celebrating 41 years in November, we've been holding his event for 3/4 of the club's life. I'm sure Sandy would be proud.

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Becoming Commodorian

by Guest Contiributor Neil Harris of CBM

They say that life begins at 40, but for me it really began at 25.

It was January, 1981. My mother called me up to tell me that she heard on the radio that Commodore was holding an open house hiring event in the Philadelphia suburbs. That was exciting news, with a few reservations. My former boss and mentor, Gene Beals at AB Computers, had told many stories of Jack Tramiel terrorizing Commodore's employees, firing people at random, and that no one lasted as long as a year. And my current boss, George Willbanks of Computerland, sneered at the idea of leaving a small company for what he termed "the corporate umbrella."

I had never worked for a large company, and being a manager in a computer store did not seem like the greatest career. And lasting more than a year seemed like an interesting challenge.

I arrived at the open house and met one of Commodore's human resources team members. She asked what I was looking to do.

"I am a programmer, worked in stores selling computers including PETs, taught BASIC programming, and wrote articles for computer magazines. And, by the way, I've read that you are coming out with a $300 color computer and would love to learn more."

Her eyes got wider and wider as I spoke. In 1981, there were not many people with a background like that.

"Let me introduce you to Mike Tomczyk."

Mike was the U.S. product manager for the VIC-20 and we hit it off right away. He had an opening for a writer but he told me that I'd be doing a bit of everything. He offered me about 30% more than I was making at Computerland.

Life was about to begin!

For my first day on the job, Mike showed me a draft of the VIC-20 user manual that had been written by a contract team at Redgate Communications (which was led by Ted Leonsis and later acquired by AOL, where he became one of the senior execs and a billionaire). Mike was not at all happy because the book was very weak, and he told me to write a new draft. What a wonderful opportunity – I had always found Commodore's manuals to be very weak and had hoped to have the chance to do better.

There was one snag – it would be 2 weeks before I would get my computer and the deadline was tight to complete the manual. You see, at that time the VIC-20 was not being taken seriously by the Commodore US operation, which was focused on the PET line. The head of PET software, Dieter Ammon, used to joke that the VIC would be given away for free with the purchase of a "real computer." It was hard to get the resources we needed to do our jobs. We were a small team – Mike, Sue Mittnacht (our admin), Duane Later (a programmer), and John Stockman (a marketing assistant).

So, I brought in my trusty Smith Corona electric typewriter and got to work.

My father has schizophrenia, but he's good people.

My goal was to provide a tutorial and reference. The older PET manuals covered the BASIC commands, but not how to use them together. It would be like describing a forest by listing all the trees but not showing how the ecosystem worked -- I wanted to show the forest and the trees. I had taught BASIC and knew how to walk people through the beginner levels of coding.

Two weeks later the draft manual was ready for Mike to edit and add the "friendly computer" illustrations.

Shortly after this, I had a call at home from an old friend I knew from a neighboring high school – we had both learned computer programming in our high school computer clubs and had shared notes over the years. Andy Finkel had recently graduated from Cornell's engineering school. One of his projects there was creating a virtual expanded memory system for the PET by swapping memory in and out using the cassette tape. Brilliant, but unbelievably slow. Andy was (and still is) brilliant and unbelievably quick.

"Mike," I said the next day, "you need to interview a friend of mine, and then you need to hire him right away. He listened to me.

Life had begun… and for me and for Andy, too.

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Burning Down the House

by Guest Contributor Neil Harris of CBM

By the later part of 1981, I spent much of my time on the road, helping the sales executives whose mission was to get Commodore home computers into the mass merchant channel. I was a sort of sales engineer, even though that role had not been defined in our industry just yet – my job was to demonstrate the machines and describe what they could do in terms that lay people would understand. Along with VP of National Accounts David Harris (no relation), I showed off our systems to major chains like Kmart, Montgomery Ward, and Sears, along with regional chains. One day this found us at the headquarters of Kiddie City, a mid-Atlantic toy seller that was eventually wiped out by Toys'R'Us. Aside from the VIC-20 and new software, I was to demonstrate the forthcoming VICmodem.

I had learned through experience to always arrive early and test everything before the demo. In the worst case, if something was not working, we would simply not mention it – everything we talked about worked, and anything not working stayed out of sight.

The VICmodem that I had was a prototype – a circuit board with no case. I set up the VIC and the monitor and plugged in the modem to the cartridge port and… nothing. Worse than nothing.

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My father has schizophrenia,
   but he's good people.
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The power light on the VIC had gone out.

I opened up the VIC case and looked at the fuse. Blown.

We could skip demonstrating the modem, but skipping the computer demo was not an option.

I had an idea what might be wrong, but I needed to check with the engineers back at the office. You see, the user port used an edge connector, and devices had a tab on the connector to ensure that you could not plug in devices upside down. But my prototype modem had no tab.

I called Andy Finkel. "If I plugged in the modem upside down, would it blow the fuse in the VIC?"

There was a thoughtful pause and I could hear Andy conferring with others in the office. The answer came back… "Probably."

So, I removed the computer's fuse and took a few quarters out of my pocket and put them in the fuse slot so the computer would work. Then I looked at the modem and carefully flipped it over and said a brief prayer. Either this demo was going to work, or we might just burn down the building, or at least melt the computer. I looked at David and he gave me a look back that clearly communicated something regarding my career prospects.

I plugged in the modem. No smoke emerged from the computer and the red light stayed on. I attached the modem to the phone and dialed The Source. Everything worked.

The demo was great, we made the sale, and when we got back to the office I got a new fuse for the VIC, a tab for the modem's edge connector, and my quarters back.

An Inexcusable Failure

by Guest Contributor Leonard Tramiel of CBM

(Some background… VisiCalc was a huge software hit, back in the day!)

After my first academic year in graduate school, I came home for the summer where I returned to the PET program at Commodore. One of the tasks I was given was to review a box of software that been submitted so that Commodore would sell the software. I didn't recommend that Commodore take any of the software. One piece of software deserves special attention.

I said that this piece of software wasn't worth selling because there was nothing that it could do that couldn't also be done by a nearly trivial BASIC program. One reason for having this view was that nearly all of the discussions that I had had with the people involved in producing the first personal computers centered around the primary use being to learn programming. So I was biased to think that everyone that used a PET would be able to write simple programs. The program I'm talking about was VisiCalc.

I hope you've all stopped laughing by now. There is an interesting "plus" to my idiotic decision. I had the chance to discuss this with one of the authors of VisiCalc. We met at a conference in

My father has schizophrenia,
but he's good people.

2010. It turned out that the same decision was made at Apple, so the authors of VisiCalc were forced to start a software distribution business. This was a very good financial decision for them. So good that I was thanked for my mistake.

So I supposed this is an example of "No harm, no foul" but ... wow, that was an inexcusable failure.

The Hubot

by Guest Contributor Jaydee Shero

Check out what this housewife is watching! Trying to work out which [Star Trek] episode it could be.

Hubot, Hubotics, 1981

The butler-esque Hubot was advertised as the first home robot that's a personal companion, educator, entertainer and sentry. A voice synthesizer was able to speak about 1,200 words in English. Hubot might as well have been called "The Kitchen Sink Robot," because its creator, Hubotics, threw just about everything it could imagine into a 44-inch movable stand that looked like a public trash receptacle with a face. Among the functions: computer with keyboard and disk drive; broadcast-ready TV set; AM/FM stereo with cassette deck and stereo speakers, an Atari

2600 video game system. Optional packages: dot-matrix printer, vacuum attachment, articulated arm, smoke detector, 300 baud modem, remote control...the list goes on. Accordingly, Hubot cost quite a bit and few people bought one. Unfortunately, the technology just wasn't there, and we're still lacking robot servants today.

(If you read the above description, the Hubot description does not mention which 1981 computer and disk drive was used. Could it have been a Commodore VIC-20 and 1540/1541 disk drive?! As for the Star Trek episode, the consensus was that it was the third season offering, The Paradise Syndrome.)

Japan's War on Disks

By Guest Contributor Justin McCurry of The Guardian

(Why is this Commodore-related? Because it has a photo of an Amiga 500 with a floppy disk!)

Digital minister Taro Kono wants to follow up his bid to phase out faxes by getting rid of floppy disks – but he faces opposition from bureaucrats. Japan's digital minister has declared war on floppy disks, decades after the technology became largely obsolete, but [he] could encounter opposition from nostalgic devotees inside the country's vast bureaucracy.

Taro Kono said he would expand his quest to rid the bureaucracy of outdated tools by phasing out disks and moving administrative procedures online.

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Kono, who has already made clear his disdain for fax machines and hanko personal seals, said businesses were still required to use disks to complete 1,900 government-related procedures such as submitting applications and other documents.

"Digital Minister declares a war on floppy discs," he said in an English-language tweet on Wednesday. "[The] Digital Agency is to change those regulations so you can use online."

Kono told reporters this week that his agency would be reviewing the use of floppy and other disks "swiftly", adding that the modernisation push had the support of the prime minister, Fumio Kishida.

Japan is not alone in hanging on to floppy disks long after most businesses and public bodies deemed them outmoded. The US air force only replaced the floppy disks it had used to manage the country's nuclear arsenal in 2019, almost a decade after Sony stopped manufacturing them.

After he was made digital affairs minister in a cabinet reshuffle earlier this month, Kono joked about the task of dragging Japan's bureaucracy into the digital age. "C'mon, there is no analogue thing left in our remarkably advanced society," he tweeted in response to a comment about his appointment. "Oops, my fax machine is jamming!"

But there is no guarantee that Kono, a former foreign minister who has been tipped as a future prime minister, will drive out floppy disks altogether.

In 2021, when administrative reform minister, he launched a personal crusade against hanko – official seals that are used to sign contracts and other documents – and fax machines, which he blamed for burying national and local government bureaucrats in mountains of paper.

Government ministries were asked to end hanko requirements for hundreds of procedures, including year-end tax adjustments and tax returns, but reports say the seals and fax machines are still in use.

Kono's digital revolution has encountered resistance from officials who believe physical media offer a degree of authenticity that an email does not, while politicians in a region known for producing intricately carved hanko accused him of attacking a "symbol of Japan".

Hundreds of government offices said banishing fax machines would be "impossible", media reports said, citing concerns over the security of sensitive information and "anxiety over the communication environment" if they switched exclusively to email.

Floppy disks, too, have their champions. The disks "almost never broke or lost data", Yoichi Ono, an official in Tokyo's Meguro ward, told Nikkei Asia last year when the local government decided to phase out floppies and other physical storage data.

The ward had previously saved information on payments to employees on floppies that were then taken to the bank for processing. Chiyoda, another Tokyo ward, said it would follow suit "within the next few years", according to the Nikkei.

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-The Small Print-

The Fresno Commodore User Group is a club whose members share an interest in Commodore 8-bit and Amiga computers. Our mailing address is 185 W. Pilgrim Lane, Clovis, CA 93612. We meet monthly in the meeting room of Panera Bread, 3590 West Shaw, Fresno, CA. The meetings generally include demonstrations, discussion, and individual help.

Dues are $12 for 12 months. New members receive a "New Member Disk" containing a number of useful Commodore 8-bit utilities. Members receive a subscription to The Interface newsletter, access to the public domain disk library, technical assistance, and reduced prices on selected software/hardware.

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