

## News from Nan

### COMPUTER HISTORY

# MY HIGH-TECH ADVENTURE: CHAPTER 07, PERSONAL COMPUTERS

OCTOBER 7, 2018 | DICK

*Dick wrote this post, which was part of a book, My high-tech adventure, to record his memories of working in the computer industry, starting in about 1960. It was first published in 2012.*



## Apple II personal computer

I first got interested in personal computers as a hobby outside of work. When I got my first personal computer (PC), it was more like an addiction than a hobby. I spent countless hours playing with and learning about it! For a person who was only able to work with big computers locked in machine rooms, having one on my desk at home was quite thrilling.

My first PC was an Apple II I bought in 1978 for \$1300. That got me a machine with 48K of memory, BASIC Interpreter and a cassette tape recorder for storing programs. The display was a small color TV set that could show only 40 characters of upper case characters per line and was very hard to read. When my son, Tim, and I went to buy the Apple II at Computerland of Cupertino, we literally had to wave a checkbook in front of the clerks to get their attention. Sales people at computer stores have been bad

from the very beginning, and still are. Keep in mind that in 1978, \$1300 was quite a bit of money. Around this time many other people also began buying PCs because they were somewhat affordable.

At first we wrote and played BASIC games on the Apple. The games included Chess, Star Trek, and Adventure. Some were copy-protected, and I used to spend many hours breaking the various protection schemes just for the challenge. It was a popular activity for a while! Now this is called hacking and is considered evil. The Apple II had no printer, no modem, no hard drive, not even a floppy drive, so you could not do anything useful with it. I did learn a lot about PCs and hardware, though. Later we added a \$600 floppy drive, with diskettes at \$5 each.



*My son Tim and our Apple II*

The kids in our neighborhood in Cupertino had a well-organized neighborhood group effort to copy games for the Apple computer so they wouldn't have to buy each one. Even then the games were expensive. There was a network of mostly teen-aged boys that engaged in this. They were experts at using all the copy protection-breaking programs. They could copy anything!

## IBM Personal Computer (PC)

In 1981, we traded the Apple II for one of the first IBM PCs that my wife, Anna, bought through IBM payroll deduction for over \$5000. I hesitate to even calculate how much \$5000 in 1981 dollars would buy today! This machine had a 5 MHz Intel 8088 processor, 64K of memory, two diskette drives holding 160KB each, a monochrome monitor, a dot-matrix printer, and a modem. It cost more than the Apple, but it could actually do useful work. Anna and I used software called EasyWriter to write letters to our kids in the summer and a spreadsheet called VisiCalc to do some simple financial calculations. Anna and I even wrote a menu-planning program in BASIC.



*IBM 5150 Personal Computer*

In the middle 80s, we traded up to an IBM PS/2 model 60 (80286). Now we had 3MB of memory, a 44MB hard drive and could run Windows and OS/2. It turned out that both the PS/2 architecture and OS/2 were a big waste of time and money for us. Considering the price we paid for it, this machine was a big disappointment. We found out later that with the PS/2, IBM had indeed “snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.” Other companies like Compaq grew rapidly by giving customers the kind of PC they wanted.

In the late 80s, we gave the PS/2 to our daughter Ellen and bought a Compaq Prolinea. This was a 20 megahertz 386 with 8MB of memory and a 120MB hard drive running Windows 3.11. Almost as soon as we bought it we added 8MB more of memory and traded the hard drive for a 540MB drive. PCs have been hungry for memory and disk space ever since.

Since then my family has gone through many desktop and laptop PCs. Too many to list here!

The career benefit I got from spending so much time with personal computers was an interest in hardware, and a confidence that I could work on and understand the guts of computer hardware. This ended up being important in my next job, at IBM.

◀ 2018    ◀ APPLE II COMPUTER    ◀ BASIC PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE    ◀ COMPAQ PROLINEA COMPUTER    ◀ COMPUTERLAND  
 ◀ EASYWRITER WORD PROCESSOR    ◀ IBM PERSONAL COMPUTER    ◀ IBM PS/2 COMPUTER    ◀ MYHITECH  
 ◀ OS/2 OPERATING SYSTEM    ◀ PERSONAL COMPUTER    ◀ VISICALC SPREADSHEET