

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

About 20 years ago I had to check something with my company's data processing manager. I found him in the computer room, watching workmen tear up the floor. "What gives?" I asked.

He explained that a new computer was due soon which would generate so much heat that air ducts had to be installed underneath to cool it off. That was the nature of early computers...bulky, costly, complex, and hot. And they broke down often.

It is no exaggeration to say that today, a counterpart of that ancient design would fit in the palm of your hand. Or almost. There has been a revolution which changed our electronic machines profoundly, and it is still going on.

The biggest change is the decline and fall of the vacuum tube. Such tubes were responsible for early radio. Without their magic in converting the alternating current of radio waves to direct, so

Today's computers had amazing metamorphosis

that speakers could work, there would be no radio.

And vacuum tubes were the mainstay of early computers. The most well-known computer ENIAC (for Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) had 18,000 of them. It gave off such heat that tubes constantly burned out. The Army, which used ENIAC to compute artillery trajectories, put soldiers manning grocery baskets filled with tubes at strategic points around it. (ENIAC was 40' long, 20' high, and weighed more than 30 tons.)

This did no good because they couldn't tell which tubes burned out at any particular time. Also, the warmth and light of the tubes attracted moths, which would cause short circuits. (Ever since the process of fixing computer problems became known as "debugging!")

ENIAC also had 70,000 resistors (they restrict electricity's flow) 10,000 capacitors (which absorb electricity and release it as needed) and 6000 switches.

No, today, you couldn't get ENIAC's do-alike to fit on your hand, but you could come pretty close. But with transistors instead of tubes.

Transistors are little faucets which turn current off and on to send digital signals to a computer like +1 or -2. They can amplify sound and when wired together do all sorts of complicated electronic things. They call these circuits.

Man had nature's circuit right under his nose in the form of a metal called germanium. Crystals of germanium sold in 5 and 10's during the 30s for a quarter. Hooked up to a wire coil and a pair of earphones, crystals caught radio waves and converted them to sound when tickled with a little bit of wire called a "cat's whisker." Engineers didn't know why at the time.

And so the first transistor was sold in the five and dime long before it was "reinvented" in 1947 by three Bell Labs engineers. Then came the portable radio, and today's wrist watches which, solar-powered, tell you their time at the press of a button. And they do actually tell you...they talk!

The contrast amazes: In '64 a Sharp desktop calculator weighed 55 lbs. and cost \$4100. Today for under \$10 you can buy a tiny solar-powered device which will perform rings around the Sharp.

J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

A good friend of mine—who enjoys the odd intellectual joust—and who remains more hopeful than many 60's children who've seen the ideals of that age prostituted on the street corner of crass materialism, simply stopped the conversation recently and said:

"O.K., you're right...now what." I had been—and quite simplistically—skewering the Democrats for this country's attitudinal shifts away from the freedom to fail, from capitalism as it is defined literally, and from the idea that one is responsible for one's self.

He couldn't quite grasp the notion that "politics", and as politics provides public dollars for, in turn, shaping public attitude, the Democrats therefore cannot be divorced from new developed beliefs, i.e., that citizens have economic rights and "entitlements", a concept which tortures rational attempts to function in the free enterprise system.

He countered that the issue goes beyond Democrat or Republican (he likes to think of himself as a Whig) and that the country's economic woes are more in need of revolutionary changes within the entire society than simply not being obstructionist as the now Republican controlled House of Representatives—they hold the purse strings—attempts some fiscal responsibility.

I still believe he's missing the forest for the trees (perhaps his Whig has fallen into his eyes), but his challenge of "now what" has caused me to think beyond the simplistic labeling of Democrats as the demon.

So here goes.... We need to sustain and increase the bulldown of the military/industrial complex; a nation, indeed, a world dependent on the tools of war to sustain economic growth, is doomed to destruction...looked at the former Soviet Union lately?

The alternative is to spend those resources in joint efforts to bring our world back into some environmental sanity, to replace our aging public infrastructure, i.e., roads and bridges, and to create new frontiers for the non-conformists and aberrants among us with an all-out effort to reach beyond this tiny planet to the stars beyond.

Back here on earth, and while we still have corporate America in place to effect economic changes, we need to change our entire

Start economic reform by playing with real money

approach to financial management. We are currently functioning with not-of-the-real-world management.

Accountants, trained in classical "count-the-beans" thinking, do little to provide meaningful and realistic financial data tools for corporate managers, i.e., classical financial management demands earnings per share numbers—the bottom line—when such numbers are a misleading assessment of a company's underlying economic activity or its current and potential value. Left out of the accountant's equation, for example, is the people asset, and that only one measurement of current or future value.

Senior corporate management, on the other hand, and with compensation plans for themselves tied to (guess what) earnings-per-share numbers, are reluctant to seek or apply relevant financial data. Instead, near maniacal methods or achieving the short-term quarterly earnings per share growth are used, i.e., shipping unordered goods to companies, even private citizens. The objective in doing so is to then be able to report increased quarterly sales/income...even if the long-term and overall picture is much darker.

In short, many American corporations are gorging themselves on a diet of antique and manipulative financial tools, cooked in a literally rusting corporate infrastructure—average age of a U.S. plant and equipment is 20 years; average in Japan is 10 years—while drinking the lifeblood of its economy with even smaller concentric circles of quarterly report, short-term thinking and methodology.

"Now what?"my friend asked. In addition to the foregoing, we must stop the manipulative quarterly, annual, weekly meeting-before-I-have-to-catch-a-plane numbers games. We must begin playing with real money.

We must stop the corporate carping about foreign competition and devise ways to deliver (as opposed to discuss) creative financing.

We must begin again the teaching of our young people about free enterprise (and that includes a balanced view of how the shaping of public policy effects free enterprise). We must teach our children about the mother of it all; about a proud, energetic people and a superior system which, when purely stated and practically applies, permits endless enthusiasm to wrap itself in boundless opportunity against the chill of want and the cold of need.

And, finally, we must do something to bring trade and budget deficits under control. In brief, the U.S. dollar is on the rocks. Measured against the mark and the yen over the last 10 years, the dollar has lost half its value. Most international money users, be they multinational corporations or foreign governments, now prefer to do business, and establish wealth, in something other than greenbacks.

Still, the U.S. (with its trade and budget deficits) keeps pouring dollars into the world economy—an economy which is now doing us an economic favor by accepting them. And if there is, in fact, a world-wide panic away from the dollar, then a global economic depression is likely.

Remember Mexico? Well the monetary situation is now so precarious that the relatively minor monetary tremor of Mexico's recent devaluation of the peso sent the dollar into a swan dive.

We must do something to reduce both trade and budget deficits.

So...if we do all of this, the pursuit of happiness (and a pursuit is all that is promised by the constitution); indeed, life, liberty, justice for all...and stock prices...will take care of themselves.

LIBRARY NEWS



By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library Reading Game, "Solve a Mystery—Read," will end Friday, August 4 at 1:30 p.m. with the awarding of Reading Certificates and prizes, followed by refreshments. More than 100 children have been involved with the reading game.

The summer story hours will conclude the first week in August. Registration for fall story hours will be held September 5-8 with sign-up at the library.

The library has been very busy the past six weeks, with the story hours, and the summer reading program and adults also taking more books for summer reading pleasure. July has always been the busiest month of the year at Back Mountain. Most every summer we have at least one 700 day circulation in July. The highest record for circulation was July

Clarification

The American Kennel Club standard for Akita dogs in last week's edition was incorrect. According to an area resident who has Akitas, show quality Akitas may be any color, including white, brindle or pinto (spotted,) with either white or black masks on their faces.

The Japanese consider Akitas to be their national monument. Helen Keller brought one of the first Akitas from Japan to the United States.

Kids' summer reading program concludes Aug. 4

5, 1994 when 832 reading materials were checked out. The previous record had held since July 7, 1989 at 789. The 1995 high to date was July 5 at 654. Summer reading is great recreation.

New books at the library: "Black Lightning" by John Saul is a gripping story of a convicted serial killer sentenced to death—and hell-bent on revenge. For five years, Seattle has been seized in the terrifying grip of a monster as black as evil itself; a sadistic serial killer who methodically lures his victims to grisly deaths to satisfy a twisted passion. This is ENIAC's do-alike to fit on your hand, but you could come pretty close. But with transistors instead of tubes.

"True Crime" by Andrew Klavan is a novel that races with the almost unbearable tension that results when the impulse to turn away from a tragic human fate is matched by the irresistible urge to know what will happen next. There are 18 hours until midnight. In those hours, Frank Beachum is going to be pushed to the very limits of his faith, looking over the edge into a nightmare.

Steve Everett is going to risk everything, even his own life.

"Twister" by Barbara Block is the second appearance of the hip outrageous redhead, Robin Light—an amateur sleuth with a soft spot for puppies, parakeets, bunnies and boas...and a knack for finding herself at the scene of the crime. She is just getting her pet shop into its new digs in the wake of a disastrous fire. She has more on her mind than finding a missing dog and boarding a pet tarantula. Then Lynn Gordon appears with a blood-stained suit.

"Mystique" by Amanda Quick is a tantalizing tale of a legendary knight, a headstrong lady, and a daring quest for a dazzling crystal...In the shadows of the great hall, Lady Alice approached the fearsome warrior who had swept into Lingwood Manor like a storm. Dark and forbidding, with hair as black as midnight and eyes of molten amber, Hugh the Relentless seemed aptly named. However, he seemed not someone to dread, but the answer to dreams.

FASSET'S WICKER

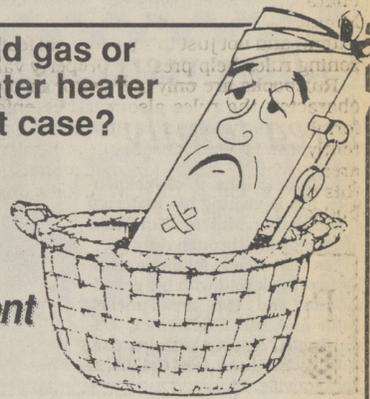
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