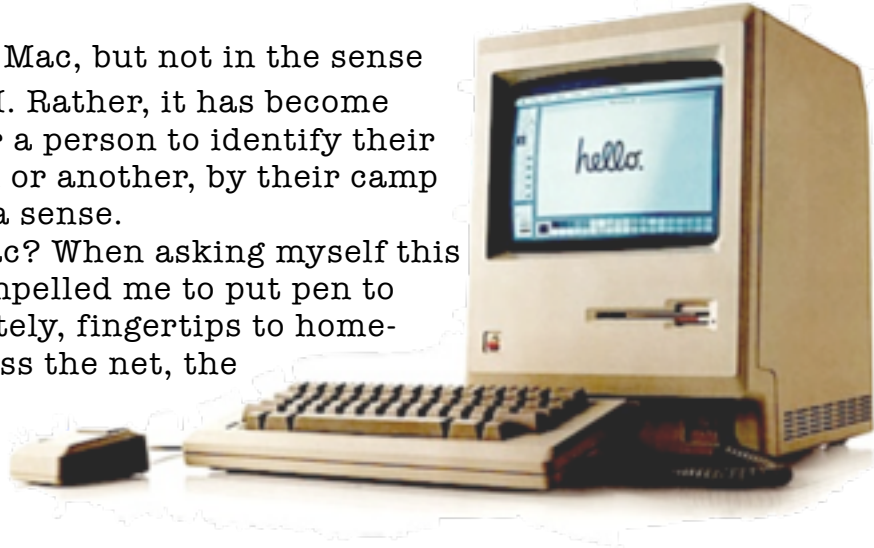


Preface

hello. I'm a Mac, but not in the sense that my brain is IBM. Rather, it has become common practice for a person to identify their self, in one situation or another, by their camp or brand loyalty, in a sense.

Why am I a Mac? When asking myself this very question, it compelled me to put pen to pad, or more accurately, fingertips to home-row, and share, across the net, the results of my self-evaluation.



I was not always a so-called Mac-User. Early in life I found myself magnetically attracted to my parents' mystic "typing TV" for such inane reasons as its pretty pictures and funny sounds.

I now know that it was a Packard Bell Legend 100cd with an original Pentium. It ran Windows 95, but at the time I was more interested that it ran MS Paint and Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games.

From that time, and I suspect this to be true of most "PC" users, it was an accepted fact that a computer runs Windows, plain and simple, right? At home, at school, and once at a soccer-mate's house, it was just apparent that when you switched-on a computer, a glitzy Windows logo appeared and a button labeled "Start" was pinned to the bottom left corner of the display.

I continued on this way for some time, believing there was no real choice in the computer market other than beige or 'white'. Computer-shopping for myself involved nothing more than comparing the machines with the greatest number in all measures except cost.

There simply must be light at the end of the tunnel, yes? Unfortunately for myself, it was many years before I wised up and began to shop from an informed viewpoint, which in time led me to my current collection of Apple computers, as well as an Apple phone.

So, where was your first encounter with an Apple computer? Remember how you jumped about and looked upon it with envy, never to look at another dull, beige box again? Tragically, my first encounters were not so immediately and eternally magnetic.



Believe it if you can, but my first meeting with an Apple computer occurred early in life, attending kindergarten.

In those years, computers were easily marketed to entire school districts in the US as invaluable educational tools. I can eerily recall Windows logos infesting classrooms, pasted on the front of every “pizza box” computer case. Strangest yet, rested on a desk at the rear of the class were two machines that seemed to serve the sole purpose of cycling the “Flying Windows” screensaver indefinitely. Regressing, I can still hear every teachers’ computer trumpeting the Windows NT 3 startup sound, wishing the school had not opted for so many speaker sets.

During those early elementary school days, I think fondly of the excitement that two words written across the blackboard could trigger within me. Walking into class after recess, glasses fogged from sugar-induced sprinting and sweat collected within my half-buttoned overalls, the lights would be off and we were made to sit and cool off for the whole of ten-minutes, before the lights flickered on and revealed the words, “Computer Lab,” hand-written and underlined in yellow chalk on the class board.

Computer lab was more a second-recess, an excuse to do something engaging, not droll and uninteresting. However, something was so curious about those “lab” computers. They were not like the others. Not similar to my own, at home.

These computers would welcome you with a green flickering bar and an otherwise black screen. Nothing to click on, and stranger yet, nothing to click ‘with’! These foreign devices had to be operated by the ‘lab lady’, swapping large floppies and typing odd ramblings to finally launch the exciting video games. Number Munchers, Choplifter, and several uninventive math games joined school and the arcade.



Apple II

Thinking back, I vividly remember the vibrant, plastic, rainbow, apple-shape affixed to every monitor, always assuming it was simply a sticker that some naughty kids had manically applied to every floppy diskette drive and every computer case in the lab, not so much as sparing the dot-matrix printers!

I've since done so much detective work to conclude that these aliens were Apple II computers, perhaps IIc's or IIgs'. I shall never be sure.

These early years were my first experiences with Apple, though the public school system would see-to that it was not my last.

Having at this time never heard of a Mac, save for the Disney feature, "Blank Check," I was so naive to assume, still, that computers and Windows are one and the same. This was so until a middle-school detention brought me Back to the Mac.

Middle-school was a war zone. Defiant and disruptive, I challenged the purpose and effectiveness of every project my tired, battered teachers passed down to me. I never once in my school career completed a written assignment, it simply wasn't my game, dig? I could never bring myself to validate such time-draining and frustrating practices.

Having always been assigned these essays as homework, I found that every hour with which I could have been agonizing over a smeared piece of notebook paper with a pencil creating sweat and blisters between my fingers, was instead spent learning! I, to this day, feel I've taken so much more from cable TV's educational offerings than any class at a public school.

But one, so-clever, teacher had me drawing the white flag in near-defeat. The winding days of speech class, just days before Summer break, saw every student scribing away to complete a final report. As I had done before, I was merely blowing it off, foretelling that I would earn my GED alternatively when my age had allowed it. However, teach had gotten wise to the game and requested an impromptu status report. Having seen my only writing done in Aurebesh and in unformatted paragraphs, she had realized I had been doing nothing at all in class.

(Though, to this very day, I contest the notion that compiling lyrics of artists the likes of Coolio, Van Halen, and David Bowie could be considered, "nothing at all.")

Wish upon wish upon day upon day. I live my life like there's no tomorrow. I have no need to beg or barrow. I'm trying to find a place where I can live my life and: maybe eat some steak with my beans and rice.

Not one to accept such deviant behavior, she had issued to me a red slip. Detention, the following day.

Slumping into class with only two others, I was directed to the desk farthest from the doorway. It was on this desk I had previously noticed two oddly-colored monitors, one blue and the other cranberry. I couldn't find the computer, but there was a disk-drive-slot positioned on the lower-most part of the monitor. It was here, with this odd thing, that I had to type an entire page before session's end, or face yet another detention.

I reluctantly typed a word into the publisher, then another, and a few more. A noun, maybe an adjective here and there to spice things up, at most forming a syntactical sentence. But through the ordeal, I could not help but notice that this computer was...different? There was no Start button to summon Solitaire. Attempting to alter a window involved decrypting hieroglyphs, though they truthfully performed in no way similar to window actions in Windows. What's this? I clicked on one of the squares and the window collapsed into a title bar? I'll simply right-click the bar and...hrm, that's odd, it's not responding to my right click. Deary me, this plastic puck has but a single button!

Unable to focus, I earned another day in the, Elmer's Glue scented, big house. Though, the second time around, I was forced to use the ancient pen-and-pad approach. But what about that odd computer? Was it, perhaps, European? The English seem to drive in the opposing traffic lane, perhaps they also have no right-click or Start menu?

Needless to say, I had not found love at first click. There was nothing compelling about this odd-box, in fact it was frustrating as! I've since learned that the machine in question was a slot-loading iMac with MacOS 8 or MacOS 9 installed. While the idea of an all-in-one might have excited me at the time, it simply was not meant to be. School was out of session and I did not encounter such an enigma for some time. Perhaps that fact is more of a positive, as I'll talk about timing in this chapter.

Returning to the classroom the following years (it almost seems that Macs only existed during school hours) our 'teacher-is-late' chat sessions would typically turn to what was new and to some degree 'cool' at the time. Inevitably, we talked of iPods and computers. But being ill-educated on the subject of computers beyond MS Paint and MS Word, there was a single word that would surely induce a fit of rage within me.

“MAC!”

What was this “mac?” What did it mean? My younger, ignorant self, translated it as the ‘others’, the outsiders, the non-conformists. I knew nothing more about Macs than the fact they were liberally garnished with Apple logos. Yet, at the mere mention of the word, expletives would roll from my mouth like the obnoxiously energetic George Carlin idolizer I was.

The ‘argument’ never advanced beyond, “nobody uses macs,” and there was simply no reasoning with me. No amount of sensible talk could persuade me from my ‘old fashion ways’ and self-upheld ignorance.

For years, I held my ground, but without a leg to stand on. Upon retrospect, I can find no valid point to my stubbornness. I simply hated Macs for the sake of hating Macs. But, that all changed one Summer. Is that...Summer theme music being played?

It was the Summer of 2007. I had not attended school that year, allotting hours upon hours of time to do what, perhaps, I love most...learn. Although, this year was different. With so many free hours to watch The History Channel and The Discovery Channel back-to-back, I began what I refer to as, “active learning.”

I began searching the net for information on whatever topic entered my mind. I soon found that the computer was a prime teaching tool on the subject of computers. It was then that I learned the difference between memory and hard drives, the units of measure, bits and hertz. I was becoming a respectable geek, if ever there was one.

Before reaching this level of enlightenment, I had made the mistake of purchasing a Compaq notebook with Windows Vista preinstalled. From the first nauseating site of the home-screen, I was in for a series of headaches and eye strain induced by a ghastly mess of icons and toolbars all accented with a, appetite-deleting, pastel theme.

In the midst of this pain, I found relief with the help of my new tool, the world-wide web. I discovered, installed, and toyed with every distribution of Linux I could get my hands on. While the Ubuntu family of Linux operating systems seemed to alleviate most of my headaches, I felt uneasy in such an environment.

Suddenly, I was without a home. Vista had cheated me, XP was appearing more and more ancient by the minute, and Linux was unwelcoming to a person that expected simple functions to be intuitive and straightforward.

Fate would have it that, in that time, I was to be leaving home for work abroad and would need a 'working' laptop computer. It was the first time I would be shopping with genuine insight, not by screen size and case color. This led me to the doorstep of a company known simply and mysteriously as, "System76."

I had not felt comfortable on any of the operating systems I could find, I was simply alienated. However, when weighing my options of Windows and Linux, I decided that Linux was far more flexible, had more to offer, and if worse came to worse, I could simply install Windows.

That was the moment I navigated to System76's home-page and configured my Pangolin Performance. Blazing by, I selected, "Order," and within seconds I was inputting my credit information. The point of no return was upon me.

Having filled in my shipping address and clicking through several warnings reminding me there was no turning back, I had succeeded in ordering my fresh new toy and simply could not wait to play with such seemingly useless features as the fingerprint scanner.

I went to bed that night dreaming of booting to Ubuntu natively for the first time, without compatibility issues or driver searching.

The next day, the suggestion of an Apple computer arose. I was referred to the Apple website by an online e-cquaintance and found myself in another world. Every Apple product I clicked seemed to have more and more drool-drawing features! My eyes dried and shriveled in their sockets as I could do nothing but stare in awe of the dream machines plastered across the site. It was only then that my e-cquaintances began sharing the obscure secrets of the Mac that made it such a beloved item in their eyes, and it was then that I suddenly realized I could no longer hate Apple.

But, my order has already been placed for the Ubuntu notebook! I had sixteen-hundred dollars tied-up and the MacBook that I had locked eyes with was listed at twelve-hundred dollars. It was simply not going to happen. I would have to wait years before my new System76 broke down and I would have the means to afford such a lovely hot rod.

Things seemed their worse, now. I had discovered Apple, but just so. It was too late. Though, the light at the end of the tunnel grows near!

What's this? An e-telegram from my new friends at System76. My new notebook must have shipped, oh what joy. I don't often express joy by moping and self-loathing, but this seemed a fitting occasion.

That was true, at least, until I read the message I had first berated.

As it would seem, it 'is' concerning the shipping of my notebook. What's this? My credit card was declined?

I wondered, that day, if any person had ever been so excited to receive such news. I had sixteen-hundred dollars that suddenly seemed so new to me, and I knew exactly what to do with that opportunity.

That same day, I began calling the local shops asking around for the model of computer I was drooling, ehm, thinking over. I must have worn an indelible smile across my face, the day through, when a store representative, whom had left me on hold, returned to tell me 'yes', they did have my requested model in stock!

I was eager to try on my new-found home, MacOS X Leopard. I was unsure if it would feel 'too' foreign after using Windows for twelve years. Yet, after the hour-long drive both to and from the retailer, I reclined in my car and opened my first Mac and never second-guessed my decision again.

I can say, however, that I consider myself lucky for 'not' transitioning during the days of PowerPC processors and MacOS X Tiger.

From that day forth, the experience of using a computer metamorphosed from trying to understand the computer itself, to actually producing results in an intuitive manner that made sense, and Apple has made that experience so unfalteringly pleasant and enjoyable that I personally feel I have been 'saved' from the clutches of evil.

It is this love affair that shaped the very person I am today, an Apple Fanatic and an unremitting Apple collector.



Think different.