John's Computer Rambling

This is just me talking about things I like and don't like about computers, operating systems, other software and my history with computers. Some of it you might want to take with a pinch of salt. ;–) Or maybe a pep pill if it gets boring and you start to doze off.

I'm not quite sure when I first used a computer. It must have been a lo-o-o-o-ong time ago. I remember some friends at school who had an Apple something, and an early version of Print Shop. Everyone used to do big banners printed out on pale old 9 pin printers, and home made greeting cards. (See the left picture.) I remember sampling the mouse, and at the time, I was amazed at what it did, but I couldn't understand how it worked. I thought they somehow "knew" where they were on the mouse pad. Now of course I know better. We had an Apple IIe in year 6 of primary school. I was so nervous about using it. One of the guys in the class wrote a BASIC program on it that I thought was pretty amazing. I still have the thing printed out on the desk here. We also used Microbee computers before that. They were made in Australia, like me. :–D All of them but one had green monochrome displays. The one which didn't was an orangey-amber colour. I really think it was more orange than amber. Everyone tried to get to that one 1st 'cos it was different. We used to have educational games on them, and we'd do typing. Even back then I was trying to use extended characters, but I couldn't figure it out. I remember wanting a " ï " for something like "naïve."

There was this game called Froggy or something. You typed in commands and this funny frog made of various text mode characters did stuff. You'd type in something like: *Make froggy run*, and then he'd start jogging along. Or *Make froggy explode*, and then there'd be a countdown timer of 10 seconds and suddenly all the characters would go all over the place! LOL. We all liked blowing the heck out of him. The other kids'd always be asking me how to spell "explode," 'cos I suppose we were pretty young back then. He did all kinds of crazy stuff. Goodness knows where that software came from, or if it's even still out there somewhere. There's an old cassette in the cupboard here with Microbee software on it, but I'll be damned if I know how you'd extract it. When you play it in a cassette recorder it just makes a lotta noise for a few seconds. It's probably only a few KB. There used to be regular looking desktop cassette recorders connected up to the computers to transfer information from time to time.
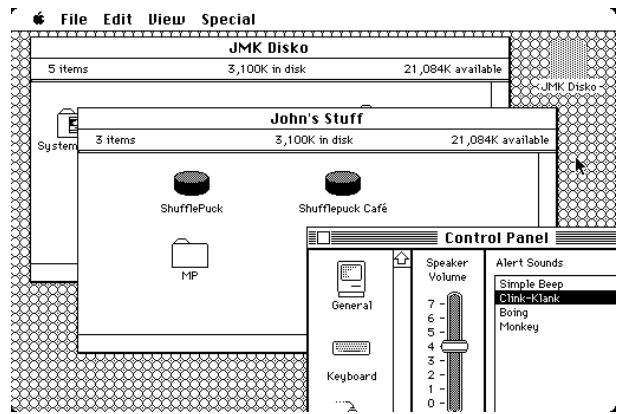
Another one of the programs was this thing with cherries. It was for learning basic maths. You had to balance up the scales with the correct amount of cherries by answering the question correctly, or something. There was probably other software as well, but it was about 20 years ago, so I don't remember it too well. We didn't have mice on these babies. Everything was typed. Damn it must've been painful! Although a mouse was apparently made for Microbee computers I think.

I really can't stand command lines. They're just so unintuitive. My computers teacher in year 11 and 12 made the point of good visual ergonomics also. You don't go putting lots of text that's bright red on bright blue backgrounds and stuff like that that clashes. It's just too difficult to read. I always try to consider that while doing my web page.

In high school we used Apple Macintosh Classics, which ran at something like 8 MHz for some and 12 for others. Man they were SLO-O-O-O-OW! They'd have made my MacBook look like a supercomputer. Black and white were the displays. Fixed at 512 × 342 pixels or so. Mmm, cramped. I'm not sure what System software we had on them. I

think they put System 7 on there, but I really don't remember. Some of them had the little Finder thingie at the top right where you could switch between applications. That was so good to be able to "multi-task." They used to be a pain with only running one application at a time.

We did drawings, word processing, spreadsheets, animations, painting, and programming with Microsoft Quick BASIC, or whatever it was. I even gave a demonstration to the class on how to do sounds or animation or something.
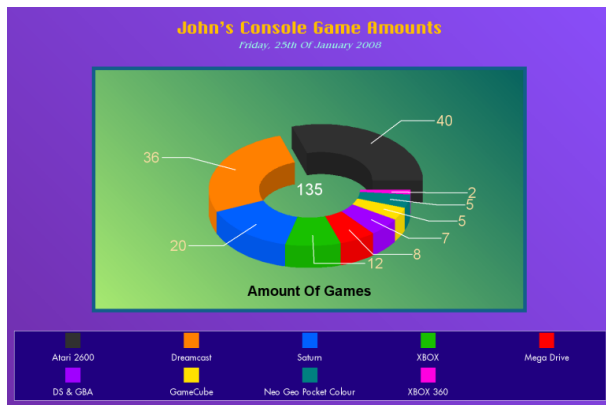
We all liked to play games on them though. Shuffle Puck Café! That stuck in my mind for years to come. I really stunk at it, but it sure was nifty. I was able to play it again recently in Mini vMac, now that Apple have released System 6 for free. Some of the computers even had Mac PlayMate, this naughty, and rather basic sexy sorta game. It had an emergency fake spreadsheet in case somebody should catch you with it. Heh heh. When we were doing the animation work, one guy that I'll just call David, found this "ooh" kind of sound effect, and he was playing it over and over and then changing the pitch, finally slowing it down as if someone was getting it on! We all cracked up with that, but the teacher wasn't all that amused. He did it so convincingly well though. LOL. One of the clever teachers administrating the network put the password as "password" and somebody figured it out in the end, and gained access to everybody's accounts. I don't think they actually did anything to them though. Another guy, Matt, decided to use 2 computers at once, to speed things up a bit. I used to change the background pattern on my computer to little smiley faces.

The technical drawing room had XT PCs with DOS. They had monochrome amber monitors, and we used those 5¼ inch (13.335 cm) floppy disks to store our drawings. We used a mouse of course. I dunno how you'd draw too well with the keyboard. We did stuff like buildings and fences, plus stuff by hand in that class.

It wasn't until 1995 that we got a computer at home. It was an Acer Acros I think. A package deal from Harvey Norman. It had a 75 MHz Intel Pentium CPU, 8 MB of RAM, a 730 MB hard drive, a 4 × speed CD drive, a 3½ inch floppy disk drive, 16 bit Magic S30 Sound Blaster audio card and a Cirrus Logic video card with 1 MB of RAM. The operating system was MS-DOS 6.22 and it also had Windows 3.11 For Workgroups. Lots of the kids at school thought it was a beast! It cost over $5000. You could only do 24 bit colour in 640 × 480 pixels. Once you changed up to 800 × 600 pixels it dropped to 16 bit, then 8 bit for 1024 × 768 and 4 bit colour for the rather flickery and interlaced 1280 × 1024 pixel resolution. It also came with Microsoft Works, (which still does work under Windows XP,) Encarta '95, Space Quest Collectors Edition, Microsoft Home CD-ROM Product Sampler, Microsoft Entertainment Pack, Best Of Microsoft Entertainment Pack and Corel DRAW! 3, which we added in at the time. Although I think version 5 was out at that stage. We also got a Canon BJC-4000 colour printer, which everyone thought was just amazing. After all it could print in colour! Lots of people only had black and white printers back then. I spent a lot of time with Corel DRAW and the other programs it came with, as well as Encarta. When I found QBASIC, I was really excited to try out my own programming. I went and found the old printed piece of paper from back in primary school to see if I could implement that.

Back then you got big thick books for software documentation. These days it's some half @$$ed PDF file if you're lucky. Corel DRAW! 3 even came with a video! There was a lady demonstrating how you could do various stuff with it. I still have that too. Corel

SHOW used to be cool, but it was very bug ridden. It was always crashing for some odd reason. I loved all the Autodesk flic animations you got with it, but I was bit

disappointed that the graphics suite didn't allow you to actually make stuff like that. Corel CHART! was great, and I used it for school also. I only ever did about 12 charts with it, until I got it back out again recently. It still works perfectly fine with Windows XP, and you can copy charts and paste them directly into Corel DRAW 8 also. It was pretty easy to use once you got the hang of the spreadsheet feature.

A bit later on we got a Relisys flatbed single pass colour scanner. It was a beast of a scanner for its time, and the picture quality was fantastic. It had a good focal length also, so you could scan all sorts of things that you stuck in it. Big fat books, flowers, your hand and so on. We upgraded the computer's RAM by another 32 MB, bringing it up to 40, which was pretty huge back then. Unfortunately ISA slots went out the window on motherboards, so it never got used passed our 2nd computer. I later got a PCI based SCSI card which it worked with, but we got a new scanner and printer combo, and it got given away. It worked with Macs also, and came with the software for them.

Our 1st hard drive died with lots of bad sectors, but we were able to get it replaced with a slightly larger 810 or so MB one, under warranty. It still works fine to this day, although I think it's in the cupboard at the moment.

Back then if you were into games, DOS had the really cool ones. If you talked about Windows games, they were the simple ones that Microsoft threw in for you. Now it's kinda the other way around since DirectX came about. It wasn't until 1998 that we got Windows '95. Software was getting harder to find for Windows 3.1, so we finally upgraded and also got Simply 3D 3 I think it was. Somewhere in there we also upgraded the CPU with a HyperRace MX Pro CPU. It was supposed to run at 180 MHz, but the motherboard could only handle it up to 150 MHz. The speed difference was incredible. Simply 3D was riddled with bugs, and we were lucky to be able to return it to Harvey Norman, and get Corel DRAW 8 with some extra cash. Corel DRAW 3 was getting too limited for what I wanted to do, and with Corel DREAM 3D, I could keep on doing 3D graphics also. The anti-aliased graphics and new transparency features were just what I wanted. Unfortunately, the installation was quite big for our little 810 MB hard drive, so some of the programs had to be run off the CD. This made things awkward when you wanted to access other CDs, and the computer could only handle 2 drives. One hard drive and one optical drive, or 2 hard drives and no optical drive. So it was time for a bigger disk. I wanted a 20 GB drive, but they were a bit pricey, so on the 10th of September 1998, we went for a 10 GB size one. Seeing as the computer couldn't handle another hard drive, the folks at Harvey Norman copied the smaller one onto the new one and partitioned into 5 parts. Probably because it was still formatted as FAT 16. The new space was great, and it lasted for quite a few years. Later that year I got Need For Speed 2 S.E. It only just ran smoothly. But in like 320 × 240 pixels. Not long after that on the 17th of November (1998) we got a Creative 3D Blaster Banshee. In other words the 3Dfx Voodoo Banshee. Finally some graphics acceleration! These were the days before AGP, so like the 1st video card we had, it was PCI slot based one, but now with 16 MB of RAM. Now I could actually go up to 1024 × 768 pixels in 24 bit colour at last. Although with Windows '95, you still had to restart it every time you changed something, which was a pain. Even Microsoft Works seemed zippier scrolling through

documents. N.F.S. 2 S.E. didn't seem to detect the card during installation, and later I worked out that you had to copy over the NFS2SEA.EXE program from the CD. It was amazing to finally see it all nice and smooth with the extra effects. I later got N.F.S. 3 as well, which required you to stick "–d3d" for Direct3D on the end of the command line for the program, because it didn't really like the Banshee either. I was also able to sample Unreal and a demo of Ultim@te Race Pro, and the Banshee came with Incoming, although it didn't run too well. Back then, DirectX and Internet Explorer were *optional*.

I also changed over the 1st sound card (which had a volume knob on it,) to a Sound Blaster AWE 64, which was also an ISA slot type card. The improvements to MIDI was quite noticeable.

By the middle of 1999 I was craving a lot more speed. The Games Wizards at Penrith put us together a totally new PC. A 450 MHz Pentium 3 CPU, 128 MB of SD–RAM and an *AOpen AX–6B plus* motherboard, with a new case also. Some 600 MHz CPUs had come in just after it was complete, but they were quite pricey. We picked it up on Monday, the 6th of August. Need For Speed High Stakes was the last game I would try on the 1st computer, and it ran like a slide show. On the new computer however, it was great. This computer lasted our family for 5 years, when it finally started having tantrums in 2004. It was the 1st computer to get me on the Internet and also saw me using Windows '98 and Windows ME.

I was really getting fed up with Windows at this stage, and swore I would ditch it and move to running Linux. Although it would be a few years until I realised what that would actually involve. The Windows bugs and crashes drove me bonkers. You'd be restarting the computer like 10 times a day or more and with no protected memory support, applications that died would bring down everything. It was a spanner in the works for productivity. We eventually got a new 30 GB hard drive, after the other one started getting bad sectors and at some stage I changed the file system over to FAT 32. The computer had a maximum of 640 MB of RAM at one stage, with extra sticks added in from a friend of mine, although while it was sorta dying, some of them didn't work all the time.

Also around 2001 our old Acer monitor began to really pack it in. At 1st it got quite dark and then at some stages it would just turn off! The switch died in it also and had to be replaced I think. So we then got the monitor I have now. A Sony Trinitron E220 with a flat screen. This baby can do up to 1600 × 1200 pixels at 60 Hz and modes up to 800 × 600 pixels at 120 Hz. Something fried in it severely during the warranty period, so it got fixed for free, and since then it's been pretty reliable, although it did get a strange flickering syndrome at one stage. I think something was loose with the connection to the video card.

It was also in about 2001 that I got interested in capturing video, and I decided to get a Pinnacle Systems Studio DC10 + card, which was about $500 or so. This thing had its own special Motion JPEG codec that only worked with its own hardware. You could input and output video and all up to 768 × 576 pixels. I used it for so much stuff, and it was great for screen shots of games for my web page.

I also was able to put a nVidia GeForce 2 video card in our 2nd PC, (which had 64 MB of RAM,) because this baby had an AGP 2 × speed slot. The Banshee had seen its day, and games were starting to use new features like hardware based T&L, which the Banshee couldn't do. The best things I got that computer to run were a demo of Unreal Tournament 2003 in 512 × 384 pixels that was actually playable, and a demo of Ford Racing 2. Unfortunately 3D Mark 2001 couldn't show off everything, because some of the stuff it did required a GeForce 3, and it was good bye to the acceleration in Need For Speed 2 as well, because it only supported 3Dfx cards with Glide. (I later found out

about Glide wrappers.)

The Sound Blaster AWE 64 had been giving me trouble from what I can recall, and I got some cheap and nasty replacement thing that couldn't play 2 sounds at once.

The next computer I got was in 2004; the one prior to the one I have now, and a real upgrade in power. Enough so to run The Elder Scrolls 4: Oblivion and Unreal Tournament 2004. It was a 2.086 GHz AMD Athlon XP with 512 MB of DDR RAM, a Gigabyte K7 Triton motherboard, ATi Radeon 9600 video card (AGP 8 × with Fast Write support) a new 120 GB hard drive, a new case with a transparent side and a Sound Blaster Live card. It was a beast! I could run all sorts of stuff at really good speeds. Towards the end I upgraded it to 1 GB of RAM to try and improve Oblivion's performance, but it just didn't like Windows ME, and wasn't even supposed to run on it. Using the Unreal Editor 3 was a real pain under Windows ME also. It chewed through the RAM, and you had to reboot so often it wasn't funny.

In 2006 I decided to try out Linux for the 1st time with Knoppix. You could run it off a CD and see what it was like. It worked quite well with my hardware, but I began to see that what I had said about leaving Windows behind was not possible. After 11 years of computing with Windows, there's just so much stuff you can't do without it. Knoppix was pretty fun though, and I learnt quite a lot of stuff about how Windows presents things that's not necessarily done the same way in other operating systems, such as hard drive labelling. The one thing that was a pain about Knoppix, was the shut down time. It took up to 20 minutes on some occasions! Damn.

Unfortunately during the same year, the Studio DC10+ card got a loose crystal, and the software would also complain that it didn't exist. It caused a lot of havoc with the motherboard, eventually permanently killing something in it. So much for IBM's specifications on hardware protection buffering. After only 2 years, the computer's short life was over, which I was really mad and bitter about, especially since I'd just got a new SCSI card for the scanner, which didn't see much use. Windows ME had all the trouble under the sun even booting in the end, and I had to disable network support and the floppy disk drive, (which died when I got the SCSI adaptor somehow,) to get it to work. Knoppix got me through the last few days, and then I was able to get the PC I have now.

This time I went straight for Windows XP. Software support for Windows ME was dwindling, and I wanted my video capturing days back again. I didn't trust much of the old hardware, so I went for all new stuff, including a new hard drive. This time I got a Pioneer DVD burner also, to replace the sucky Samsung piece of trash I had previously.

I now have an Asus A8V-MX motherboard, which I don't really like, since it doesn't correctly support AGP Fast Writes, and is too small in the way of expansion slots. I decided to get a 64 bit AMD Athlon CPU to run the 64 bit version of Windows XP, but at the time I wasn't aware that 16 bit application support had been dropped, and I was able to exchange it for the 32 bit Professional version for free, since this was told to me during the PC being built. (Just in case anyone didn't know, it's 64 bit Windows that lacks the 16 bit program support — the 64 bit CPUs can still run that stuff.) The video card unfortunately was a downgrade, to an ATi Radeon 9550, which was noticeably underpowered on Oblivion. I also got a Sound Blaster Audigy sound card and was provided with some kind of high resolution TV tuner card. I later gave it away to someone I know, and replaced it with a Pinnacle Systems Studio 500-PCI card, which came with Studio 10.5.

Knoppix didn't like my new sound card, and despite various efforts I could never get it happening. I later tried out the Australian Puppy Linux, which did work with it and fitted on an 8 cm CD.

During some exciting Oblivion action one night, the screen suddenly went black and the hard drives stopped. Uh oh. I rebooted and nothing. My power supply had fried! A quick trip to Springwood Computers got me a new one just in time for the weekend when I had a friend coming over.

After receiving about $900 from MBF, during some kind of merge, I decided to splash out on a new video card at the end of 2008. I was recommended a nVidia GeForce 9600 GT for PCI Express, but I found out that this motherboard has the wrong kind of PCI Express slot. So I went for an AGP slot nVidia GeForce 7600 GT, which has a whopping 512 MB of video RAM! Again with the problems! The day after I got it, all hell broke loose, as my poor new PC began to malfunction. My heart sank. I took out the new card and put back the old ATi one. But it still was having trouble! No one at the shop seemed to know what was going on though. To cut a long story short, and a couple of hard drives later, the chaps at Springwood Computers, worked out that my power supply was underpowered and had half died under the strain of running 2 hard drives, 2 optical disc drives and now this new beefy video card, which by the way takes power directly from the PSU. With a new one guaranteed to deliver 500 W at all times, my 3rd power supply in this PC has now got me back in action. But something left my video capture card a bit iffy after all the power drop outs and what not. It now has the tendency to drop frames when it shouldn't.

The stability of Windows XP over Windows ME has been unbelievable. I can actually run my PC all day without ever rebooting. Plus you can actually run the Unreal Editor with other programs at the same time! And if a program dies, nothing else gets affected. The only Blue Screens Of Death that I've got have been due to hardware problems as well. Although it does have a LOT of other annoying "features" and design problems. The default set up is almost unusable. I really needed to tweak a bunch of stuff to get things more flowing. During 2007 I was getting really interested in getting a laptop computer. Something that'd let me take my stuff out away from home. I considered getting one with Linux, but finding a place that actually sold one without Windows was almost impossible. Custom building full size PCs is easy enough, but customising a laptop computer is a different matter. As far as I know there aren't that many places that let you choose every part of it. The other problem I found with Linux was that I was doing more work trying to get it to work than what it was doing for me and I hated the idea of having to compile programs yourself that you downloaded. It was far too archaic in that respect, and the bizarre dependencies and compilation errors made it a real nightmare. There was no standardisation to anything. So I decided I'd go for something from Apple. Macs were supposed to be easy to use and you could actually go and buy software for them, where as nobody stocks Linux software. I figured the white MacBook would be the best. The MacBook Pro would have been really nice, but it was far too expensive. I'd never actually used Mac OS X before, so it was a bit of a plunge. I was really impressed by how it looked though in various screen shots. I thought it had the most amazing looking GUI I'd ever seen.
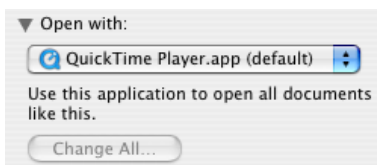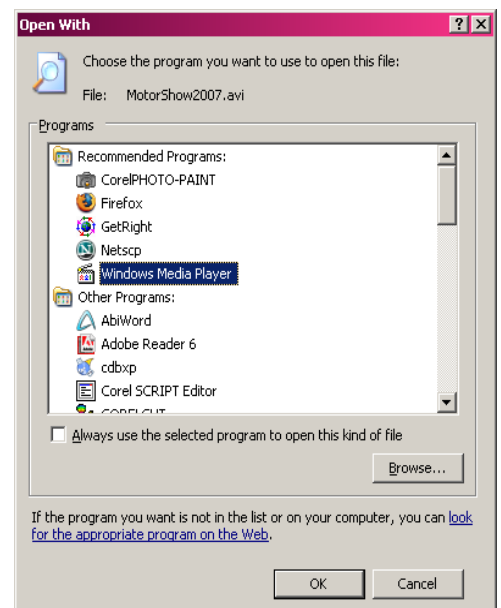
Using it has been a bit of an up and down experience. It's certainly right that there isn't as much Mac software as what you can get for Windows. Maybe only $\frac{1}{10}$ of the stuff in some instances. I was lucky to get Corel DRAW 11 back in early January of 2008, as it was the last Corel DRAW suite ever made for Macs. Corel had given up on all the stupid changes that Apple kept making to the OS, (like the constant revisions,) making backwards compatibility almost non-existent. And that's one of the things I don't get about Apple. They have such a small amount of software available for their computers, yet from Mac OS X Tiger and on, they've eradicated all support for their Classic environment. Nothing earlier than 2001 or so that hasn't been "Carbonised" will work and

new software won't work at all on an earlier revision of the OS. They seem to be shooting themselves in the foot so badly. Mac OS X Snow Leopard even has Rosetta (— the PowerPC emulator —) as an optional extra. Without that, nothing prior to 2006 will even run! If you ask me, they should never have dumped the PowerPC. Changing CPU types is a recipe for disaster, and it's shown. So unfortunately, my MacBook will most likely be the last new Mac I'll ever get. Apple obviously couldn't care less about their customers and making things compatible, (which they obviously used to do,) and it makes you feel so disillusioned by them. They almost seem more like a fad these days rather than anything serious. So despite the irritating past, I'm going back to Windows again in the future. At least you can run stuff older than a few years on it. I guess if you start as a Windows user, you're always a Windows user, but really, I don't know how some of the Mac only users survive. I'll keep my MacBook running as long as I can manage. I really do like it, but I have no intention of forking out money for new operating systems for it. I've only had it for 2½ years, and Apple have put out 2 more revisions of Mac OS X in that time. It's far too frequent.

Changing operating systems is hard alright. Especially to one that barely supports any software. If you're only interested in listening to music, looking at pictures, browsing the Internet and watching DVDs, then you might find changing from one system to another pretty easy. But when you've accumulated so much software that does very specific things, or doesn't exist for other operating systems, like the Nexus memory transfer software, Corel CHART, the Unreal Editors, Need For Speed High Stakes and so on, you're going to be in trouble. You also have to consider what new software you're going to have to buy to replace the stuff you already have for a different OS. The bonus about the Corel DRAW 11 suite is that it came with both the Mac OS X version and the Windows version in the one box, as well as Diablo 2. You can actually turn the Mac demo of Unreal Tournament 2004 into the full version if you have the PC game as well. Although I found it had missing sound effects and voices. :-P
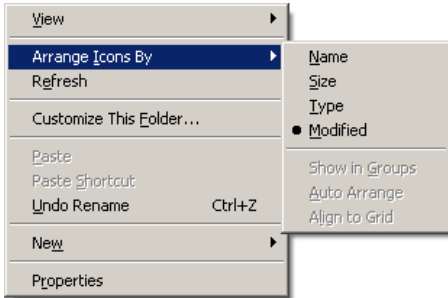
Mac OS X is really nice and stable though. I've only had one kernel panic in about 2½ years, which was related to Virtual Box (, which is a virtual machine). Although sometimes on rare occasions, it refuses to boot, leaving you with just vertical lines down the screen, like the Atari 2600 when a cartridge wasn't inserted correctly. There's less stuff to tweak in Mac OS X as well, which is often a bad thing also. Like, how do you make any adjustments to your video processor? Where's all the settings for texture filtering, triple buffering, anti-aliasing and all that? It doesn't seem to exist unless the game you're playing supports those adjustments.

The interface is less annoying than Windows XP. It seems more sensible. Take file associations for example. In Windows, you'd think that if you set a file to open with a specific program, it would do so. Baaap! I set my AVI files to open with Media Player 6. (Type in mplayer2 on your run menu, and you'll know the one I mean.) Yet *every* time I double click on one, I get the same question about what program I want to use to open it with. It's hopeless! You can tick that "Always use the selected program…" box to your heart's content — it won't make the slightest bit of difference. I'm not sure why I'd want to open it in my web browsers or GetRight. Hmm…

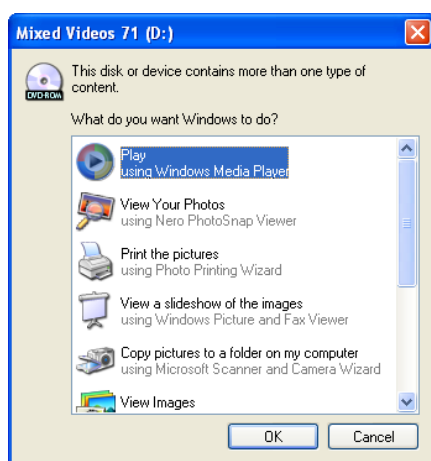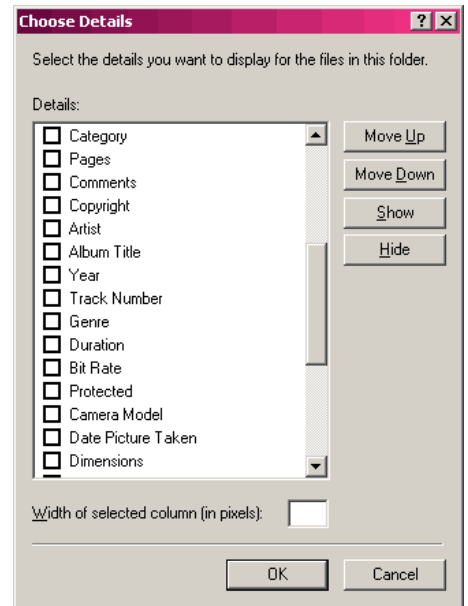In Mac OS X, you go to the file properties, choose the

program you want, click on Change All... and it's done. Just like that. You can even have specific files open with a different program. No BS, just plain and effective.

Another thing that's screwed with Windows XP is the extremely annoying way that it guesses what kind of view to display in Explorer windows, based on what type of files are in that directory. That's just plain inconsistency. Suddenly context menus are missing sorting options, certain types of files won't show modification dates and other important info compared to other files in the same folder — it's a real mess. I'm pretty sure in Windows ME it wasn't this bad. Not only that, it even often comes up with sorting options for the wrong types of files, such as video related features, when the folder only contains audio and pictures for example.

These on the left are the only 4 sorting options you need in my opinion. All this stuff on the right is just a load of bollocks. I just wish Windows XP gave you the option to delete them. Apparently in Windows Vista it's even worse! Ack. A similarly related annoyance introduced in Windows XP are the new autorun handlers. It used to be so much easier in Windows ME. You put in a CD or DVD, and if it had an autorun.inf file, it would do what it had to do, or you could prevent it by holding down Shift. Now in Windows XP, some moron forgot that, and it suddenly activates this blasted Sticky Keys feature instead! Another thing you need to go and disable. Like with the folder views, Windows comes up with a whole bunch of malarkey to do with your optical disc, based on what it finds on it, and at worst, when you change discs, it often forgets to update what was in there, so when you think you're double clicking on the icon to open up something like a bunch of random files you've burnt yourself, up comes WinAMP, 'cos Windows thinks it's still the previous audio CD you had in there!
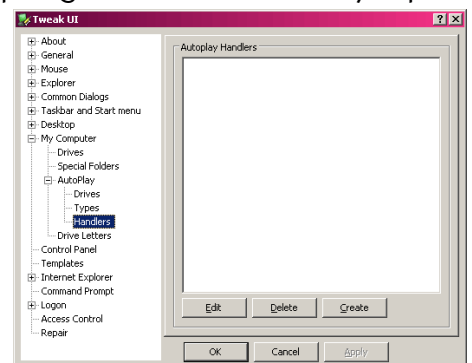
This is the kind of annoying thing that pops up when you stick in any old DVD. (This is on my Dad's computer. How does he survive?) In this case, one of my backup DVDs of stuff. In the past, if you stuck in such a disc, Windows would do absolutely nothing, which is exactly what I'd want it to do, until I'm good and ready to attend to the DVD. Thankfully by downloading Tweak UI of the Powertoys For Windows XP, you can disable all this junk. In fact, for me it got so annoying that I just disabled the autorun feature entirely and made up 2 batch programs that will only open up to the root directory of my optical disc drives. They're easy enough to make. You just put:

Start D: or whatever letter your drive is given. You can also put: *@ECHO OFF* at the top if you don't want the text displayed.

These are my autorun handlers on the right. Yep, that's right, I deleted all of them.

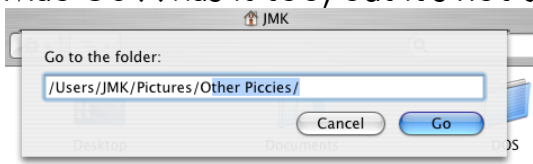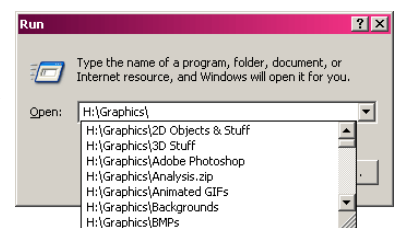Mac OS X has a preference pane that allows you to

choose what actions to take also. Like Windows, I usually have it do nothing at all, except this comes with the operating system. You don't need to download it. Inserting a blank DVD to a drive that doesn't support DVD burning will automatically eject it again also.

One thing that's handy in Windows that Mac OS X doesn't allow, is the ability to drag files from any save or open dialogue box into another application. Say you're going to open a picture, but find it isn't in the directory you thought. You can then open the correct folder, where it really is, and then cut and paste it into where it should be, using that same 1st open dialogue. It can speed things up not having to go and open another Explorer window of that initial directory. Plus you might find an audio file in there you'd like to play. You can just open that from there also. Windows has a great suggestion feature also, for when you're typing in locations, which I use all the time to speed up folder navigation. (I think it goes back to Windows '98.) Mac OS X has it too, but it's not quite as good.
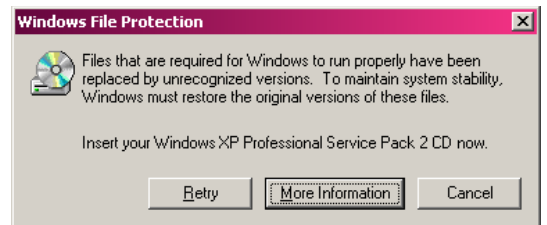
Here's some pictures showing what I mean. Windows gives you a list of possible next choices, where as Mac OS X only fills in the rest of your typing to the 1st match. In this folder of "Pictures", I also have a sub folder called "Other YK," but it isn't suggested until I type in the "Y."

Let's talk about program installations next. Windows has it down pat, if you ask me, although that's not to say that some poorly created applications don't make a mess of things. You run an installation program, and then later if you don't want it any more, you can just run the un-installer in the Control Panel. Usually everything about the program will then all be removed, including information in the registry. In Mac OS X, installation is usually done by opening a disk image file and then dragging the application folder into your Applications folder. When you want to get rid of it, you just dump it in the trash can. Unfortunately, what you don't realise though, is that several files relating to it still exist in other bizarre locations on your hard drive, such as the Application Support and Preferences folder. So you have to manually search and destroy them. Some more nicely written Mac programs however come with an un-installer also, but it's not very often. If it was me, the program and its preferences would all exist in the one directory.

The other thing that got worse with Windows XP was the amount of software included that no longer became optional. Although, Internet Explorer, the worst of all, became stuck in the works like chewing gum in your hair since back in Windows '98 or so. Although Windows XP has a tantrum, you CAN remove other items like MSN Messenger, Windows Media Player 9 and Outlook Express. You'll get a message like this once you've removed the application AND the backup files. (Which are usually in: C:\WINDOWS\system32\dllcache.) Just click on Cancel and forget all about it. Of course you need to be careful, and not remove something that really is needed to run the OS.

Mac OS X lets you remove stuff just by chucking it in the trash can. Although you'll probably want to keep Finder and QuickTime. You can just chuck Safari, (especially if you use Firefox,) iWeb, Comic Life and Garage Band. iTunes and iPhoto seem to be tied up with Front Row, so you might to hang on to them! Some web sites claimed you

couldn't remove the widgets which come with Mac OS X Tiger either, but you can, so long as you have your administrator password. You can dump the lot if you don't want them.

Another thing I *HATE* is automatic software updates. (They seem to assume you always have an Internet connection, some of these software developers.) If I wanted to update my software, I'd go and see about it! The last thing you want is half a squillion programs chewing up your connection speed while you're trying to do other stuff. I update when I want to update. If of course the programs were written properly in the 1st place you wouldn't need to do any updating. It just comes across as lazy and it bloats up programs as well.

When it comes to virus protection, Windows XP is a lot more vulnerable than Mac OS X, mainly because there's more viruses written for it. In my 14 years of computer use at home, I've only had about 3 viruses, although one was more of a Trojan horse, which looking back on the file I got, I should have known better about. I'm not sure what it actually did though. That said, the chances of getting a virus on my Macs is probably pretty slim, since there's only a handful of them at best. The general way to be safe is to never accept unknown programs from people you don't trust, don't download programs from "black market" Internet sites and when you do download stuff, make sure it's from somewhere reputable that's checked it first. If you're really paranoid, a virtual machine is a great way to test software and see what it does before running it on your main OS installation.

Earlier in the year (2009) I got fed up with drop outs in the power supply (to the house) and got myself a UPS, which I'd been putting off for years. If you want to protect your computer from hard drive "head crashes" as well as other file system errors and even losing your work, a UPS may very well be worth the money. My one cost under $200 and they'll usually keep your computer up and running for at least 10 minutes during a power failure. Plenty of time to finish up what you're doing, and shut the computer down correctly. Although with mine, the battery charging time is 8 hours, so you don't want to suck it dry. :-P My UPS even came with optional Java based monitoring software, in case I wanted to know how it's doing.

(5th of August 2010 extras:)

I don't really like the whole Windows XP activation thing either, which is something Mac OS X doesn't make you do. Naturally you'd never see anything like that with Linux either. As someone pointed out in an article I read recently, what's the point of Microsoft treating all its customers like criminals when hackers know how to bypass the activation stuff anyway? Regular users don't benefit from any of the malarkey Microsoft make out. It's just a way for them to try and prevent themselves from being ripped off. It would be nice though if they could provide some kind of bypass application when they drop support for the OS in 2014.

(15th of April 2011 extras:)

Late last year I had to replace the Sony E220 monitor because it got the heebee geebees again with this flickering syndrome. CRT monitors are unfortunately very hard to get now, with LCDs being the predominate "choice." The 2 main benefits of cathode ray tubes that I didn't want to leave behind was their ability to do multiple resolutions and their excellent viewing angles. Although they do tend to fade over time. So I thought I'd go for a LED display instead, as these have very fast pixel response times and much better viewing angles than LCDs. Unfortunately when I tried to find places that might have one, I discovered that they aren't really being sold yet in great numbers, and there didn't seem to be a lot about them. So I decided I'd have to go for a LCD after all. I wanted something with the same resolution, or better, than the one I had been using and

a good pixel response time also. Nothing cheap and nasty either, so I got to reading a heap of reviews. I eventually found out that keeping the same resolution would mean having to get a bigger monitor. There seemed to be a limit on how small LCDs would go at high resolutions. I eventually decided upon the Hewlett Packard LP2065, which got mostly good reviews. Some people had said the pixels got stuck on occasions, but I've never seen it do that. The maximum resolution is exactly the same as the Sony monitor I had, but now I actually use it, because the old monitor was quite flickery on 60 Hz. The pixel response time is about 8 ms, which is pretty good, and the viewing angle is surprisingly wide. Unlike my MacBook's screen, you can actually look up and down and side to side without it going inverted. All in all, it's been really good so far, plus it's nice & sharp looking. On lower resolutions you can apply a sharpening effect to reduce the blurriness also.

(29th of July 2011 extras:)

Last year I was given an older PC that was going to head off to the tip. Apart from missing a hard drive, the rest of it still worked. I found an old 120 GB hard drive and put Mandriva One 2007 (Linux) on there to begin with, since it only has 256 MB of RAM. I used it for a bit, and then recently changed it to Windows '98 to see how well it could run T.E.S. 3: Morrowind. I planned to get it up and going in one afternoon, but it actually took some time into the evening, after constantly running into various troubles along the way. The computer initially had a nVidia GeForce 2 MX video card with 64 MB of RAM, but I changed it to my ATi Radeon 9600 (with 256 MB of RAM) from my previous computer. It's now set up to run on my TV as the monitor. (Up until Windows loads, it stays on the default NTSC signal. Luckily the TV supports this too. When a BSOD comes up though, it goes all weird.)

(6th of January 2012 extras:)

I think Apple have made a lot of mistakes with the Lion revision of Mac OS X. The fact that you can no longer even run early PowerPC applications for the same operating system is just weird. So while us Windows users can still run applications from at least 17 years ago, Mac users have been reduced to universal applications from only 6 or so years back. Not only that, but they cut out support for their own modem and the operating system isn't even available on optical discs in shops! So if you never had an Internet connection, you can't get it for an older Mac, and if your hard drive fails, you can't restore it yourself either. (Unless you back up the installer.) So I think that's really stupid and short sighted of them, especially with all the other issues Macs have with the lack of support for software and hardware. You'd think the company would try to become more compatible with as much as they can, rather than doing the opposite. It's just giving Windows an even greater edge. And Linux too.

(22nd of December 2013 extras:)

One thing I can't stand is that horrid Clear Type excuse for anti-aliasing on text edges, which plagues Windows 7 in situations even when you have it turned off! How can anyone STAND using it? It makes text look like an out of focus rear projection monitor, or TV. It gives me a headache. Mac OS X suffers with it as well, but once you turn it off, you NEVER see it again. And then you get these screen shots on the Internet of other people using it, and you're like: "Dude! The colours!" Oaugh, it's painful! It doesn't matter what monitor you're using; it looks ghastly, and should never have been put into Windows 7 at all.

(7th of October 2015 extras:)

I may have had a go at Apple in 2012 about Mac OS X, but Windows 10 this year — oh my gosh, what were they smoking over at Microsoft? This is like Windows 8, but worse! Apart from the ghastly interface, which let's face it, is just Windows 1 with anti-aliasing

and a few extra bits thrown in, the OS is now spyware!!! In the licence agreement, you are accepting that Microsoft can keep track of what you're doing! WHAT?!!! What files you open, what web sites you visit, what programs you use. Anything they like! Not only that, but they've now rammed that blasted auto-updating junk down your throat even further. You pretty much have to go into the services area to disable it, rather than just in the Control Panel. (And it shouldn't exist anyway.) And if being spyware wasn't bad enough, they put adware into Windows 7 and 8 for the poor sods who had the Windows Update dealie enabled in their operating systems. Then there was all the malarkey about them giving it away for free, but this only applied if you got it from their web site, which would have been a huge download to suffer through. (How many days would that take on a dial-up connection like mine?!) And then some people said it didn't even work anyway! I somehow doubt the shops are going to be giving out free copies. The true price is $299 for the "pro" version & $179 for the "home" one. Pro my @$$. This has been the biggest cock-up at Microsoft since dodgy old Windows '98 & ME. And although they were as unstable as a mentally defective pile of wooden building blocks in an earthquake, at least their interfaces looked better, and you didn't have all the other B.S. tied into Microsoft's web site.

Last year however, I went backwards and got a used HP Compaq laptop PC to run Windows 2000 on. Oh! That was a very wise choice. That operating system is arguably Microsoft's finest hour I would say. Certainly their last serious effort anyway. Although Windows 7 was a false sign that they were pulling their socks up, 'cos everything just went down hill after that.

(19th of February 2016 extras:)

This year I've been aiming to acquire a Power Mac G5. I think it'd be an interesting computer to have. Something a bit beefier than my iMac G4 and with a sexah looking case to boot. I'd probably spend up to $300 on one — some of the prices on eBay have been less than that, although I'd rather get one from some computer refurbisher place. I'd probably have to find a copy of Mac OS X Tiger for it as well, unless the person I get it from actually does provide that OS. I certainly want Classic support.

I also started doing a little bit of Mac programming again after 8 years. I'd much rather be using Visual BASIC or FreeBASIC in Windows though.

I said in the past I wouldn't go back to a new Mac, but that still remains true, as the G5s are about 11 years old now. Ultimately, I'd like a fan cooled dual core 2.3 GHz model with 2 GB of RAM and a 500 GB hard drive. I get the feeling I'll probably need to make compromises on that. It would be nice though for it to have iDVD processing my DVDs, rather than cracking out my MacBook. And you really need some grunt for that program. I'd probably get some kind of DVI switching device to share my monitor.

(12th of September 2016 extras:)

On the 27th of July, my Power Mac G5 arrived. I ended up with a dual core 2 GHz model, with 2 GB of RAM, and the original 149.1 GB hard drive, which I intend to upgrade from. Possibly to a 900 + GB one. I've yet to find out if it will work with AF drives, and if not, I will put the new drive in a caddy, and switch to it when the internal drive fails.

I have both Mac OS X Tiger & Leopard on separate partitions. It's a bit of a git switching between them, and I had to disable Spotlight to stop it chunking up every time you went from one to the other. Our scanner only works in Leopard, even though there's a driver for Puma, (which didn't work,) and of course Classic only works with Tiger. I've got Mac OS X Tiger on the bigger partition, because that's what I prefer using mostly. (It looks a bit better as well, apart from the Dock.)

Compared to my MacBook, the PowerPC CPU is not as efficient as Intel's Core 2 Duo. It's more like the performance of my 1.66 GHz one, based on rendering tests that I did with

Art Of Illusion.

What's surprising, is how slowly the fans run, even under full CPU usage, and how little they increase in speed. Still, it has 4 fans dedicated to just the CPU alone.

The (cough cough) Microsoft keyboard I'm using with it, can be a bit erratic in terms of being detected, and sometimes you need to reboot for it to work, or unplug it and then plug it in again.

Even this early on, I've had to replace the DVD drive, which wasn't all that easy, since parallel connecting drives are getting hard to find now. I was able to get a used one for $10 from a shop in Sydney, which works fine so far.

(21st of May 2017 extras:)

AF drives do work fine in the Power Mac G5. At least the 931.5 GB one I have. (You can go up to 2 TB apparently.) I'm not sure what I'll do in the future if the current one needs replacing. But when you consider how much I use it, it may last for the next 15 years anyway, and something else'll probably die 1st.

I tried to make a new year's (high) resolution to stop whinging about Windows 10, and I have mostly kept to it at the moment, since I couldn't care less about it right now. No doubt Microsoft will do something bold & ridiculous again, that just begs to be commented on.

I worked out a way to get Need For Speed 2 S.E. running in Windows 7, so that's pretty good for a game that's 20 years old. You certainly can't run stuff that old natively on a new-ish Mac! You'd have to use Sheep Shaver, if it worked, and if it supported 3D acceleration. Not that there were any N.F.S. games on Macs back then.

(29th of May 2018 extras:)

I had to replace my main PC's primary hard drive which was close to 5½ years old. After coming back from holiday, something caused it to get bad sectors the moment the computer was turned on after 12 days of just sitting there. If somebody could explain that one, I'd really like to know what happened.

Back in April the motherboard in my newest computer from 2013 just up and died in the middle of me playing Need For Speed: High Stakes, so it's not been a very lucky year for computers so far. That cost me about $803 to get a replacement, which was "refurbished." Anyway, as I wasn't using the 931.5 GB drive it came with, I put that into my main PC, and I've been trying to get it back to how it was. The last time Windows XP was installed was in about December 2008! So almost 10 years of settings went out the window. Plugging my 4th flash memory unit in reminded me of what a length of time this was. It has always been shown as drive "S" on this computer, because when I 1st used it, I still had an actual hard drive partition of "R." That has long gone, and now I just have directories with those letters as remnants of my Windows '95 days. Windows XP let me change its letter back to "S" though, so next time I plug it in, I can carry on as I usually would.

If this computer makes it to the end of 2026, which will be pushing it, it will be 20 years old! Well, it still has to get to 12 yet.

As for the replacement computer for my one from 2013, it actually has an older motherboard from about 2011, but it's still a Gigabyte one. The CPU is an Intel Core i7 running about 3.5 GHz. This time there's 12 GB of RAM! Yikes, that's a lot for me. I have the same video card, but I had to go to the built in sound processor, because there's no regular PCI slot for my previous Sound Blaster Audigy. ¡x I have the same hard drive too.

The computer came with Windows 10 as well, which I tried in VirtualBox, but it was worse than I thought it would be.

(16th of February 2021 extras:)

This year I replaced my UPS, which started acting weird and turning off when it was

supposed to be saving me from power drop-outs. I got a more powerful CyberPower one, which has a display on the front to show you all kinds of information from the input frequency and voltage, to battery time and watts used.

The "2018 PC," which has the Intel Core i7 CPU gave me trouble as well! Basically not turning on, but just restarting, failing, and trying again. It wouldn't even get to the BIOS. I ended up cleaning the RAM contacts, (which <u>were</u> filthy,) and so far it's been okay, but I'm not 100% sure if that was the cause.

I haven't changed to Linux or Free BSD Unix yet. I'm still hanging on to Windows XP, Windows 7 and Mac OS X Tiger & Leopard for as long as I can!

In August 2018, the Airport card died in my Power Mac, and I had to remove it, which was quite an effort. It was preventing Mac OS X Leopard from starting, and just caused a kernel panic. Of course being a Mac, it was totally useless at telling you WHAT had gone wrong. It was only due to Mac OS X Tiger, that I was able to find out from the panic logs, because this revision of the OS was starting fine. The other worrying thing, was that the special hardware test CD found no trouble with the Airport card! What a crock, huh?

In 2019, I got a late Christmas present iMac G5, which has been running fairly well so far. Although its iSight camera is dead. The OS knows it exists; it just gives no image. For some reason I couldn't get iDVD 7 to work properly with Mac OS X Leopard, even though it's fine on my MacBook and Power Mac. So I have a portable hard drive with Mac OS X Tiger on it, which iDVD 7 does work fine with, and I can boot the iMac from that, if I want to use that instead. Especially for Classic too.

Last year, my MacBook's battery wore out. It will no longer charge, and Mac OS X Leopard just says it needs checking. I can still run it from the little PSU thingy anyhow.

My main PC made it to 14 years old, and for a few months there I had clock problems, where the time would "freeze" when the PC was turned off. It wouldn't reset back to the default time; it would just stick. And I'd have to fix it every time I turned the thing back on. (I had replaced the battery too.) That's stopped happening though now, for some unknown reason. I also moved its case fan from the side to the back, and it's running about 20°C cooler! If I'd known that, I'd've put it there years ago.

(10th of September 2023 extras:)

Since the last time I wrote in this file, my Power Mac G5 packed it in, and my main PC as well! No·o·o·o·o! It was around the middle of 2022 that my Mac snuffed it. It started to "freeze." It was to the point where it couldn't even add to the error log dealie. It could do nothing but keep the image on the screen. I figured it was heat related, because as the day went on, with me examining it, it became less and less stable, down to it beeping in ways I'd never heard, indicating the likes of failing RAM and other issues. I think the power supply might be knackered. Or something on the logic board. So that was very very sad. It was also while I was doing a 13th DVD of personal stuff. I had a backup copy of the iMovie project, but when I went to put it on my MacBook, it couldn't read part of it! Nor could my iMac G5! So I had to remove the hard drive from the Power Mac, put it in a "dock" thing, and read it that way. Then, after I got it processed on my MacBook, I copied the DVD image file from iDVD to my main computer, or 2018 PC, to burn it. I thought: "Oh! I'd better backup the iDVD project too." I turned my MacBook back on, and it wouldn't even load Mac OS X. The hard drive had completely died between turning it off and back on! I couldn't believe it! (Victor Meldrew: *I do not beli-EEEEEVE IT!*) So I stuck in the Mac OS X Leopard installation DVD, and Disk Utility couldn't even find the internal hard drive, let alone read from it! So maybe 13 really is cursed.

This year, around the 12th of August, my main PC refused to turn on. I figured the power button must've worn out from all those years of pressing it. I must've pressed it close to 6000 times over 16½ years. Anyway, I chopped the wires, and soldered in a new push

button, which just hung out the front of the case. That actually took close to an hour to achieve. I thought the problem was fixed then, as I pressed it, and it worked. The next day, it didn't work. I pulled on the wires, and one came unsoldered. So I fixed it, and it was good again. Then the next day, nothing again. It was no longer looking like that button was ever at fault. One thing I noticed, was that the mouse L.E.D. was flashing, and the one on the motherboard. That did not seem normal. I took out the video card, and tried re-tightening its screw, so it was more "comfy." This seemed to work at one stage, but it failed again. I tried cleaning out the dust, cleaned the RAM, and none of that seemed to fix the issue. So, I dunno what happened to it. In the last failure, I was typing stuff, and the signal to the monitor just sodded off. I could still hear my music, but I couldn't see what was happening. I'd also run out of replacement video cards to try, plus the built-in thing didn't work either. Now I have a brand new PC, which was ½ a birthday present. This one cost just over $600 off eBay, and it has the 64 bit version of Windows 7. It's got a 3.7 GHz 6th generation Intel Core i3 CPU, and 8 GB of RAM. I'm just using the built-in Intel GPU, and Realtek sound processor, but it has had some glitches, so I may get a Sound Blaster Audigy FX card or something. This is only a short tower design, so it's not loaded with card slots on the motherboard. I've only just got settled in with it recently, having it feel like I'm "back at home," so to speak. I also have Windows XP installed in a virtual machine, and I'm using it now to type this in Open Office. (Or Open Orifice, if it's being an @r$€ hole. ☻ Which it isn't usually.) I didn't want to give up Windows XP, so this was the option I took. I was uncertain as to how Corel DRAW 8 would work in Windows 7 as well. I am never giving up that graphics package! Plus I have some 16 bit programs I wanted to use, and one of the programming languages I have, doesn't work under Windows 7, even though the programs it makes do. In any case, it's really easy to back it up now. I made a virtual hard drive of 30 GB, but it's only using just under 4 GB currently. It's set to expand the file as needed.

Microsoft really ticked me off with their lack of customer service, when it came to activating Windows XP. Mac, Linux, Unix and even Haiku users can laugh at that ridiculous B.S., and at me I guess, for choosing to use it. Anyway I tried using the activation over the 'net, and it failed, like in 2018, when I last installed it. So I wrote down that huge number it makes, and rang Microsoft the next day. The activation service didn't even get as far as asking what OS this was for, mind you. I had to enter some number on my 'phone to make sure I wasn't some kind of "machine." Unlike them, the 2 faced gits. They wanted me to enter 432 to begin with, but it didn't even work! The recorded woman said it wasn't a match. My @r$€ it wasn't. So I did it again. A different number; the same problem! I was furious! So I went back to my PC, and tried the paid number, and all I get is that this 2nd number was now out of service! Although it was still being used by MS, because they rattled off a new number, and I had to ring the (2nd) number 5 times, **and** get somebody else to write it down, before I got the whole thing. Those idiots! How do they expect you to remember a number you've never heard, when they yack that fast? Then, when I did get the final (3rd) number, they screwed me again! They said the service had been discontinued so that people didn't have to wait in queues, and then they just palmed me off to their web site! The mother-f**kers! I almost smashed the telephone. Then the site didn't work anyway. So I said: "F**k you, Microsoft! Never again." But Lady Luck was with me, because I found a program somebody put out last year, which simulates that 'phone activation service. It gets the number made by Windows XP, and generates the one to put back in. What a relief! See, only legit customers get screwed by these tactics. "Hackers" can already get passed all this stuff. So now I can activate Windows XP whenever I need to, and my Dad's copy if his computer stuffs up. Speaking of which, his computer has never fouled up badly since he got it in 2005. It's got the same primary hard drive too. Although I think it was this year, that the secondary drive went, but it is 23 years old! It's an IBM drive with glass platters, or some such thing. I dunno what that was about. It predates the original XBOX consoles.

Anyway, due to my MacBook's battery dying, I then discovered that it will only run at half

speed now, off the power supply. So at 1 GHz. What a rip off! So my iDVD projects now take 7 hours to complete, instead of 3½. It's made me wonder about running Mac OS X Leopard in a virtual machine on one of my new potent PCs, but then I mightn't use it that much. In any case, I reckon Windows XP runs faster in the virtual machine on this new PC than it did on my AMD Athlon 64 CPU. So it might be worth trying.

I also had to kiss goodbye to using my Lite-On CD burner, which lasted me 20 years with not one problem. I won't chuck it, but I can't use it in this new compo, because of the parallel connection. New drives use serial cables of course. I still have my 22 year old Logitech keyboard though! Yay! I like it more than that Microsoft one I got 10 years ago, with the flat-ish keys.

That about sums it up for now, but if I think of anything else, I'll add it in later.