

**A DAY IN THE LIFE
OF A
COMPUTER SOFTWARE TRAINER**



**Memoirs
by**

Viv Martin

**"Men make their own history more wisely when they know what that history has
been about."
- Manning Clark**

Viv Martin

30th May, 2013

SAY AGAIN? TO HELL WITH THAT!

"I don't intend to grow old, there's no future in it!" -

P.K. Shaw

Have decided that I will no longer reveal my age to all and sundry. Am tiring of remarks like, " but you have such good skin FOR YOUR AGE!" How I am beginning to hate that expression, " for your age!" Also, the surprise that I am still working followed by "When are you going to retire?" I have a C.P.A. brother-in-law who is 10 years older than me and he's still working; why can't I?

HOW MUCH PER WEEK IS THAT?

I started work when I was 17 years of age, in an office - the boss asked me to calculate my weekly wage when being paid £400 (\$800) per year. I failed my first test by calculating something less than what it should have been! He was quite prepared to pay me that if it was truly what I would accept! It wasn't really my first job - started work in a furniture store to learn the furniture trade, etc etc but that's another (funny) story in it's self.

THE COMPUTER - THE GREAT UNKNOWN!

To put my students at ease, I usually relate my own first experience. We had a bookshop in Bendigo for 11 years and a customer, Charles, who had become a friend, enquired how it was all going? Charles was an accountant and also taught accountancy at the Bendigo College of Advanced Education. I remarked that if it wasn't for the rotten paperwork, I might be able to spend less after hours time trying to keep up. He suggested that I might like to come around to his place and "play with" his computer which lay idle for most of the time. Charles doesn't laugh at me but reminds me of the first visit and, with my hands suspended above keyboard, I looked at him and remarked, "But what does it do?" So, you see, we've all been there, done that. It is not always easy to learn from a book; it is far better if someone is over your shoulder instructing (not showing) you what to do!



DELETE ONE - DELETE ALL!

At the Ashburton Community Centre, Bruce Livett and I, used to borrow a number of Osborne CP/M computers and run classes. We had the old "Word-Star" as a word processor and one day I heard a lady student say to the lady sitting next to her, "I haven't got on my screen what you have on your screen." By the time I got to

her it was too late; the old Backspace was <Cntrl> G and instead of pressing down and immediately letting go, she was holding them both down. Most of the document had gone “down the tube” by the time I had arrived at her side!

TEACHING AT HOLMESGELEN T.A.F.E.

The Bendigo friend, Charles (Jehovah’s Witness), mentioned earlier attended an accountant’s conference of some kind and in discussion with a Melbourne accountant, Sam, discovered that Sam (Jewish) was having difficulty with the SuperCalc spreadsheet program fairly popular at the time. VisiCalc, the forerunner of Lotus, was the other main contender at the time. After some discussion, my name was put forward, having not long moved to Melbourne, as a possible trainer or helper with Sam’s SuperCalc problems. For quite a while I used to go over to the Sam’s office at St. Kilda and do mainly cash flows for his business clients who intended to take over or float new businesses. Some time later he ‘phoned one weekend advising that he had purchased a laptop with Lotus and was experiencing some problems. Sam eventually persuaded me to allow him to come over to my home (I felt I hardly knew Lotus but it was very similar to SuperCalc anyway). After about an hour and a half we had solved his problems and increased his understanding of how Lotus actually worked. He then asked had I ever considered teaching! I just laughed and said he had to be kidding. He then revealed he had just finished a six week course on Lotus and had just learnt more about Lotus in the last hour and a half than he had in the six weeks. He asked to be allowed to put my name forward as being willing to teach Adult courses during nights and weekends at Holmesglen T.A.F.E. to which I eventually agreed, with some reluctance. (His friend Henry was in charge of this section). Within twenty-fours they had ‘phoned to confirm that I was available but then the discussion revealed that they had plenty of spreadsheet teachers. What they really would like to do was start a *NEW* course for students who had done their manual bookkeeping course to introduce them to computerised bookkeeping. When I expressed some reluctance, I was asked if I would like some time to think about it and I said yes. Very well, we will ‘phone again *TOMORROW* and see what your answer might be! After some quick ‘phone calls to some friends and some reassurance, I said okay but what program should I be using? How “green” can one be? Oh no, I was to choose the program and write all the course notes! Talk about a sharp learning curve! Learning on the job certainly taught me a lot and improved my enunciation and use of the English language having to deal with a number of nationalities. Thus was born, “Introduction To Computerised Bookkeeping.”



Late in 1991, Henry produced a copy of Quicken v4 for DOS and asked would I assess it as a possibility for a course at Holmesglen T.A.F.E.?

So I took it home but before I had even loaded it, a friend, Barry McMenemy, ‘phoned me and with some excitement announced that he had imported from the U.S.A., Quicken v5 for DOS and I should come over to his place ‘cos it was absolutely fantastic and very intuitive to use. After us both exploring it, I went back to Henry and announced that Holmesglen T.A.F.E. should introduce it as a course and that I would teach it!

(28th October, 1991 - Purchased Quicken for DOS v5 from Ozzie Software)

I ran this *Quicken* course for a few years con-currently with “Introduction to Computerised Book-keeping” but eventually phased this out in preference to the *Quicken* courses. The *Quicken* courses ran for quite a few years through the DOS

versions and up through a number of Windows versions until student numbers dictated the termination of these courses. It may have been about the time QuickBooks started to dominate for business?

Also taught over the years, *Quicken* & *QuickBooks* at Melbourne PC User Group.

THE BIG CON

When I first started teaching at Holmesglen T.A.F.E., I developed the sly technique of using the student's first name as the name of their file. This gave me the advantage of addressing the student correctly when helping with their work. Everything worked well until one particularly class, a student had garbled text appear on his screen. As there was a spare computer that evening, I suggested that he use the spare but it also gave the same result. It took a few split seconds for me to realise what the problem was. I asked if he could spell his name, Con, differently and he suggested Kon – problem solved! In computer parlance Con is an instruction to write to the screen/monitor as opposed to writing to the hard disk.

THE ROAMING PEN

While teaching at Holmesglen T.A.F.E., in a Melbourne suburb, had occasion to see the man in charge of the Adult Courses which is what I was doing at evenings and weekends. While talking I noticed this huge thermometer protruding from his top pocket and, of course, I had to ask didn't I? He looked down at it in feigned surprise and said something like, "Oh, heck; some bum's got my pen!"

SAY EXACTLY WHAT YOU MEAN!

When loading software from disks it has been quite common practice to describe the process along the lines of, "Insert first disk, then insert second disk" and so on. This caused much confusion to some students as there was no instruction to remove the disks before inserting the next. I had one occasion where two 5.25" disks had been jammed in the drive!

"HIT" A KEY WHEN READY!

While teaching to a group at Holmesglen T.A.F.E., where they were required to learn new skills or were in danger of losing their allowances, I used a long time expression of, "Hit a a key when ready." I hadn't realised at that point of time how stressed out some people can get when forced in to this sort of situation! I saw this guy, probably in his twenties and, I think, married (that's enough stress for a start!) stand up, line up the keyboard and give it an almighty whack! From that point, my instruction to students was to press a key and immediately let go!

The ANY Key

When installing some software, sometimes there will be an instruction to "Hit ANY key when ready." In one of my *Quicken* classes at Holmesglen T.A.F.E. an adult student asked, "Which one is the ANY key?" As this is an old furphy, I thought it was a bit of a wind-up and, as I was already moving around the room, I positioned myself to look at his face. Unfortunately, this was for real! I have thought at various

times that I should have had some decals made with the word ANY so that I could add it to the Space Bar.

THE COMPUTER IS EATING MY DISKS!

In browsing the web have seen similar stories to this. While teaching at Holmesglen T.A.F.E., one student had difficulty ejecting the disk. The lights were somewhat subdued in that particular computer room and originally we were using the somewhat slim 5.25" drives and the physical gap between the two drives allowed the student to push the disk through this gap!

SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

Amongst my students was a mature student, John Landy. When I recognised his name, he was quick to assure me that he was not the well known runner and former Governor of Victoria. I let him know that I did realise this and I also knew that he taught manual bookkeeping at Holmesglen T.A.F.E. but what was he doing in my class? His students had evidently been asking what they should do after they had completed his course and he had been suggesting that they should attend my classes to learn how to use a computer for bookkeeping. Not knowing what that entailed, he had decided to enrol in my class to be able to recommend more knowledgeably. John also revealed that he could work a typewriter but had never used a computer. I assured him that I would guide him with anything that may seem a puzzle.

After the classes were well under way, John lamented that he could not keep up with the ladies who were doing the exercises at a great rate, while still being able to chat! I assured him that they were not listening to what I had been saying and that the first half of the course was made up of practical demonstrations and the second half was exercising what had been learnt. Sure enough, the very first exercise was an instruction to 'bank your cash sales from yesterday' which stopped these students in their tracks. John steadily worked through all the exercises and understood perfectly, finishing first. It wasn't long before John was on his feet working the room and helping the others understand what was required; he couldn't help himself! It was all a bit comical really.

A while after this, one of the ladies in the Administration office asked me if I had heard what had happened to John. Not knowing what to expect, I said no that I hadn't. It seems that John was so thrilled that he was able to do computer bookkeeping that he had gone off and purchased his first computer!

STUDENTS COMPLAINTS

While at Holmesglen T.A.F.E., I only had two official student complaints they I had to respond to; they were required to be submitted in writing.

The first concerned a qualified (in Malaysia) lady accountant who was required to do courses in Australia to be accepted which, no doubt, generated some resentment. My knowledge and methods were challenged to which I reviewed her work. My assessment from the work on her computer disk was that she had not been paying attention to my instructions and her out of balance accounts were due to non-

posting of entries which that particular system required the user to do. This complaint evaporated.

The second concerned another lady that claimed my instructions were not plain and easily understood. I offered to revise all questions requiring answers at a place and time of her choosing. I attended at her home in the evening and after one session, she elected not to require any further personal instruction.

This second event was accompanied by requests to all current students for an assessment by each on my abilities. This was met with 100% favourable results and some hostility to the student that the others claimed always arrived late and left early!

I'VE NOW DECIDED I'M NOT YOUNG ENOUGH TO KNOW EVERYTHING!

(misquote from Oscar Wilde). Tom, another member of the Melbourne PC training team who taught hardware had an occasion where he planned to go to a home-user site and format their hard-drive. They were warned to back-up all their data files before he arrived. When Tom arrived, the twelve year old son proudly announced that he had backed up the whole hard drive. Tom marvelled somewhat at this and asked the young lad to show him just how this could be achieved and how many disks it may have taken. A packet of ten 3.5" disks was produced and it was then revealed that after working through from disk one to disk ten, he then recommenced with disk one etc. True story!

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION!

One of my regular clients was an accountant who totes me around his clients fixing up irregularities and training clients. One particular lady whose name is Shirley was doing the books for her husband Pat.

That's not unusual you might think but strangely enough their surname was Curley. Now Shirley Curley told me this story and it gets even funnier! Shirley was from the north of England and received a 'phone call from over there, Manchester I think.

"Mrs Curley?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that your first name is Shirley?"

"Yes, it is."

"We are having a 'phone-in segment in two weeks time on unusual names. Would you participate?"

"Yes but I will be over there in two weeks time for my daughter's wedding and could come in to the studio if you wish?"

"Okay; good."

"I will come in with my friend, Pearl(y) White."

"You're kidding?"

"No; it's true!"

It get's even better! Now wait for it; don't anticipate me!

The guy who was scheduled to do the interview thought it was a bit of a wind-up, especially as HIS name turned out to be Curley Shirley!

