This short essay represents my much abridged computing history. There's lots of little details I've left out like experimenting with AppleTalk networks and typing cheesy stories that 8 year old me thought were just the best. Lugging an SE to my grandmothers house, wasting time on old Mac portables, etc.

The Early Years
As one could expect, the earliest days of my computing history are a bit fuzzy. My earliest memories involve a computer or two in the home. My father was always in some way involved in computing so we were one of the lucky few families that had a personal computer. We had an unmemorable Wintel box running Windows 3.1.1. I remember being utterly confused by the clunky interface. Its primary purpose was to serve as a terminal for my fathers stock price index. We had a DTN brand satellite in the backyard and used a modem to connect. This was prior to us having any sort of Internet access, but the setup worked in much the same way. The screeching modem would connect and the Wintel box would display charts and prices, historical data, etc. The most I played with that machine was to draw using MS Paint.

The real computing memories came about when my father brought home a Macintosh IIci. He obtained it from Schlumberger, a French oil company. I have clear memories of traveling with him to his workplace for after-hours support. That was back in the days when it was more cost effective to repair machines than throw them out. My favorite times were the late evening times when everyone had gone home for the day. I had the run of the place. They turned off 3/4 of the lights to conserve power. Everything had a strangely calm feel to it. I remember looking in office windows and seeing the beige boxes with screen savers going. I was never a very social kid (who is now not a very social adult, go figure), so being able to get up close to the technology without the human aspect was fantastic. As many IT people did back then, my father pulled double duty as support, installation, maintenance, and networking. It was neat to see the inner workings of computer networks back then. The mess of cables in closets, the hum of the routers and switches.

Somewhere during this time period my father also brought home a Macintosh SE. The little all in one beige box. I used that quite a bit as well, but heavily favored the ci for its color display and horsepower.

The IIci I mentioned played a central role in my computing life for nearly a decade. I played ShareWare games he would bring home on 3.5 inch floppy disks. Keep in mind we lived in the middle of nowhere. Corn fields and tractors rambling down the road were far more common sights than anything technology related, so even then I knew we had something special in the house. Firing up Solarian II at night in the dead of winter was quite the experience. Later my father bought a 1x SCSI CD-ROM drive for the computer. I believe it was somewhere in the

ballpark of $250 at the time. My sister who is 3 years my senior got a real leg up on her classmates by having the Grolier multimedia encyclopedia. Boy that had information on almost any topic imaginable. Admittedly my interest in the computer was mainly for the games, but I did spend many hours watching the grainy videos on how things worked.

Middle school era

We eventually moved into the "city". Well, more like suburbia. The ci came with us of course. One of the most memorable games I had was A-10 Attack! by Parsoft. I got quite good at the flight sim, and eventually my father bought a MouseStick II. That took things to a whole new level. By this time I was in middle school, or junior high as some localities call it. The computer played a key role in typing up book reports and the like. For the longest time we had an Apple LaserWriter II, but upgraded to a fancy pants color Epson printer shortly after. I clearly remember typing a report for a history class for Mrs. Greshaber (yep, I even remember her name!). I was very proud of my work, and it looked better than anyone else's report by far. In a pile of sloppy handwritten reports was my computer printed gem. Instead of praise, she wrote "Your own work…?" on it. That really ticked me off, and my parents eventually had a conference with her to discuss. Amazing that teachers back then held such contempt for technology! We had a lab at the school, an army of beige Wintel boxes running Windows 95 on Pentium 1 133Mhz hardware. Those were terrible. Our 25MHz IIci ran circles around them, and was far easier to use.

Fast forward to the day my world changed. My father started working for the University of Michigan. He took us all to his workplace at UMTRI in Ann Arbor and showed me this amazing thing called the "Internet". The first thing I did was look up information on trains (one of my biggest obsessions at the time). I printed out documentation and pictures. He saw the potential for this and luckily the University provided free access to Michnet Dialup. I clearly remember the phone number the modem dialed…489-2222 (an acquantance of mine on the Diablonet IRC chat room [irc.diablonetnet] informed me as of this writing that that particular number actually still works!). The ci proved amazingly slow for anything Internet related. Soon after my father brought home a Wintel box. It was running Windows 98SE. The hardware looked homebrew to me, definitely not a branded box. It was typical beige tower, and sported a Pentium 1 running at 166MHz. The early days of the Internet were truly the wild west. I'd stay up until 2 in the morning on Yahoo chatrooms. My oh so creative username was taken from the monitor attached to the Wintel box. It was a Mag Innovision display. So, my screen name was "Mag_Innovision_98". Yeah.

I was still playing A-10 Attack! on the ci at this time and was hungry for more. We were in a Best Buy in Ann Arbor and I saw Microsoft Flight Simulator 98. This absolutely blew me away. The graphics were incredible! I was in actual flight training at the time and my father

decided to invest a bit in the simulation as he saw it as practical, cost effective training. He purchased a Voodoo 3 2000 PCI graphics card and took the sim to a new level of realism.

The next few years were a flurry of different computers. We never kept any of the computers my father brought home as they were property of the University. So, when a need came up for a machine, he'd have to swap it out for a different one. The ci stayed around since that division of Schlumberger went defunct…there was nobody to return the machine to. During this time we had a 6100/60AV (what a pile…), a random Performa that I don't remember the model number of but is hardly worth mentioning, and a G3 desktop machine running at 233Mhz. That was a fantastic machine aside from the awful Internet performance. The biggest upgrade came in the early 2000's when he was able to acquire a PowerMacintosh G4 tower running at 400MHz. That was an outstanding machine. Speedy and reliable, it ran Mac OS 9 like a hot knife through butter.

At this point I became increasingly interested in Apple and their history. Steve Jobs had made his return only a few years prior, and Apple was doing amazingly well. My first exposure to Mac OS X came at little Mac reseller called the Learning Center in Ann Arbor. They had a few PowerMac G4's set up. I played with the system and thought it was the greatest thing ever. My father still worked at the University and was able to get the latest and greatest operating system software from Apple free of charge. He brought home the installation CD and thus began my love affair with the sleek, modern operating system. Back then OS X was horribly slow and buggy, but I didn't care. I was sold.

I remember wanting a computer of my own, but fell far short from the money to buy one. I pleaded with my father to buy us a G3 iMac, but it would never come to be.

High school era
High school is, interestingly, foggier than my early days. For no real reason other than it was a bizarre time. Changing attitudes, hormones, and general disinterest in many things I was once into played a role I'm sure. So, let's skip this.

College
I started my college career at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor. Actually, I started in a "middle college" program. A then unique concept that the public schools were essentially designed for blue collar jobs and didn't prep students for white collar positions. What would have been 11th grade was a mixture of highschool and college courses. My computer during this time was a Mac Mini G4. I used that for just about everything. It was then I downloaded the demo of Unreal Tournament 2004 and started my real interest in gaming. The Mini just wasn't cutting it, so I bought a 1.8GHz G5 tower on ebay. My

father was none too pleased about that. He ranted at some length about wasting money. I only now understand his concerns and I'm supporting a family of my own, so I don't fault him.

During this time I became interested in servers and associated technologies. I acquired a PowerMac G4 tower and my father installed a license of Mac OS 10.4 Server on it from U of M. I ran a file server, web page, and QTSS streaming server. I thought that was the coolest thing in the world (and apparently still do!).

The first new computer I purchased myself and exclusively for my own use was an iMac. Apple had just updated the line to use the aluminum enclosures. My parents still use that computer to this day. It is a 2007 20-inch model, 2.4GHz Core 2 Duo with 4GB of RAM.

In the mix eventually were a few home-built AMD based systems running Windows XP for gaming. The girlfriend at the time was rather good at Unreal Tournament 3, so we played together quite a bit.

Modern day
I've been through massive changes in my life. I moved away from home in Michigan with my now ex-wife to Portland, OR. I have two young children I see on an alternating schedule with the ex, and as of the time of this writing and preparing to move in with my girlfriend. Through the good times and bad I've always had my technology. It continues to play a central role in my life as a way to keep up skills, indulge in a hobby, and even as some kind of therapy. There's a joy computing brings to me, especially being part of the retro community. To me they are more than just machines. Each represents a time in my life, maybe when things were simpler and easier to understand. With each passing year I gain a little more experience, and look at the technology with a different perspective.

I hope you've enjoyed reading a bit about my computing history.