

BAKING BREAD?

By Fred Hobbs

Inventions that have changed my life? Without a doubt one stands out above all the wondrous devices in common use today: the computer. Now, I'm not a computer whiz. Actually I'm more of a computer klutz. And, that's just in using a garden variety IMAC.

In addition to having the services of a word processor and message sender/receiver, virtually every action in my daily life involves a computer.

Buying groceries. Pumping gas. Watching my cable TV. Banking. Making airline and hotel reservations. The list is endless. I'm not sure, but it may even include baking bread. My daughter bought me a machine, that when loaded with the contents of a box of special dry ingredients from the super market and a small amount of water from the tap, cycles through a process that produces a freshly baked loaf of sourdough in about three hours.

Bread baking or not, for better or for worse, it appears the computer is here to stay "til death do us part."

Specifically regarding communication, how did civilization exist prior to e-mail and LinkedIn? My mother and father were born at the very beginning of the 20th century. Conversations were person to person or by handwritten letters. The telephone had been invented, but wasn't in widespread use yet. In grade school, they learned to print and then to write in cursive (long hand.) That was still the norm in my early school years.

In junior high, typing classes were offered. The typewriter was a great invention, but was subject to the making of errors not easily corrected. "White Out" correction fluid was messy, time consuming and unattractive on the page.

My first encounter with the world of the computer came as a freshman in college. At the beginning of the semester, students lined up to register for classes. I noticed stacks of cards with holes punched in them. The information was contained on those cards which, when run through a machine, recorded the student's schedule and kept track of the number allowed in a class and printed a list of their names. Magic!

The most exciting computerized moment in my life came as I started my own public relations agency. With very limited funds, I rented an early Apple model word processor and put the IBM Selectric typewriter away in the closet. I could now write news releases, client reports and letters with every word evenly printed. If I goofed, I could zap a character, a whole word, even a whole paragraph! Across the street was a print shop that could print it out and make copies for me. The office building manager had a machine that actually sent documents by telephone. For a dime a copy I could send a FAX.

We wrote scripts for a client that transmitted college class lectures by cable television (another great invention.) We drove the script copies to the TV studios every week. Then, one day, the client asked, "Don't you have a modem?" I had no idea what it was. I learned the device

miraculously “flew” the words in the script directly from our computer to the TV studio.
Marvelous!

I could write much more in praise of this fantastic communications device, but the bell on the bread machine just rang. Time for some hot, fresh sourdough!