Preface

This book is so much more than I had originally anticipated when beginning to outline it in October 2007. It started out simple: I was going to talk about the 1980s and everything that influenced me like comics, television, movies and videogames. I started by writing down what videogames I felt were notable enough that I played in that decade and found out I had well over 100. I decided to keep going and write all of them down that were released through October 2007 (when I started this book) and found out I had well over 500 total. It dawned on me that the idea of covering comics, television and movies needed to be passed over. I also started planning on how to split all those games up and decided on doing so via decades.

What you are reading now is the first book, *Growing Up 8-Bit*. It covers my gaming experiences of games released that I played from birth to the end of 1990. This book simply is me talking about my experiences with over 100 games in those years. To give some background on my unique experiences with gaming, I'll give you some background. I was born in St. Paul on July 4, 1976. I was born without a left eye or an iris nerve in my left eye socket, making it impossible for me to see even if a transplant was possible. I've lived my whole life only being able to see out of my right eye. Surprisingly, I've never had much in the way of problems with what fully sighted people are capable of. You might think it is hard to play videogames just being able to see out of one eye, but it isn't. With that in mind, this book constitutes my experiences with gaming through 1990 and further books will cover the newer decades.

I took a cue from the *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader* series of books in how my experiences with the games are laid out. For the most part they are divided by the first or primary system they were released on. There are many games that I played on multiple systems (I do note what systems I played each game on under the game name). Each game has its own page for the most part and I created a Table of Contents that can easily be traversed. Little did I know when I started this book that eReaders like the Amazon Kindle and Barnes and Noble Nook would become so popular and make the Table of Contents that much more valuable. You can certainly read the whole book if you want to as well.

It's taken me almost three years to complete this book. There has been a lot of downtime in those years and as soon as this book is done I expect to really pour into the second book and get it done in far less time.

I hope you enjoy this book. I certainly hope my unique experiences on these games will spark memories of when you played these games in your younger years. I also hope that you can share these and your own experiences with your children, showing them how important these games were to your childhood.

Arcade/Atari 2600 Games

I start off my book talking about the arcade and Atari 2600 games I played that came out in the 1970s and 80s. I combine the two because a lot of arcade games were later ported to the 2600 and I played both versions. There are also a few at the end of the decade that saw releases on newer systems. I add them here because I remember them more from the arcade than their ports.

Arcades were at their literal heyday in the 1980s. Physical arcades were all over by where I lived. Even in the town I grew up in, Forest Lake, there was always at least one arcade up until around I graduated in 1994. In the 1980s you'd see lots of kids at the arcade after school was over. I forget the name of the place, but the first arcade was in the local mall. There was also an arcade at the restaurant/bar my family frequented in Hugo, MN. Later on in schooling the arcade would be part of the local bowling alley that has long since closed.

So, you can see that arcades were a vital part of my early life. I was introduced to games like *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.* in the arcade long before playing them on their respective ports to consoles and computers. The early 1980s were the halcyon days for both arcades and Atari, but soon enough a crash happened and the landscape changed. Here are the important games I remember playing in the arcades and on my Atari 2600.

Combat

Developer: Atari
Producer: Atari
System: Atari 2600
Released: 1977

I honestly don't remember when I actually got my Atari 2600. I remember the videogame crash around 1983, so I must have had it before then. I was born in 1976, so there is no way I was only 1 when we went to Sears and bought the Atari 2600 system. I am guessing it was at some point between 1980 and 1982 when we picked one up. I have no idea how much we paid for it, but I'm sure it was quite expensive (maybe $400?). *Combat* was the first game I ever played on it though since it came with the system itself.

The game today doesn't look as cool as it did when I first played it. I remember spending hours playing with my family and against the computer in this game. *Combat* was made up of 27 games according to the box itself. However, many of the games were just derivatives of the basic 3 gameplay options: Tanks, Biplanes and Jets. Most of my time was spent in the Tanks section because it was the most fun. There were straight one-on-one battles, but then there were some options to mix it up a bit.

Tank Pong was a favorite of mine. You had to bounce the shots off at least one wall and hit the other tank with the shot. This was probably my first experience with mathematics and I didn't even know it. You had to get the angle just right to hit that tank. There was another game where you would fire your shot and the tank would go invisible, making it hard for your opponent to hit you. There were also different maps that would put obstacles in your way.

The Biplanes and Jet games never really got me excited, but I spent a lot of time playing the Tank games, even when my parents purchased me other games.

Space Invaders

Developer: Taito
Publisher: Atari
Systems Played: Arcade, Atari 2600
Released: 1978, 1980

I believe *Space Invaders* was one of the first arcade games I ever played. The arcade was an important place in my childhood. Back in the late 70s and through most of the 80s arcades were all the rage, nowadays they are a rare breed. I don't believe there is any arcade establishment still around in the Twin Cities metro area. I played most of my arcade games back then at a local restaurant called the Blacksmith as well as a couple other actual arcades in the area. My family would go to the Blacksmith every week it seemed. We would order cheese curds and breaded mushrooms (which are still available today at that same eatery) and my parents would give me some money to put in the quarter machine in order to play arcade games.

Space Invaders was one of the games in the arcade room. Looking back on the game it all seems quite simple when compared to games that came out in the 80s. You and your little ship would go back and forth horizontally and shoot at the rows of aliens that are slowly moving toward you. The key is to eliminate all the aliens on the screen in order to go to the next level. In the end I probably didn't spend a whole lot of time playing this game because it certainly doesn't stick in my mind as a game I put a lot of quarters in.

Asteroids

Developer: Atari
Publisher: Atari
Systems Played: Arcade, Atari 2600
Released: 1979, 1981

Asteroids is one of my favorite arcade games I played in the 80s. I really started playing it in 1984, the year my dad's high school had an All-Class reunion. Every morning the reunion went on (it was at least a few days long) my mom and dad would drop me off in the high school gymnasium where all the kids were watched by some chaperones. There was a bunch of fun things to do there: play basketball, table tennis, pool and lots of stuff to eat. However the thing that really caught my attention was *Asteroids* sitting right next to *Ms. Pac-Man*. Having played the latter quite a bit, which I will get to later since it came out after this game, I honed in on this new game to me.

Asteroids was a simple game, as many of the early arcade games were. You flew a spaceship and destroyed asteroids. It sounds simple, but it was also very addicting. I think I hoarded the game from all the other kids around me and they probably didn't like that very much, but I was only 8, what did I know?

Pac-Man

Developer: Namco
Publisher: Atari (Midway)
Systems Played: Arcade, Atari 2600
Released: 1979, 1981

This is the game that basically started the video game craze. I dropped a lot of quarters in *Pac-Man* and I'm also sad to say I picked up the Atari 2600 version of the game believing I would get the same kind of experience as I had in the arcades. It is quite easy looking in hindsight to know that this was one of the worst ports of a popular game that came out on the 2600. I was young when it came out, so the amount of sales a game made really didn't affect me at this point, but as I look back into information about the 2600 release it was obvious the game didn't sell too well and probably contributed to Atari's eventual crash.

Pac-Man was a brilliant game that was trumped later by its successor, Ms. Pac-Man. I also find it amazing that this was probably the first instance of a game that was more popular in North America than it was in Japan. The original title when it came over here was Puck-Man, but Midway (who distributed the game in North America) thought that vandals would put an F in place of the P, so they renamed it Pac-Man. Probably one of the best ideas ever devised.

Defender

Developer: Williams
Publisher: Williams
Systems Played: Arcade, Atari 2600
Released: 1980, 1981

Defender was an interesting game that saw a few of my quarters. It is probably best know for its control system where there was a joystick that you could use to go up and down and five buttons for other things. There was the reverse and thrust buttons to go backward and forward horizontally; the fire button and smart bomb button and then there was the hyperspace button that would jump you to some point on the screen. Defender is also well known for being a very difficult game and I never found myself getting very far playing it. It was an innovative game in that it was one of the first side-scrolling shooters, a genre that would only get more popular as the 80s went on and bled into the 90s where the genre slowly, and unfortunately, trailed off.

Frogger

Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Systems Played: Arcade, Atari 2600
Released: 1981, 1983

Frogger is another game I dropped a lot of quarters into and purchased the sub-par, but serviceable, Atari 2600 version. This game was pretty simple, just take your frogs and maneuver them through a busy road and stay away from alligators and diving turtles on the water half of the screen and hop into one of the safe spots at the very top of the screen.

The Atari 2600 release for this game wasn't nearly as bad as *Pac-Man*, but it still was not an equal port in any way, shape or form. However I spent a lot more time with *Frogger* on the 2600 than I did *Pac-Man*, that's for darn sure.

Frogger is also well known for an episode of the 1990s TV show Seinfeld where George finds that at the local pizza place his high score from when he was young is still on top of the *Frogger* machine. He wants to preserve this feat and figures out how to keep it on battery power so it doesn't turn off, but needs to figure out how to keep it on and get across the street to a plug in. Kramer had some yellow tape, but ran out of it at this point, so he couldn't block the traffic for George. The camera goes to a blimp-like view and you watch as George does the *Frogger* moves trying to get it across the road. He gets to the other side, but finds out there is a lip that he can't lift the arcade cabinet over. A truck drives in and destroys the game and Jerry Seinfeld says, "Game Over". All during this there are sounds from the game being played as George makes his moves.