**The Machine That Changed the World**

The computer has a far greater history than I knew of or realized. I had known from my Grandfather that computers used to be people and not machines, and that the term used to refer to a person doing computations in a long and laborious effort. He had started out working in coal mines of West Virginia, and as computers started to catch on they grabbed his interest, and he eventually found himself working at Kennedy Space Center, for NASA. I remember him working there during my early years in grade school. With all that being said it’s still astounding to see the progress modern computers have made from 15 years ago until now.

I found it intriguing the strides in the basic idea of a programmable computer Charles Babbage had made more than 150 years before the large wall sized vacuum tube computers were built (like ENIAC). It’s sad that his designs and concepts didn’t catch on due to failed backing because others considered his ideas too “grandiose”. I find myself wondering where we would be right now if his ideas had caught on and developed further. Even so, his ideas caught the attention of Ada Lovelace (Lord Byron’s daughter), who is now considered the first computer programmer because of her correspondence with Babbage and detailed published notes of “programs” for the “general purpose programmable computer”. That kind of shocked me; finding out the person considered the first programmer was a Victorian woman; not just because she was a woman, but also because of the point in time and culture she was a part of.

Then a computer that used hundreds of electric relays was developed in Berlin by Conrad Zuse during WWII? I did not know that either. But his developments were halted as well, by Hitler’s rule and choice to scrap Zuse’s project because of his firm belief WWII would be over in less than two years (the time he estimated he would need to build a computer with vacuum tubes). So there’s sort of a prehistory to the development of today’s computer; people had thought of the idea before and were able to develop it into something tangible, but were unable to fully finish and construct the computer until the mid to late 1900s. It is quite amazing to see how computers “grew up” so to speak, to the machines practically everyone owns and uses today.