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preface

I have lost count of the number of PCs I have worn out since I started my career as a software developer—but I will never forget my first computer.

I was only 12 years old when I started programming in BASIC. I had to learn English at the same time because there simply weren't any books on computer programming in my mother tongue (Dutch). This was in 1982. Windows didn't exist yet; I worked on a TI99/4A home computer from Texas Instruments. When I told my friends at school about it, they looked at me as if I had just been beamed down from the Starship Enterprise.

Two years later, my parents bought me my first personal computer: a Tandy/Radio Shack TRS80/4P. As the *P* indicates, it was supposed to be a portable computer, but in reality it was bigger than my mother's sewing machine. It could be booted from a hard disk, but I didn't have one; nor did I have any software besides the TRSDOS and its BASIC interpreter. By the time I was 16, I had written my own word-processing program, an indexed flat-file database system, and a drawing program—nothing fancy, considering the low resolution of the built-in, monochrome green computer screen.

I don't remember exactly what happened to me at that age—maybe it was my delayed discovery of girls—but it suddenly struck me that I was becoming a first-class nerd. So I made a 180-degree turn, studying Latin and math in high school and taking evening classes at a local art school. I decided that I wanted to become an artist instead of going to college. As a compromise with

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