

# alvin, Hobbes, and Mom

My mom's been a Mac user since July last year.

It all started when she inherited a Kaypro running MS-DOS something-or-other a few months earlier. I was new to the Mac and loved it, but thought, well, it's free, and she really only wanted a word processor. She had the thing running, and had found an expensive dot-matrix printer it would work with. But she was having trouble finding files, and trouble saving stuff, and trouble opening things, and trouble doing just about anything at all.

I live in New York. She lives in Florida. I figured I'd find out enough about DOS to help out occasionally over the phone. So I went out and got *The Little DOS Book*. Nice, friendly-looking book. Chatty, non-threatening, assuring prose. So I read it. I read it again. Then once more, because I was looking for the part where it tells you how to make things easy enough so your mother can use the computer.

I didn't find it.

Then Mom calls asking about a modem. She wants to go online. That's when I started sweating. And I wasn't sleeping well. Does AOL have a DOS B.C. disk? Aside from the fact that the only modems available, and those only sort of available, were really slow—like 300 bps—I was realizing that there's just no way in the world my mom is ever going to do the things she wants with this computer! She's very smart, but her mind is not the sort that will get along with DOS. (Thank goodness. I hate to think what my upbringing would have been like. Sheesh. Who would I be now?)

After a few fitful nights I suddenly realized I was sitting bolt upright in bed at 3 A.M.

Mom needs a Mac.

Not a fancy new Mac, an old cheap Mac that can do most of what she may want. And that she can actually use. I called Mom, told her what I thought, said I could get everything for \$1000 or less.

She'd had enough, trusted me, and agreed.

So I hit the AOL classifieds, USENET forsale spots, NYMUG's BBS. And after a few hours online and a few phone calls—okay, okay, more like ten hours online and a few dozen phone calls—I had it together: a Ilsi 9/80 & FPU, Teleport Gold modem (not II) with OCR, ClarisWorks 2.1, System 7.5 (she owns the CD, I made disks for her), StyleWriter and more. About \$900 from five different sellers, from Austin, Texas to San Diego, California. And the StyleWriter came from Staten Island by ferry. I registered the software in her name and updated it. I assembled the complete Mac system into two boxes, labeled the cables and ports clearly, pasted on/off and emergency restart instructions to the monitor, included Macs for Dummies 1 and 2, and sent it off.

Of course everything  
as been working swell  
since then. Of course,  
some people need more  
help than others. But  
since she's legal owner  
of the software, she has  
full access to tech  
support!

She's never used tech  
support. Not once. I'd  
love to say it's because  
everything is so  
entirely and flawlessly  
intuitive that she has  
never had a problem.

In fact we've communicated more during the last nine months than we have in the whole rest of my life, or at least more than since I was an infant. Not because she wants to thank me for talking her into the Mac, which she does love. Nor because she's had huge problems doing what she first intended to do. We communicate because she keeps doing new things, or just plain screwy things. Just about one month after she got the computer she emailed me through AOL asking why she didn't have MacTCP in Calvin's Control Panels folder.

"What!?!"

"Well, I went to a meeting about Naples Freenet and I need MacTCP. They'll give me the PPP thing, but I need MacTCP."

So I emailed an explanation of how to get it from her 7.5 install disks, which she did. Then with the help of her FreeNet group she got online, even though the help was from an entirely non-Mac person!

I'll have to come clean here. I really believe in paying for software. But Mom does have some utilities on her drive that are also on my drive and should only be on one drive. I don't like to admit it. But there was an emergency, and she's my mother. Okay, I lent her Deraser (name changed to protect the guilty). I guess I didn't get it back. Anyway, her disk is getting just packed, and some operation or other said she needed more disk space.

So she threw out her documents folder. I'm not making this up. She had complete confidence that since Deraser worked so well before, she could just throw things out and retrieve them later. It's so simple! Why hasn't anyone thought of this before!

It didn't quite work out. And we communicated lots more. Luckily she had copied the most important files to floppies not too long ago.

Anyway, there seems to be no stopping Calvin, Hobbes (a Trash alias) and Mom. But we'll have to find her a larger drive

I can't tell you about her latest computer adventures. Someone might REALLY get in trouble.

Happy Mothers Day to All.

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