

hh, yes. A new year. A time to look back on the accomplishments of the year past and forward to the upcoming year's promise. It's no accident that January was named after Janus, a Roman god who was guardian of portals and patron of beginnings and endings. Janus is depicted with two faces: one looks longingly into the past; the other stares boldly into the future. Janus' insight was thought to be especially keen because he constantly monitored time in both directions.

Personally, there are several events my wife and I fondly recall about 1997. We purchased our first house, took a relaxing and adventurous vacation to New England, and I coached some really good kids during my first season with youth basketball.

Of course, there were some events we'd rather forget, too. One is the time my wife fell ill with a particularly bad strain of stomach flu and ended up in the emergency room. Another is a night when I consumed too much scotch and tried to pass off the next day's after effects as a particularly bad case of stomach flu. Oh, well. Live and learn, right?

I'm sure the gang at One Infinite Loop has much to remember as well. 1997 started out alright. Dr. Amelio was at the helm. The Power Book 1400 was a big hitter. MacUser. MacWorld. Newton was still a bit of a joke, but bigger things were promised for 1997. Clones ran amok. System 7.6 ruled the roost. Microsoft was the "bad guy."

Then, all hell broke loose. Dr. Gil — out; Steve Jobs — in. Powerbook 3400 and 2400 made the 1400 look pokey. MacUser + MacWorld = MacWorld. Newton finally got teeth, then departed from the Apple "umbrella." Cloners made a big stink, then were subdued (my apologies to UMAX, the lone holdout). System 8 debuted, but not in the form Mac users were led to expect. Steve Jobs negotiated a truce between Apple and Microsoft.

Recalling these incidents makes my head swim. I am flooded with memories and find myself wondering, "Where was I when the news of the Microsoft deal broke?" It's almost as if it was as momentous as the Challenger disaster or the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Oh, by the way, I was wearing my khaki dress pants, dark green shirt, and deep blue tie with multi-colored swirls while sitting at the breakfast bar of my kitchen on my lunch break, eating a ham sandwich with hot deli style mustard on a hard roll, and drinking a coke over ice when I saw Steve Jobs announce the deal on the midday news. But who has a memory that can recall every detail?

One downside to the past is that you can't change it. How many of us have thought of a glib putdown for that surly bank teller or obnoxious co-worker a week after the incident occurred?

That kind of thing always burns me, but in the end we have to move on with our lives and look to the future to see the promise of what's to come. The new year is like a blank word processor screen in ClarisWorks — it begs me to begin writing another exciting chapter of my life.

During 1998 my life will change dramatically. Our first child is due in early April. Talk about a life-altering event. You see, right now, we leave the house whenever we wish. Movies? No problem. Dinner out? No problem. Grocery shopping in under an hour? No problem. But all of that is going to change after April 3rd, our due date.

There's a lot of promise embodied in an infant. My wife and I saw one such promise a few weeks ago during a tour of our hospital's maternity floor. We passed a new father holding his newborn and walking from the nursery to his wife's recovery room. His eyes had a dreamy, misty look. A newborn is the ultimate blank slate. Lots of things will happen in this person's life, but how will they shape the individual?

Every parent wonders, "What will my child be when he or she (my wife and I don't know what we're having) grows up? Will she grow up to become a politician? A captain of industry? A famous athlete? Or will he grow up to be a shyster? A con man? A used car salesman?" These thoughts make me dizzy.

Apple Computer has much to ponder during the new year. The new G3 chip introduced in November 1997, on-line purchasing of computers directly from Apple, and the store-within-a-store concept at CompUSA are all in their infancy. They also hold a lot of promise.

I stopped by my local CompUSA in Clearwater last week to see what was happening. The new Mac "boutique" has not yet been constructed in this particular store, so its Macintosh selection was meager at best. Three models of 604e Power Macs sat on the shelves. Two of them were running System 7.6.

But I could see the promise. The place where the Mac store would be had been marked out. Some displays had been rearranged to make room for the impending renovations. I looked to my right and saw a kids' software department, featuring a multitude of games for all ages. I really admire the store-within-a-store concept. It takes very little effort to imagine what this scheme can offer different segments of the computing consumer market:

The Die Hard User will see a new commitment to retail sales of Macintosh products and grin. Finally, the Apple Computer line will be featured in a major retail setting. Others will finally be able to see what this person has been advocating since the 1984 commercial hit the airwaves.

The Computer Newbie will finally be offered a choice of computer platforms in a side-by-side comparison. Mac catalog retailers have historically done a booming business, but it has been difficult to attract new users to the MacOS platform. Can you honestly blame them? Imagine if you were buying a car. One company makes great cars, but you can only buy them, sight unseen, through a catalog. Another company has showrooms on every corner. The cars may not be perfect, but they are adequate for transporting you from point A to point B. Which car do you think you'd buy? With a selection of Apple products available in the store, the computer newbie can comparison shop, get hands-on experience with the pros and cons of each platform, and make an informed decision.

The Education-Minded Parent will see a section devoted to Macintosh hardware and software which compliments the experience their children encounter in the classroom. This equating

of Macintosh computers and education could be a real boon to sales. In fact, Apple should encourage CompUSA to have a Mac-savvy educational consultant in the store at all times as a matter of policy.

The Creative Content Wizard has often found herself at the Mac, needing an important piece of software to complete a job on time. Now, instead of waiting until the next morning to receive a shipment from a catalog purchase, she can race down to the nearest CompUSA and be back to work in minutes.

The Educated Catalog Shopper has often seen something in a mail order catalog that he wanted to try just once to see if it was what he needed. By scooting over to CompUSA, he can now give the product a quick test drive and do some comparison shopping while he's at it.

Will there be growing pains with the new set up? Of course there will. As with parenting, you need to expect some setbacks. If Mac sales come up flat at the CompUSA locations, it won't take a rocket scientist to figure out what will come next. No one wants to lug around a losing proposition just because it feels good.

But, if things start to move in the direction predicted by the brain trust in Cupertino, you may see a Mac "Renaissance" as people rediscover what this machine can do.

Many interesting and exciting things await the Mac community: Rhapsody, faster chips, new displays, new software, and new output developments. Apple's renewed commitment to market their products should add up to better days and exciting times for the Mac. While I can guarantee you that I'll be happy, my feelings about Mac's fortune won't even come close to the joy I'll feel in that delivery room when I hear my child cry for the first time.

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