

•By Tim Robertson <Publisher@mymac.com>•
&
•Russ Walkowich <Editor@mymac.com>•

This month My Mac Magazine is proud to present an interview done with Jef Raskin, considered by many Mac enthusiasts to be the father of the Mac. He took some time out of his busy schedule to answer some questions presented by both Tim and Russ. So, sit back, relax and learn a little bit about someone involved with the Macintosh from the very beginning.

y Mac: The Mac has changed much since your original model. What do you like

and dislike in the Mac now?

Jef: Like everybody else, I appreciate the increased power and speed of the newer models. However, they have become increasingly complex and difficult to understand and use. I just got a new PowerBook and it took me four days before I got it running. If it really will run over four hours on one battery pack, I'll like that, too.

Here's the note that I have up over the computer to remind me how to turn it on. If I do not follow this sequence either the peripherals won't work or the computer will crash:

To Turn On This Computer:

1. Make sure that iMate USB-to-ADB adapter is attached to upper USB port in back of computer.
2. Make sure that nothing is attached to the iMate adapter.
3. Make sure that the printer is not plugged into the other USB port.
4. Boot. Wait for full boot up.
5. Attach dongle and keyboard interface box to iMate. Keyboard, trackpad, and dongle should now operate.
6. Attach Epson USB printer cable. Printer should now operate

USB is a fine idea, but it is still not ready for prime time. If it wasn't for the fact that my son is trying to write a USB driver for a motion simulator we are building (you sit on a chair in a box and the box moves like a flight simulator as you watch an image on the display, sort of like a home version of Disneyland's Star Tours), and if we didn't have the USB debugging tools, we probably would not have been able to figure it out. If we had not been hardware/software hackers (in the good sense) it would have been even more frustrating. If you happen to need lots of USB devices, this is not "the computer for the rest of us." We had similar problems with his G3 tower, which still doesn't work with his printer.

My Mac: What would you like to see done with the Mac to improve it?

Jef: Answering this question gets you the real answer to question 1: The Mac interface has become too complex and is far too hard to use. I designed the Mac as hardware and software built around a clean interface design, but that happened 20 years ago and we know a lot more about interface design now. For example, the desktop is a useless waste of time (you don't get your work done there!) and the gradual accretion of interface widgets has turned the Mac into a kludge.

I just finished writing a book on how it could be fixed. The book's title is "The Humane Interface." It's to be published (by Addison Wesley) late this year or early in the next millennium.

Some of my ideas in this regard are on the website that friends put up for me:
<<http://www.cfcl.com/jef>>

My Mac: If you could go back in time, what changes would you make to the Mac at the beginning?

Jef: You can't go back, but in retrospect it might have helped if I had stayed and fought for my bus extension port that was part of the original Mac; I knew that we'd need expandability. While developing the Mac, I tried to convince Apple to get its customers onto the Internet (then the ARPA net), and failed. Perhaps I should have pushed harder.

My Mac: What do you think the future holds for computing?

Jef: There's no room here for the book length answer this question requires.

My Mac: What changes do you think Apple needs to make to improve their share of the market?

Jef: A good interface would help.

My Mac: Are USB and FireWire the way of the future in computing or is there something better in the works?

Jef: As said earlier, USB is peculiar. I haven't used FireWire, but the specs sound great. USB sounded great until I tried using it. I have always advocated hot-swappable electronic connectors; it is good to see that happening. But human factors were ignored. For example, the USB plug is barely asymmetrical, unless you look carefully, you try to plug it in upside down; true, it doesn't fit the wrong way, but you have just wasted some time.

It would have been better to make it more obviously asymmetrical or, better still, design it so that it works however it is plugged in. If the connectors were also hermaphroditic, then it wouldn't matter which end was plugged in and any cables could be used to connect two units or as extenders. This, too, is discussed in my book.

My Mac: Much has been said lately of the coming changes to the OS in Mac OS X. Are these changes necessary in your mind? Do they need to be done or are they still not enough?

Jef: They are very much in the wrong direction. Here's my definition of an operating system: what you get to hassle with before you can hassle with the applications.

Operating systems should be like the pistons in your car engine, you never have to see them or touch them.

My Mac: In your mind's eye, do you see yourself as a writer, engineer, or something else?

Jef: I prefer to think of myself as something else.

My Mac: Looking back, what was your greatest professional achievement?

Jef: My current work showing how interface efficiency can be quantified, making interface design a bit more of an engineering task than a religious debate, is pretty spiffy. Convincing Apple that it was better interfaces and not better hardware that it needed to stay alive after the Apple II, and creating and leading the Macintosh project to implement that insight are wonderful credentials to have in my résumé. The far better interface I created for the Canon Cat makes the Mac look dopey. And the stuff I'm doing now is spiffier still.

As far as I know, I was the first to introduce musical performances with slides showing lyrics in translation when I was a conductor. The idea is now widely used. I am also properly credited with revolutionizing the way some model airplanes are now built (the foam-and-tape concept) and I manufactured the first model plane to use computer-aided design back in 1973.

My Mac: I assume you saw the TNT movie "Pirates of Silicon Valley" The movie made it seem that Macintosh was Steve Jobs' idea, which is not true. As the man who created the Macintosh, does this bother you? And what did you think of the movie as a whole? Accurate or mostly fiction?

Jef: Your assumption is wrong. I did not see it. I can't get cable in the "rural" setting where I live (five miles south of San Francisco is just too far out, they tell me). Like many of the books written about Apple's history, the movie was fiction. I'm told that the movie was billed as fiction, the books tried to pass themselves off

as history. However, two recent books, Malone's "Infinite Loop" and Linzmayer's excellent "Apple Confidential" (Linzmayer's book is recommended reading for any Mac fan), get the Mac story pretty much correct.

Speaking of TV, if you stole our family TV, we might not notice for few days. Sometimes I don't watch it for weeks (OK, I did watch Star Trek last night while cooking and eating dinner). There are so many more interesting and rewarding things to do. I do spend an hour a day practicing piano or organ. I just put in a pipe organ, and Bach and Buxtehude call to me more loudly than any TV show. The kids have their practicing and homework, and in the summer we do great projects together. My wife is extremely busy with her own professional work.

As for credit, yes I am upset when the creation of the Mac is attributed to Jobs. It's sloppy reporting. On the other hand, Jobs' role in bringing the Mac out was also crucial, as were the contributions of hundreds, indeed, thousands of others at Apple and elsewhere. What would the Mac be without third-party software and peripherals? And who among us Mac-aficionados has not applauded Jobs' recent rescue of an Apple Computer that was nearly dead?

My Mac: You have a passion for model remote controlled airplanes. Where does that passion come from?

Jef: How we get our passions, choose our vocations and avocations, and why we ride our hobby horses so avidly is not understood. Maybe it was the airplanes my father put up on the ceiling of my room when I was an infant. Maybe it was the human urge to fly. I love the mix of aerodynamics, building, and getting out to field or cliff and flying, but I can't say why. Your question is a nice research topic for psychology. I haven't a clue.

My Mac: Looking at your Curriculum Vitae, you have done everything! What do you most regret not doing?

Jef: I have not done everything. For example, I have no accomplishments in sports at all, I never got beyond local time trials in bicycle racing, any decent club player can beat me at table tennis, I've never even played touch football much less the real thing, and I can't skate (just for starters). If I go to a library, it is full of books that contain immense amounts of knowledge I know little or nothing about; though born on the same day and in the same city as Bobby Fischer, I am terrible at chess. I don't think I've ever met anybody over the age of 8 or so from whom I could not learn something. I believe that anybody can participate in at least as wide a spectrum of human activities as I do. You have to give yourself permission, be

willing to be a beginner when striking out into new areas, and to take risks. If you're lucky, as I have been, it can work out well. If not, the trip is still worth the price of admission.

My Mac: Thank you for spending some time with us.

- Tim Robertson• <Publisher@mymac.com>
- Russ Walkowich• <Editor@mymac.com>

Websites mentioned:

<<http://www.cfcl.com/jef>>

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