

The MCCC Connection

A Publication of the Metroplex Commodore Computer Club
May 1996

Still an Amigan

I got the the April MCCC News this morning, and I really liked the article, "Defining an Amigan". I've had some interesting experiences related to this subject over the last year or so, which I might relate.

I considered buying into the PC world for a long time. The demise of Commodore got me down a bit, and forced the PC idea to the front of my mind. I had trouble finding financial software and some other special software (rocketry and firearms ballistics programs) on the Amiga. It didn't seem like the thing had much of a future, while PC stuff was everywhere. Then the InterNet became such a big deal, and my situation appeared even worse. The state of InterNet access software on the Amiga was disgusting. So, I started shopping for a PC.

At first I just wanted a basic PC, like a 486 ISA machine. But, I got promoted on something bigger and better: a Pentium 90 PCI tower! A local technician here built it from a generic ASUS motherboard. I even got Win95 shortly after it was released — knowing from prior experience that Win3.1 was a nightmare.

Here I am, the better part of a year later, and the wretched thing still doesn't work right. After spending huge sums of money and time trying to straighten it out, I've decided this PC is a basket case. It won't keep time when the power is off. Because I can't find the right drivers, all my drives are stuck in MS-DOS compatibility mode (slow). Trying to configure programs to work with the sound card is a hit-or-miss proposition. I get weird errors sometimes, telling me that my hard drive is full even though I know it has half a gigabyte free space. DOS programs sometimes tell me I don't have enough "conventional memory" to run them, even though I have 16MB RAM in the machine. Sometimes they can't even find the mouse driver. Win95 only recognizes 12MB of the RAM. The Microsoft-supplied WWW browser is unstable, often crashing. Plus, the whole machine occasionally locks up tight for no apparent reason. Then there's all the normal nonsense associated with Win95 even when it's working right: bogging down on any kind of serious multi-tasking, thrashing the hard drive for no reason, making a big production out of simple tasks like opening a text file, and the total lack of custom screens.

Meanwhile, my Amiga 4000 continues to function flawlessly. I can't even remember the last time it crashed. It's not just the efficiency and reliability that draws me back to the Amiga, though. There's also a level of comfort. Is it because the Intuition interface is really that much better, or is it just a matter of familiarity? I don't know, but I feel like I'm fighting the PC whenever I use it. It's sort of like wearing a stiff new suit: hot, scratchy, ill-

fitting. Using the Amiga is more like putting on comfortable old jacket. There's nothing mysterious about why I stick with the Amiga. It's not really a matter of loyalty or faith or dedication. It's just that the Amiga continues to work for me where nothing else has.

I'm especially amazed when people say the Amiga is too expensive. In my experience, the PC platform is the most incredible money pit ever devised. There's a constant spiral of hardware and software upgrading, like a dance of death. The degree of money-grubbing that takes place in the PC world is shocking to me. Soon I think even "Hello, world!" programs on the PC will come as crippleware with pages of legalese and demands for registration fees. Meanwhile, I got AWeb for my Amiga. It's a web browser, and it's freeware, and it appears to be quite neat. The author says, if you want to pay for it you can. If you don't want to, you don't have to. This would be unthinkable in the PC world.

I believe the rise of the InterNet may herald great changes for the Amiga and for its relationship with the other platforms. More and more, InterNet access (and WWW in particular) is seen as the defining reason for owning a computer. But, the InterNet is not an artifact of the PC platform. With the right software, an Amiga can access it just as well as a PC — perhaps better in some respects, due to the Amiga's greater efficiency.

Executives at Apple have been promoting the Java language as an equalizer. Because it's hardware-independent, it puts the Mac on equal footing with the PC. The same, of course, could also be true for us if we get Java onto the Amiga. I've heard some die-hard programmers making fun of Java, and I can see their viewpoint. It's not in the same class as our serious development languages like C++ or Amiga E. Yet, there is also an opportunity here for the Amiga community. HTML and Java may be the first steps toward breaking down the PC stranglehold. It has to start somewhere.

The InterNet can do something else for us, too. It can effectively multiply the support for the Amiga. I mentioned that I had trouble finding financial software. I've since learned that there is some I just didn't know about. With the resources of WWW, FTP and UseNet at my disposal, things like that will be far less likely to slip by me in the future. This could be a boon for all of us. The AmiNet FTP archive alone is huge, and that's only one of many Amiga resources the net offers. Another example: I recently learned from the UseNet Amiga Announcements area about a new scan doubler card for the A4000, which could let me use my favorite Sony monitor with it. The card is made in Finland. I can order it from Finland, and they will send it right to my door. The world becomes a smaller place! PC owners may brag about being able to buy hardware and software at the

local mass retailers, like Best Buy or Babbages, but is that really such a big deal? Now I can get Amiga stuff from anywhere.

I've had problems getting my Amiga onto the InterNet. I've got the registered version of PPP.device here, and the commercial release of AmiTCP/IP. But, I haven't quite been able to get PPP to connect successfully. If this stuff is hard for me, a veteran Amiga user and programmer, how could a novice ever manage it? At best, he would need a lot of help. I think I will work out the kinks eventually, though. The Amiga Surfer package, I have no doubt, will finally iron out these problems. I was skeptical of the Surfer at first, thinking it sounded like another Commodore style get-rich-quick scheme. Then came the glowing previews of it, and I began to think maybe we are onto something.

There's been a lot of griping about Amiga Technologies, but I believe they are doing more than they are getting credit for. I don't know what the critics expected of them. A nationwide ad blitz and Amigas selling in Wal-Mart? That's not very realistic. Amiga Tech are building the product. They are manufacturing A1200 and A4000T systems; they've got together the Surfer package; they've got serious development work going on the Walker prototype and the Power Amiga; they are soliciting ideas for Workbench 4.0; they are releasing updated developers' materials on CD-ROM. This is a great deal more than Commodore were doing for the Amiga, and it's laying the groundwork for greater successes in the future. Before you promote, you need a product. Under Amiga Tech, the product line is gradually coming together.

I must apologize for the rambling nature of this letter. I just want to make it clear that I think the Amiga has a future. People who stick with it aren't some kind of mad monks struggling in a desperate fight against the inevitable. We aren't holding ourselves back from the ever-so-attractive PC because of some abstract ideals of loyalty or community. I, for one, am trying to get away from the PC because it's junk! To my sorrow and expense, I have learned that first hand.

...Tony Belding <tibelding@htcomp.net>

May Calendar

May 7 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
7:30 pm — Dan Stockelman's Place

May 11 — Metro C64/128 Chapter
1:30 pm — UNT Health Sciences Building

May 14 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm — N. Richland Hills Community Center

May 30 — Amiga North Dallas Chapter
7:30 pm — Richardson Square Mall, Community Room

Library Hot Picks

CyberGraphics update 2.16	MCCC-A_1050
CyberShow update 6.0b	MCCC-A_1053
Imperial v2.65	MCCC-A_1052
Diamond Caves v2.5	MCCC-A_1053
World Facts 92	MCCC-A_1056
Route Planner 1.6a	MCCC-A_1059
Scout 2.6	MCCC-A_1060
Term 4.6	MCCC-A_1061-63
LZX v1.21	MCCC-A_1064
Digitized scenic pics	MCCC-A_1068-69

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April 1996

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May 1996

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Metroplex Commodore Computer Club

P.O. Box 813
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