



MCCC News



Fort Worth

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Vampires, Tablets & 40 Years of Computing Part 2

It's summer, which around here means heat, and just about everything else besides. After all my negative ranting over misfortunes last month, I feel things have turned a corner in one sense or another. My new Samsung tablet, which cracked its screen less than a week after purchase, is now repaired and returned, and most fortunately covered under warranty, so it would seem the choices I constantly second-guessed turned out to be the right ones. After months of waiting and prodding, my quest for the Vampire 600 board has move forward one more step, and I finally have my board paid for, and with luck shipping without several more months of waiting. Though given past history an experience, I'm considering allowing the time to get my Amiga 600's capacitors replaced, on the assumption the interval between now and the point I get the board might just allow it.

It has been interesting watching the continuing development of the "Apollo core" which makes the Vampire-series cards so desirable. What started as a processor accelerator faster than any 68060 added more features, such as a video card equivalent outputting to HDMI and progressing with an implementation of the AGA chipset (making possible the use of AGA software and games on non-AGA systems, and output-

ting Amiga screens and audio thru HDMI). There is demand for floating-point-math unit implementation, and so far a "softFPU" is in testing, which appears suitable for lower-demand work until a more direct implementation is added (if it is). An AROS-based 'kickstart' ROM geared toward use with Vampire boards is in work too, bypassing the need to work around the limits of over twenty-year-old kickstarts. All this is in service of building a stand-alone Vampire-based system, which is essentially a new-and-improved Amiga system, mostly compatible at a hardware level, more or less fulfilling the promises of the Natami development team back in the day. Exactly what the demand would be for such a setup, especially outside of current and former Amiga owners, is unknown, but I'll keep an eye on developments. Hopefully I'll be using my Vampire 600 at the time.

Finally, I recently picked up a new Raspberry Pi 3 board, swapping out the Pi 2 I had before, and revamping my multi-emulation system in the process. I'll be sure to bring it along to the meeting, to show off the differences.

Last month, I started running through my four decades of past experiences in computers and consoles, from 1977 and the Atari VCS to my first Amiga systems as I went off to college. I did miss one notable thing though. Around 1985 or 1986 I got my third system after the Atari and the Commodore 64—the Nintendo Entertainment System. The lure of Super Mario was too great back in the day, along with the

promise of 80s-grade arcade quality at home. The NES was my first piece of major electronics I bought with my own money, getting one through layaway at the now-defunct Hills discount store. I got a lot of use out of that gray box, at least until the Amiga started shifting my focus years later.

Catching up, I went to art college in Columbus as the 1990s got moving. I spent my first year in the dorms, so I was unable to bring my Amiga with me (probably for the best, as my room was robbed once, and I lost a typewriter), but I frequented the school's computer graphics lab, which had several Amiga 1000s and a few 2000s. (apparently the Columbus College of Art and Design had a lot of confidence in the Amiga during its early days). I brought my own software and managed to get work done in the lab, even producing an animation from start to finish over a number of hours one day. The next year I moved into my own apartment, and my Amiga 2000 followed. The system got a work out then, as I could work alone, calling online bulletin boards in Dayton over long distance, at the height on my Amiga-related celebrity. I was approached by Electronic Arts to beta-test what would become the AGA version of Deluxe Paint 4 (though AGA hardware was unreleased at the time), and Gold Disk to produce animation clips for a new product of theirs, Both of which lead me to my next computer systems.

I'll take a break here to talk about my next game machine. I always had an interest in Atari's counter-

part to the NES, the 7800, which played 2600 games in addition to its own, ever since it was previewed in magazines back in 1984, but not released widely until after Nintendo dominated the market. In the 90s the Atari systems were sold at clearance at Odd Lots (now Big Lots) stores, but I was unable to secure one, though I did get a 2600 'Jr.' and lots of game carts for 1 to 3 bucks each. I later bought a 7800 off a friend, and spent much time playing Atari games in my college apartment, reveling in nostalgia. This seems to have kicked off my recurring tendency to buy 'finished' game systems as they sell out stock for cheap. I also got my first Apple Macintosh, the 68020-based Mac LC (for 'low-cost color') pizza-box, a loaner machine so I could produce example works for Gold Disk's new mac animation software and screen saver packages. Using the Mac for extended periods gave me an appreciation for the differences between the Amiga and Mac systems, even if the Mac was a bit sleeker and higher-spec than my A2000.

That balance was redressed somewhat with my next jump forward, the Amiga 1200 with its 68020 CPU and AGA video chipset. I remember shopping around at a Computerfest for an 80 megabyte hard drive to put inside it, splurging on a 120 meg drive instead, believing it to be tremendous overkill at the time. The move to 256 color and near-24-bit HAM modes was quite the leap, even if I already had some of that on

the Mac. The newer, faster Amiga systems forced me to reevaluate the way the way I created my animations, even if they were not specifically geared to fast AGA machines. I noticed my old animations often played unwatchably fast on the faster systems, as back in my Amiga 500 days, I would set the animation to run as fast as possible, the hardware itself being the brakes. I learned to set a particular playback speed, that won't be exceeded when the hardware is fast enough to allow it. I continued to apply my Amiga skills to my graphics classes, perhaps cheating a bit by applying newer and better hardware to my work than others had access to in the Amiga-using class.

1994 was my last year of college, but unfortunately also the last year of the Commodore company, which put a lot of uncertainty into my Amiga interest. Still, I was riding my Amiga systems to new heights, even as I returned the loaner Mac. After graduation, I produced larger, more ambitious animation projects, put more effort into the AFIT/Amiga-Dayton/AmiTech user groups and their appearances at the yearly Computerfest shows, and produced a collection of my animations with Fred Fish for the then-fresh-and-popular CD-ROM format. The CD was quite successful, and I made a lot of money off it back then, which was poured into a (relatively) brand-new Amiga 4000 tower, from the returned Escom Amiga Technologies. The 4000T would be my most

powerful official Amiga system, growing with 68060 and PowerPC CPUs, video and sound cards, bigger drives, I/O and USB over the years. My collector mentality asserted itself a bit, and I tried to acquire examples of the Amiga systems I didn't own, including the original Amiga 1000, the A600 (the same one I plan to add a Vampire board to), and the CD-32 game console. I think the only system I never got (discounting variants like the A1500 or A500 plus) was the CDTV multimedia player (and I still wouldn't mind having one). Things would change once again in 1996, as I learned more about the wider world and saw a demonstration of the Mosaic web browser. I found I couldn't resist the temptation any longer, and signed up for dial-up Internet service for the first time.

To be continued in part three.

...by Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette,
July 2017

Amiga Game Music Radio

I just started a radio station for Amiga game/demo/intro music:

<http://198.143.144.226:8322/>

Hope you enjoy.

...Marisa Giancarla
fstltna@me.com

August Calendar

August 7 — MCCC Chapter Meeting
7:00 PM — Grand Prairie Airport
3116 S. Great Southwest Parkway, Grand Prairie

August 7 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:00 PM — Location TBD

August 28 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 2507 Tamaron Cove Cedar Hill, Texas 75104
<http://www.amigamccc.org>