

Macintosh Origins

The untimely death of computer pioneer and renaissance man, Jef Raskin, is a great loss to all of us. Raskin was the foremost proponent of designing computers with the user's needs first. His book on this subject, *The Humane Interface*, is essential reading for anyone pursuing software design. Not only a philosopher of computing, Raskin was also a professor, an accomplished pianist, painter and model airplane designer. For more about Jef Raskin please see his web site at: <http://jef.raskincenter.org>

Jef Raskin's death prompted many, many obituaries, appreciations and discussions of his place in technology history. It also resparked a long running argument about who deserves credit as the "father" of our Macintosh computers.

There are, of course, two primary claimants, Steve Jobs and Jef Raskin. Raskin was ever-ready to acknowledge his digital offspring. Jobs never made an issue of his involvement as though there could be no controversy. Certainly, the mainstream press, in their obituaries of Raskin, has solidly laid the claim at his feet. As with most such arguments, both are correct in their way.

Jef Raskin began the Macintosh project in 1979, code naming it after his favorite apple variety. His goals were simple. He wanted to create an inexpensive, basic computer for basic tasks that a new user could learn to use with virtually no training. Raskin invented the idea of computer as kitchen appliance; as easy to use and understandable as a toaster.*

In the late 1970's, no computer had a mouse or icons to click or even a white screen with black letters on it. All computers used strange commands that had to be typed verbatim, from memory. For instance, if you wanted to copy all of the files from one floppy disk to another floppy disk, you had to type: **copy a:*.*b:** It's no wonder that only geeks wanted to touch computers!

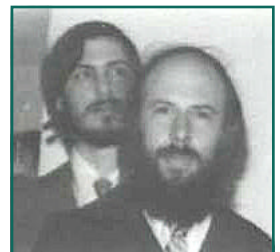
Before coming to Apple, Raskin, as a visiting academic, was privileged to visit the famous Xerox PARC research labs and see some of their early work on "humane" computer interfaces. These ideas validated Raskin's own and he brought his enthusiasm to Apple. Raskin encouraged Steve Jobs and several Apple engineers to visit Xerox PARC to see those user interface experiments.** The Apple delegation came away convinced that an easy to use computer was the next, big goal and Raskin had his mandate to continue on the Macintosh project. But...

* Sadly, this has not yet been accomplished 26 years later.

** Largely unknown is that Apple paid Xerox \$100,000 in Apple stock for this.



Jef Raskin 1943 – 2005



Jef Raskin and Steve Jobs
c. 1982



Lisa I 1983



Macintosh 128K 1984



Canon Cat 1987

Steve Jobs became super enthusiastic about Jef Raskin's and Xerox's ideas (as well as the seminal work done by Doug Engelbart ten years earlier). When Jobs becomes enthusiastic, things happen. The thing that happened was *Lisa*.

Steve Jobs didn't want a basic computer for basic users, he wanted a revolutionary business computer that would conquer the world by its brilliance. In the end, he got the revolution and the brilliance, but not the conquer, however that is another story.*

Jobs ran the Lisa project like the SOB he can be. Pushing his engineers unmercifully and constantly changing specifications and goals as new ideas came to him. Of course, the project ran hugely over budget and began to look like it would never be completed. So, in a move that stunned Apple, company president Mike Scott removed Jobs from the Lisa. To salve the wound, Scott offered Jobs his pick of any other project. Jobs chose Macintosh.

Steve Jobs and Jef Raskin butted heads immediately. Raskin's goals were too

* To learn more about the Lisa, a computer so ahead of its time that it still hasn't been equalled 22 years later. See *The Lisa Legacy* at: <http://www.calcompcare.com/files.html>

practical and small scale for Jobs. He wanted a forum to validate his work on the Lisa project. By 1982, Jobs had removed Raskin from the Macintosh team and began his quest to transform Macintosh into *Lisa Lite*.

Instantly gone was the proposed \$500.00 price goal. Gone was the limited, focused functionality. In their place Jobs created a general purpose computer with a Lisa-like interface. With the broadened functionality, new technologies, undreamed-of by Raskin, were invented and added. By the time Macintosh appeared in computer stores, it was 1984, virtually none of Raskin's ideas, but the name, remained and the price tag was \$2500.00.

Jef Raskin's Macintosh didn't see the light of day until 1987 when Canon released the *Cat*. Raskin designed the Cat with a nearly free hand. It was the culmination of his user interface theories. Sadly, Canon had no idea how to market the Cat and it quickly disappeared to an obscure place in computer history: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_Cat

You can read Jef Raskin's thoughts about his part in the creation of the Mac: *How the Mac was really invented* (my title) on the CCC web site's Files page: <http://www.calcompcare.com/files.html>

March Tip—

Files to Go

Sometimes it's necessary to carry files with you. Pictures, music, work or movies are often too big to email. In olden days, we moved these files on floppy disks, but floppies are no more. But, never fear, you have three good choices.

CDs and DVDs are an obvious choice. Nearly all Macs can use them. CDs will hold 650MB and DVDs about 4.3GB. Unfortunately, CDs and DVDs are slow to copy to and from and can't be reused or changed.

USB "Pen" drives are a new idea. A small, solid state "disk" drive (the size of a highlighter pen) that plugs into a USB port. An icon then appears on the Mac desktop, just like a hard disk. You can copy with disk drive speed and flexibility. USB pen drives come in sizes from 64MB to over 1GB and will work with all USB equipped Macs (Mac OS 9 or X).

Your iPod is an often overlooked choice. Any space on your iPod that isn't filled with music can be used for files. Just plug it in and its icon will appear on the desktop just like the USB pen drive. You may need to change a preference setting in iTunes.

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