My First PC

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I got my first personal computer 30 years ago this month.

It was during the summer of 1992; I had just finished my first year of studies at the Collège Sismondi, and it was the first summer after we arrived from Argentina that looked like a real holiday.

And one of my greatest childhood wishes, the thing that I wanted so badly since I was a kid, became a reality that summer. A PC. It's weird to think how many doors that computer opened for me. It was a childhood dream come true, and I can still see it as if it were yesterday.

It was a "Microspot" generic desktop tower PC, equipped with an 80386 SX CPU running at 8 MHz (it could reach 16 MHz hitting that "turbo" button at the front), with 2 MB of RAM and a 128 MB hard disk drive. It came bundled with a very heavy 13-inch monitor connected to an SVGA video card (no GPUs back then, kids), featuring a maximum resolution of 1024 x 768. I also bought a Sound Blaster 2.0 card, a cheap brand-less joystick, and my first ever Logitech Mouse.

My mother bought it for me in July 1992 in an Interdiscount shop at the Rue de Coutance in Geneva, and it must have cost around 3000 Swiss Francs; I don't remember the exact price, but it was definitely around that value. When I look backward, I realize that I knew very, very little about computers; at that moment in time, I could have bought a 486 with Windows 3.1 pre-installed for just a bit more from a different vendor. But, anyway. That's how one learns.

In terms of software, the thing came bundled with MS-DOS 5 preinstalled. I bought a separate copy of Windows 3.1 (en Français, s'il vous plaît) in September.

What did I do with this first computer? Let's go back down memory lane:

- I tweaked its `config.sys` and its `autoexec.bat` to the extreme, mostly following the instructions I read in PC Magazine and other similar publications.
- I learned to program in QBasic and later in Turbo Pascal. I also typed the occasional listing in assembler provided in one of those computer mag-

azines I read.

- I played games, such as Aces of the Pacific or SimCity.
- I wrote school reports using Windows 3.1 Write. I know, the crappiest text editor according to today's standards, but that's what you got with Windows 3.1, and at the time it seemed to me a fantastic tool.
- I bought a copy of MS Access 1.0 at the end of 1992, to learn about relational databases.
- Another thing I bought was Lotus Improv for Windows; seriously, my favorite spreadsheet ever.
- And I got into the shareware game. It was quite cool; there was this French mail catalog, updated monthly, with lots of shareware software produced in the US and Europe. There were apps and games of all kinds, and you only paid for the diskettes. I tried plenty of software this way and bought quite a few titles. I wasn't aware of the concept of computer viruses back then. Good times.

I later upgraded this first machine to 4 MB RAM in 1994, and finally sold it to a friend in 1995.

My next machine was yet another generic desktop PC, this one with an 80486 DX 2 CPU running at 50 MHz, 8 MB of RAM, capable of running Windows 3.1 and OS/2 Warp 3. I liked OS/2 Warp, it was rock solid but there wasn't a lot of software or hardware made for it.

This 486 was my main PC until 1997, and it was the first one that I connected to the Internet from home, and where I wrote my first web pages. I upgraded this second PC later on with 8 more megabytes of RAM, an internal CD-ROM drive, and even an external Iomega Zip Drive that connected to the printer port. 128 MB diskettes, whaaaat?!

I also sold this second PC to another friend, right before I flew back to Argentina in January 1998.

What about printers? My first was a black & white HP DeskJet 500 bought in 1992, replaced in 1995 with a color HP DeskJet 560C. I have remained faithful to HP printers ever since, with a small period of Lexmark printers around 2000. I still have an HP printer, an HP Color LaserJet Pro MFP M277dw printer compatible with Linux, Mac, and Windows.

As for the monitor, in 1994 I chipped in and bought a beautiful 14'' Sony Trinitron CRT monitor with the best image I could dream of. It was a fantastic monitor, with astonishingly good image quality. But it was heavy as hell.

It's crazy to think how much things have changed in such a short time, and at the same time, how much they are still the same.