

Items Past and Present

By Jean Day

"Introduction to Data Processing" was about the most unlikely subject I could have chosen. I didn't know anything at all about computers and don't recall even seeing one before I enrolled at CTC for this class.

I suppose the nearest thing to computers that I was familiar with was the pocket calculator. Then I don't trust and will only use to check my own math. I am not mechanically minded. I don't have to be since one of my six sons is usually available whenever anything machine-like becomes balky.

Mathematics is not my specialty either and it has been more years than I care to admit since I had done any serious studying. So why did I enroll in EDP 104?

The same reason men give for climbing mountains, I guess -- because it was there. I decided to go back to school to prepare for general office work. This was the only subject in a related field which was available and would fit into my busy schedule. Also several people had mentioned that many offices nowadays, even locally, use computers.

I don't know if it is what I expected or not because I hadn't any idea as to what to expect. The first night we met it was apparent that the class represented a typical slice of Carteret County -- individuals from all ages and backgrounds. Many of my fellow students already worked with computers.

By the beginning of the second week, I felt like a middle-aged lady elephant swimming in a sea of sinking sand. But I was determined to swim slowly but steadily until I reached the other shore.

When the class went into the computer room, we were told to type this, print that. We were not given printed instructions as to the machine language to run a program. I've discovered I cannot remember instructions; definitions or explanations unless they are written down. A simple list would be very helpful to dumbbells like me. Perhaps it is old age or maybe just years of carelessness, but I have difficulty remembering even my children's names.

So you can imagine the problem I have had trying to understand and memorize the word explanations. It is a completely foreign language to me. Before each test, I spent hours and hours reading the handout sheets aloud over and over until everyone around me knew them better than I did.

It seemed to me that every time I began to get a glimmer of understanding about the subject of computers, we would go off

on a completely new tangent just as bewildering as the one we left. Since the class text book is ambiguous and yet inadequate to really cover the subject, I must prefer the handout sheets which are well written, logical and fairly simple to follow.

I looked forward eagerly to each class session. Except for those I dreaded when we were to have a test or quiz.

I enjoyed the way the instructor put the lessons across with a low key sense of humor. On the first quiz one of the questions asked for the teacher's name. Most of us misspelled it. He claims he is a Turk -- one of a very few in this country by his name. The Nolan is easy to remember but the Tomboulian is rather unusual. He is young, bright, interesting and available. He never made me feel ridiculous even when I obviously didn't grasp the meaning of the lesson but instead he explained it to me in another way.

I felt as if the middle-aged lady elephant had hit solid ground and was breathing fresh air when I passed the mid-term exam with such a high grade -- almost broke my arm trying to pat myself on the back.

One class night the group took a trip to the central computer rooms at the base at Cherry Point. This helped put class theory into a realistic form. Of course I didn't understand it all but was rather surprised at just how much I did grasp.

We have learned a great deal about computers in this class. We learned about the different kinds of computers, various input and output devices, generally how they work and the many ways they are used.

However, the most important thing I have learned by taking EDP 104 is not how computers run or even how to run a computer. It is instead, how to study. If I never use another computer or take a computer programming course, just learning to study has made these weeks worthwhile.

I do intend to continue my studies, taking more typing and other subjects to prepare me for a better job. After all, life is a learning process.

I live by the theory that all knowledge helps one to develop as an individual, will be useful at some later date and is stored in your personal storage core until needed.

(EDP 104 or Introduction to Data Processing will be offered during the summer quarter either during the day or evening.) Call 726-2811 for more information.

