

A large, stylized number '50' is the central graphic. The number is filled with horizontal rainbow stripes (orange, green, red, yellow) and has a thick black outline. The text 'Things to Do' is written across the top of the '5' and '0' in a white, bold, sans-serif font with a black drop shadow.

**Things to Do**

**with a**

**Computer**

**Forward 50**

Future Visions of Education Inspired by  
Seymour Papert & Cynthia Solomon's  
Seminal Work

Gary S. Stager  
Foreword by Cynthia Solomon

## The First Thing I Did With A Computer

by Dr. Bryan Sanders

for Dr. Gary Stager's Celebration Book about 'Twenty Things To Do With A Computer'  
March 2021

*Setting: California. 1983. Elementary school.* I was a nine-year-old student when Governor Brown worked out a deal with Steve Jobs to put Apple ][ computers in classrooms. Teachers worked out schedules for each student to have weekly classroom minutes for Lemonade Stand, The Oregon Trail, and Apple Logo at the single workstation. Bragging rights went to the kids who had \$50 in lemony assets or who managed to ford the river. But that traveling triangle that drew shapes on the screen had me wondering and staring from across the room.

We had computers at home starting in 1977. Bally Astrocade, Atari 800, and then the Apple ][. Zork, Castle Wolfenstein, Lode Runner, Olympic Decathlon -- those are burned into my DNA. I felt expert at moving sprites with a joystick or WASD, but Apple Logo was a complete mystery to me.

After our teachers made sure we knew how to turn the Apple ][ on and off, as well as how to load programs, they let us be. The curiosity of working freely on a computer with no discernible objective left me stumped for weeks. I thumbed through the spiral-bound book of commands on the desk. Soon I confidently made boxes and circles and triangles.

Drawing flowers was a crowning achievement. Kids started asking other kids how to write commands to make art with a computer. Kaleidoscopic wild creations started to emerge on the screen every day. There was noticeably less talk about profits in rainstorms or how to avoid dysentery.

*Setting: California. 1984. Next school year.* Ewoks and Jedi. You couldn't avoid them. Together with some friends, I negotiated to stay inside at the computer a few times a week during recess. We wanted to program in BASIC a choose-your-own-adventure *Star Wars* game that would allow us to explore new story plots and outcomes. We found some books on BASIC and taught ourselves. Writing fiction and line commands together felt unfamiliar and exhilarating, as though we were explorers of an ancient future world.

Months went by. We must have saved our program thousands of times to that 5.25" floppy. We read somewhere that we could also draw graphics with BASIC. Those abstract polygons with Logo from the previous year started having a reason to exist. Line by line, we saw the project through to completion and proudly stood by as our peers and our teacher played our game and witnessed the graphic finale.

And for all the love and care we had in making our *Star Wars* fan fiction game, nobody kept the floppy or even the computer. I have ten boxes filled with art and school work



my mother kept from those days, but on this one you'll just have to believe me. It happened. And I was there.

That was the first thing I did with a computer. Thank you, Logo. Thank you.