

- DEC Connection
 - About Digital
 - Reminiscing and Ruminating...
 - My most memorable Digital experience....**

[« previous](#) [next »](#)

Pages: [1] [GO DOWN](#)

[REPLY](#)

[NOTIFY](#)

[MARK UNREAD](#)

[SEND TOPIC](#)

[PRINT](#)

[Author](#)

Topic: My most memorable Digital experience.... (Read 350 times)

SEHarker

Newbie



Posts: 17



My most memorable Digital experience....

« on: November 14, 2007, 09:38:59 AM »

[QUOTE](#)

[MODIFY](#)

[DELETE](#)

[SPLIT](#)



We've all shared the experience of working for Digital, but within that experience there is often one experience or event which, I am sure, for what ever reason, stands out in its own right, because it transcended the work we carried out on a daily basis, or spoke to our essential humanity. This is mine.

About 2:00 AM early one spring morning in 1978, I received a call from our PK1 Datacenter 3rd Shift Supervisor. The voice on the other end was terse: "We need your help with a user. Can you come in?" My answer was, of course, yes, but with the feeling something extra-ordinary was going on. Our 3rd Shift Operations group was noted for being a skilled and independent bunch who considered themselves to be totally self-sufficient. Although its staff knew my Group (Client Services) was on call 24 hours a day to assist them in user-related matters, we were only, very rarely if ever, called after hours, and never by the 3rd shift at any time in the morning.

Arriving at the Data Center I was immediately led to an old Western Union TTY, where hard copy of a KL-10 System's control console's communications between an operator and user was printing out. The amount of paper I saw on the floor suggested it had been a long dialogue. Reading between spurts of information about the user's problems in compiling a FORTRAN program, it had become extremely heated as time after time a operator's totally reasonable question "Why don't you call in?", then "Just call us!", kept appearing. And, each time, the response back was "No!", or "No. No. No, I can't." By the end of the scroll the printed evidence of heightened frustration and anger was apparent on both sides, and with no apparent resolution to the user's problem which was a programming issue with, as I remember, a FORTRAN IV subroutine. It was also apparent, as they stood around the console; the majority of the operators in the room had each taken turns trying to assist with no result.

Taking over the console chair I sent several questions to try and narrow down the problem. Over the course of 15 or 20 minutes the user's responses led to the discovery a wrong version of FORTRAN was running, and an operator dashed off to get a tape containing the right version.

With most of the remaining operators still standing around, now exhibiting signs of relief, while still watching out of general curiosity, and with the problem in the process of being corrected, I typed the same unanswered question. Paraphrased, it was something like, "Just out of personal curiosity, why didn't you just call in to discuss the problem?"

Perhaps my use of the pass-tense, or the change in typed personality triggered a change in attitude, but the response that slowly came back on the screen, still stunned all of us.

"I can't.... I'm deaf and blind!"

I swear, the next sixty seconds in that room consisted of dead silence, followed by a mix of hands slapping foreheads, soft curses, and a scattering of guilt-laced, "Oh God!!!'s", as the information circulated around the room.

The User – who I would later meet – was a young woman, deaf and blind since birth who, closely cared for by her Mother, had developed advanced skills in programming and system design. Being recognized for her capabilities, she had been offered and accepted a role as a Contract worker for DEC (At the time she had the hope of obtaining a fulltime position). Working out of her home, she was supporting both she and her mother.

Thereafter, as knowledge of her existence spread to the other Shifts, she would received special attention and consideration whenever she dialed in. I don't know if she ever achieved her ultimate professional goal, but on that particular night in the spring of 1978, she humbled a good number of grown men, including myself.