

# Jonathan Rotenberg's Photos

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## COMPUTERS

### The Boston Computer Society

Jonathan Rotenberg

"The Boston Computer Society" meets at Commonwealth but most people at school are not aware of this fact. The meetings take place after school hours so people tend to forget that the club even exists. This is unfortunate because many people at school would benefit from and enjoy belonging to the computer society.

I have been interested in computers since the fifth grade. In seventh grade, after searching and finding no simple introductory booklet which would take the reader through most of BASIC, I decided to write one myself. The result, Programming in BASIC Using English rather than Computer Jargon, was never published but over 100 people acquired Xerox copies.

Over the next few years I continued to be interested in computers and in 1977 I helped to found the "Boston Computer Society."

We had our first meeting February 17, 1977--two other people showed up! Gradually, though, we began to attract more people to our meetings. The club grew as we added guest speakers as a monthly feature.

After the second month I had been running the club by myself --no one was willing to assist in organization and no one was willing to pay the \$5 a year membership fee. It wasn't until February, 1978 that the "hobbyist" began to fade out and the serious home and business user appeared. We started getting a responsible, dues paying membership and were finally able to offer various services such as information exchange services, free literature, and magazines. By May we had turnouts of up to eighty people at each meeting.



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**Jonathan Rotenberg**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY APPLE: FROM YOUR SOULMATES IN BOSTON

If you go to business school and get an MBA (like moi), you can learn that some of the greatest innovations in business history have happened in one of two ways. First, there have been big companies led by MBAs who built wonderfully innovative R&D departments. Second, there were MBAs who left these big companies and launched their own wonderfully innovative start-ups.

Well, sort of.... It's true that Bell Labs DID invent the transistor, Xerox PARC pretty much invented graphical user interfaces, [Steve Wozniak](#) worked at HP before starting Apple, and Jeff Bezos worked at Bankers Trust before starting Amazon.com.

But the most earth-changing innovations in business don't happen in business school lectures. They are inspired by science fiction writers.

Many of the greatest technology innovators of all time grew up reading science fictions novels (by authors like Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov and others); being absorbed with the thinking behind TV shows like Star Trek and the Jetsons; and studying movies like 2001 and Avatar. World-changing innovations don't come from customer or market analysis; they come from inspired imaginations unleashed and brought together.

A catalyst for the founding of Apple Computer 36 years ago this week was a club in northern California called the Homebrew Computer Club. Started in March 1975, the club was a meeting place for people with vast

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imaginations, steady soldiering—gun hands, and tremendous passion for inventing computer systems based on recently-invented, silicon-based microprocessors. Club members argued passionately at meetings about a truly RADICAL concept: The home computer. At the time, the idea of a "home computer" sounded about as outlandish as a "home aircraft carrier" or "an 18-wheeler for the home." In this salon of inspired people imagining and creating a science-fiction future in the present moment, homebrew computer projects were born. One of those projects was a single-board computer called the Apple I, developed by Steve Wozniak.

The passion of Homebrew Computer Club members spread like wildfire. Microcomputer clubs popped up all across the U.S. in 1975–76, including the amazing Amateur Computer Group of New Jersey and the Southern California Computer Society.

But—in my opinion—no group aligned more closely with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak's vision than The Boston Computer Society. [Richard Lee Gardner](#) and I started the BCS in February 1977 in the library of Boston's [Commonwealth](#) School because there was no organization in Boston for people interested in microcomputers for home, work or education use.

Yet the BCS was different in its orientation from other major microcomputer groups of the day. Instead of focusing on BUILDING microcomputers, the BCS was focused on how nontechnical consumers could BENEFIT from microcomputers. Our vision, like Apple's, was that the technology should help people to be better at whatever they want to do. The goal is NOT the technology itself; the goal is that technology should SERVE PEOPLE and help them to realize more of what they are capable of.

Yesterday, a dear friend and classmate from Commonwealth, [Jonathan D. Cutler](#), sent me the article below from the school's student newspaper. Prior to yesterday, I had no memory of this article. I wrote it in October 1978 for the school newspaper, at the tender age of 15.

I realized reading this today, 34 years later, that I was actually—desperately—trying to get more students and teachers from the school to come check out BCS meetings. The meetings took place in the school's library and gym. Despite the fact that students and teachers didn't even need to leave the building, almost no one from the school ever dared venture into a BCS meeting. (Except, of course, for the amazing "Vanna White" of computerdom, [Ann McLellan Lardas](#), who was our fabulous greeter of BCS guests. :->)

There were a number of nights where I thought to myself: If I don't show up tonight, that's the end of The Boston Computer Society. I never imagined that the organization could survive after I graduated from high school. But the mission of serving people kept calling to me.

Despite enormous adversity, Steve Jobs & Steve Wozniak stuck with their unique, somewhat against-the-grain idea. Apple became the most valuable company in history, surpassing even Exxon-Mobil. Similarly, the BCS went on to become the world's largest personal computer user organization.

It wasn't until after Steve Jobs passed away in October that I began to investigate how much deeper his vision went than merely starting a computer company. Steve didn't just want to give humanity better technology, he wanted to give human beings the freedom to evolve to higher levels of being.

The day that I met Steve Jobs, in 1981, was the first time in my life that I saw another human being meditate. On that day, Steve Jobs introduced me to meditation and Buddhism.

There was a spirit in the creation of Apple unlike any major U.S. corporation in history. The logo that launched Apple Computer Co. 36 years ago this week—if you study it closely from my post yesterday—featured an image of Isaac Newton sitting Buddha-like under a tree with a glowing Apple in the branches above his head. A ribbon wrapped around Newton with an excerpt from the William Wordsworth Sonnet called "The Prelude":

"And from my pillow, looking forth by light  
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold  
The antechapel where the statue stood  
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone."

Not a typical tagline for a future Fortune 500 company or a brand that would become better known than Coca-Cola or Kleenex. Yet the Wordsworth ribbon spoke deeply to the soul of the new company and its founders. It is a soul that I believe we have barely begun to explore.

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 [Erik Griswold](#) Speaking of Ray Bradbury, he usually makes an



appearance at the soon to again come L.A. Times Festival of Books, which is something you really ought to attend, given your current project:  
<http://events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks/general-information/>



**Los Angeles Times Festival of Books**  
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**Ann McLellan Lardas** Thank you for letting me start the day with a huge smile. I remember wondering why the computer at Commonwealth had a phone on it, and hearing BCS presentations about such silly things as children using computers in school! We hid the fact that you wer... [See More](#)

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**Raines Cohen** At age 13 in 1979, I always thought of you as "that old guy" leading the BCS as I participated in New England Apple Tree (N.E.A.T.) meetings and got the Newton Apple Kids going. BCS was to us at the time the mega-corporate monolith that we danced in the shadow of.

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**Jonathan D. Cutler** As I was rummaging through old stacks of memorabilia that my parents had collected (and were about to dispose of if not taken IMMEDIATELY after 30 years), I came across Jonathan's article in "The Printed Page" dated October 1978, edited by Commonwealth... [See More](#)

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**Jonathan Rotenberg** Raines – I can PROMISE you that the BCS was NEVER a mega-corporate monolith.... Funny, I think it was because I was a very nervous 13-year old (with braces and my voice changing) that I went to such lengths to try to make the BCS look bigger and more ... [See More](#)

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**Jonathan Rotenberg** Jonathan – Thank you rescuing this from your parents' clutter-reduction ultimatum! If this really is an important cultural milestone, then I believe that would make [Jenny Altshuler](#) and Jonathan Litter prescient cultural diviners as well.... :->

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**Jenny Altshuler** Very nice article!!

April 4, 2012 at 5:05pm · [Like](#)



**Jenny Altshuler** I can see where we cut and pasted it onto the page to Xerox it!

April 4, 2012 at 5:06pm · [Like](#)



**John Michael Sawyer** Jenny: Why, there was no "cut and paste" yet, back then. Oh, wait a minute...

April 19, 2012 at 4:18am · [Like](#)



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