

The parents of this family were involved with their children. They supported but did not push, maintaining a climate for achievement and creativity.

In almost every issue of ITYB there appears an article by a junior- or senior-high-school or college student. Two of them are reproduced below. Daniel W. Smith was an eighth grader. Kathleen Marie Montour, a Mohawk Indian from Canada was a 19-year-old senior at Johns Hopkins. She received her B.S. degree, with major in psychology, on 21 May 1976 at age 20 1/4. Currently, Ms. Montour is a graduate student in human development at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

MY INTRODUCTION TO COMPUTING

Daniel W. Smith

The harrassed young man in registrations at American University had finally gotten me a Social Security number, and I was ready to start their twice weekly night course, "Introduction to Computing." I arrived early that first day with my mother and lurked in an empty room at the end of the corridor, peering furtively at students entering the classroom across the hall: my future classmates. Though there would be two others, I was at the time the only representative of SMPY, and it seemed advisable to explain myself to the teacher. (The people who registered me seemed to think my father was an AU professor.)

But the teacher, as it turned out, was a substitute, since our regular teacher had the flu; she had recently taken the same course she was teaching, and I gathered that she was just barely keeping ahead of the lessons she taught by reading up on the textbooks the night before. She nonetheless taught well, and managed to disabuse a few classmates of the notion that there were actually people inside a computer — our book broke down a computer's functions into the actions of three 'people': the Master Computer, the Reader, and the Assigner.

Next week Dr. Chang, our regular teacher, showed up. He, too, was a good teacher when one became accustomed to his Oriental accent and the whirl of the air conditioner.

My classmates, I think, were a little confused by me, unsure if I was really what I looked like or just a somewhat diminutive college student. Finally, one accosted me on the stairs, asking what grade I was in. He seemed amazed that I was in the eighth grade and taking algebra: "They didn't do that when I was in school."

But my main accomplishment in the course was meeting my first computer. I say meeting because it seemed to take on a personality: somewhat irascible, very dogmatic, and firm with fumbling fellows like myself. It, like a few other machines, had the gift of talking back. "Error! Invalid element in input list!" "Error! Subprogram A used in line 4 is missing!" And the first words it ever said to me were, "Error! Was expecting operator after, but end of statement was found." The poor thing refused to do my homework for me because I had put in an extra comma.

But I was not the only one who suffered for my faults. I managed to make the same mistake two different ways in attempting one problem, with the result that the computer first spent five minutes adding nine after nine, then exhausted reams of paper with indefinite subtractions of five. The computer and I had gotten stuck in a loop, fated to repeat the same action until the automatic cut-off was activated and the printer reprimanded me: "Error! Time limit exceeded!"

However, I worked my way through the course, despite the fact that the computer tended to break down the day before an assignment was due, and as it drew to a close, I suddenly set my ambitions high. I decided I was going to teach the computer how to play the card game of War. So I typed out a 158-card program. But somehow it never worked. My directions in a case of a war must have been too convoluted, for it could never seem to get past the first transaction, where an ace captured a jack.

But I was determined not to come up empty-handed. I had already typed out a data deck to represent a set of playing cards, and with it and a new program I managed to get the computer to simulate a game of blackjack. (The dealer won four times, the player twice, which shows why they like to play it in Las Vegas.)

Months later, a large white envelope arrived. Squinting at the carbon copy, I managed to may out my grade, A, and the semester average, A, which probably means I had a better college average in

the eighth grade than I'll have in college!

All in all, it was a worthwhile experience. For one thing, I'm now on record as Social Security No. 999-10-9000, a number I can write with a flourish on my bank account, driver's license, and myriad other places in years to come. With a name like Smith, I figured I deserved it.

MERRILL KENNETH WOLF: A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AT 14

Kathleen Montour

Tufts University

In September of 1945 Merrill Kenneth Wolf of Cleveland, Ohio, became quite possibly the youngest American ever to receive the baccalaureate when he took his B.A. in music from Yale College at the age fourteen (since his birthdate was 28 August 1931, he had just turned fourteen). Because Yale was on a special accelerated schedule during World War II, Wolf completed his degree requirements in less than the usual number of academic years.

Prior to his Yale career, Wolf had a most amazing development history, being highly precocious both verbally and musically. When he was an infant of only four months, he began to speak his first words. At the age of six month he said his first full sentence, "Put on another record." In a personal communication to the writer dated 3 February 1976, Dr. Wolf explained the context of this remark: "Phonograph recording was still a very imperfect technique in 1931, and the pianola, which we now think of as a saloon accessory, was an important medium of classical musical reproduction. It was another pianola roll I was asking for, and the device served as my first — in some ways, my best — piano teacher. About a year and a half later, my mother discovered me playing the piano myself, and apparently imitating tolerably well what I had seen the mechanical device do in the way of depressing given keys to obtain given sounds. Confronted with this, my father taught me to read music, and lessons with a professional teacher then followed, at age 3." By this time his education had commenced; his father was using flashcards printed with whole words, not just letters, to teach the baby how to read. On his first birthday, Kenny was given a first-grade reader, for which he was by then ready.