

## “Technobabe’s” Tears

Barbara D. Parks-Lee

The telephone call came while I was ridding my body of influenza demons. The person on the other end was a Carnegie professor sent to interview me. As I tried to sound dignified while in the midst of bathroom duties, I thought, “Why now?” It seemed the hexagonal blue floor tiles leered at the vomit that missed the trashcan, and his questions seemed never to end.

“Wow, this is the first—and I hope only—time I’ve ever had a bathroom interview. I hope my background noises cannot be heard, but whatever is, **is**. I cannot move from my porcelain throne, so here I am.”

Once the interview was over and I’d cleaned up the surroundings, my body began to shake. Had I aced the interview? Could the interviewer guess where I was as I answered questions?

Though I was surprised, Carnegie accepted my best friend and me. We were two educators of a certain age, and we were in a place of mind-bending beauty. Palo Alto was lush in July. I arrived tired, frazzled, and awed at my surroundings. I’m in “high cotton” as I entered my office. It was about twelve feet square and contained an ergonomic desk chair, a two-drawer cherrywood table, and a state of the art computer.

“H-m-m, how do I work with this? It is nothing like my little daisy-wheel computer/printer at home.”

Almost simultaneously, my friend, stage-whispered from her identical office across from mine, “You know how to turn this thing on and off?”

Frustration was the word of the hour, and it was frustration on steroids! One of our fellow educators ran his paperless English classroom in New York.

When we asked him the **simplest** directions, he started in with history and inner workings of the computer, where upon, we two started crying silent tears, then loud sobs.

“What’s wrong? Why are you so upset?”

I answered, trying to wipe away tears and a snotty nose, “We just need to know how to turn this thing on, off, and how to save! We don’t need to know anything but these things right now!”

“Calm down. Let me show you how these computers work. By the way, what kind of computers do your classrooms have?”

She answered, “There are computers at my school, but I do not use them.” “My classroom is still chalk, pen and pencil, and paper-based. There are no computers available to teachers where I teach. My home machine is a daisy-wheel.”

During the month following, I earned the ironic title of “Technobabe.” Not only did I have to master my office computer but also to learn to utilize e-mail and a new laptop I’d need to continue work as a Carnegie Scholar and Fellow.

I think back on those tears, fears, and frustrations of twenty plus years ago as I now feel enough at home with the computer to dictate Technobabe's handwritten—I still have to write first in longhand—thoughts to computer programs in several applications.