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I like to answer interesting questions by writing and programming.

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DATA DRIVEN (/DATA-DRIVEN) 6/06/2012 @ 10:53AM | 4,482 views

Steve Wozniak's Favorite Gadget

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Steve Wozniak spoke with me about favorite gadgets. Several came up, but his transistor radio stood out.

My transistor radio was a gift from my parents when I was probably about eight years old. To this day, I view every gadget in terms of that: How well it fits in your life. I remember that radio so well! It was so important to me.

You might say, “all it was was a radio.” But I don’t know. I think it touched me because it brought me music—any time, day or night. To me, a gadget has got to be entertaining first to be the best.

I was building projects by myself at the time that my parents gave me the radio. In elementary school I built computers that could play tic-tac-toe with hundreds of transistors that I soldered together. But this radio—it brought music and life! That’s a finished product that I want forever. And I kind of judge all gadgets by that: good gadgets are personal. I own them. They’re in my hand. They’re like my radio: I can turn them on when I want to.

It was a six-transistor radio. These radios back then were AM only, and there were only about three stations for kids to listen to Rock ‘n’ Roll—early, early, early Rock ‘n’ Roll in the sixties. You’d pick up the far-away stations that played at night. That was so amazing! I heard a station that was really weak and it was in Idaho—it was an amazing discovery.

The chip industry was just getting started then, and they were about to make an early chip that would do about as much as a light switch. It cost about 500 of today's dollars—five hundred dollars for one chip!—and I said to my dad—you know, I didn't know how much they cost—so I said, "Oh my god, I need that chip so I can make better radios," and he said, "oh, no, those chips are for the military. That's why they cost so much money."

What the public gets is the cheaper stuff that falls out later. You know, surplus parts. And I felt sad that the most important thing in my life—the transistor radio—was only surplus junk to what the industry had really been trying to create in transistors and then in chips. I was so hurt that throughout my life, I always cared more about the consumer, the average guy in his home, having enjoyable products in his house.

Eventually, the state of the art in chips came to personal computers. Then it went to making chips for games. So the most powerful processors in the world are made for games! Now the military uses technology developed for playing games on computers!

It's kind of like the kids—we average people in the world—won out finally.

Steve Wozniak created the Apple (<http://www.forbes.com/companies/apple/>) I personal computer in 1971 and co-founded Apple Computer with Steve Jobs (<http://www.forbes.com/profile/steve-jobs/>) in 1976. He is chief scientist at Fusion-io, which makes computer memory products and software.

This is an extended version of an article that appears in the June 25, 2012 issue of Forbes Magazine.



Steve Wozniak, inventor of the Apple I personal computer and co-founder of Apple. (Image credit: Getty Images via @daylife)



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