

THE DAVID LOCHHEAD MEMORIAL DINNER

Santa Rosa, July 8, 1999

Bob and July and Erik and Marilyn : We are having this dinner on behalf of many people: the magic of cyberspace is that we can all be with each other without leaving our homes. But when we have occasions, dinners, like tonight, we can't exactly be all in one place.

So we have to imagine Marta Frascati Lochhead and Lew Wilkins, and Curt Ackley, and Houston Hodges, and George Conklin, and David Pozzi Johnson, and Sandy Johnson, and Jim Lochhead and Jack Sharp, and Neil Topliffe, and Ian and Paula MacKenzie, and Susan Peek, and Donel and Marilyn McClellan, and Paul EdisonSwift, and Dave Pomeroy, and Merrill Cook, and Ken Bedell, and David Shearman, and Ron Ford, and Gordon Pokorny, and other names as well.

Bob, I don't know quite what a role David saw in you. I want to give you these words, from MODEM DREAMS, which you may have forgotten or perhaps never read:

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For one reason or another, despite the tenor of online chat, I found myself becoming enthusiastic. I remember one of my colleagues bought a modem shortly after I did. He went online, found nothing of interest, and more or less ignored his modem for years afterwards. In retrospect, that seems a quite rational response to the online world of the early eighties. It was not my response. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, I responded more to the possibilities than to the realities of cyberspace. I spent hours online, trying to find whatever it was that would match my vague vision of the exciting new world that computer communication would make possible.

A chance encounter with another visionary helped to fuel my online enthusiasm. Shortly after I had discovered the online world, we held a workshop on small computers here at VST. One of the organizers gave me the telephone number of someone in California who might arrange access for us to a major online database called Newsnet. I placed a call to this person, Bob Cramer, and was launched into a very new experience. What enthused me was not so much the impressive

collection of religious news that Cramer was publishing online - although that was impressive. What enthused me was the flurry of messages that flowed back and forth between Cramer and myself over those days. It was like being in the same office with someone 900 miles away.

In Cramer, I discovered a kindred spirit. We recognized that something was happening. Something was happening to us. Something was happening to the church. Something was happening to the world. In all of it, we were attempting to discern what this thing was that was happening. We were witnesses to what we did not know. We were witnesses in a world which, by and large, could not hear.

Cramer was a genius in connecting with those who could hear. Once Cramer knew of your interest, he would get on the phone. Wherever there was a church person who took the new medium seriously, Cramer would make another connection. Slowly a network grew around this freelance communicator located in the unlikely community of Windsor, California.

Cramer's network was ecumenical from the beginning. Bob was then an American Baptist, but he took his associates wherever he could find them. By the time that an serious church related networking began - in 1984 and 1985 - Cramer was busy encouraging isolated groups of Methodists, Presbyterians and the two United Churches - the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada.

During this preparatory period, I found my expectations changing. The prospect of using my TRS80 to write programs on the university mainframe faded quickly. By early 1984, when asked what I would want in a denominational online service, I answered in terms of access to information: denominational policies, news releases, statistics - that kind of thing. If you could pin Cramer down - and that was not always possible - it seemed that his vision also was also the development of searchable online databases. By late 1984, however, there was a consensus that seemed to be growing that it was networking - community building - that lay at the heart of the new medium.

However, I think that most of us thought in denominational terms. In late 1984 the first of a number of denominational experiments began. The United Church of Canada used a commercial email system - Envoy 100 - for the dozen or so people across the denomination who

could be identified as having computer and modem. Within a few weeks, the United Church of Christ launched an experiment on Compuserve. The following summer, the first incarnation of Presbynet was inaugurated, also on Compuserve. Even then, there were cross-overs. Bob Cramer, for example, participated in both the United Church of Christ and the Presbynet experiments on Compuserve. Curt Ackley of the United Church of Christ became infamous as the chief pig at the Presbynet trough (namely, Ackley used more online time than anyone else in that experiment.) And when the United Church of Canada shifted its operations from the Canadian Envoy 100 system to Unison, a small Denver-based online system, Cramer immediately joined us there.

The first crisis in ecumenical online relationships happened in the fall of 1985. UCHUG, the United Church of Canada network, had been operating on Unison as a private network since May of that year. A few "outsiders" had joined us there. In addition to Cramer, there were Donel McLelland of the United Church of Christ and Houston Hodges of the Presbyterian Church (USA). All three were accepted as honorary UCHUG participants. While UCHUG proceeded to blow its whole year's budget in two months of online frenzy, the Presbyterians were having their summer of online frenzy on Compuserve. When the Compuserve experiment was over, however, a large number of Presbyterian refugees, looking for a new online home, descended on Unison.

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Bob, there is a reason why we are here tonight, toasting David Lochhead. It goes well beyond the simplicity of the event, five people sharing a meal.

I would like to think of it as a time of dedication and rededication to the world of possibilities. David was crucial for us in finding our way in that world and finding meaning in it.

It's not over. It's just begun.

IT'S ONLY JUST BEGUN!

AMEN - MAY IT BE SO!