

DESERT DISASTER  
By Lorraine Frantz Edwards

The story I'm about to relate may be an exception. On the other hand, some readers may be able to identify with my frustration and expense. For others it may serve as a "caveat" (beware).

Four years ago I started with a public domain genealogy program called *Family History System*. It was (IS!) an excellent program (but that's another story). In October of 1988 I saw the Roots3 presentation by Howard Nurse -- and my adventure began.

It was a herculean hurdle to go from a \$35 public domain/"shareware" program to \$350 Roots3. I rationalized the credit card purchase. ("I'm worth it." "It's my only hobby." "I can provide valuable documentation for posterity.") Although I had over 5000 names in *Family History System* (FHS), I started re-keying family data "from scratch." When Comsoft released their Gedcom, a friend insisted that I move text from the old program to Roots3.

My old 8088, 512k, computer labored with the Gedcom data for ten hours and then gave me the "out of memory" message. Later the friend transferred the FHS Gedcom to Roots3 Gedcom -- on his machine -- and mailed me diskettes that would copy into the program.

Now I had duplicates of approximately 300 people; I was a total novice when it came to knowledge of the Roots3 program. I struggled to tie subsequent generations to the early families and delete duplicates. WHAT A MESS! (All this before the new upgrade with search for duplicates and orphans.)

With upwards of 3000 names in Roots3, I was running out of memory. An Intel AboveBoard was my next major expense. It never seemed to function per manufacturer's publicity. (Not Intel's fault.) One evening in February 1990 the Roots3 program went on strike -- "out of memory." I ordered another 512k of memory chips and installed them. (All of this expense on the already burdened credit card. But my very worthwhile hobby is worth it, right?)

It was three months before I saw my major Roots3 database again. Honest!! With additional memory on AboveBoard, I expected several months -- or a year -- of data entry. Wrong! The computer refused to cooperate. Several plaintive long distance phone calls failed to resolve the problem. Brilliant minds couldn't help me get the computer "up and running."

One weekend I hauled the computer into the Los Angeles basin (from Lancaster) and a Roots3-knowledgeable-computer-person tried to diagnose the problem. His assessment: The hard drive was gone and could not be reformatted. Solution: \$400 for a new hard drive.

A week later I retraced my route and retrieved my computer. Alas, I had the system BUT none of the data would "restore". (Exact same DOS . . .) I've been a fanatic about "backups"!! I had never had an occasion to use the DOS "restore" feature. When I needed it, it WOULDNT WORK! In consternation, I

told acquaintances of my dilemma. For the first time in five years of computer ownership, I heard numerous people say, "Oh, you can't rely on DOS. You need a backup program."

Again on the credit card, I bought *PC Tools Deluxe* (with backup features) but it WOULDNT INSTALL because it required a version of DOS higher than 3.1. Traded it for the twice-as-expensive *Fastback Plus* and installed it--but it WOULDNT WORK!! (No lie!) When I checked with my computer support company, I learned that, indeed, *Fastback* wouldn't operate. When I asked "why?", I was told "It just won't."

Meanwhile I sent my DOS backup diskettes, with Roots3 data, to Comsoft. God bless Howard Nurse!! Somehow he salvaged the data and I was able to "copy" it into my Roots3 directory. Words cannot express the joy I experienced when I saw all my familiar family history on the screen!!

After three months without my genealogy software program, I was ecstatically happy -- but cautious. How could I conscientiously pursue data entry if backups and restore were questionable? (In self-defense I must tell you that I'm really fairly knowledgeable about computers. With my employment I've used them for about ten years. Bought my first [an IBM-PC Jr.] about five years ago; belong to a local IBM Club; perpetually take computer classes at the college.)

A Roots3-user/computer-"genius" took pity on me and sacrificed a day of his precious weekend. I hauled my computer to Orange County, watched my friend attempt a number of diagnostics -- and heard the verdict: "This computer has serious problems!"

A couple of hours later we were back in his workshop with a brand-new 386 IBM-"clone". He configured the system for me and installed the mouse. For the first time I have the proper equipment to run the Roots3 program. It has been nineteen months since I "fell in love" with the Rolls Royce of genealogy programs. After another trip to Orange County, I should be able to (again) print precious family history. (At this time, my obsolete, daisy-wheel, serial printer is not "handshaking" with my new computer. I can't prepare this story on WordPerfect and print it out. I'm "stuck" with an old typewriter.)

I write this story in support of the RUG of Arlington, VA and RUGs everywhere. (I belong to two in Southern California.) We need groups to help us through the rough places -- considerate people sharing their knowledge with first-time computer and software users. Alas, I can't attend meetings in Virginia, but I benefit from the newsletter.

If a reader has experienced similar problems, TAKE HEART and "HANG IN THERE." ROOTS3 IS WORTH IT!!!!

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