

An old dog learns new computer tricks

By J B Leftwich

I know the drill -- the one about television sets. If you don't know how to fix it, call repair service. Or call your eight-year-old grandson.

A problem. My grandchildren understand computers. But how do you corral one long enough to solve a problem?

So, I rely on my fifty-something son - or daughter - to show me a solution so obvious that I know what they are thinking. "How did I happen to have a reasonable number of smarts when Dad?" It's a valid question.

I operate a computer in the same manner I operate a car. I just drive it -- the car, that is - and rarely raise the hood. I make this statement to encourage other ancient mariners to buy computers, face the humiliation and explore the wonderful world of cyberspace.

Many young people these days have had computers from day one. To them, computers have always been there. To me, a telephone was a marvel. Many people my age had no telephone until well along in life. When I was four, my family moved to Arkansas where we lived for four years. During that span of time, we never called Granny, and she never called us. There likely was not a telephone in either neighborhood.

I remain in awe of telephones. I have a cell phone with multiple functions, but all I want is to dial a number and get an answer. I don't want to calculate or make pictures of some slob eating pizza while making a mess of his face. I know. I know. I'm passé. A relic. A dinosaur.

Slowly, I have learned rudimentary operations of the computer and explored the wonderful world of the Internet. When Lebanon's bladderpod story was current, I cranked up a search engine and discovered there were 2,190 websites which testify to the theory that the plant is not as endangered as the EPA would have us believe.

Last week, I asked the search engine to call up data about the high school in Putnam County I attended. The search engine delivered. There were more data that I needed. It's amazing.

That isn't all. Because of the reference to Putnam County, the search engine popped up a website on the genealogy of the Ensor family. My family intersects with prominent and respected family. In a small community such as Buffalo Valley in Putnam County, most families intersect.

For more than two hours, I read about the Ensors dating from the Seventeenth Century.

The most interesting character for me was Prettyman Jones. Doesn't that name grab you? Why would any family name a son "Prettyman"? Turns out there were many Prettymans. (Prettymen?) It was a family name, just as Jones was a family name. Maybe parents thought it would avoid confusion.

It also turns out this Prettyman was not one to put up with foolishness. He was involved in a few scrapes and understood encounters with the law. In one case, he was fined \$10, a considerable sum in 1801. In another case, he was fined 58 cents.

According to this website, Prettyman's most notorious case had to do with his trading with the Cherokee Indians. He wrangled a contract to sell grain to the Indians, which ended when he and two cronies were accused of stealing three of the Cherokees' horses. How that case came out was not disclosed.

Prettyman returned to favor when he fought in the War of 1812. After the war, he settled in Buffalo Valley and married Sarah Unknown whose last name is lost in history. Sarah Unknown was a good businesswoman who owned 200 acres of fine farmland. Prettyman and Sarah Unknown had ten children. Ol' Prettyman became a prominent citizen

See? What interesting stuff you can learn on a computer? Without a computer, likely I would have not learned this story about Prettyman Jones, probably one of my relatives.

To each of my ancient contemporaries who has no computer because he or she does not want to face the humiliation of learning, I say. Get one. You can learn. I am testimony.

You can, too, teach an old dogs new tricks. It just takes longer.

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