The 'huge cultural change' sparked by computers
By John Stampfel, President, Brookdale Computer User Group, NJ
May 2018 issue, BUG Bytes
www.bcug.com
jstampfel+bcug (at) gmail.com

You are a computer user. How often do you use your computer? Of course, if you are reading this, you are using a computer – of some sort. But, are you one of the people who is employed in a job which requires you to use a computer? Or are you someone who only opens a laptop every few days to check your mail? Or to check Facebook? I notice that since I am retired, I no longer use the computer the way I did when I was working and used it daily.

You may know from either past columns or knowing me personally that I could be called an addict to computers. OK, a nicer way to say that is that computers are my hobby. Would you call someone who spends as much time as possible on their boat, or fishing, or at golf, an addict? No. Those are hobbies. How about you? Have computers become a necessary evil in your life? Or a welcome means of staying in touch with distant friends and relatives?

Using your iPad to watch videos or play games is using a computer. So is using a smart phone to get directions or stock prices, or the weather. Let's ask again: How often do you use your computer? I'm not trying to sell computers here.

There are members of our club who have told me that they do not use their computers for banking or online bill payment. All the fears about hacking and viruses, etc. Unfortunately, most of the things they seem to fear happen at the banks, etc., anyway, whether they use the services or not. I mention this because I had my piano tuned recently and the piano tuner took a credit card, zipping my card through a little white device which plugged into his cell phone. He took all kinds of cards. (We, as a club, don't do that – accept credit card payment, online – because it is too expensive for the small amount we process, or the rules are unacceptable. I have checked. Maybe they will change.) Our conversation was about, oh, sure, his generation (he was probably half my age) grew up with this so they expect it.

I can tell you, when I receive your checks, they are deposited via an app from our bank. It is as secure as the bank. Depositing in an ATM is less secure. Our account, or my account, or your account, could be hacked if the bank's, or credit card company's systems are compromised. One may as well make their life easier and use the tools available to do so.

So, this, and some other ideas floating into my brain got me to think about other changes in society. Things like giving people physical pictures or writing letters. How many of you know or remember your great grandparents? Their names (if you don't do genealogy)? We share many pictures on Facebook or by email. We take dozens more with digital cameras, camcorders, cell phones.

Where do all these go? Trying to make this coherent for you, despite that my own thoughts rambled a lot to get to this point: who will have any pictures or messages or emails from us, or the people – our children, grandchildren, friends, when we are gone. Unless Facebook sends you a "memory" from n years ago, could you find a picture of your grandchild from 3 years ago? Even if you saved a copy on your computer, who knows your password to get at it if you couldn't? Who would think to go look for it?

There's a huge culture change that has been going on. We haven't had it long enough to get control of the implications. We don't really want to lose all the pictures and written conversations between us and our friends and relatives. Stuff in your computer or in the cloud just isn't the same as the shoebox or album of pictures, or collection of letters tied in a ribbon. This is not heading to be a condemnation of computers or the digital age.

Fast as it has been growing and changing, it is still a very young age. You are not, I hope, going to die tomorrow. You can still learn and adopt the best of what this new age has to offer. And we and the other computer users in BCUG are learning with you and here to share and help overcome any fears.