



## Dave Bull - Early Billionaire!

Let's stay back in high school this week. I may have left a misleading impression with last week's story, and I think it should be 'corrected' right away!

I told you that the personality testing showed me to be a fairly quiet person, not so interested in social activities. That was certainly true, but it didn't mean that I was any kind of a 'loner' - I had plenty of friends, although when I think back on them now I can see that they (we) were pretty much of a type. I don't particularly remember the slang of the day, but nowadays this kind of person would fall under the 'nerd' or perhaps 'geek' category. My friends were all boys - no exceptions. I couldn't so much as speak to any of the girls; they were just too ... perhaps 'scary' is the appropriate word here.

This was the mid-60s, and these days when I read about the early history of such people as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs (who are both four years younger than I), and of how they were able to use their school's computer system to learn about programming, I feel more than a twinge of frustration. I was born just a few years too early! If our school had had a computer system, I and my friends would have been all over it!

There is a well-known episode told about Bill Gates, and how he 'hacked' the school computer in such a way that he received class assignments that favoured him personally. When I first read about that, I remembered an episode that makes me wonder if my path and his would really have been all that different ...

Our school had no computer system, so all such things as attendance records were done by hand. Each homeroom teacher took a quick roll call first thing in the morning, and sent the sheet down to the office by (student) runner. A secretary there would quickly collate all the information and produce a sheet that listed all the absent students. This would then be delivered to each classroom, and would be referred to by the teachers over the rest of the day, letting them know which students would be missing from their classes.

One day, some of my friends and I cooked up a scheme to 'hack' this. We arranged in advance that each of us (in a different home room) would jump up and volunteer to be the person to take the attendance sheet down to the office. The night before, we had prepared a set of 'dummy' sheets, and as we gathered together in the hallway that morning, we did a switcheroo. We quickly filled in the dummy sheets with the correct data just collected by the teachers, with one alteration. We added our own names.

We then separated, and one-by-one, strolled into the office, put the sheets into the collection basket, and then returned to our homeroom classrooms. Later that morning, when the master attendance sheets were distributed, we took a peek and found ... success! Our names were there, thus enabling us to skip school for the rest of the day!

There was only one problem.

We were nerds; we weren't 'bad' kids. The idea of actually skipping school was repellent to us. We suddenly had this freedom, but had no idea how to use it!

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So we hung around. We couldn't just stand in the hallways, so tried to find places and ways of killing time without getting caught. We went into the library for a while, then sat in the cafeteria, pretty much completely at a loss.

Some of our friends knew what we had done, and word passed around here and there, finally reaching the teachers, and somewhere along the line suddenly there in front of us was the vice-principal, "I want to see you all in my office ... now!"

He gave us a dressing down, expressing that he was disappointed in our behaviour, etc. etc. There was no particular punishment (that I remember), but we were of course sent back to our classrooms. Now that I think back on it he was probably trying to avoid breaking down in laughter as he scolded us. Of all the things he really had to worry about - kids getting in car accidents, getting drunk, etc. etc. - hacking the attendance record probably didn't rank very high on his list!

But there you have it, proof positive that if only our school *had* indeed had a computer system, I too would have followed *exactly* the same path as Bill Gates.

I'm sure. :-)

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