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## Mountain Hermit Makes 'Apples' Sing In Simple English

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### Programmer Paul Lutus Tries To Widen Computer Uses; Avoiding a Priestly Class

By MARILYN CHASE

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MEDFORD, Ore.—When a hulking man with an unruly red beard walked into Michael Brown's computer store here two years ago, the retailer says he thought, "Here comes another flake."

But the visitor spoke like a scholar about computer programs, and Mr. Brown found himself "talking about things I couldn't even spell."

The visitor was Paul Lutus, who in the intervening years has become one of the most successful independent software writers in the burgeoning personal-computer field. He has written programs that can help people compose a song or build a house, but his biggest commercial success is a word-processing program called Apple Writer, published by Apple Computer Inc.

Some other Lutus programs have been published by Insoft Inc., now managed by Mr. Brown, who notes that success hasn't tamed Paul Lutus.

### Mountain Man

Although his computer-program royalties brought him income in six figures last year and promise to reach \$250,000 or more this year, the 36-year-old Mr. Lutus lives and works in almost-monastic solitude on Sexton Mountain, near Sunny Valley, Ore.—much the way he had lived before his rags-to-riches success.

A high-school dropout from San Jose, Calif., Mr. Lutus scaled the heights of computer programming after years of wandering, from San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury

to New York's Greenwich Village, with his interest in computers developing along the way.

"My real interest lies in keeping computers from becoming the province of a priestly class," he says. "Computers are incredibly dumb. Programming forges a link between people with a job to do and a machine which doesn't understand any of the abstract wishes of a human being."

Software is what harnesses the "dumb" power of a computer and turns it to practical uses. A programmer types on a computer terminal a minutely specific set of coded instructions, which are recorded on a small disk. When "played" in the computer's disk drive, the software instantly reprograms the computer to perform a function the user wants, from calculating the hour of sunrise, to writing a letter. More and more, the value of a computer lies in its software because, as a software specialist at Apple Computer observes, "People buy the machines for what they do."

Software writers are often solo-entrepreneurs. But Mr. Lutus is perhaps the most fiercely independent of all. A raw-boned six-footer, he lives alone in a sprawling house surrounded by 32 densely forested acres that, in turn, are surrounded by federal forest lands. "No possibility of neighbors," he says with satisfaction.

"When someone comes to my door," he adds, "I know they must really have wanted to get here." His girlfriend and a few local associates normally are his only visitors. He burns wood for heat and plans to use a nearby creek to generate electricity. He often uses a bicycle to run errands and for recreation, and his major household concession to civilization, besides his computers, is a hot tub.

At work on his computers, he sits ramrod straight in a hand-hewn chair, his huge red-

tufted hands flying over the keyboard with concert-pianist delicacy. Disdaining any nine-to-five routine, he tends to work in long frenzies, pausing only for stand-up meals of vegetables, fruit, cheese and yogurt. Then, back to the keyboard, where he often eventually falls asleep. Working late one winter night, he realized that the room temperature had fallen below freezing only when his disk drive stalled from the cold.

### Dropping Out

That kind of passion isn't the only thing that separates him from the crowd. For unlike the razor-cut superachievers who dominate the computer elite, Paul Lutus was an academic underachiever.

The stubborn son of a Lithuanian-Catholic machinist, he was nearly placed in a class for slow learners until he scored above 160 on an IQ test. But he continued to languish as a student, "reading in the back of the classroom or tinkering with electronics in my garage."

After a bitter row with his despairing parents, he fled home at 16, dropped out of high school and supported himself as a TV repairman. Lured to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district in the mid-1960s, he says, "I became a street hippie, folksinger and panhandler. I took LSD-laced night rides on my motorcycle. I slept under a tree in Golden Gate Park." Now, considering himself lucky to have survived, he eschews drugs and alcohol other than wine.

His wanderings and his independent study of physics and calculus eventually led him back to his old love for electronic tinkering. He exchanged panhandling for a job engineering medical instruments for several hospitals, including New York's Mount Sinai Medical Center. He joined a National Aeronautics and Space Administration subcontractor in San Jose to design lighting systems for the space shuttle Columbia. When the project was over, he used his earnings to buy his first 20 acres of land in Oregon.

He was 30, and he discovered software. At first for his own amusement, Mr. Lutus, started writing programs — hundreds of them. Most found their way into the pirated-

software underground before they could be sold, but about two dozen have been published.

### Making Apples Sing

His published programs include ones that help builders do architectural drawings and; would-be composers write music. His software, in effect, even taught Apples to sing. With his program that transforms the Apple computer's monotone beep into many notes, the operator can use the keyboard like a piano to play everything from a Scott Joplin rag to a Bach fugue.

Mr. Lutus occasionally leaves his mountain to visit Apple, about 400 miles south in Cupertino, Calif. Instead of using commercial air travel, he usually bicycles to an airfield at Merlin, Ore., and pilots his newly acquired Cessna 170 to San Jose, Calif.

"Then we see him bicycling up to our office with his backpack on his back," says Ida Cole, manager of applications software for Apple. "Paul's a little eccentric," she says, "but we're crazy about him."

With good reason. His Apple Writer word-processing program, the source of most of his income, has made millions for Apple Computer, which published the program's first edition in 1979. In the past 16 months alone, Apple Writer revenue has exceeded \$1.5 million, and Miss Cole says sales of the program are becoming "outrageous."

"We have a symbiotic relationship," Miss Cole says. "Paul's become successful because of Apple, and Apple sells machines because products like his are available." Despite this mutually profitable relationship, Mr. Lutus plays the field: He is working on a similar word-processing program for International Business Machine's personal computer.

But his relationship with the computer establishment hasn't always been cordial. He deflects the marketing overtures of computer manufacturers and software publishers. He writes for the beginner, rejecting the mysticism of others in the profession, and he writes only what inspires him.



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# Mountain Hermit Loves 'Apples' And Teaches Them Basic English

Most companies won't touch his stuff as a result," says Mr. Brown of Insoft. "Paul won't produce games or business packages on demand. He wants to write masterpieces." Apple's Miss Cole adds, "He's got an ego, and he's stepped on a lot of toes."

Another reason some in the computer elite dislike the Lutus style is that his programs are written so densely that programmers can't easily get inside the code to make changes. But the programs are a boon to the novice user, who doesn't care about operating modes and other esoterica, and who can run the Lutus programs quickly and easily, using simple English commands.

## Emphasis on English

"I favor using English over any other language for communicating with a computer," he asserts. "But there are many in this profession who write computer languages which perpetuate the idea that you

have to be a superman to use one."

Mr. Lutus champions the notion of "computer activism," and he uses his terminal to joust with the establishment, so far with mixed results. When a mining consortium wanted to strip mine Eight Dollar Mountain, where he lived in a cabin until recently, he armed conservationists with computer calculations contradicting the miners' financial projections.

In another skirmish, he answered a speeding ticket with an investigation into the safety of police radar devices, running calculations that showed radiation levels exceeded federal safety limits. The judge was unmoved.

"I had to pay the \$35," he says, "but I consider it a moral and scientific victory."