

# Pride's Corner



This year, area computer enthusiasts will be trying out some software designed by a local boy and the pride of Portland's Armenian Community. It's called... Macintosh OS-8.

Westbrook "golden boy" Avie Tevanian, 36, has led a team of over 100 software designers at Apple Computers, Inc., to design OS-8, the new Macintosh system software created to answer the challenge issued by Microsoft's Windows 1995 and 1997.

## Can Westbrook's Bold, Brainy Avie Tevanian, Jr. Transform Apple Computers, Inc.?

Interview By Colin Sargent, Photos By Gary Parker

**I**N 1914, 21-year-old Armenian immigrant Louis Tevanian arrived in Portland's "Little Armenia" district below Cumberland Avenue, bought a house at 44 Cedar Street with gas lights but no electricity or furnace, and by all accounts did pretty well

for himself. Quickly realizing that most of the Armenian immigrants making clay pipes in the Winslow Pottery Company were dead-ended there, he left after a week, became a dishwasher at the Congress Square Hotel, was named a cook within a week due to diligence and de-

pendability, and in time became a noted area chef, first at Joe Langley's popular restaurant beside the Eastland and Congress Square Hotels on the corner of Congress and High Streets (where Congress Square Plaza now exists), serving American cuisine; later at Boone's landmark

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restaurant on Portland's Custom House Wharf; and, beginning in 1939 at his own place, Louie's Spa on Cumberland Avenue, a place so celebrated by workers of South Portland's wartime shipyards that carloads of them came over the Million Dollar bridge every day for the ale and a chance to sample what was hot.

Louis was lucky in love as well. By 1921, he had fallen for lovely, 16-year-old Rakel



Bartanian, herself a recently arrived Armenian immigrant who had been studying in Constantinople. They married, brought up a wonderful family, and enjoyed a life together that would last 51 years.

**H**is son, Avadis Tevanian, Sr., did pretty well for himself, too. Through hard work and an acute sense of timing, he built and opened Westbrook's Pride's Corner Drive-In on May 13, 1953; acquired Westport Bowling Alley in 1968; cam-



DIANE HUDSON

Above: Forty-four Cedar Street, which Louis and Rakel Tevanian owned in Little Armenia, once a thriving neighborhood below Cumberland Avenue and Portland High School, still stands.



Rakel Tevanian, Avie Jr.'s grandmother, is a lively 93 years old and a Westbrook resident. Her husband Louis Tevanian died in 1979.

paigned to be mayor of Westbrook in the early 1980s; even helped his sons launch Westport Marine in the months before his death in 1988. And by all reports his son, Avie Tevanian, Jr., is doing okay as well. As Senior Design Engineer for Apple Computers, he is the author of Macintosh's sweeping new System 8 software and nothing less than the hottest software executive in the United States.

What was the first computer you ever touched? Was it at Westbrook High School on the Dartmouth System?

Avie Tevanian: The first I recall was a PDP8 that we used at Westbrook High School made by Digital Equipment Corp-

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oration. I honestly can't remember if I used a calculator before that. I used it for all four years of high school, writing things on paper tape, mostly in Basic, and learned how to program with it on the machine level with the switches on the front.



DIANE HUDSON

Avie Tevanian, Sr., built Pride's Corner Drive-In, opening in 1953. The Tevanians also own West-Port Bowling Alley on Brighton Avenue.

How old were you then?

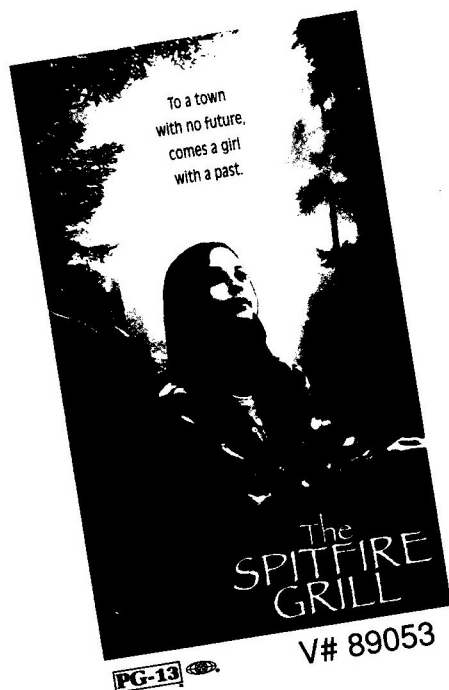
Avie Tevanian: I was 14 during my freshman year, in '75.

Was there a person you considered a mentor then? Who was your favorite high school teacher?

Avie Tevanian: Absolutely. No question. A gentleman by the name of Mr. Small, head of the math department. He really spent a lot of time with me and my friends. I didn't start in classes with him until I was a sophomore, but I squeaked in breaks to work with him and the computers.

(Ralph Small, now retired and living in Windham, remembers Avie well: "Avie was a tremendous student, I enjoyed him very much. I had him for several courses. He was very, very good. He and his friends, including Nick Gross, enjoyed participating on the math team in the Pi Cone math league.

"In the early years there we had a nice little math lab. When Avie was there, we bought a Digital Computer right from the nearby Westbrook plant, a Digital PDP8, but that was back in the stone age. It only had 8k of memory, and I taught Basic, assembly language – how to use the switches on the front of the computer – and how



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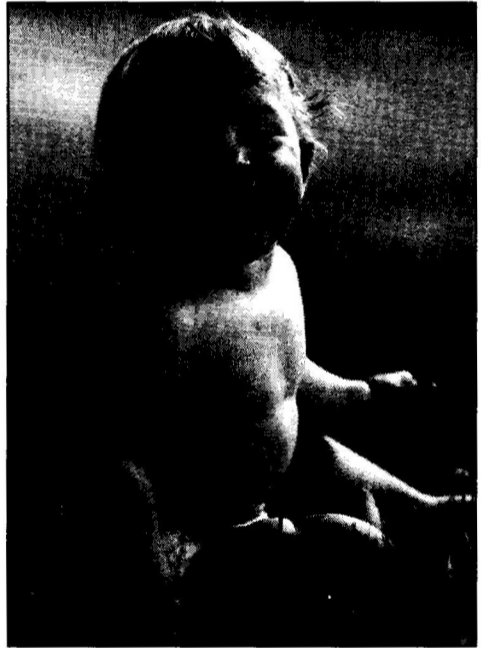
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to use the Octal or Binary System. Avie used to do that and enjoy that.

"It was just fun for him. There was no question that he was interested in the computer. In those days we used to keep the lab open sometimes until 8 at night. I didn't stay all those hours, because I would have been there 24 hours a day, but kids could sign up on it and the janitors would check up on them whenever they passed by while mopping the floors. Avie'd stay there pretty

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The house at 127 Deerhill Circle in Westbrook, where Avie, Jr., grew up.

late, usually till 5, sometimes longer. The thing about those early computers was, we actually had to program them, unlike computers of today with all the shortcuts. I think that strengthened some of those early students.

"Back then, we used an oil-based tape for program storage, and when we saved a file, the teletype would punch holes in the tape. The amazing thing was, almost at the beginning Avie could read the holes in the tape and know what it was. He could just read it and write it down.")

**What activities did you participate in at Westbrook High?**

**Avie Tevanian:** Math team. By senior year I might have been ranked second in the state. We vied for first place with Bonney Eagle. One guy there was ahead of me. He's out here in Silicon Valley somewhere. I heard he worked for Microsoft for a while.

**Where did you live in Westbrook? Did you have any favorite hideouts, or places you liked to go to be alone?**

**Avie Tevanian:** 127 Deerhill Circle. My brothers and I still have our property there. It wasn't a matter of having a place to go hide, during the school year. In the summer we *could* hide around our place

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at Sebago Lake. There were some trails and wilderness out to the side of our house. We'd take motorcycles or bicycles there.

Do you still have a motorcycle?

**Avie Tevanian:** A Kawasaki GPZ 1100, which I don't get to ride very often. It's the same one I used to have, growing up.

What did you do in your spare time? Did you watch television, and if so, what was your favorite show?

**Avie Tevanian:** Obviously "Star Trek," no question about that. Whenever there's new episodes with "Star Trek: Next Generation" or "Deep Space 9," I'll try and take them in. When "Star Trek" was cancelled on television, I participated in letter campaigns as a kid to keep it alive.



Avie, Jr., at the Tevanian camp on Sebago Lake.

Did you ever get into trouble—climb up onto the school roof, or anything like that?

**Avie Tevanian:** No.

(Avie's uncle, Herbert Tevanian, says, "Avie was never hyper, never got into trouble. You knew he was different, more focused. He loved to work on things. If things he was trying to build or fix didn't work out right away, he didn't get mad and bang them against the wall. Of all the brothers, I think everyone would agree he's the most elastic.")

What were the 15 most exciting sec-

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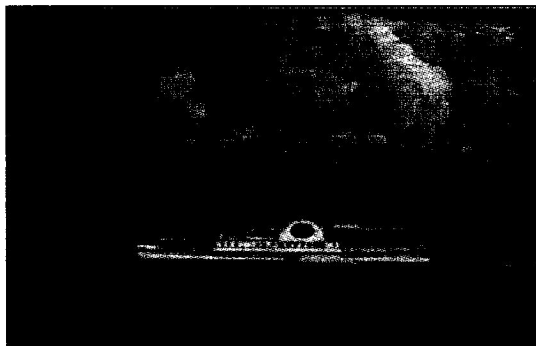


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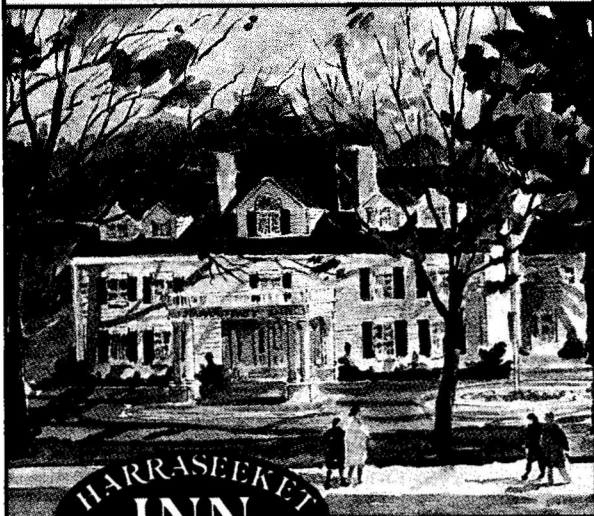
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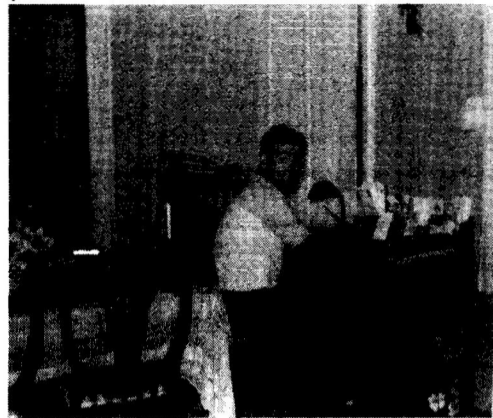


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onds you spent in your youth? Ever fall out of a tree or get struck by lightning?

**Avie Tevanian:** I loved to waterski. I used to be very good, and could ski bare-foot, on a slalom course. I can barely do any of that now. Early in my college years, I did drag racing up at Oxford Plains Speedway with my dirt bike. One year I



Avie, Sr., working at home.

took second place in the point race.

This is kind of a funny question, but as a Westbrook boy, was Rudy Vallee held up to you growing up as the apotheosis of achievement? I've heard that from some Westbrook natives. Portland High kids had the polar explorer Robert Peary to look up to. Was there some other Westbrook figure you were supposed to look up to?



## An Avie Tevanian Time Line

Left: Avie in his senior photograph, Westbrook High School, 1979

**1979** Graduate of Westbrook High. Accelerated math courses with Ralph Small. Co-captain of Westbrook High's Pi Cone math team with Nick Gross.

**1979-1983** Attended University of Rochester. Graduated with a B.A. in Mathematics.

**1983-1988** Attended Carnegie Mellon University. Earned an M.S. in Computer Science and a Ph.D. in Computer Science.

**1988-1997** Joined NeXT Computer, Inc. First responsibility: Chief Operating System Scientist. Took on various management roles, eventually leading to VP of Engineering.

**1995** Became VP Engineering, NeXT Software, Inc.

**1994** Married Nancy; **1996** Son Zachary born

**February 1997** NeXT purchased by Apple for \$400 million. Became Senior Vice President of Software Engineering, responsible for all of Apple software engineering

**Avie Tevanian:** Nope. It didn't come up.

Did you work at Pride's Corner Drive-

In as a callow youth? Specifically, did you make the pizza?

**Avie Tevanian:** I never did much work at the drive-in itself. My dad built it many years ago. I did work in the bowling alley that my dad bought out of bankruptcy in '65, '66, behind the counter, but it was a matter of the whole family pitching in. I liked bowling, and by the time I left for college, I was pretty good. My high score in candlepin was at least a 130, maybe even higher. I had close to a 95 to 100 average. I like to come back to Maine and check the place out. Sometimes I'll bowl a few strings.

What about your family's place on the lake? Is it simply a source of recreation for you or does it have a spiritual value for you? Superman had to go to the North Pole to get his head clear and charge his batteries. What do you do?

**Avie Tevanian:** The place we have on the lake is your basic very simple Sebago Lake camp, 'couple of bedrooms, very small. My three brothers (Alan, 35; Greg, 31; and Mike, 29, all of whom run the family businesses here in Maine) have very nice places on Sebago, Little Sebago, and on Presumpscot Cove.

Do you keep in touch with any old friends you grew up with in Westbrook?

**Avie Tevanian:** One of the guys, Nick Gross, who was co-captain with me on the Westbrook math team, lives about 15 minutes from me now. He's a lawyer on intellectual property stuff, patent law. We keep in touch.

What were your favorite Portland-area restaurants growing up? How about now?

**Avie Tevanian:** In those days, we almost never ever went to restaurants. We never did stuff like that, not back in those days.

(Herbert Tevanian: A generation before that, in Little Armenia, we had the Armenian Coffee House. They served grape leaves, powdered coffee they had to boil. My aunt used to read her coffee. She was wacko.)

Did friends and associates in Westbrook predict disaster when you got so

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hung up on computers? Did anybody 'warn' you about them?

**Avie Tevanian:** The only warning I got was from some of my relatives when I went to Carnegie-Mellon for grad school, because I was already accepted at MIT and Stanford. People in my family said, 'Are you crazy? You've been accepted at MIT in computer science and you're not going?' But I knew what I wanted to do, and Carnegie-Mellon was where things were happening.

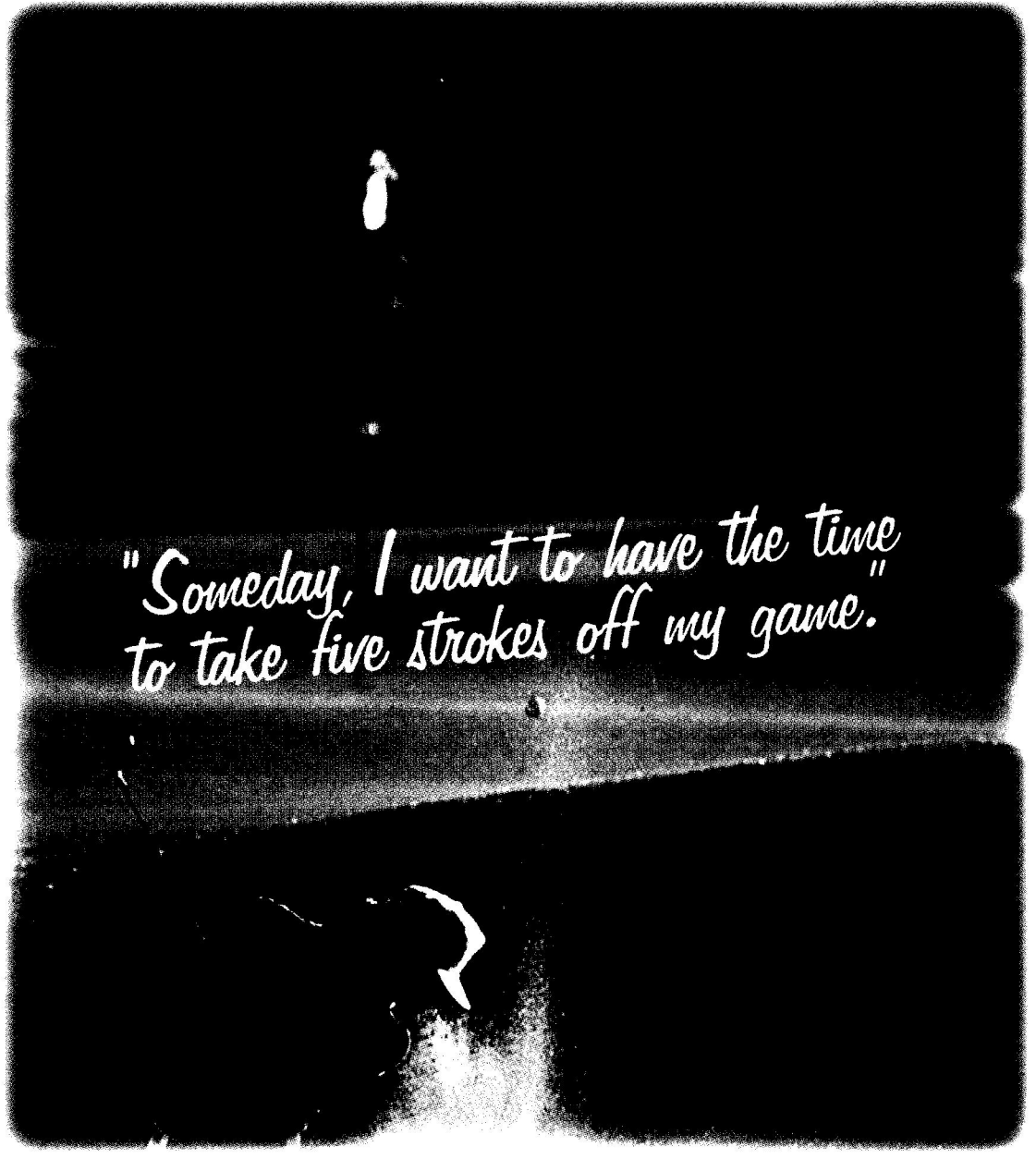
What was undergraduate school like? What did you major in? Was there any flash of recognition at 2 a.m. that let you believe that software design would be your calling?

**Avie Tevanian:** That happened way back before college. I knew I really loved computers the first days I saw a computer at Westbrook High. They pulled me aside on orientation day because I was really good at math and showed me some things. I fell in love with it. When I was in high school, computers were something to tinker with, not a possible career. If you were a math major, the assumption was you'd become a statistician or something like that. Through college, things began to change, and I thought I'd become programmer in the trenches somewhere. Then, I got accepted at grad school, and things began to pick up.

Deep in the night at undergraduate and graduate school, did you have any unusual studying habits? Did you play classical music in the background? Any tips for young students now?

**Avie Tevanian:** In undergrad school I did something strange—I studied with TV in the background. I remember they had a lab that was mostly for grad students, but they let me in. For computers back then, they had Xerox Altos, which later inspired the Macintosh, and I'd write games while watching TV. I'd write my own games, and I created my own versions of Defender and Missile Command as an exercise. My Macintosh versions of those two games are still out there, free on the public domain. Missile Command's actually not too bad – it teaches valuable lessons about survivability in a nuclear holocaust.

You designed the Mac versions of



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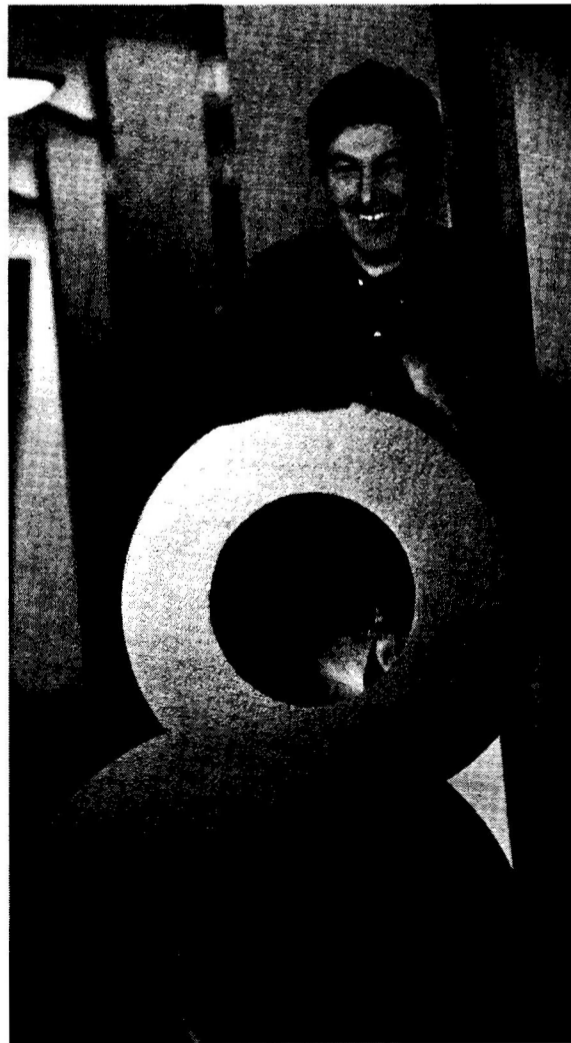
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**Defender and Missile Command? Those are seminal early games, aren't they? Young gamers must consider you the inventor of chess and checkers. When did you buy your first computer, and what was it?**

**Avie Tevanian:** It was a Macintosh, in 1984. I was at Carnegie-Mellon. I bought it to use at home.

**When did you first lay eyes on Steve Jobs?**

**Avie Tevanian:** That would have been in roughly 1986 or 1987, when I was out here on a business trip with my graduate advisor. He had just formed NeXT, and he invited us to have lunch at the NeXT headquarters at Palo Alto. He was world famous by then, but he seemed like a regular guy. The funny thing was, he thought he had already met me. He was certain of it. I told him I would have known if he'd already met me. Lunch continued, and he was talking about using some of the technologies we were working on at Carnegie-Mellon. Listening to him, it be-



came clear to me that I'd finish up my Ph.D. and graduate so that I could go west

and work in that kind of environment. At the end of the meeting he asked me again if I was sure we hadn't met.

**Working so closely with such a mercurial talent—have you ever been angry at him? Tell me a few examples of some of the ticks he has, or strange habits, or funny stories of what it's like working with him.**

Because of the way our industry works, there's lots of issues on strategies and that kind of stuff. We have opinions and differences, we work late, and yeah, we argue sometimes. It's the nature of the work we do. But we're able to get a lot done.

**You've been tapped to make speeches at MacWorld conventions and other computer comfests. Your profile keeps getting higher and higher. As Vice President for Engineering, you're essentially the number two creative person at Apple now, with Steve Jobs saying that turning Apple around is "like turning a tanker." It's well documented that he prefers the work at Pixar, the computer**

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animation company that created the movie "Toy Story," because it turns like a sportscar. Are you being groomed for an even higher position with all these speeches? Is your role changing?

**Avie Tevanian:** It depends on how you measure it. Out of necessity I have to do keynote conferences, and I've done enough now that I'm very comfortable with speaking to large groups of people. I could (and do) speak literally every week. I've been doing this for a long time, and they're all the same. Because I'm introducing new products like OS-8, a MacWorld Conference is just one more thing to do.

Macintosh cultists say that Windows 95 is like some "flimsy basement paneling" hammered up to hide DOS, the real operating system, while a Macintosh's operating system is a graphic user interface from the ground up. Millions of people recognize this and swear by Macs. But why can't Apple make more people understand how much more fundamentally elegant Macs are?

**Avie Tevanian:** Part of the problem is a marketing issue. Apple went down a failed strategy to replace the Macintosh OS with the Copeland operating system. Everyone lost sight of the fact that the original Mac operating system was pretty good. People lost sight of what's good and what's *really* good. We're doing something about that now with OS-8

**What was it like at NeXT?**

**Avie Tevanian:** Things were very different. With no joke intended, it was like an apples to oranges comparison. I knew absolutely everybody in the entire company.

**What computer languages have you spoken, in order, from your early days?**

**Avie Tevanian:** Basic, PDP-11 console machine language, TI-59 calculators, Olivetti cash registers, Fortran, Pascal, C, C++, Objective C, Snowball, P-11, a little bit of Cobal.

**How about Armenian? Do you know**

**a lot about the early days your family spent in Portland?**

**Avie Tevanian:** I don't know a lot about that in particular. I have a living grandmother in Westbrook. She's getting up there in the years now. They were teenagers when they came here, and we're very proud of them. I see her whenever I'm in Maine.

**How do you get to your family home in Westbrook, where you grew up?**

**Avie Tevanian:** Coming from Portland on Brighton Avenue, you pass McDonald's, go one mile down Main Street, turn down Tolman Street, and then you hit Deerhill Circle, No. 127.

**Tell us about your family.**

**Avie Tevanian:** I have a wife, Nancy, and an 18-month old son, Zachary. I met Nancy through a friend at work. She was working in sales in the software industry, living in Orange County, but after we fell in love, she and I didn't believe in long distance

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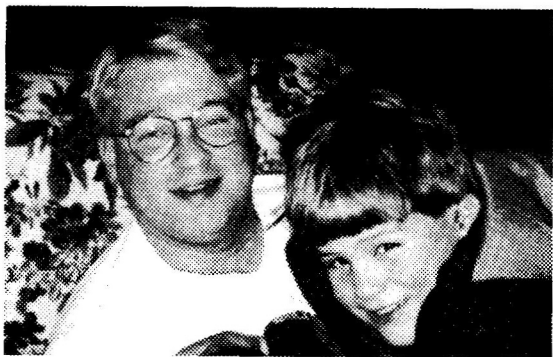
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How does she like Maine?

**Avie Tevanian:** Overall, she likes it a lot. We took her out waterskiing. She's been to Maine many times, but it's not like it's a real vacation where you stay at a hotel and have room service, because we stay in the family camp, so she's visiting in-laws then in a rustic atmosphere, with a new baby.

What's a typical day for you?

**Avie Tevanian:** I wake up at 7, don't usually have breakfast. I work on my computer at home, take a shower, drive to work. I'm home for dinner. I don't program any more. I can get a lot more done by directing other people on how to do that. Programming is an intimate, elegant affair where you have to spend a lot of time just thinking about one particular thing, and I don't have lots of time to devote to individual elements—it's more a sense of coordinating the whole. My work's based on e-mail from designers that I'm coordinating. During the day I'm in meetings.

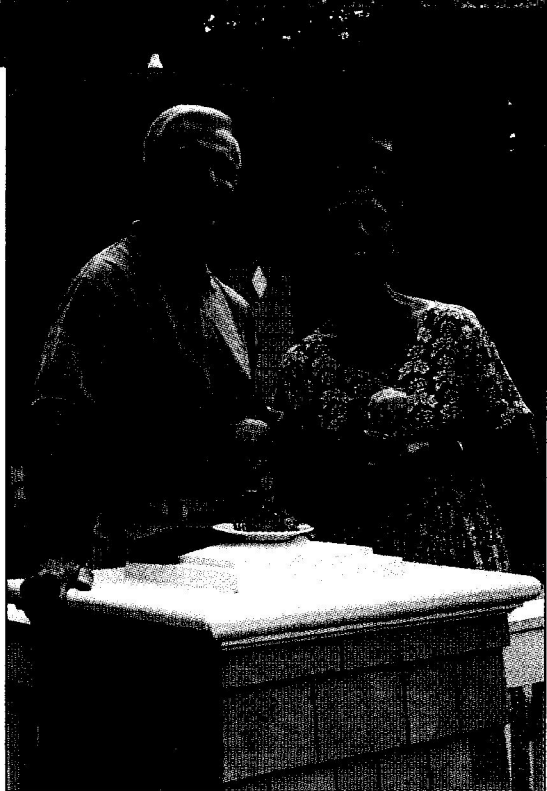
If you agree that Macintosh started out with the better operating system, what was the biggest error Apple committed? What's the biggest missed opportunity?

**Avie Tevanian:** I'm not smart enough to know that answer. There was probably a whole number of things that went wrong.

Yesterday I wanted to buy a 2.1 gigabyte external hard drive for Macintosh, and I had to order them from MacWarehouse. If these had been IBM-based products, I could have driven over to Staples and bought them. What's the story there? At Staples I could buy 20 different printers for an IBM but only one or a grudging two for my Macintosh. Since Microsoft is strictly software driven, and you're a software guy, do you think hardware is what was keeping Apple down?

**Avie Tevanian:** I don't know if that's quite a fair statement. Microsoft has a virtual monopoly position.

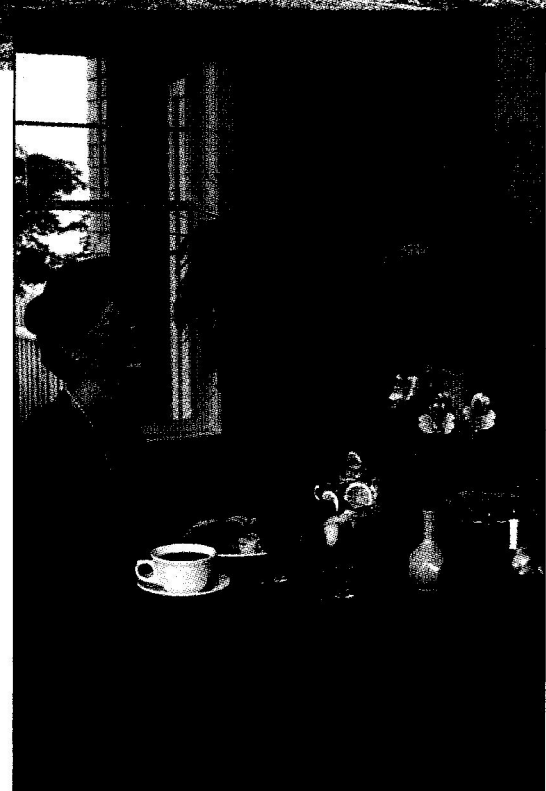
When I called your brother Alan over at West-Port Marine, he laughed and



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said, 'Oh, you want to speak to the golden boy!' Is there a lot of good-natured kidding between you and your family?

**Avie Tevanian:** (Laughs) Oh, yeah, did he? We get along great. We don't tend to joke but we do have a lot of fun.


Why do you have to live in Silicon Valley? We poor consumers have always been told that computers are supposed to free us to have flexible hours and home offices, and we've finally accomplished that. Now we see you guys all clustered in Silicon Valley, shooting up property values. What gives?

**Avie Tevanian:** I do probably a total of 3-4 work a day at home, morning, evening, weekends, all electronically. I'm at my office 9-10 hours a day in meetings with co-workers, often as a result of morning e-mail, so it's a mix, definitely an improvement over the past. Still, with a creative team of engineers, in some cases there's no substitute for face-to-face contact.

What products out there can people buy that you've designed?

**Avie Tevanian:** Beyond Defender and Missile Command for Mac in 1984, there's Unix's latest 4.4 version, Berkeley has a lot of my code in it that I wrote back at school, and some of the things I've done at Apple, hidden deep down in bowels of the system programs.

What kind of car do you drive, and what computer do you use at home?

**Avie Tevanian:** A 1997 platinum Audi A8, and a Powerbook 3400. 

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