



TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET

Jef Raskin, 61; Led the Team That Created User-Friendly Apple Macintosh Computer

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Jef Raskin, the software developer and renaissance man behind Apple Computer Inc.'s pioneering Macintosh personal computer, died on Saturday of pancreatic cancer, his family said. He was 61.

Raskin died at his home in Pacifica, south of San Francisco, his son, Aza, said Monday.

Raskin joined the fledgling Apple as employee No. 31 in 1978 after graduating from the State University of New York at Stony Brook with degrees in math and philosophy and earning a master's degree in computer science at Penn State University. At Apple, he first worked as manager of publications and later became head of the team developing the Macintosh computer.

Coming at a time when computers were driven by text menus and complicated commands that had to be memorized, the Macintosh was the first to successfully use the now-familiar "graphical user interface" featuring icons and windows on the computer screen.

Besides overseeing the development, Raskin is considered responsible for the machine's drag-and-drop feature, a user-friendly innovation later adopted by other computer operating systems, including Microsoft Windows.

“He always had an incredible intuition for what computers could do for people,” said Aza Raskin, a math and physics student at the University of Chicago. “He’d challenge engineers who wanted to design computers around processors, and he’d say ‘No, design them around people.’ ”

Raskin named the project for his favorite kind of apple, and the name Macintosh lives on in the Power Mac, iMac and Mac mini computer sold by Apple today.

But Raskin felt Apple co-founder Steve Jobs was muscling in on the Macintosh project and resigned from the company in 1982, two years before the Macintosh was released. Raskin and Jobs -- who recently received treatment himself for a less-virulent form of the same cancer -- reconciled and communicated frequently in recent months, said Jennie Bourne, a filmmaker who is making a documentary about Raskin and interviewed him extensively.

“He couldn’t sit in a chair without analyzing everything around him and how it works,” Bourne recalled. “In some of our interviews he’s analyzing the switches on an electric blanket or the Roomba mobile vacuum cleaner. He’s always analyzing [to determine] if things are serving the functions they’re supposed to.”

After leaving Apple, Raskin formed his own company, Information Appliance, and developed a computer called the Canon Cat, with backing from Canon Inc. It sold only 20,000 copies before Canon ended its support.

His latest project was “Archy,” a computer interface designed to operate similarly on Windows, Apple or other operating systems.

Raskin was known as an accomplished musician and artist.

He performed on the recorder, rebuilt and installed an entire Swiss pipe organ in his home and taught electronic music and other subjects at UC San Diego before joining

Apple.

He also created works of sculpture that reflected his sense of humor, such as a piece of glass decorated with suction-cup darts, which he called “Objet Dart.”

Some of his work was shown at New York’s Museum of Modern Art.

Raskin, who dropped the second F from his first name early in his career, insisted that his children call him Jef, to underscore that he was their friend as well as their father.

In addition to his son, he is survived by his wife, Linda Blum, and daughters Aviva, Aenea and Rebecca.

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