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## Joint Closing Session

### Severe Tire Damage's Stupid MBone Tricks -A Lecture/Demonstration

Summary by Idajeon M. Fisher  
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This year all three USENIX tracks—Refereed Papers, Invited Talks, and USELINUX Business—shared a common closing session. This year's ceremony featured the band Severe Tire Damage. The band began its musical career under another name with a different collection of people. Originally, all members were employed at DEC, but over the years the band's members have changed as often as its name.

Severe Tire Damage entertained USENIX participants for an hour and a half, alternating between playing live music—the lyrics of which usually had a humorous technical slant—and describing its member's collective experiences that led to becoming the band it is today.

For up-to-date information on Severe Tire Damage, check out their "2 k3w1 4 u" Web site at <<http://www.std.org>>.

## Report on the ACM97 Conference: The Next 50 Years of Computing

Summary by Peter H. Salus  
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ACM's celebration of its semi-centennial began last year in Philadelphia, the site of ENIAC (the first electronic computer, 1946). But when ACM puts on a bash, it's a bash. So the year ended with a five-day festivity in San Jose (March 1-5). There was the culmination of the international programming contest (lots of teams from all over), an exhibition that would turn UniForum or Internet World green with envy, a two-and-a-half day program of presentations, and enough food and drink that I spent under \$70 in five days.

### Sunday

I spent most of Sunday at the exposition—which was open to the public free (Monday and Tuesday the place was full of kids from about 7 to 18, just what ACM and its corporate sponsors intended). I'm serious, I the pedant who would spin through the late UNIX Expo in two hours of carping.

For me the highlights were a "rogues' gallery" of the greats: Bell, Engelbart, Cerf, Kahn, von Neumann, etc., with photos by Bachrach, brief bios, and a vast number of *objets trouvés*: a hand-wired bit of yellow Ethernet; an Alto; an Altair; an

Apple I; etc., etc. In the hall proper, where the theme was that of an archaeological dig in 2047, there was Zuse's Plankalkuel (lent by the Nixdorf Museum); a 1955 Burroughs; a VAX 750 (both from the Computer Museum's historical collection); an excellent video on chip history by Intel; a lot of interesting stuff from SGI and a number of universities (CERT, RIT, Michigan, the Media Lab, and Waterloo caught my eye). Coco Conn and Zane Vella (Digital Circus) were there, as was Steve Roberts and Winnebiko II (though he wanted to talk about his Microship Project).

Off in one corner were three enormous video screens, with sofas, beanbag chairs, and tiered bleachers, running four hours of SIGGRAPH stuff: Newshole, Blit, two shorts from the Pacific group (Tom DiFanti, Lou Katz, all that crowd), and tons more; I spent two solid hours after lunch planted there watching stuff I hadn't seen for over a decade. Then I went to change and go to the awards banquet.

I missed the whole session on "Copyright and the Net."

The banquet was delightful, ACM not wanting any of us to miss out on a treat. There was a bomb scare, and we were evacuated to the chilly outdoors while dogs and police took over the ballroom. Luckily it was just some nut, and we resumed the banquet after 45 minutes in the freezer. I won't enumerate the honorees, as I'm sure that CACM will list them all.

### Monday

ACM President Chuck House welcomed us; Program Chair Bob Metcalfe declared the bridge open; MC James Burke was pleasant, witty, and somewhat acerbic.

The first presenter was Gordon Bell. Bell spoke about the "Laws of Prediction," pointing out that when Thomas Watson saw a need for five computers worldwide (in 1943) he wasn't being foolish: "Watson had no history." Bell stated that he likes to have three data points to make a short-range (3-5 year) prediction; Watson had none. Aiken had not yet built the first electro-mechanical computer; Eckert and Mauchly would only finish ENIAC in 1946; Wilkes had not even begun thinking about EDSAC. Bell told us, "In the short run, bet on the pessimist; in the long run, on the optimist."

Burke, in MC fashion, provided *entr'actes*: each of us was provided with a paddle with red and green reflectors, which were to be held up to "vote." They were counted photoelectrically. I won't give all the queries, but I'll supply enough so that you get the flavor. Here, we began with:

- Will virtual reality eliminate all other entertainment by 2047? (91% no)
- By 2047 will the computer be used to keep people under observation? (91% yes)