A mostly true story about the TI-83

by Josh Spilker

A box of TI-83 calculators. Mechanical and computational. The box is in a store, or what once was or maybe still is a store; its natural land use code is I-10 industrial or R-2 residential or RH-5 retail. Whatever those classifications, the owner has deemed the store to be storage--a human bird's nest of mixed-use paper, recyclable goods and dull white refrigerators with brownish mold in their corners, their nooks, their crannies and the only shoppers are crooks and grannies and me.

Nooks and crannies. First heard the phrase from my grandmother explaining how and where to clean. Maybe cleaning the bathroom, maybe cleaning my ears. Maybe cleaning grease between the gas cap and the oil cap on the lawn mower. This time of cleaning nooks and crannies must have been before the time of the TI-83 calculator. I had left the surrounding area of grandmother's house then--only to return each summer for quick formal visits where doing yardwork or cleaning or chopping wood or picking collard greens was deemed wasteful since we could only be together for a short time and that short time was best used watching Jeopardy and memories were not made only recalled.

Scratch that. We didn't recall any memories only trivia and we could not remember where or how that trivia was made or how it weaseled its way into our mind. No, we didn't remember the making of trivia only the trivia itself.

At that time in my life, I was in the possession of a TI-83 graphing calculator. Ms. Svabek demanded one for her class, the Ms. Svabek whose hair looked like a bird's nest at the height of the popularity of

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The Simpsons television show. Someone drew a caricature of Ms. Svabek with a bird in her hair, as if her hair was actually a nest and a nest it was of trigonometry and algebra 2 and even a made-up discipline called Trysics, a horrible combination of Trigonometry and Physics, an english major's worse nightmare, and where the desired instrument was not a good brain, but a TI-83. Programmed applications included "Drug Wars" and "Tic-Tac-Toe" and these were essential to keep our brains off Trysics.

Amazing things the TI-83 can and could do like graph floating radian degrees in connected sequential horizontal order, or at least that's what came up when I punched a random button just now, as I never really learned how to operate the TI-83; I only learned that Kmart and Office Depot and Walmart and Office Max make a killing off of these, and the only thing I learned was how to hand over a debit card and receive my TI-83, a skill I'm still perfecting with the TI-83 as it resides in my own personal storage drawer of mixed-use paper, recyclable goods and coupons, my own personal bird's nest of which the TI-83 is an integral part. And the only time the TI-83 sees the light of day is when I'm rectifying my debit card purchases at such places as Kmart, Office Depot, Walmart, and Office Max, to make sure everything comes out even and good and perfect, a skill never learned in Trysics, only in "Drug Wars."