

Inter-Office Memorandum

To	SSL, SPG	Date	May 17, 1979
From	A Notetaker	Location	Palo Alto
Subject	My First Transcontinental Trip	Organization	PARC/SSL

XEROX

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Introduction

Please let me introduce myself, I am "Hankshaw", one of the first Notetakers to be completed. I just returned from my first transcontinental journey and I want to tell you about it.

You see, some folks in California wanted to show me off (along with my sister "Batteries") to Xerox people in Webster, Henrietta, Leesburg, and Ann Arbor. Being quite young, Batteries and I had never been east of the PSA flight path, and so we were a bit apprehensive about the hazards of transcontinental travel. To make the situation worse, our porters, Doug Fairbairn and Larry Tesler, thought it would be interesting to see how rugged we were, and so subjected us to rougher handling than we would have liked. Here's what happened, blow by blow.

Wednesday, May 9

Things started out well enough. Barbara Baird and Doug strapped us onto luggage carriers and wheeled us through PARC to Barb's station wagon. We were gently taken off the racks and loaded into the wagon, handle-side-up. Suddenly we were surrounded by luggage, the motor started, and we were off to San Francisco Airport.

At the airport, we were unloaded from the wagon and placed on the carriers again, handle-up. Barb drove off and left us stranded in the airport driveway until our porters, with luggage in their hands and on their backs, tilted our carriers and pulled us to safety inside the air terminal.

No sooner were we on the check-in line but an airline employee came over and told Doug we were "too big" to be considered "carry-on luggage". Saying we were too big was insult enough, but calling a computer "luggage" -- really! I wanted to squeal through my built-in speaker, but alas, I wasn't plugged in.

Fortunately for us, Doug refused to let the airline check us. Imagine being tossed into, around, and out of a luggage compartment. How uncivilized. We Notetakers are capable of playing fine music and displaying fine art; we won't be tossed around like rucksacks.

The employee said Doug should take up the matter with the flight agent at the gate. This turned out to be a victory for our side, because the people at the gate, upon seeing us arrive there with boarding passes, assumed that the employee at the check-in line must have approved us as carry-on items.

Once inside the plane, we were removed from our carriers and brusquely shoved into a carry-on luggage compartment, handle-up. Soon, the door of the compartment closed and it got dark. The flight lasted for hours. Borrrring! At least Batteries and I had each other for company. The ride was smooth; we only rocked a bit and bumped each other gently.

When the plane landed in Cleveland, our porters retrieved us, carried us off the plane, loaded us back on our carriers, and took us for a fun ride through the airport. Some bystanders asked who we were, and Doug said "electronic test equipment". I was shocked at the insinuation, until I realized that we Notetakers are not yet cleared for revelation outside Xerox. So I didn't output a word to contradict Doug.

When no people were looking, Doug took Batteries off her carrier, popped the keyboard off, attached the keyboard cable to the mainframe, and turned on the DC power switch. Presto! Her screen cleared and the disk drive chattered happily. My sister sat in a loop waiting for a disk to load, but our disks were all packed away in a suitcase, so she couldn't show off any programs. Doug and Larry raved about the first test of a Notetaker in an airport, but that didn't cheer Batteries up much. (I won't even tell you how I felt; having no battery pack, they didn't even try to power me up! Oh, well; I guess one can't expect to get turned on in Cleveland.)

Soon we were on another plane. This time, I got to ride under an aisle seat in front of Doug, but Batteries got shoved to the back of the carry-on luggage compartment, at the suggestion of a stewardess. Leaving her there turned out to be a mistake, because no luggage was beside her and some time during the flight, she fell over. We don't know when it happened exactly, because we don't have real-time clocks. (Not having real-time clocks has one advantage though: we don't get jet lag.)

I fit just fine under the aisle seat, with my handle towards the window, four of my little feet facing down and four facing the aisle. My aisle feet stuck out maybe just a little past the seat, but not enough for the stewardesses on that flight -- or any other -- to complain. If I had been under the middle seat or the window seat, there would have been even more room, but it would have taken a bit more sliding around on the rug to get me there from the aisle.

I did cramp Doug a bit, since I stuck out several inches behind the seat back. But Doug loves me as if I were his own baby, so he didn't complain. I rode under seats all the rest of the trip, and sometimes, someone's stocking feet would rest on my top cover. Very intimate.

Our rental car at Rochester was a Datsun B-210 that seemed to have less horsepower than we, and not much space in the hatch either. But we fit in anyway, along with all the luggage: a large rucksack, a garment bag, a small suitcase, and a briefcase. We headed for our hotel, and got another one of those fun elevator rides. Every time an elevator accelerates or decelerates, my heat sinks.

In the hotel room, Doug switched Batteries on and inserted a disk. Alas! Smoke began to pour out of the rear of her cabinet, and she screamed, "Hankshaw, help!". The stench of smoldering plastic filled the room, and I feared for my sister's life. But Doug, having taken First Aid training, knew to switch off the power quickly before the damage spread any further.

Our porters went out to dinner, but I stayed behind to console Batteries. I was sure her damage was caused by falling over in the carry-on luggage compartment. How callous of those people to leave her there unsupported!

After dinner, Doug opened up Batteries' cabinet, performed a visual inspection, and probed with a volt/ohmmeter that he had been thoughtful enough to bring along. One melted chip was found in the CRT circuitry. Doug could not explain how such a thing could have happened, since Batteries' power was switched off when she fell.

Thursday, May 10

The next day, we were brought to Webster Research Center. After the melted chip in Batteries was replaced, she mostly worked, except for her CRT. There was no time to figure out what the problem was --WRC starts their presentations at 9:00 a.m. sharp. (That's 6 a.m. Pacific Time; I'm glad I was immune to jet lag.)

We got all spiffed up and set on tables in becoming poses. A hundred people came to see us, and Doug talked about us for a half an hour, showing transparencies through an overhead projector. We sat there on our tables beaming at the audience.

Then our really big moment came. We both got switched on, me running off AC and Batteries running off her battery pack. Her built-in speaker has more volume than mine, so she got to play music: "God, Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and Bach's "Invention". My CRT was the only one working, so I got to do the rest of the demos: "Blits", "Kal", "Keyboard Test", "Tablet Test", "Mouse Test", and "Smalltalk Display".

After the music and the Blits demos, Larry showed part of an LRG film about Smalltalk editing, and he talked about Smalltalk as well as other languages that could be used to program us, i.e., almost any language that has been implemented on an 8080 or 8086, and languages that PARC folks know how to implement, like Mesa. Then the audience came up close to see the other demos. I think they liked us!

Batteries got taken to a lab for emergency treatment, but it was hours before Doug could attend to her. After finding nothing wrong, Doug pulled out her CRT board, pushed it back in, and, Lo!, she worked again. Maybe the board had shaken loose when she had fallen over, or maybe a conductive particle had gotten wedged between some pins and caused a short. We really don't know to this day why she was sick. But, who really cared; all that mattered was that my sister was finally well.

We went to visit Rick Jones, who used to work at PARC, and I got demonstrated to Rick right on his desk. But the people in the room hardly talked about me at all. All they talked about was softball. They don't even take me to games to keep score.

After a very interesting meeting with the Software Group, who were shown a video tape about Smalltalk, we finally got back to our hotel room. Doug wouldn't let us go to sleep until my sister's batteries were charged up and we had both been checked out extensively.

Friday, May 11

In the morning, we went to Henrietta to meet the Lotus software folks. The show was similar to the previous day's, but the audience was much smaller. We both worked flawlessly.

At both WRC and Henrietta, people suggested lots of interesting applications for us. Besides text editing and logic design, we might be used for field testing of copiers, for driving small ROS devices, and for monitoring laboratory test equipment.

That evening, we headed back to the airport. Doug and Larry took a very long way around. They knew they were supposed to turn left at the intersection of Interstate 94 and New York 47, but they didn't realize that those highways intersect twice, once east of Rochester and once west. Despite the detour, we made it to the airport two hours early.

At Rochester Airport, I learned to ride my luggage carrier up wheelchair ramps as a way to avoid being carried up stairways. They never rolled me on a stairway, but they did roll me on and off curbs, albeit slowly. I also was rolled over grates, rough asphalt, and other unpleasant surfaces.

One thing we noticed being wheeled around was that we kept bumping into the rear leg of our porter. (You don't usually think of people as having rear legs, but when people walk, one leg or the other is almost always in the rear.) Notetakers think that bumping into legs is fun, but apparently legs don't like bumping into Notetakers, because our luggage carrier position was soon changed to handle-sideways, i.e., with our long dimension vertical.

While waiting at the airport, Batteries and I learned that Doug's destination was Leesburg, via Washington, D.C., while Larry's was Ann Arbor, via New York City and Bloomington, Indiana. Doug wanted to bring Batteries with him, and Larry wanted to take me. "Bon voyage, Hankshaw" were my sister's last words as I rolled on to the plane. "See you back in California", I replied.

Laguardia Airport brought new experiences. I was wheeled deftly onto the step of a moving escalator (Larry learned this trick from a stewardess whom he was studiously observing). I was loaded for the first time into the baggage compartment of a bus, laying down on my side, still strapped to my collapsed luggage carrier. New York bus drivers do not have much consideration for their passenger's comfort: I slid back and forth in my compartment whenever we rounded a corner. But I didn't slide much, and my carrier took the bumps, so I stopped worrying and enjoyed the trip.

At our destination, a man who said he was a cab driver grabbed me from Larry's hands and started running with me to a cab. He even hefted me a few inches into the air. I thought I'd fall to the ground, but he caught me deftly. At the cab, he tossed me in and Larry's rucksack followed. "Where are you headed", he asked. "St. Moritz Hotel", replied Larry. "That will be \$1.95", said the man. Larry gave him \$2 and the man vanished. Guess what. He wasn't the driver of the cab. Welcome to New York City, hotbed of hustlers. Larry had to pay another \$2 when we reached the hotel, and I laughed the rest of the afternoon.

Saturday, May 12

Larry spent the afternoon walking all over Manhattan tasting pizza and knishes, and spent the evening evaluating bars and dancing establishments as possible acquisitions for Xerox. I rested all day in my hotel room, listening to horns honk and sirens howl.

Sunday, May 13

It was raining when we left the hotel, so we were careful not to expose my vents to water. I hope someone gives me a custom-fitted leather coat for Christmas. I'd also like a motion-activated boot switch that can be enabled when I'm left alone. That way, if a stranger tries to abscond with me, I can squeal "Help, I'm being stolen" through my built-in speaker.

We flew to Chicago and then took a shuttle bus to O'Hare Commuter Terminal to meet our Allegheny flight. There we discovered that our trip to Bloomington was to be an hour and a half long on a 19-seat two-engine Metro II. My first time on a prop plane! The seats had no space underneath them, so I was put into a very small baggage compartment. Larry joined four other passengers, the pilot and the copilot, for a joy ride to Bloomington. Larry said the cloud formations over Indiana were awesome to behold, but I couldn't see anything.

Monday, May 14

After Larry led a colloquium on Smalltalk at the Computer Science Department of Indiana University, we caught another Allegheny Commuter plane, this one a Beechcraft 99 with only 12 seats. The baggage and I were piled in the rear of the cabin. The plane, its 2 crew members and 3 passengers took off in a spectacular thunderstorm. It wasn't really too rough, because the pilots flew *under* the storm. We had a good view of the farm land below.

Since we never had to attain altitude, it took only fifteen minutes to reach Indianapolis. I felt fine, but Larry looked a little shaky. He popped some pills, and seemed almost normal by the time our next flight departed for Detroit. Fortunately, it was a 727 jet.

Because of the United Airlines strike, American had sold out all its coach seats and we had to ride First Class, which has a different seat arrangement than Coach. I couldn't fit right next to the aisle, so I went between the chair supports, beneath the armrest separating the seats. I wasn't in the way of either Larry or the passenger in the window seat.

In Detroit I took a "limo" van to Ann Arbor. Usually when I was moved to a vehicle during this trip, I was taken off my luggage carrier, but sometimes detachment wasn't necessary. To get back on my carrier, it had to be unfolded and I had to be strapped on with a bungee cord in such a way that I wouldn't get my paint scratched by the hooks at the ends of the cord.

My porters had two different ways of strapping me in. One way was to loop the cord around the back of the carrier handle; it was simple, but didn't allow the carrier handle to be collapsed for short carries up stairs and into vehicles. The other way was to loop the cord around the strut below the carrier handle; although slightly less stable, the carrier handle could now collapse, and besides, there was a convenient place to tuck books and tickets where the cord wrapped closely around me on top.

Larry carried the book *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, by Tom Robbins, and named me after the main character in the book, Sissy Hankshaw, the world's greatest hitchhiker. Like me, she hitched rides all over the country without ever knowing where she was headed. I won't tell you what else she did; it's unsuitable material for a technical memo.

Tuesday, May 15

I was taken by cab to University Microfilms International (UMI) in Ann Arbor, where I was shown to people working with the Disc-o-Text system developed by EOS. They were very enthusiastic and suggested a lot of interesting applications for machines like me. We might be used for thesis composition in universities, editing and layout at UMI, typesetting of mathematical and musical notation, a dynamic textbook for teaching music theory, and optical music recognition for republishing ancient works.

Wednesday, May 16

Finally, we headed back to California on a 707 jet. I went through an X-ray machine for the fifth time. Some attendants like me on my carrier, some like me off. Some like me standing up, some laying down. Larry said my X-ray picture looks funny.

In the SamTrans bus from SFO to Palo Alto, I shared a seat with some luggage. On the local bus from El Camino to Foothill Expressway, I rode on the floor in front of Larry's legs. Then he put me on the carrier, his rucksack on his back, and wheeled me the last half mile up the hill to my home at PARC.

I arrived in sound condition. Except for a fussy head load mechanism in my disk drive, I never failed to work the whole trip. My sister Batteries' story was different: besides the trouble in Rochester, I hear her power supply failed while being charged in Leesburg. Fortunately, her batteries were charged up enough that Doug was able to demonstrate her anyway, without the power cord. Batteries' batteries saved the day.

Conclusion

I was made to travel, and have shown that I travel well in many ground and air vehicles. However, I think I'm too heavy and delicate to ride on a bicycle, and even motorcycles scare me a little. If I go on a boat, I won't mind the rocking, but I'd better not get wet.

I hope that relating my traveling experiences to you will help other Notetakers to have safe journeys in the years ahead.