

VOODOO COMPUTER HEALER

By Jerry J. Davis

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I consider myself lucky that I discovered everything I knew about life and the physical universe was wrong. Lucky not only because of the discovery, but also because I was young when the revelation occurred. Had I been older I would have rejected it as nonsense.

Music, attitude, and your point of view can change things beyond belief. An energy, a positive force, can be generated. Magic can be done.

Listen to this!

There was a computer store in Cameron Cove, California --- part of a major chain --- that had a golden year. It became a sort of Camelot. Through the random processes of physics, the right elements just happened to fall in place at the right time.

Remember, given enough time the unlikely will occur.

At the time I was hired, there were four others working there:

Janet, the receptionist --- a bright, cheerful mother who's kids had grown old enough for her to go back to work. That she needed the extra money was beside the point . . . she wanted to go back to work, she was happy about it.

There was Nick, the manager --- an optimistic ex-used car salesman from New Jersey. He was a friendly, generous person. Easy-going. Definitely not the management type.

There was also Bob, a slick, go-for-the-throat salesman with the remarkable ability of not being sleazy. He was just doing it to work his way through college. It wasn't his life, so he wasn't bitter about it.

Now Steve, he could have been my brother. We even looked alike. Same hair, same beard, except that he had brown hair and I have red. He was a salesman too, but he was the nice-guy type who relied on the customers who liked to do business with him.

Now here were the elements: Janet, Nick, Bob and Steve. And myself. And music.

It started with the music. Nick liked music, and we always had the stereo pumping the B-52's or the Talking Heads through the

store's sound system. Living, jumping music, full of positive energy.

Janet had never really heard these groups before, and she would smile when we played them. "I like this!" she'd say. "Who is this?" She said this all the time, with each new group we introduced to the store.

When I first came to work there was a mountain of dead computers to fix, a really bad back load of work left over from my predecessor --- a negative person, from what I'd heard about him. A real ogre. Hated customers, hated fellow employees, loved only his computer --- and only his computer. He now makes six figures programming for the Department of Defense. You know --- space based weapon systems?

So all these inert, dead computers he left behind had owners who needed them back. Needed them living, working, running their businesses and doing their taxes. Entertaining their children. And they would call everyday, begging for their machines back. Screaming at me! Calling me names! Sucking away all my positive energy and leaving me dry like a sack of old sticks.

When the music played, however, it was different. Music made things flow. Music lubricated things, eased frictions, speeded work. I started catching up.

Janet would walk into the tech room every once in a while just to watch and smile. Nick would wander back to get away from the pressures of his job, and stand there listening to the music. His feet would start tapping, then his head would sway. At one point he began to mimic playing the drums. When Steve saw this, he came back and began playing the "air guitar" --- unlike myself, these guys both had musical backgrounds --- so "air guitars," "air drums," and jam sessions were part of their everyday lives. It was inevitable. Inevitable! Steve and Nick jamming, and I'd start to dance. Janet laughed, thinking this was the greatest thing she'd ever seen, and I said, "Come on! Dance with me!"

"You guys are crazy!"

"Come on!"

Her grin straightened out. She thought a moment. Then she let go and we were dancing, dancing, bodies gyrating to that spring-gone-haywire beat, bouncing and jumping and laughing about it all. Steve playing that phantom guitar, Nick slamming out that beat on the tech bench with pencils. Bob, hearing all the laughter, excused himself from a customer and came back to see what was happening. His face lit up like a sunny day at the beach. "Yes!" he said. "Yes! I like it! I like working here." He went

back to the sales floor and sold a big, fat computer system.

It was energy we were generating, living positive energy. It flowed out of that tech room and filled the whole store. The building vibrated with it. It was alive, living.

Now, computers are neutral things. Not living yet not dead, not smart but full of thought. Not its own thoughts --- our thoughts. The thoughts of the user and the thoughts of the programmer. So, depending on who is using it and what program it's running, a computer can become positive or negative.

Over the hours and days of good feelings and good times, the positive energy in that tech room became so intense I could feel it like heat. While the music played and my friends were happy, I worked on those poor, sick, dead computers . . . I felt the energy flowing down my arms, through my hands, and into what I was doing. Spare parts were becoming more and more unnecessary. Things, in their odd electronic ways, were beginning to simply heal.

Nick noticed this first. He wanted to know why my tech room was suddenly so much more profitable. "I'm fixing the boards," I told him, "instead of replacing them."

"You can do that?"

"Yeah!"

He smiled and nodded. Things were looking up. Sales had climbed to an all-time high as well. "Maybe," he said, "maybe we should cut the repair prices down. Do ya think?"

"It wouldn't hurt us," I told him.

"I want to do that," he said. "That'll really make our customer's happy, wouldn't it?"

"Sure."

"Okay. Do it. Start giving them a break." He was happy. He was being nice, and it felt good --- especially since he didn't have to be nice. It irritated him when he had to be nice, but when it was of his own free will, of the genuine goodness of his heart, it felt great. It pumped the positive energy up another notch in the store, as well.

He was right, too --- the customers were happy. Mr. John P. Galmore had been quoted \$350 for his IBM repair, and we only charged him \$220. Wayne Trapper thought it was going to be \$175 to get his laptop back, but it only cost him \$90. Little Jimmy Malcot got his Macintosh repaired for only \$25 instead of \$110. Nick even gave him some games for free.

Two weeks later Jimmy's father came in --- Mr. Malcot of Malcot Industries --- and bought \$350,000 worth of equipment. He did this because of what we had done for his son. Nick was

ecstatic! What we were doing was paying off. Everyone was winning. Everyone felt good!

We had a little party one day after work, celebrating yet another record breaking month. During the party an old man in a sports jacket banged on the front door even though the store was obviously closed. He looked through the window at us with a desperate expression.

Nick let him in. "I'm a writer," the man said to Nick. "The only copy of my novel is on this computer, and the computer stopped working."

Nick swore to himself. "If there's something wrong with your hard drive," Nick told the writer, "your novel may be gone. And when it's gone, it's gone."

The writer looked stricken. "It's the only copy I have."

Now Nick was gritting his teeth and frowning. This sounded like a really bad scene. "You didn't print any of it out or anything?"

"No." The man was on the verge of tears. "I've been working on it for four years. Nothing like this has ever happened."

"Well, we'll get our tech working on it," Nick said. "I can't promise anything, but if anyone can save your novel, he can."

We put it on my work bench and plugged it in. Turned it on. There was a humming sound, and garbage --- looking a lot like Egyptian hieroglyphics --- filled the screen. "It's trying to boot," I said, "but either the main board is damaged or there's scrambled data on the hard drive."

"Oh," Nick said. Everyone had grim expressions. I tried another test with a floppy disk. The computer started and ran through its paces, but as soon as I tried to access the hard drive it came to a halt. More garbage filled the screen. "The trouble is in the hard drive, all right," I said.

More grim faces. The novelist looked like someone had just shot his dog to death. "Oh," is all he could say.

"How long have you been working on this novel?" I asked.

"Years," he said.

"Years?"

"Years and years." His voice was barren and hollow.

I looked at everyone in the room. I looked at Janet. "We need to turn on the music."

"At a time like this?" Steve said.

"Yes. Especially at a time like this."

Bob had a gleam in his eyes. He half-grinned, like he had a secret. I believe he had an inkling of what I had in mind. Bob

went and turned up the stereo, putting on a B-52's album. "Let's go down to the loooooove shack!" shouted the speakers. "Love shack, yeahhh!"

I started dancing. Janet, looking a little perplexed, started dancing with me. Positive energy, I thought. Let me feel it. Let me absorb the music, the dancing. Flow . . . flow . . . warm music, warm dancing. Warm feelings. Even the novelist was smiling. Janet and I gyrated together, generating that energy. Nick tapped on a monitor with a pen, helping the rhythm with a staccato clack clack CLACK! Steve shook his head, saying, "You guys are nuts," but he wasn't disapproving --- he wanted to see something happen. He wanted a miracle.

I felt it growing in me, blossoming. The power was in my arms, in my hands --- they felt like they would glow in the dark. Still rocking with the beat, I danced to the work bench and held onto that computer, held it tight, flooding it. When the moment felt right, I turned it on.

It came up without a glitch.

The novel was there.

From that point on it seemed there would be no stopping us. Business kept growing, mainly because people felt good as soon as they entered the store. Nick felt good and he kept on slashing the prices. I performed miracle after miracle on the tech bench, resurrecting data from the dead, healing ill IC chips, brightening lost CRT's.

It was a cold November day when a college professor brought in an old Apple III CPU, a model that hadn't sold well and was actually quite rare. He'd just walked in and I happened to be out front, and I said, "Let me take that for you." He handed it to me, and I felt the tired old circuits, poorly designed and hastily built. This was more factory defect than breakdown, but the user apparently never knew there was something wrong with it until it quit altogether. The moment I touched it the energy flowed, and by the time I set it down it was fixed.

"Let's plug it in and see what's up," I said.

"It doesn't work at all."

"We've got to start somewhere."

"Now wait, how much is this going to cost?"

"It used to be sixty-five an hour, but for you I'll only charge twenty-five."

"Why?" he asked.

"Why what?"

"Why do I get a lower price?"

"Because . . ." I looked around, thinking up a reason.

"Because we give everyone with orphaned computers a break."

"What do you mean, 'orphaned' computer?"

"That's the term for a computer model abandoned by its manufacturer."

"This model was abandoned?"

"Yes sir, I'm afraid so. Quite a while ago."

He was upset at this news. "Well then, what's the point in fixing it?"

"A working computer is better than a dead computer."

"A worthless computer is worthless if it's working or not."

"It's not worthless if it does what you need it to do."

"It's never done what I need it to do!"

Whew! The negative energy billowed out of this man like an explosion of thick, black smoke. It was creating a hole in the positive energy in the store. I'm treading on eggs here, I thought. "What do you need it to do?" I asked. "Perhaps I can help you."

The man blustered and turned red. "It doesn't work!" he shouted.

"Well, I'll fix it, then we'll get it to do what you want it to do."

"I want it to work!"

Almost all the positive energy in the room was gone. A horrible development! I conjured all the positive energy I had stored up in my body and levitated the professor's computer through the air and into his hands. He grasped it, astonished.

"It's fixed," I told him. "It will now work better than it ever had. It will function perfectly." I smiled, using my last few drops of warmth. "No charge."

"Preposterous!" the man yelled, throwing the machine down onto the floor between us. He turned and took leaping strides out of the store, slamming the glass doors open and high-stepping to his gray BMW. It looked like he was trying to climb steps into the air.

Steve walked to the front and stood with me as the car left the parking lot with tire-squealing sounds. "Wow. I don't think you should have pulled the levitating trick."

"I guess not."

"Looks like he overloaded and locked up."

"Yeah."

"Total systems crash."

"Massive parity errors."

"To the max."

We picked up the pieces of the twice-abandoned Apple and took it back to the tech room. It took 3 days to recharge the store to its former level of positive energy. By the end of those 3 days I had the professor's computer repaired again, but this time it had taken manual board swapping and spare parts. The professor hadn't left a name or number for us to reach him --- in fact, we didn't find out he was a professor until a few days later when the corporate headquarters gave Nick a call. After the call, Nick came back to talk to me.

"That guy called corporate and complained."

"You're kidding!"

"He told them you threw his computer at him."

"No! You're kidding! You're kidding!"

Nick shook his head. "His name is Screwtack, he teaches at the University."

"Oh no!" I was terrified. "You set corporate straight, I hope! I mean, Steve is my witness."

"Yeah, yeah, I told them all that. But they're sending someone down from corp to check us out."

I shrugged. "That can't be bad."

"Naw. Don't worry about it." He laughed. "Business as usual . . . except, don't go levitating anything in front of him."

"No levitating," I said. "I promise."

An unnecessary promise. When the corporate man, Denny, walked into the store he sucked so much of the positive energy away that I could barely work, let alone defy the laws of gravity. The man had such a negative charge he was like an energy hole. The magic drained away in a tearing, silent vortex, spinning into a sad, mortal oblivion.

"Do you always play this music in the store during business hours?" he asked Nick.

"Yeah. It makes a good working environment----"

"Well, that stops right now. This type of music is against corporate policy." Denny peered around with cold, narrow eyes. "We have corporate tapes with encoded subliminal messages that you're supposed to be playing." He looked directly into Nick's eyes, making Nick balk and inch backward. "They encourage customers to spend recklessly and to prevent employee theft."

"I don't really think we----"

"You're not paid to think, only to sell." Cold, cold, cold! Pointy nose, beady eyes. Perfect, stiff, unwrinkled black suit. "Your prices are far below the standard."

"Our sales and gross income have tripled in the last nine months."

"So what. These prices are too low. Use your salesmanship, not sacrifice profit margins. Where's your technician?"

"He's in the back."

I of course was listening in, and had to scramble unseen into the back for them to find me. "You've practically stopped ordering parts," he said to me. No hello, no introduction, or anything. Just blurted out those words, like an accusation of a crime.

"I fix the boards in-store," I told him.

"Component level repair is against corporate policy."

"Look at my profit margin."

"I've seen it. I've also seen that you've cut the hourly service charge."

I glanced at Nick and back. "We're building a large and very loyal customer base," I told him reasonably.

"Your profit margin could be three times as high. From now on, your rate is back up at corporate's standard sixty-five an hour."

"Whatever you say."

"And no more component level repairs. Our studies have shown it as a waste of time and energy."

Suck! Suck! He was sucking away at the magic in the tech room. He was an animated karma vacuum. His cold eyes scanned my equipment and the few computers I still had in for repair. He passed right by the resurrected Apple orphan and zoomed in on my portable stereo. "No music in the tech room," he said.

"What?" This was too much!

"You have a problem with that?"

"No. You do. I have it in my contract that I get music of my choice in the tech room. And no earphones, either --- I get to play it out loud."

"What contract?"

I pulled it out of my file cabinet, waved it defiantly in the man's face. He'd sucked all my positive energy away, leaving me in the negative myself. I was ready for a fight.

Instead of debating it, he turned on Nick. "You entered an employee into a contract?"

"Yes."

"That was pretty irresponsible."

"I don't think so," Nick said. He was ready to fight too. "I don't know where you come off stepping in here and turning everything upside-down. I'm running a very successful store here,

and I'm running it my way."

"You're running it against corporate policy."

"Yeah, well, whatever works. My figures don't lie. Hey, I don't see many of the other stores turning the business like this one."

"This store does not belong to you. You're just an employee here."

"Yeah, well, this employee is doing a damn good job if I say so myself. I'll leave before I ruin my business by adopting your greedy, short-sighted policies."

Nick was given his final check that very week. Denny himself moved in to manage the store. He tore up my contract in my presence, with Bob, Steve, and Janet watching. "If you don't like it, sue me."

During the next few days, Janet and I tried generating positive energy for repairs by chanting the lyrics to our favorite songs. We had a limited success, but then Janet was chewed out and banned from the tech room for "spending too much time chattering."

After work, sometimes Bob, Steve, Janet and I --- all with our collective spouses, Significant Others, and children --- would meet at a little ocean-side pizza place and try to figure out a way to recapture the magic, despite Denny's negative presence. Angry, negative-energy plans were rejected, and all our positive energy plans failed.

Negative energy, it seems, is always stronger than positive energy. Possibly because positive energy has to be generated and exists in limited amounts, while negative energy is as vast and limitless as the universe itself. It's easy to be negative. It takes effort to be positive. And when positive meets negative the positive drains away.

It seems the negative usually wins.

Just look at the world.

We finally figured that the only way to beat the negative is to avoid it, so as a group we all resigned from the store --- and, with sadness, went our separate ways. It didn't matter in the least to Denny, he simply hired more and continued on.

The moral? I don't know. Just generate as much positive energy you can, share it with those you love, and never, never levitate someone's computer unless you know them very well.

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