

July 5th

Victor H. Yngve

Born: July 5, 1920; USA

Died: Jan. 15, 2012

Yngve was one of the early researchers in computational linguistics, and developed COMIT, the first string processing language in the later 1950's. COMIT had a strong influence on later languages, such as SNOBOL [May 19]

One of his first COMIT programs produced random but well-formed sentences, based on the text from the children's book, "The Little Train" (1940), by Lois Lenski.

One outcome of this (apparently frivolous) work was the "depth hypothesis," for which Yngve is probably best known. While calculating the maximum amount of memory required to produce a sentence, he found that even very long sentences seldom had a syntactic depth of more than two or three. Sentences with greater depths were often considered ungrammatical and/or unintelligible.

Juris Hartmanis

Born: July 5, 1928;

Riga, Latvia

Died: July 29, 2022

Hartmanis established the foundations of the field of computational complexity theory with Richard Stearns in a seminal paper from 1965.

They introduced time complexity classes which represents the amount of time (or number of computation steps) that a computer (such as a Turing machine [Nov 12]) would take to solve a certain problem using a given algorithm.

Hartmanis' work on complexity theory was instrumental in establishing computer science as a formal discipline distinct from mathematics, physics, and

electrical engineering, much to the relief of all those involved.

Susan Wojcicki

Born: July 5, 1968;

Santa Clara County, California

Google can be said to have been born in Wojcicki's garage [Sept 7] at 232 Santa Margarita Ave, Menlo Park, after she decided to rent it to Larry Page [March 26] and Sergey Brin [Aug 21] for \$1700 a month. Google now owns the house.



Susan Wojcicki (2013). Photo by TechCrunch Disrupt SF. CC BY 2.0.

Wojcicki became Google's first marketing manager in 1999, and was the product lead for AdWords [Oct 23], AdSense [June 18], DoubleClick, and Google Analytics. She handled the purchase of YouTube [Feb 14] in 2006 and DoubleClick in 2007, and became the CEO of YouTube in Feb 2014.

In 2015, *Time Magazine* described her as "the most powerful woman on the internet."

Wojcicki's first business was selling "spice ropes" door-to-door when she was 11.

Leisure Suit Larry

July 5, 1987

"Leisure Suit Larry" is an adult-themed video game series created by Al Lowe, and published by Sierra [Oct 30]. Each game followed Larry Laffer, a leisure suit-wearing computer programmer in his 40s, in his attempts, usually unsuccessful, to seduce women.

The series had its origins in Sierra's "Softporn Adventure", a 1981 text adventure. When Lowe was asked to update the game, he remarked that it would be difficult as the game had aged so badly that it might as well be wearing a leisure suit.

The first game in the series, "Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards", was released on this day, and went on to win the Software Publishers Award for best adventure game of 1987. It was followed by two sequels before skipping straight to the fifth game because Lowe had promised he wouldn't make a Leisure Suit Larry 4.

Lowe has said of the recent in-name-only sequels, "It was like getting a video from your son's kidnappers. On the one hand you're glad he's still alive, but oh shit what've they done to him!?"

You're a Dog?

July 5, 1993

Peter Steiner's cartoon "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" appeared on page 61 of today's *The New Yorker*. The single panel shows a dog sitting at a computer while talking to another dog about its Internet usage.

The panel has become the most reproduced cartoon from the magazine according to Robert Mankoff, the cartoon editor.

Steiner has said of its popularity: "I feel a little like the person (whoever it is) who invented the smiley face." [Most historians think it was Harvey Ross Ball [Sept 19].]

In a 1996 interview, Jon Postel [Oct 6], said that the cartoon showed that the print media no longer had to explain the Internet every time they used it.

In Oct 2023, the original drawing sold for an astounding \$175,000 to an anonymous bidder who had been trying to buy it from the magazine and the artist since it was first published. It is the highest price ever paid for a single-panel cartoon.

At least one software product, Cyberdog [Feb 16], was inspired by the cartoon.

For more computing cartoons, see [March 12], [April 16], [Aug 23], [Sept 9], [Sept 24], [Oct 17].

First Uber Arrives July 5, 2009

Uber became a pioneer in the sharing economy due to its ride-hailing app which now operates in over 700 cities worldwide.

On this day, UberCab (as it was then called) connected its first rider with a car for a journey across San Francisco.

The company's "creation myth" goes that Garrett Camp had spent \$800 hiring a private driver on New Year's Eve, and had been thinking of ways to decrease the cost of black car services. Another version has Camp and Travis Kalanick stuck out in the snow in Paris, unable to get a cab. This one seems unlikely since Kalanick joined the team after hearing about the ride-hailing idea at the LeWeb technology conference in Dec 2008.

The prototype app was built by Camp, Oscar Salazar and Conrad Whelan, with participation from Kalanick, who'd been brought on as a "mega advisor".

Uber's appeal hit the mainstream in 2012 when the company created UberX, a service that allowed anybody to use their car as a cab.

The "Uber" name is a reference to the German word über,

meaning "above". Friedrich Nietzsche's 1883 text, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," introduced the related concept of the Übermensch, which can be translated as "superman".
