

IS THE ROOT

AT THE TOP OR THE BOTTOM OF THE TREE?

I've been a computer user for a little over a year. The instruments were delivered, in the box, with DOS and Word Perfect already loaded. I'd taken no instruction in working this new toy, but was told by the dealer that there were books enclosed, one for each piece of software, and that they would be sufficient to start me on this new path. I unloaded all the equipment, connected the keyboard, monitor and printer properly and turned it on. Next, I took the DOS book and within a few minutes became convinced that I'd made a big mistake. Either my reading comprehension had suddenly dropped or the writer of the manual had long forgotten what it was like to be a novice. Probably he or she never was a beginner; I'm convinced that certain people come out of the womb with their "computer heads" first. I went through the same experience with the Word Perfect manual. It now became evident that I needed a good deal of help. Fortunately, I went into a major bookstore and discovered a whole section on computers and software. I became quite excited that some authors had anticipated my needs and that books were available for my two programs at a level I could understand. With practice, my facility has grown so that I can copy documents from my hard disc to a floppy and I can move sections of a text from one document to another, and now wonder how I ever got along without a

computer. As a matter of fact, this editorial is being written on my new found friend.

However, one thing bothered me. I could not gain a good understanding of the directory system and consequently of the way sub-directories and files are made. It wasn't that I couldn't create these "folders," but rather that I was uncomfortable with the explanations given. Recently I had occasion to fly the Trump Shuttle out of New York. Donald has provided an impressive number of relatively unknown magazines for his customers. I have taken several interesting magazines in the past and purposely arrived well before flight time to be able to review the collection. One publication, PC Novice, caught my eye. I flipped through it, and by the time I boarded the airplane was convinced that this was a magazine for me. It was clear that its editorial staff choose subjects and have articles written in a way tailored for the "non-power user."

Later that day I read an article in the same magazine under the section of Operating Systems and Environment.¹ It had an illustration that made bells go off in that part of my brain devoted to computers.

I suddenly gained an understanding of the directory system. It was a picture of a tree and superimposed on it was a representation of a computer directory sys-

tem. But the picture had something that none of the books had clearly expressed; the root directory was at the top of the tree. Now, I had always assumed that the root kept the tree in the ground, and any dictionary confirms this. However, only in the world of the computer linguists does it reverse. Even stranger to me is that people either ignore this misuse of the term, or, as I now do, begin to accept it.

As you can see, roots have been on my mind. Consequently, I recalled a conversation with a group of colleagues at a recent meeting. They were complaining that the roots of behavioral vision are being ignored; that few people check and chain, and the basic tenets of Skeffington are being ignored and replaced

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by a different type of optometry. They bemoaned the fact that there was more standardized testing, more incursions into other areas, at the expense of functional optometry.

Although I didn't and still don't agree with them I didn't have a good response. However, now that I've had time to think about it, I think I do. It's based on the fact that I've read and reread a good deal of Skeffington's writings over the past several years and have formed an opinion of his goals and intentions. I believe that he wanted to give us the basis or root of a model and philosophy of vision, but that it didn't end there. I feel that he expected this philosophy to change according to new knowledge and the times, yet always to remain an important part of optometry. I'm convinced he foresaw significant changes in the future. Some 60 years ago he wrote of his belief that the profession should expand its scope of practice; he referred to his frequent statement that "... optometry shall become the group to whom is allocated all eye diagnosis" ... and that "... optometry must take it upon itself to see that any uncomfortable pair of eyes is made comfortable."²

I believe we miscalculate and misrepresent the man if we give the impression that his goal was to maintain the status quo. My understanding is that he dispensed his insights and knowledge to foster growth in optometrists and optometry. He truly gave us our roots. The only question is whether we place them at the top or the bottom of the tree.

References

1. Remington M. Evolution of DOS. PC Novice, 1991; 2(3):50.
2. Skeffington AM. A few notes on remote ophthalmoscopic diagnosis. Am J Optom, 1930; 7(5):265.