

THIS & THAT

by

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I get a big bang out of watching Alton Brown, the chef, on the Food Network show Good Eats. He's quite scientific about the way he prepares food. He likes to unearth the "What's and Why's" of cooking. I kind of like to do that when it comes to computers.

By the way Alton is a good ole boy, just like we is. He lives in Alpharetta, GA.

I also like the way he explains stuff. Whenever he's getting ready to make something, he tells his viewers all the hardware and software they will need in order to do the job. I like that. He often compares cooking to the computer. He was a high school teacher in a former life, so he knows the power of analogies in making concepts understandable.

I've been in the classroom myself for some fifty years, so I guess it's fair game if I use the kitchen as an analogy for the computer. Turn about is fair play.

Now, if you don't understand a thing about either the kitchen or the computer, well, I guess you've just finished readin' this little ole article.

"Well Bob," someone in the back speaks up, "so just how does a computer compare to a kitchen?"

I paid him to ask that.

Well, then, Alton begins by assigning some kitchen stuff to the word hardware. Hardware is the stuff in the kitchen we use when preparing a dish. The stove is hardware. The refrigerator, microwave, counter tops, cabinets, knives, forks, spoon, pots, pans, dishes, measuring cups, and all that kind of stuff is hardware.

"My heavens," you say. "What's left?"

"Software," I says, that's what's left; the software is left.

Alton calls all his ingredients, *software*. I sort of bend that use of the term a bit by including recipes in that category. In fact I expand kitchen software into two categories, and further divide one of those into two sub-categories.

My two kitchen software categories are ingredients and recipes. I further subdivide ingredients into input edibles/ingredients, and output prepared dishes. Recipes are the directions used to convert the input food stuffs into output food stuffs. I think of these three things as kitchen software.

Wake up! This is really interesting.

Get the idea?

Let's turn our attention to the computer. Fully functioning computers also consist of hardware and software.

Just as all kitchens, these days, come with a basic complement of hardware, so do basic computers. Basic computer hardware consists of a computer box, a monitor, a keyboard, a mouse, a printer, and sometimes speakers. The computer box is further divided into four common parts; 1. the microprocessor (the brain), 2. RAM (Random Access Memory - the counter top work area in the kitchen), 3. the hard drive (the place where everything we

want to save is stored and stays safe even when we turn the power off), and 4. The modem (the device we use to connect our computer to the Internet.) There are other forms of computer hardware, but those I've named here are the basics.

Next we turn our attention to computer software. Computer software falls into two categories; 1. Programs (like recipes in the kitchen). These consist of the instructions that the microprocessor (the chef) follows when the computer is functioning/working, and 2. Data, which comes in two forms; Input data - the letters and words we type when composing a note, and Output data - the final printed note.

Have I lost you yet? I hope not. The idea here is that if you understand how a kitchen works, you really do understand how a computer works.

Maybe you need a break here because I've got one more item to add to the story. Brace yourself, here we go.

There are two kinds/classifications of computer programs; 1. Application programs, and 2. Operating Systems. If you use a computer, you use both. Application programs are those you start and use when you are actually doing something productive on the computer... yes Sarah Jean, the solitaire program is an application program, and the computer is performing productive work when you use it... I do consider enjoyable computer activities to be productive work.

Word Processors, Genealogy programs, Image Processing, Internet, and all the Games are also application programs.

That leaves one thing left to be described; Operating System type programs. These are a

little harder to visualize, but our kitchen analogy will help.

A kitchen has one master chef, several sous chefs, and lastly, a bunch of kitchen staff workers.

The Master Chef, *chef de cuisine* head of the kitchen, directs the work flow throughout the kitchen. When an order enters the kitchen, the Master Chef assigns a Sous Chef to prepare it. In computereze, you tell the computer to start solitaire. You actually tell the Operating System (Windows XP or Vista) to start the Application Program solitaire for you when you click your mouse to start it. Once Solitaire is running, it occupies your attention, and you ignore the Master Chef. But, decide to write a letter, and you will use the Operating System to start your word processor (another sous chef) and use it.

Computers only have one Operating System. These days most of the popular operating systems are written and distributed by Microsoft. They are called both called Windows, but one is Windows XP, and the other is Windows Vista.

Microsoft also sells application programs like Microsoft Word, and the internet program called the Internet Browser. Many other companies create and sell application programs, like Adobe, Norton, McAfee, Broderbund, and Corel, just to name a few.

Have you ever thought about where the word Windows came from? Well, you'll just have to wait for another time before we get into that interesting tid-bit. We've run out of space.

Okay everyone, Wake Up!