

Here's a story about the formative era of personal computing. I originally wrote it in 1999, but the point it makes is still valid. Hope you like it.

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It was an age of heros, those days. Men of action, of vision, of legend. Ed Roberts, Gary Kildall, Jobs and Woz, Paul and Bill, Philippe Kahn. Richard Stallman and Linus Torvalds. They swashbuckled across the technological stage, making their mark. They took naked chips and gave them soul. It seems so long ago, looking back from our perspective of comfort and complacency. We stand on their shoulders, and they deserve our credit and our thanks. They shaped our world.

But that was a long time ago.

Where have all the heros gone? Did innovation die in 1990? Maybe now software is just too big for one person to deliver full blown into the world. Maybe we live in a world of big teams and little advances. These are not the days of heros. Or are they?

Did you know that a heavy duty data enabled web development environment, called Zope, has surfaced as free software within the last year? Did you know that a group is now writing a portable, free software Clipper workalike? Did you know that both Perl and Python have XML interfaces already? Do you think five years from now some of these people might be considered heros?

So next time time you're at your Linux User Group meeting, look around the room. That guy sitting next to you just might be the next hero. Or maybe the next hero is even closer. Think about that the next time you look in the mirror.

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I wrote that story in 1999 as part of a Troubleshooting Professional Magazine issue themed "Where Have All The Heroes Gone". The next month's issue, themed "More Heroes, and a Trip to Linux Expo" featured an article on a college kid named Mark Spencer, who had coded up a graphical network monitoring app, an AOL client for Linux, a PPP/VPN app, and an app that makes your Linux box seem like a simple modem connection to your Palm Pilot. The article ended like this: "Who are computing's future heroes? Only time will tell. I'm keeping a close eye on Mark Spencer."

Eight years later Mark Spencer's company, now called Digium, employs 50 employees and and rakes in over \$10 million in revenue. They're a hardware company. Their niche – selling preloads of Asterisk, the free software PBX system created by Mark Spencer. The heroes just keep on coming.