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<http://www.cpcug.org>

# Confessions of a Groupie

by Angela Lakwete

**S**ome months ago, I bumped into Capital PC User Group (CPCUG) President Lillian Milliner and her Mom on an escalator in Union Station. “Hi!” I gushed. “You don’t know me, but you’re the president of my computer user group.” Membership for probably less than 2 years had given me title and possession of CPCUG.

No offense was taken, of course, but during the conversation Lillian asked me to do a little more than attend meetings and classes; she asked for an article for the *Monitor*. My first reaction was that I was an amateur user and not a professional, something most members appeared to be. But with characteristic persistence, Lillian encouraged me to share my thoughts on CPCUG.

I came to Washington, DC, from Newark, Delaware, on a predoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian in June 1994. A postdoctoral fellowship took me to the University of California, San Diego, this spring. From the vantage of La Jolla’s morning ocean effect, crystal clear days and cool evenings in August (there are some things I will not miss about

Washington, DC), I reminisce about CPCUG and my promise to Lillian.

I bought my first computer in 1986. It was a Commodore 128. I bought it at a Commodore/Atari store, my printer at Sears, and used my television for the monitor. When the dust settled, I had connected a second monochrome monitor (with switch box, of course), a second disk drive, joystick, and a 1200-bit-per-second modem. A couple of years later I added a Tandy 200 for portable notetaking and online connection. I remember the Tandy cost more than the Commodore at \$500. I loaded each of the three memory banks, and it became, and remains, a constant companion.

The folks at the store where I bought the Commodore introduced

me to my first computer club experience, the Commodore Computer User Group in Detroit, Michigan, where I worked at the time. I remember my first meeting very well. I drove to an elementary school in a Detroit suburb. The club used its enormous cafeteria for demos, lectures, displays, and food sales. The assembly of people and computers, sounds and smells filled the room and intimidated me.

That lasted for about 5 minutes, until I joined a group that looked fairly friendly—a retired engineer, a couple of families with kids, other single men and women of all ages—all talking about their Commodores. They included me in their conversations, and I discovered that I had something to share, and the rest, as they say, is history. The club became an anchor for me in Detroit, a somewhat hostile town, and it became an alternative to my work as an art conservator at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

A profession and nearly a decade later, I found myself in Washington, DC, finishing a dissertation in history. My stepmother had inherited a Tandy/Radio Shack computer—I can’t remember the model—and needed instructions on how to use it. I located the DC Tandy Users Group and found Ron Schmidt in Lanham, Maryland, who had exactly what she needed. I knew about them through my Tandy 200, the second generation of the Tandy 100, the first laptop. Before I left this generous man’s home, he handed me an old issue of the *Monitor* in case I should ever be interested.

Of course I was impressed with the format, layout, and content, but

living on a fellowship stipend constrained my disposable income. A year later when I secured a full-time teaching position, I sent in my check but was too busy writing my dissertation to attend meetings and classes. When I finally defended and got the degree, I treated myself to my first monthly CPCUG meeting. And history repeated itself.

The first meeting intimidated me profoundly but for different reasons than had the Commodore group. Now I realized just how far back I had fallen on the computer literacy scale. I had become frozen in time with my 286 without a user group to keep me in touch with reality. Even the language was foreign: FAT, DIMM, DRAM, and TCP/IP. Unix I knew—that was my interface, Lynx my browser, and 2400 bits per second was my speed. DOS 3.3 was my operating system; WordPerfect 5.1, dBase 3+, and Lotus 1-2-3 v2, my productivity software. People looked at me with a mixture of horror and sympathy. I took my typical stance: defensive. It all worked fine; never crashed; why change?

After a few CPCUG meetings, I changed. Not from any overt coer-

cion, mind you, but from the overwhelming reality that I needed to upgrade, and the confidence to do so that CPCUG classes instilled. In June 1997, I bought a ThinkPad 365XD with 8 Mbytes of RAM that I upgraded myself to 24 Mbytes of RAM, with a 1.2-Mbyte hard drive, CD-ROM drive, 14.4-kilobit-per-second fax/modem. (I'm still poor.)

And I signed up for lots of classes. I realized that I might be overdoing it when Registrar Harold Motin asked quietly, "You take a lot of classes, don't you?" I answered that I was taking as many as I could because I would soon be moving to California. Before then, I needed to learn how to use Windows, HTML, and upgrade my software, everything I could. Susan Kousek's "Windows 95: An Introduction" class made the greatest impact on me. Susan is a consummate professional and gave me the proper guidance and confidence to make the leap from DOS to Windows. I entered her class completely intimidated by Windows and did all of my work in the DOS mode on my Pentium machine. After the class, I put shortcuts to the DOS programs on my desktop but also

loaded and began to use Windows programs including WordPerfect 8.0.

Although I'm 3000 miles away, I continue to tap the resources of the membership to help me solve problems in Windows, the Internet, and other software issues. Sometimes it takes a while to find someone who speaks your language, but there is always someone who can help. For that reason, because of the inimitable *Monitor*, and for intangible other reasons, I plan to continue my CPCUG membership.

One regret I had leaving the Washington, DC, area was that I did not take the "Build Your Own PC" course. It might be a reason that would draw me back to Washington to submit once again to the sweltering summers and treacherous brick sidewalks. That and the free Saturday seminars, the monthly General Meetings with raffles and bargain software and hardware offers, all the informative SIGs, and, of course, the friendly and informed members. It would be worth it.

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## 10 Advantages CPCUG Members Get

**Capital PC User Group (CPCUG)** membership entitles *each member of your family living in your household* to all CPCUG membership benefits—

**1. Helpline**—a great way to get help from experts for your hardware, software, and Internet questions and problems at no additional cost. The Helpline Directory is updated and published in the *Monitor*, the magazine of CPCUG.

**2.** Mail delivery of a print copy of our **award-winning magazine**, the *Monitor*, with its practical tips for computer users; technical articles; regular columns; CPCUG-member-authored reviews of software, hardware, and computer-related books; CPCUG event calendar; and special interest group (SIG) and Training Program information.

**3.** Computer education and training **classes**, seminars, workshops, discussions, and labs **at low member rates**—some are even free to members while others are for members only.

**4.** Assistance from CPCUG Build Team **mentors** in specifying and **building your own computer**. CPCUG's popular "Build" Workshop gives participants the knowledge and confidence to select appropriate components to build and later upgrade their own computers without additional paid assistance. This workshop is only \$75 and is only available to CPCUG members.

**5. Discounts** on software, hardware, and training are periodically made available to members of our user group. [If you take advantage of several discounts available only to CPCUG members, your membership pays for itself.]

**6. Internet service** options available **only to CPCUG**

**members at competitive rates** through our Internet domain [cpcug.org](http://cpcug.org).

**7.** Access to **new member-only e-mail distribution lists** being created to supplement our more than 30 public discussion and announcement lists. List subscribers can ask and get answers to computer hardware and software questions, and stay informed about CPCUG activities and Training.

**8. New software and/or computer reference books—available without charge to members** who review them for our magazine, the *Monitor*. You'll also get a byline in the *Monitor* and become a member of our product review coordinator's team.

**9.** Member-only **door prizes**—available most months at General Meetings, some special interest group (SIG) meetings, and occasional seminars. [This benefit has more than paid for the annual membership fee of many active CPCUG members. Software prizes have included Lotus Domino Go Webserver, MS Office Professional, and Adobe Photoshop. Hardware prizes have included Hewlett Packard Pocket PCs and Palm handhelds.]

**10.** Opportunities to **develop and/or enhance leadership and management skills**, while **building your professional network**, by volunteering with CPCUG.

The biggest benefit of all may be that by becoming active in the Capital PC User Group you become part of a very helpful community of computer users and IT professionals who are truly "Users Helping Users."

Before you know it you will also become a "User Helping Users."