

# A World of Change in 20 Years

## Go Back to 1980....

Nothing seems to be going right. Inflation is taking a double-digit bite out of your paycheck. Rust is eating your '77 Plymouth Volare, and Japanese carmakers are eating Detroit's lunch. Rising interest rates are putting a big hurt on the housing industry. Factories are closing. Cities are decaying. Farms are failing. And that's just here at home.

The global outlook is no brighter. Fundamentalists have seized the American embassy in Iran, the Soviets are making mischief in Afghanistan, and the Berlin Wall looks as if it might outlast the Great Pyramids.

In short, the present offers little reason for optimism, and the future promises more of the same.

But the future has a way of confounding most predictions. The 1980s and 1990s turned out to be full of surprises:

- The U.S. inflation rate dropped to less than 3 percent during the late 1990s.
- The rate of U.S. homeownership hit an all-time high.
- American cars were able to hold their own against imports.
- Japan went into an economic slump that never seemed to end.
- The Berlin Wall crumbled, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War ended.

And that's not all. Twenty-plus years of economic and technological change transformed the rhythms and routines of daily life — everything from the way we work to the way shop.

Of course, human nature being what it is, we don't always realize how much life has changed until something triggers a memory that causes us to reflect on the passage of time. The trigger can be as simple as . . . a back issue of *The Ledger*.

## Portrait of the "Young Artist" as a Man

A recent foray into *The Ledger* archives uncovered a perfectly preserved copy of our December 1983 issue. And there, on the front page, was a pen-and-ink drawing by Robert Abbanat, a student at McCall Junior High School in Winchester, Massachusetts, during the early 1980s.

Over the years, we'd had the good fortune to talk with Robert's mom from time to time. We'd ask her how the "young artist" was doing, and she'd bring us up to date on his progress through the American educational system.

Then one day it happened, a real Rip van Winkle moment. We asked Robert's mom the usual question: "So, how's the young artist?" Her response confirmed the well-documented fact that time does not stand still.

Robert had graduated from Boston College and headed for Georgia Tech to do graduate work in aerospace engineering. Not long after that, he and one of his professors co-founded Engineered Multimedia, an Atlanta-based company that creates CD-ROMs, Internet sites, and multimedia presentations for an impressive client list that includes CNN and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The company's first high-profile project was a computer-generated simulation of the 1997 Mars Pathfinder landing.

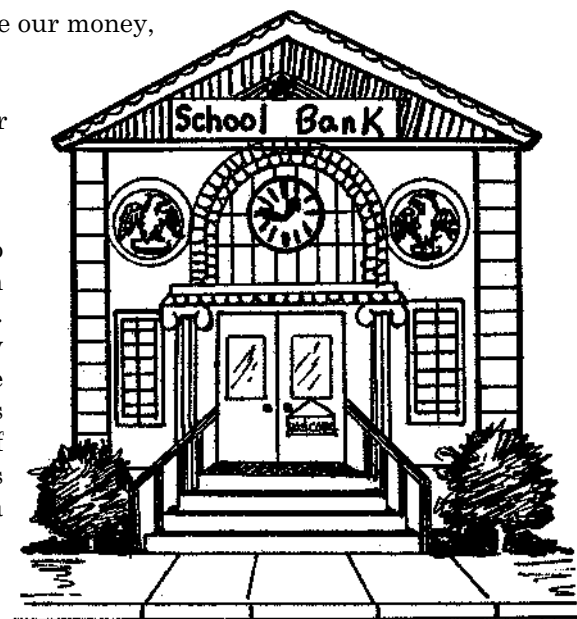
Well, you say, that's very nice but not terribly unusual. Lots of talented kids go out into the world and make good. It's a classic American success story that goes all the way back to Ben Franklin.

But there's a twist to our tale: Robert's company, Engineered Multimedia, was using technology that either didn't exist or wasn't widely available when he was in junior high. Back in the early 1980s, the only people online were scientists doing research for the Department of Defense. Even a true visionary might have had trouble imagining that so many of us would soon be surfing the Net, shopping in cyberspace, and swapping jokes via e-mail.

Which is why we thought it might be fun to take a closer look at how everyday life changed for all of us during the last two decades of the 20th century. We'll start with an overview of economic and technological changes. Then we'll focus on:

- the way we work,
- the way we handle our money,
- the way we learn,
- the cars we drive,
- how we spend our spare time, and
- the health care we receive.

We don't pretend to offer you an in-depth treatment of each area. Nor do we make any predictions for the future. Our sole aim is to give you a sense of how different our lives became in so short a period of time.



Robert Abbanat's 1983 drawing