

[\\$145,000 mortgage for...](#)Mortgage rates are still...  
[www.lowermybills.com](http://www.lowermybills.com)[Listen to Free Music Online](#)Rhapsody.com gives you...  
[www.rhapsody.com](http://www.rhapsody.com)[About](#)[Archive](#)[Links](#)[Networking](#)[Reviews](#)[Subscribe](#)**ATPM 5.06**  
**June 1999**[Cover](#)[Sponsors](#)[Welcome](#)[E-Mail](#)**Columns**[Apple Cider](#)[Paradigm](#)**Segments**[Hello. \(Again.\)](#)[Response Apple Cider](#)**Reviews**[Shareware Roundup](#)[eFax](#)[Mac Upgrade Bible](#)[MAXpower G3](#)[PhotoGenetics 1.0.2](#)[Slithereens](#)[FAQ](#)[Trivia Challenge](#)**Download ATPM 5.06**

Choose a format:

[DOCMaker stand-alone](#)

## SEGMENTS: SLICES FROM THE MACINTOSH LIFE

### **Hello. (Again.) (And again.) (And again.)...Faith and the iMac**

The journey that would test my faith in Apple and the iMac began one sweltering afternoon last August. I was working at home in my living room, my new "office" for the software company I had recently started, running HomePage and ClarisWorks on a reliable, but slow, PowerBook 165c. Even though I was stripped down to my underwear (who was going to know?), I was sweating like an old horse and had to stand up every five minutes to peel my butt off the chair. By noon it was like 99 °F with 99% humidity, and I couldn't tolerate waiting for the PowerBook anymore. I had to get out of the house.

I got dressed and drove to Borders. As a rule, bookstores are nice places to lounge on a hot day; they're air-conditioned, and no one hassles you if you don't buy anything. Usually I check out the new fiction first then browse the music section; however on this day something pulled me to the magazines. Five minutes later, I was flipping through a copy of *Time* when I saw the thing that would start me on my journey.

The iMac. Apple had taken out a five- or six-page ad in the middle of the magazine with foldouts and big, bold photos of the new machine. It was neat, clean, and blue. It promised to be fast and friendly and easy to set up. Plus, it was cheap, which would help if I wanted to convince my wife to let me get one.

To say I wanted one at that point would be an understatement. I craved an iMac with a longing I hadn't felt since my wife went away for two weeks before we got married. I was going to get one, and that was that. I ran a few traffic lights on the way home.

The house was still oppressively hot when I returned, but I didn't care. I got on the Internet and went to Apple's Website. There it was again, that little blue angel.

"Hello. (again)," the iMac screen read.

"Hello to you," I said. I waved at the picture and clicked on.

The Apple Store proved to be nothing but a malicious tease. I would gladly have typed in a credit card number—mine, anybody's—but they weren't taking orders for another month. After a half-hour of poking around, I stumbled onto a store locator and typed in my zip code.

The nearest Apple dealer was in Salem, New Hampshire—not the place where they burned the witches, but as I later found out, an armpit nonetheless. I ran to the other room, grabbed the atlas, and cracked it open on the coffee table. With a ruler I measured the distance from my house in Maine to this phantom Apple dealer—about 150 miles. That's nothing, I said to myself. In college, I had done more than my share of 10- and 12-hour road trips. A drive like this was like going to pick up some milk.

I dialed the store. After about nine rings a voice answered. The person on the other end was on a speakerphone, giving his voice a hollow and ominous quality, like the way God sounds when he talks to people in the movies.

"ComputerTown," the voice said.

"Hi," I said. "I'm calling about the iMac. Do you have any?"

"The blue things? Yeah, we got `em."

Clearly I was dealing with a master salesman.

"I'd like to buy one," I said. "Can you put one aside for me?"

"Sorry, can't do it. Hot item, you know?"

"Well, do you think you'll have any left tomorrow if I drive down?"

"Where you coming from?" the voice asked.

"Maine."

"That far, huh? I can't say. Probably we will, but there's no guarantee."

"That's okay," I said, "I'll see you tomorrow."

Later that afternoon, when I picked up my wife from work, I drove her over to Borders to see the ad. She, too, was enamored with the machine.

"It's cute," she said.

"And fast," I said. "Much faster than the PowerBook."

"How much is it?"

Ah, the big question. Luckily, I was ready. I told her. She nodded.

"What about sales tax?" she asked.

"New Hampshire doesn't have any."

"So you really want one of these, huh?"

I bowed my head and looked up sheepishly at her.

"Yes, I do."

"Well let's go then," she said.

I didn't say anything. We bought the magazine.

Once in Salem, finding the Apple dealer wasn't very hard. A giant rainbow Apple sign—a remnant of the company's 80s heyday, no doubt—stood at the roadside with tall weeds sprouting up from its base and leaning into the road.

"This is it?" my wife said.

"We're not buying the building," I said.

"Good thing."

We parked and ran inside. Well, I ran and my wife strolled, but she was excited too.

I glanced around the store. The front desk was empty, covered with a mass of wires and circuit boards. Across the room, a salesman was demonstrating a PC to an older couple. Peering down a hallway to the left, I spied a room packed to the doorjambs with orange iMac boxes. Good thing we had rushed.

"There it is," my wife said. She pointed at an iMac display across the store.

It sat on a low, unassuming table in the shadow of two G3 towers, but glowed so blue and bright that the second I saw it, I felt myself being sucked in. We walked over.

"The mouse," my wife said, "it's so small."  
"I like it," I said.

I moved the mouse around, launched a couple apps and browsed the Internet for a minute. This machine was fast, slick. Suddenly my 165c, which had served me so faithfully over the years with its 33 MHz processor and 28.8k modem, was about as appealing as a root canal. After three minutes of tooling around on the iMac, I was ready to buy. I stood up and looked for a salesman.

"Look, honey," my wife said, "it's see-through!"

It took the salesman another ten minutes to ring up the older couple's PC and get them out the door. Then it was my turn. He swaggered over to us.

"Help you?"

The guy looked like Joe Pesci's character in *Goodfellas*, with enough gel in his hair to deflect a bullet. I could see that my wife had a bad feeling, but I ignored her.

"I'm ready to buy," I announced.  
"What, one of these?"

"Yes."

"You got it," he said.

The salesman disappeared into the giant, Mac-filled room and returned a minute later with an iMac, the faces on the box smiling at me. My wife nudged me in the ribs.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked.

"I'm a man of faith, Alexas," I said. "You know that."

By the time we paid and stuffed the box into the back seat of our car, it was dark and we faced a 2 1/2-hour ride home. While Alexas slept, I drove, stealing glances of the friendly orange box in the headlights of passing cars and, once, reaching back and caressing the smooth cardboard.

Once home, I roused Alexas out of the car and carried the iMac upstairs. A little less than a year before, I had carried my new bride up the stairs. Now a computer. Funny how things change.

Inside, I put the box down in the living room and slipped a soft jazz CD in the stereo. Alexas got ready for bed. Soon I had the iMac unpacked, plugged in, and ready to go.

A couple things bothered me though. First, there was no manual. None. This seemed so unlike Apple that before I started the computer, I called Apple just to make sure I hadn't been gypped. The customer service representative explained that there was a help file in Mac OS and that their Website had more than adequate support information. On that point, I was convinced. Still, something else troubled me: there was no floppy drive. I had noticed this shortcoming when perusing the ad in *Time*, but it hadn't registered until I got the iMac home and set it up on my own desk. Somehow, the idea of the computer not having a floppy drive seemed remote—like the idea of my own mortality—until it stared me in the face. How I would transfer all my work from the PowerBook? A brief shiver ran down my spine. Maybe I had been too hasty. Maybe Alexas's intuition had been right.

No, I told myself. It was destiny that I have this machine. It was destiny that earlier that day I had wandered into Borders and seen the ad. A Higher Power would not have directed me to that ad if there weren't some way to transfer files to the iMac. It was settled. I pressed the On button.

My heart leapt when the computer chimed (more of a gong, really) and my iMac came to life. The Happy Mac appeared on the screen and in no time I was on my AOL account, surfing, checking e-mail, and, in general, loving life. The connection with the 56k modem might as well have been a T1; I felt like people must have felt when they rode in an automobile or flew in a plane for the first time. Just as they probably had a hard time going back to horse and carriage, I knew that I could never (happily) return to my dark days with the PowerBook.

Late into the night I called computer pals and bragged about my new purchase. There was talk of visits. When could they see it, they asked. Soon, I said. One of my friends helped me locate an Ethernet to LocalTalk converter, but I didn't have any money left to pay for it, so he bought it for me, to be delivered the next day. Everyone wanted a piece of the iMac action, even if vicariously.

By midnight I was an obsessed zombie, clicking icons for applications just to see how fast they would load. I decided to sign on to AOL one last time before turning in. It was then that my fun ended.

The Finder froze. A tingling sensation crept down my legs. My face went flush. Don't panic, I told myself. It just crashed, that's all. I turned to the "Emergency Handbook" (not a very good sign) and found the directions for restarting. The normal method using the keyboard didn't work, so I opened the side hatch, dug out a paper clip, and did the nasty.

Soon after rebooting, the Finder crapped out again. Not being one to give up, I restarted over and over, testing different applications each time, and each time, the finder froze. Finally, at three AM, I went to bed. Maybe it will be different in the morning, I said to myself. Falling asleep, I said a prayer. God, let my iMac be okay. Please, God. Amen.

I awoke at six to find that my new computer was still sick. Now, rather than saddened, I was angry—angry at this machine letting me down, angry with the hoodlum who sold it to me, and angry with the weeds around the Apple sign at the computer store. I packed the computer back into the car, stuffed the receipt in my pocket, and drove Alexas to work.

The sky was a deep, crisp blue that morning, as if chosen to taunt me. On the way down I worried. What if they wouldn't take it back? What if they were out of new ones? Had I made a mistake?

The night before, I had read the reviews of the iMac, most of them resoundingly positive. I loved mine too, but it was sick, and callous or not, I wanted a 100% healthy iMac, not something repaired or rebuilt. I decided that I would accept an exchange and nothing else. Have faith, I told myself. Apple wouldn't let this computer go to market if it had problems. Your problem is an anomaly. A new machine will fix things.

At the store, after a few brief questions about what was wrong, the manager exchanged my iMac for a new one. Despite the problems with the first one, I would now have the joy of opening the box to another brand new machine. I drove the 150 miles home in two hours, pleased with myself for my faith and perseverance, both of which I was sure would soon be rewarded.

Knowing how to set up the computer, it took me considerably less time to get my second iMac going. (In fact, if Apple gave me a chance, I bet I could beat the

pants off that kid and his dog in the QuickTime movie.) I pressed the On button, leaned back in my swivel chair, and waited.

The iMac started up, but the screen looked odd, like someone had run it through a washing machine with bleach. Everything was gray—even the rainbow logo on the Happy Mac. It couldn't be. I restarted the machine. Gray as March in New England. I called Apple Technical Support.

It took some time to explain that I was working with my second brand-new iMac in less than 24 hours, but once we got through that the support specialist talked me through a color check and a restore of the original software. After the restore, the support person waited on the line as I restarted the computer.

"How's it look?" she asked.

"Still gray," I said.

"I'm sorry."

"So am I."

I returned the iMac that afternoon and entered a sullen period in my life for the next two months. Returning to the PowerBook after the iMac was sheer toil. Friends called, asking how the iMac was doing, still wanting to visit. I deleted their messages on the answering machine and ignored their e-mails. Jeff Goldblum's iMac commercials only added to my despair, and to top it all, while visiting a friend in Massachusetts, I passed an Apple dealer with a giant balloon shaped like an iMac out front. "Hello. (again)," the screen read. This time I flipped it the bird.

Time heals all wounds, the saying goes, and gradually my sadness subsided and my faith began to return. I read more articles about the iMac, several of which talked of problems with the Finder freezing. Apparently there was an easy fix for that. As for the CRT problem, it seemed like that was just a fluke.

Meanwhile, my work with the new software company was

reaching critical mass. Soon I would need to test our program, write the documentation and marketing materials and update our Website. I knew there was no way I could continue with the PowerBook. Since starting the company in July, I had been running the computer 12-15 hours a day, seven days a week. Eventually, the bottom of it got so hot that I had to buy a mini-fan and direct it underneath the machine to keep it cool. Obviously it was time to buy another computer. The only question was, should I take a chance on another iMac?

By now I had told my closest friends and business partners of my saga with the first two machines. They reassured me that they had heard nothing but good things about the iMac. They suggested I give it another go. One of my partners gave me the number of a representative at MacZone, and the idea of buying yet another one began to take shape.

A week later I received a catalog from MacZone, something that ordinarily wouldn't be a major event in my life, but in this case was a mystery because I had never ordered anything from them before. Maybe it was like the ad in *Time*, I thought; a new sign pointing the way to a new iMac. I opened it and read. They were bundling an additional 64 MB of RAM into the machine. There were printers and other devices available now. Perhaps it was time to give Apple a third chance.

The only problem was, unlike the retailer I had purchased the first two machines from, MacZone didn't accept returns on the iMac. If I bought it and had a problem, I was stuck. But what were the odds of having problems with a third machine? The third one had to be a charm. No way would a Higher Power subject me to further torture and misery with this device. Still not entirely persuaded, I decided to wait.

On a clear, bright October morning I bought my third iMac. I sat on the back porch with the cordless phone, my credit

card, and a cup of coffee and dialed MacZone. While waiting for a sales rep, I breathed deeply of the cool, pungent air. Something in the coming fall lent promise to this endeavor, this new act of faith.

When the salesperson came on the line, I described my previous experiences and peppered him with questions about the iMacs they had sold. What kinds of problems had they encountered? What were the number of returns? Is Apple coming out with new models? Like a good priest, the salesman slowly allayed my fears and I was once again at the point of decision.

Although I have never been a religious man in the conventional sense, I did major in philosophy in college, and as a result, attach deep significance to certain life moments. This was one of them. Suddenly, phrases I had read somewhere about religious belief came back to me:

“In the moment you truly decide, then Providence moves with you.”

“Faith is the substance of all things hoped for, the evidence for which is not seen.”

I felt like Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade*, when he was forced to make that leap from the Lion’s Head. I decided to make a similar jump: I ordered the computer, along with a printer, a scanner, FrontPage, and a couple games. I hung up and finished my coffee.

During the next couple days, while I waited for the iMac to be delivered, I tried not to think about it. I tried not to think about Teamsters pitching my little iMac onto a truck; tried not to think about the 18-wheeler hauling the iMac pounding on every bump in the road; tried not to think about the plane carrying my iMac crashing; tried not to think about MacZone being an elaborate front for the mob and that there was no iMac coming to me, that it was just a scam. Like I said, I tried to forget about it.

Finally, I got the call from my wife. I had had MacZone

deliver the computer to her work, where they had a loading dock and a dolly to transport it. When I showed up, her office was abuzz with excitement over my iMac. They didn't know it was my third one, and I wasn't about to tell them.

"Such a pretty box," one of the women said.

"Yeah, whatever," I said and loaded the boxes into the car.

I got it home, unpacked it, and sat it on the new desk I had bought for it. After I plugged everything in, I stood there for a moment, hands on my hips, staring at it. The edges of the CD-ROM drive curved up in a slight smile.

"Hello," I said. "Again."

The iMac just sat there.

"You better work this time," I said.

Still nothing. I turned it on.

The computer seemed to take longer to start up than I remembered it, but when it finally got going, it worked. Programs ran, AOL loaded, the printer printed, everything. I started it up and shut it down about 10 times. No problems. I was in heaven. I looked up to the ceiling.

"Thank you," I said.

The next two months were bliss with my new iMac. Quickly the computer began to supplant the old PowerBook as the reliable workhorse. It was clear that whatever problems I had had with those other two machines, this one was of better stock. This one wasn't going to let me down.

In December, days before I was to leave for a trade show where our company was debuting its software, the iMac began to have problems shutting down and restarting. Intermittently, when I shut down or restarted the computer, the power light wouldn't go off, or the computer refused to reboot.

Needless to say, I was pissed, but I also by this time had adopted something of a fatalist view toward my plight. I thought of Job in the Bible, the guy who is made a pawn in a game between God and Satan, with Satan wanting the chance to test Job's faith and God okaying it because he knows that there's no way his man Job would renounce his faith in Him. No way.

I began to wonder if I was being played in a game between Steven Jobs (God) and Bill Gates (Satan), with Gates attempting to get me to renounce Apple altogether. I'd used Windoze machines before, but it would take a heck of a lot more than two bad iMacs (and possibly a third) to make me use one of those again. For me, hell would be having to use a Windows machine for eternity.

The day before I left for the trade show, I took the iMac in for service. The lone Macintosh technician who would be working on Ernie (the name I had given the computer) was a slight, bespectacled man with an air of precision around him that reminded me of my childhood violin teacher. I imagined him listening intently to the whir of my iMac's hard drive, much like my violin teacher scrutinized the pitch of his instrument before practice. I gave the technician the long and sordid story of my two previous iMacs, and he assured me that he would get to the bottom of it.

I returned five days later and picked up the repaired iMac. The technician had replaced a bad analog board, only to discover that the one Apple sent him was also bad. Then, in the process of replacing the second analog board with another one, he discovered that the CRT had problems, so he had to replace that as well.

This last episode rattled my confidence, but somehow my faith in this little computer remained intact. A month later, I had to take the iMac in for yet another analog board. A month after that it was a keyboard, and the month after that, another keyboard. I've been on hold with Apple and

endured their terrible muzak for countless hours, consulted with technicians and senior technicians and public relations personnel, and rebooted and reset the PRAM more times than God can count, but through it all my love for this machine has never faltered. If you can love a computer, I love my iMac.

*Copyright © 1999 Chris Orcutt, [chris@orcutt.net](mailto:chris@orcutt.net). Mr. Orcutt lives in Portland, Maine. You can view his Website <http://www.orcutt.net>. Segments is a special place in ATPM that's specifically designated for your stories. Send your Segments submissions to [editor@atpm.com](mailto:editor@atpm.com).*



## Also in This Series

---

- [Building a Web Site](#) · April 2006
- [Thanks For All the Fish](#) · February 2006
- [Living The Wireless Life](#) · December 2005
- [Hit Me Again](#) · July 2005
- [Podcasts: Number One on the Hype Parade](#) · July 2005
- [Love at First iBook](#) · July 2005
- [Tiger's New Stripes](#) · June 2005
- [Mac mini—The Modular Tower of Power](#) · June 2005
- [The Apple Store SOHO—My Small Office/Home Office Away From Home in Manhattan](#) · May 2005
- [Complete Archive](#)

## Reader Comments (1)

---

**James Wyatt** · October 03, 2003 - 23:50 EST [#1](#)

This is a brilliant piece! Funny, clever, and very deep.  
Where did you find this guy?

## Add A Comment

---

**Full Name**

**E-mail Address** (will not be published)

**Comment** (You may use hyperlink, italic, and boldface tags. Use a blank line to start a new paragraph.)