

Stephen A. "Jack" Dyer

## A Dream Come True!

Occasionally, I hear the line, "This is a dream come true!" The line can certainly be classed an American-English idiom. I'll let the reader perform the grammatical analysis on it, but it is meant to convey, as the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary puts it, "something you have wanted very much for a long time that has now happened." It is what this column is for me.



In the past, I have taken on several editorial duties and positions, both within and beyond the IEEE Instrumentation and Measurement Society, but the most editorial fun during my adult life was as founding editor-in-chief of the *IEEE Instrumentation & Measurement Magazine* (IAMM)—this magazine. I was given almost-free rein regarding content, and one of my deep desires was that we include short articles and columns that provided design ideas, tutorials, and reviews related to instrumentation and measurement (I&M). In its 1997 meeting, the newly formed editorial board for the *Magazine* enthusiastically concurred. Throughout the years since the *Magazine's* first issue appeared in March 1998, the various editors-in-chief have maintained the presence, in one form or another, of such articles and columns.

The editorial appearing in the second (June 1998) issue of this *Magazine* was entitled "Having Fun," and much of it described my position, as an eleven-year-old, as editor-in-chief of the start-up magazine, *Electronics Experimenter* (EE). (I also held almost every other position associated with EE.) In that editorial, I described briefly the stuff that made up the few issues of that short-lived magazine as follows:

A broad range of articles appeared—mainly construction projects such as a loudspeaker code-practice oscillator, a one-tube radio, a solar-powered radio, a continuity tester, a galvanometer, etc. There was a Beginner's Corner, as well as "how-to" articles on soldering and the like. The writing was concise. The first issue, although only eight pages in length (plus covers), contained six project-articles and four other features.

Something similar is what I have in mind for this column. My hope is that the column can find its way into the hands of a student—pre-university, university, post-university, retired, or otherwise—who would like to productively play, or ideate, or reflect; perhaps the column could, on occasion, act as a "starter." Maybe the column can find its way into the hands of a mentor—a Socrates who needs only a good student. Maybe students and mentors can find in a particular installment of the column a reason to gather, and from that humble beginning find a reason to go off and learn great things together.

I imagine a setting that includes construction projects—some very simple and some a bit ambitious, but not overly so. My notion is to provide interesting projects that can be completed by persons with limited experience in design and construction, and which can have utility in common I&M tasks. (The current IAMM editor-in-chief, Wendy Van Moer, says she would like to see a simple power supply as the first construction project.)

I imagine including other topics—ones useful especially to students (e.g., habits of mind, hints for organization, etc.). "Tips and techniques" sorts of items worthy of sharing with fellow I&Mers will surely present themselves from time to time. The wealth of available history, stories and musings relating to I&M offers a wonderful opportunity for providing heightened appreciation and broadened perspective. And just as important are the historical figures (e.g., Heaviside, Kirchhoff, Tellegen, etc.) and their specific contributions. In my mind, all these topics and more, in modest and appropriate portions, have their place in the column.

Finally, I imagine an opportunity for lending occasional assistance—either some of my own or that of others willing to share *their* expertise—in solving readers' problems or addressing issues they have encountered, where the solution or advice might also be of use to the general readership.

Oftentimes, and perhaps necessarily, the most difficult task in beginning a new entity, whether a business, an institution, a magazine, or a simple column, is that of finding for it a reasonable name that is somewhat descriptive. "Somewhat descriptive" seems, indeed, all one could hope for with a column proposed to be of a broad nature. Naming the column

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“Streams of Consciousness” or “I&M Potpourri That Some of the Readers Out There Might Be Interested In” were two of my initial attempts.

My design is that this column does become one of a broad nature—and one having many clinical elements. I decided that the title “Jack Dyer’s Clinic” would be as good as any other. The proposed title is not off-the-wall. My nickname is Jack—given to me by multiple persons independently through the years, the first time having been almost 50 years ago. The reference was to “Jack of all trades...”. And the column would be hard to describe adequately with a brief title, other than that I intend for it to be clinical in the sense that it strives to be observant, practical and helpful.

But there is more hidden within: the title is, further, part pun and part allusion. It is meant to honor an author known to many older technicians and engineers in the U.S. not only for the very practical technical books he wrote but also for his long-standing column in *Radio-Electronics*, which, over its lifetime, provided brief semi-tutorial explanations, shared good

technical advice, and addressed hundreds of problems submitted by readers. That column was Jack Darr’s “Service Clinic.” Now if you say “Jack Dyer” in your best North Carolinian accent, the pronunciation is almost indistinguishable from that of “Jack Darr.” Whenever I try that, all of a sudden I feel a special sense of connection with someone who joyfully tried to give help—both technical and otherwise—to others.

The inaugural details concerning my dream come true are now in the open. The next item of business for me at present is to imagine that power supply for Wendy.



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