

When I worked as a Deputy Court Clerk, the District & Associate Court Clerk (my boss) once told me when they first brought in some IBM computers (which he informed us we now had to fill with our records – paper was out – computers were in) that someday, everything would be in a computer system and everyone would be using them. I scoffed. I thought the idea was ludicrous. Everyone? Yeah, right.

But - sure enough, here I am today, 30+ years later, interviewing author Roland Hughes... imagine that!  
~~ Cindy



**Q:** A family farm and as a sideline, drilling water wells. How did all the computer technology come into play?

**A:** Quite naturally actually. I grew up on this farm; it is actually my family's, not mine. I just help out when I'm home and store my larger toys here. Fate is cruel but if you live long enough it is fare. I had the worst case of pollen allergies ever. As a child of 4 or 5 my allergies were so bad I would actually get water blister on my eye which would nearly swell my eyes shut. My allergies were why we purchased our first window unit air conditioner. Houses didn't have air conditioning standard back then.

This farm had horrible sulfur water. It started out bad and got progressively worse as time went on. You get used to the smell and taste, but what you don't get used to is the replacement cost. Refrigerators, freezers, televisions, basically anything with copper or silver simply got destroyed in a matter of months. Towards the end even the top-of-the-line freezer didn't make it a year. Average life span was about 6 months.

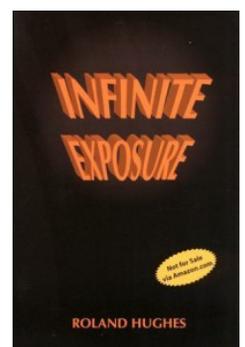
Adding insult to injury the well we had was either the 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> well ever drilled on this farm. Family lore is a bit fuzzy. My father was a child when the sulfur well was drilled. The drilling company used a cable tool rig. They ran it 24 hours per day. It took a month, but they finally got a sufficient quantity of water for the livestock operation the farm had back then. They just happened to have to go 1250 feet deep to get it.

Suffice it to say that history gave me a keen interest in the drilling of water wells. Paying a drilling company to punch a dry hole in the ground isn't cheap. When you know ahead of time finding water is going to be difficult due to the location it becomes cheaper to get the training and the equipment then invest your time. We now have a much shallower sulfur free well. It was a journey which spanned 8 or 9 years if memory serves me correctly.

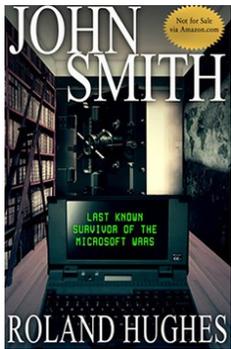
During my senior year in high school we got 3 Commodore Super Pet computers. I was in the first class to learn BASIC on them. We even went to some student programming contest at ISU (Illinois State University) and took third. No idea what it was at this point. As a kid with severe allergies attending a school without air conditioning I thought this was great. You got to work in air conditioning, got paid a lot of money and were surrounded by women in short skirts and heels all day. (I was in high school remember?) After graduating college I worked as an employee for a few years where I did actually manage to get the air conditioning but not the other two, so I became a consultant.

**Q:** The “geek” books make sense since you have the technological understanding, but what brought about the interest in writing novels?

**A:** In truth, “Infinite Exposure” was written because someone from Citi Bank pissed me off one day. There is a company which makes T-shirts and stuff for writers. One I've never purchased but always liked has a warning printed on it. “Be careful or you will end up in my novel”. Truer words were never spoken or written. I no longer have any Citi Bank products btw. Last time I checked none of the mutual funds I own even hold their stock. Around the same time I wrote “Infinite Exposure” I got rid of all the funds which did.



“John Smith – Last Known Survivor of the Microsoft Wars” was a bit different. There were a lot of little things which kept rattling around in my brain. Then we had all of the Mayan 2012 hoopla. As an IT worker doing business analysis and systems architect work you are trained to always ask “what if”. In this particular case it started out as a single question, “What if it's not a light switch but a starting point?”



People are very narrow minded and short sighted in general. For years you would hear reports on the news about mud slides in California and they would always say something like “the mud slide started this morning at...” those reports were always wrong. The mud slide started many months prior to that when the forest fire burnt the trees off.

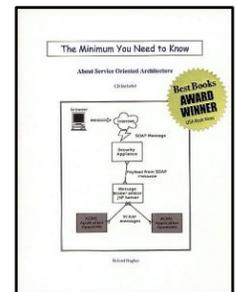
There is a really good “Star Trek TNG” episode/movie where Captain Pickard is bouncing between 3 different time periods due in large part to Q. It takes most of the show for the Captain to figure out that Q is trying to teach him about a paradox. Three different ships from three different time periods focused a certain type of energy beam on the exact same point in space. It caused a rip in the barrier between time and anti-time. Due to the nature of anti-time the event horizon was much larger in the past, a past which had not had the event.

That event horizon was about to stop the very creation of life on Earth. Not some gigantic disaster which killed all humans, but a quiet event which simply stopped a puddle of basic proteins from joining to create the first single celled organism from which humans would evolve.

“Babylon 5” had a great story line running its first few seasons. Two ancient races were tasked with “guiding the younger races”. Essentially these two were the light and the dark at least during the early episodes, different shades of gray in later episodes. They both meddled in different ways, even changed the genetics of some species in their attempts to “weed the garden”. For someone with a writer's mind, this was not about the age old struggle between good and evil it appeared to be but about the struggle which is almost as old. That is the struggle between Manifest Destiny and Free Will and the high price of such a struggle.

If you are looking for direct influences when it comes to “John Smith – Last Known Survivor of the Microsoft Wars” at that one episode of TNG and the first few seasons of Babylon 5 up through the end of the Shadow Wars.

“What if” the Mayans were right but it was a mud slide and not the flicking of a switch? “What if” that old Mayan story/legend where they claimed to be survivors of some great catastrophe was really how they viewed the start of a new cycle. “What if” alien visitations really happen but they aren't aliens, just survivors of past cycles trying to herd us along? These questions were running through my mind. Thankfully Susan Krowley came along to interview John Smith. I really thought that interview would be a single chapter long. I didn't even think the story would be a novel. The two of them thought otherwise.



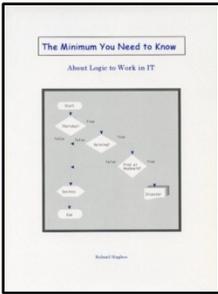
**Q:** *Will there be more novels and do you anticipate in changes in genre at some point?*

**A:** There are going to be more novels and more geek books. I'm working on some of them now. Once John Smith really takes off I will be looking for some very young and gifted writer to co-author the second John Smith book to flesh out the world so they can continue on with the “Earth That Is” series.

**Q:** *In layman's terms, what does Logikal Solutions do?*

**A:** It is an IT consulting company. We provide software development, technical writing, systems architect and business analysis services to various clients.

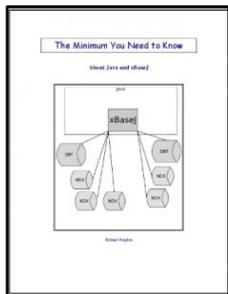
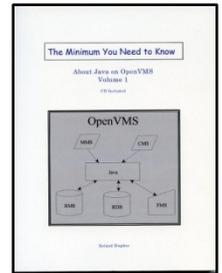
**Q:** *How has the “computer age” changed the farming business?*



**A:** Improvements have come at a very high price.

Due to the “race to the bottom” when it comes to software development and technology products in general, a poorly designed steering/navigation system lawyered up and cost the country a 4G satellite and ground station wireless system which would have actually provided 4G to the entire nation in a matter of months instead of the “nationwide” 4G services which seem to only exist in the N largest cities.

Many of the tractors built in the mid 70s to early 80s are still serviceable. Granted some have had new engines put in them, but they were well built and designed to last. Not so much the case for the 90s forward. This problem is twofold. The first problem is “chasing the fast buck” and the second is the massive electronics burden. Engines and transmissions of older tractors, the ones built when people had to draw by hand, were over engineered by today's standards. In short, they were built to last. The graphics design programs allow engineers to design tractors with a planned end of life as short as 5 years. Today's tractors and combines have quite literally a rats nest of wiring and electronics inside of them. Rats nest is a good term since a single mouse can get into them during winter storage and render your quarter-million-dollar-only-made-the-first-payment-on-it piece of equipment a pile of scrap metal. The days of a father buying a new tractor and being able to pass it down to their son/daughter when they handed over the farm ended with my generation.



The list goes on and on.

**Q:** Do you feel that having all this “data” on electronic files is putting countries more at risk?  
*(I have no idea where that one came from because I’m not a very political person, by nature)*

**A:** Putting YOU at risk. Forget the country. Do you know where your bank has its data center? THAT is “Infinite Exposure”. You should read it. I based much of it on what the FBI actually tells bankers during their lectures.

**Q:** Are there any other writers in your family?

**A:** No. My grandmother on my father's side taught me to write letters at a very early age. Her sister used to write very long letters telling stories of their youth and I used to respond. This was with pen on paper. We didn't even have a typewriter then.

**Q:** Farming, Computers and Writing – a very diverse agenda. How do you find the time to manage all of this?

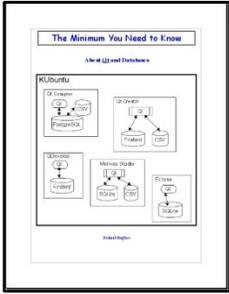
**A:** I stopped playing video games years ago. Consulting has also helped even out the flow. I use the time between projects to pursue my other interests.

**Q:** Do you read a lot? Who is your favorite author?

**A:** The short answer would be no. I used to read quite a bit, but the authors I used to read really honked me off in one way or another. The “Wheel of Time” author started out great and then churned out volume after volume of what I would call “oatmeal” even after he was diagnosed with a long term illness. He stretched it out and someone else had to finish the series. Same with “A Song of Ice and Fire”. I got to the last hundred or so pages of “A Dance With Dragons” and I stopped. The writing quality had dramatically diminished. While I may one day finish this book I have no plans to read more in the series. I have never read any of the “Harry Potter”



books, but I have seen all of the movies. I applaud J.K. for choosing to close that circle. A primary story arc which doesn't end is a horrible thing. Perhaps that is why I have all of the "Babylon 5" series on DVD, even "the lost episodes". They set out to have a 7 year arc and they completed it.



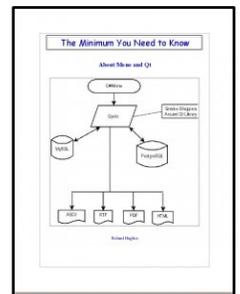
I know the old adage is "to be a better writer you have to be an avid reader," but I just don't buy into it. At some point my Block Buster subscription became a much better source than reading did. The 3-at-a-time flat monthly fee completely changed my viewing habits and I will wager it changed most of the country as well. During the days of VHS we had to pay something like \$7 to rent a movie. You needed a second mortgage if you returned it late. Now for something like \$20/month you get 3-at-a-time and return them when you get done. If you want more movies watch them faster.

When I had to pay \$7 each there was no way I was watching a documentary or an artsy "indie" film. Now I add those DVDs to my queue without even thinking about it. My view of the world goes way beyond Hollywood. "John Smith" contains little snippets from all over. Even a bad movie can have one redeeming scene which sticks with you. One of the most flattering comments I see about my novels is "this book really makes you stop and think."

*Q: Any final words or areas you'd like to elaborate on that I may or may not have touched-base on today?*

**A:** I read many comments about "how to write". While they are well meaning most of them aren't worth the time it takes to read them. I have read many arguments between Outline Nazis and other writers. Have seen people try to quantify just how many books and which books a writer "must" read. I have seen these discussions paralyze people who would otherwise be writing because they "didn't want to do it wrong". I have heard I don't know how many "learned" cough cough hack hack people instruct newbie writers to "show don't tell". Don't bother listening. To me the only oxymoron larger than "military intelligence" and "happily married" is "creative writing class."

The moment you open up LibreOffice or put pen to paper and churn out the first sentence, you are a writer. You may never get paid, but you are a writer. That is the only requirement for the title. You *are* going to do it wrong. Don't believe me? Choose any famous author you want, then ask someone who doesn't like their work. Take a Stephen King horror novel and have it reviewed by someone who only likes warm fuzzy love stories set in New York. I can tell you what that review will be like before they even start reading the book. If the reviewer doesn't point out spelling/grammar errors or dramatic gaffes such as a character being called Fred for the first 6 chapters and Susan for the rest of the book with no mention of gender changing surgery or other wretched storyline problems, they probably weren't part of your target market. That said, *you* are the least qualified person to edit your own work. A work of fiction needs at least 5 rounds of professional editing from 3 different editors if you plan to sell it. This is something the majority of the Kindle crowd seem to skip which is why I don't think Kindle is doing anywhere near as well as some proclaim.



"Tell done well is the show." So very few people do tell well people created the "show don't tell" mantra because writers who hadn't quite honed their skills could do show. If you choose to go down this path there are some things you need to watch and remember. One of the (I think?) Mad Max movies ends with a group of kids in some mountain valley all gathered together for an evening and then you hear the line "Every night we do the tell to keep the story 'membered well." If you are going to do a "tell" make your story 'membered well. Nearly every reviewer for "John Smith" finds some different part of it which shocks them or sends them off to look something up. At least those who like the story all seem to comment on it. Even the ones which empty their colon on it seem to have at least one comment like that.

How do you keep your story “remembered well?” By scattering the nuggets. The second movie you need to watch to understand this is “Casino”. There is what many movie goers thought to be a throw-away scene which tells you everything you need to know. De Niro's character is having breakfast with someone and his blue berry muffin doesn't have any blue berries. As soon as the guy next to him unwraps his blue berry muffin it falls apart because it has so many blue berries. De Niro then informs the head chef he must ensure every muffin has the same number of blue berries despite the chef protesting about how long it will take. “Scattering the nuggets” is much like making blue berry muffins. You need the right amount of blue berries in each muffin. Too many it falls apart. Too few and it is just a nasty dry muffin.