My Tail Of Whoa

I can't help but think that part of the reason for our current economic troubles are all the drastic changes brought about by the new economy, which is based on the personal computer and the Internet. I'm not saying it's a bad thing, but industries and businesses have been turned upside down by all the new technology.

The Dotcom Generation now gets their news via the Internet, the morning newspaper is disappearing right along with breakfast, and the computer has made writers out of people who can't spell and don't have much to say. Amazon is selling books that can be downloaded on to a little plastic screen and soon there will be no need for bookshelves or books.

How very sad.

Lonely people now try to find their dates on the Internet instead of the local bar and retailers by the big box full are going bankrupt because consumers are shopping online instead of in person. Banks need fewer tellers as a result of ATMs, and draftsmen have been replaced by computer programs.

Many workers have been laid off or unemployed because they were replaced by a keyboardist at a computer. And many times that key puncher isn't even in this country!

You can't convince me that at least some of the shenanigans on Wall Street weren't made possible by sophisticated computer programs that allowed crooks to cook up Ponzi schemes and sucker strategies and then hide their crimes.

Some of us have have not responded well to the revolution in productivity that was ushered in by PacMan. Although I write on an Apple Macintosh computer, and have since 1984, in many other ways I am stuck in the dark ages of the 1970s.

I sill take pictures with film, my address book is handwritten and the only Blackberry in my house is in the refrigerator. I navigate the information superhighway well but when I get spammed, illegally downloaded, put on hold by tech support or someone uses my computer to spy on me, there is no one in cyberspace to hear my screams.

It's not the first time, nor will it be the last, when game-changing technology transformed our economy and who we are as people. Surely lives were changed just as dramatically by electricity, the industrial revolution and indoor plumbing.

Even bigger than those changes brought about by the computer, I think the end of the horse age and the dawning of the automobile era must have been even more unsettling. There were people back then who, like me, did not make the change very well either.

There was a time in this country when the words "horse" and "power" were synonymous and our plows, guns, taxis and freight wagons were pulled by horses. Then as now, the horses took a lot of the work out of our work. Can you imagine the jobs that were completely erased when a single tractor replaced a team of as many as 32 horses that pulled one grain harvester?

The lives of horseshoers, bridle makers and feed and grain merchants were turned topsy turvy, just like now. Eventually those jobs were replaced by careers for mechanics, tire manufacturers and loan sharks. But it took time. And it will this time too, no doubt.

One of those people who, like me, did not make the transition well was Doctor W.T. Lucas. Although you could count on W.T. to make house calls in all kinds of weather when he rode his horse, it was a different matter entirely when he came by car. The good Doctor drove an auto until he was 90, not well mind you, but he did drive.

To give you an idea of his prowess behind the wheel, W.T.'s garage was open on both ends just in case the good Doctor got it in the wrong gear. And when he'd arrive to make a house call, instead of applying his foot to the brake pedal, he would pull back on the steering wheel

and yell at the top of his lungs, “Whoa.”

My sentiments exactly.