
One Last Compile...

The Parent Trap

Delphi has put me in a philosophical, reflective mood today. I found myself doing something that confirmed my growing suspicions that, day by day, I am turning into my father.

On the surface, of course, this is a ludicrous statement. My father is a supremely practical, outdoors, all-weathers, kind of chap. His idea of a fun weekend is to build a new garage or dig an ornamental lake or two. He is vaguely aware that his son 'works in computers', but has no idea what this consists of. Probably, like my mother, he thinks that I actually sell those grey boxes that sit in people's offices making humming noises. I occasionally catch him looking at me with a puzzled look, as I struggle to hammer in a nail or assemble a deck chair without injury, as if he can't quite believe that I'm the fruit of his loins.

There would be many advantages if I were to turn into my father, of course. I fear that, on balance, most people would vote firmly for the change. It would go down well in my flat, for example, where there is a chronic shortage of people capable of changing a washer or putting up a shelf. My father can look back on his life and point to a number of concrete, visible achievements that will survive storms, floods, wars and famine. Most of my achievements consist of abstract constructions of magnetic particles that could be wiped out by any passing fridge magnet.

And yet, today, I found myself fiddling with Delphi, thinking to myself that my Dad would be proud of me. What I was doing, belatedly, was working through my program fixing all of the hints and warnings that the compiler had told me about.

This, I have to tell you, was no trivial undertaking. Hints and warnings are something that, until recently, I

paid no heed to. (I had a lot of Delphi 1 code, for example, and in Delphi 1 if it compiled, that was it. There was no question of getting *feedback*, for goodness sake. Now when you compile your program it's like getting your A-level results all over again.) These hints would accumulate in their tens, if not hundreds, and frankly I felt that life was too short to worry that I had declared a variable on line 1,647 that I never got round to using, or that there was a danger that variable X in my subroutine wouldn't be initialised.

But, just for the hell of it, I double clicked on one of them and went to the problem. It happened to be one that normally irritated me by being excessively paranoid, where I'd created a `StringList` inside the `try..finally` instead of immediately outside it. (I mean, I declared this `StringList` on the very first line inside the `try` block, and if Delphi considers it safe to create an object just outside, what does it think is going to wrong on the first line inside?) But I changed it anyway. And it felt good. So I fixed another, and that felt good too, and before I knew it I had been right through the program, and it was compiling with 0 hints and 0 warnings.

I could feel my father beside me, nodding his approval. I felt positive, empowered. I felt like a real craftsman. And I realised I was more like him than I thought, and I was proud of that. So I went home, and I retrieved the toolbox from underneath 18 months' worth of *Hello* magazine, and I went to work on that leaking tap.

Eventually we managed to stop the flooding, and the downstairs neighbours were very nice about it, and my Dad says he'll come up next weekend and sort it out properly. It's not an overnight process, obviously, this changing into your father thing.