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The Voice of the Valley

It's 1969, the magical year, and in the Palo Alto Research Center, known at the time as Xerox PARC, a curious 14-year-old Michael Malone is sitting before the first terminal that used Ethernet, at that time called the ARPANET. As he played around with the first terminal, Mr. Malone was unimpressed. Little did he know this was a pivotal moment in history and in his life.

Michael Malone is an author, professor, and journalist who offers educated insights into the past and trajectory of the Bay Area, particularly focusing on the evolution of Silicon Valley. Mr. Malone's relationship with the Valley goes back far as he has lived here most of his life. He has written 30+ books and currently has a podcast called "The Silicon Insider" with NBC reporter Scott Budman. In the words of his podcast partner, "He was covering tech here before it was cool, and before billionaires were running things" (Budman).

Sitting in a well-lit room in the comfort of his own home, Mr. Malone is on Zoom with Mr. Budman recording their latest episode. They discuss current hot tech topics and have been doing so for the last four years. Mr. Budman claims this podcast and its audience of listeners has "long passed my highest hopes". The idea for "Silicon Insiders" was born over a cup of coffee and then eventually it came to life in a little studio. However, when Covid hit, Mr. Malone and Mr. Budman had to improvise due to the lack of studio access. Before they decided on their current set up, they experimented with other options. They sat in Malone's truck and recorded the show with a cell phone.

Mr. Malone was born in West Germany when his dad was stationed in Munich as an Air Force officer. In elementary school they moved to Virginia. His dad later retired and worked for NASA at Ames Research Center and they moved to Mountain View, California. In 8th grade Mr. Malone was in the gifted children's group Mensa International. Growing up here he lived in the same neighborhood as tech geniuses Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, and Steve Wozniak. Living in this area allowed Malone to be “marinated in the tech industry”.

Growing up in this area and Mr. Malone’s passion for writing led him to become a business reporter. Mr. Malone has always enjoyed writing. He claims he “writes to live”. For example, in high school he would write short science fiction stories to impress girls. Later, he got a job as a business reporter at Mercury News and his beat was Silicon Valley. This was around 1978/1979 where this was all new rising technology and there was no one reporting it, except for Mr. Malone. He was the world's first daily technology reporter. His connection to Jobs as a child led him to do the first stories on Apple.

Silicon Valley has grown significantly since the late 70s when Mr. Malone was the first reporter. “Today, Silicon Valley is home to more than 30 multinational companies...85 billionaires live in Silicon Valley as do an estimated 163,000 millionaires” (Morrison). 1996 was when there was a significant change in Silicon Valley that led it to be the place it is today. In 1996 there was the dotcom bubble in Silicon Valley where there had been around 10,000 companies created here. “Dot-com bubble, period of large, rapid, and ultimately unsustainable increases in the valuation of...“dot-com” companies” (Duignan). Mr. Malone remembers this time clearly as he recalls a memory from attending a San Francisco Giants game here. As he drove on the highway to get to the game, he saw dot com ads everywhere. There were flatbed trucks with billboards advertising dot.com companies, there were ships in the lagoon with big

billboards mounted on them, and there were planes flying overhead, towing signs. Once he got to the game, the ads did not stop. He recalls the seat in front of him having a dot com ad on the back along with dot com ads on his cup, cupholder, and all the signs around the stadium. As Mr. Malone was surrounded by these ads he thought to himself, “This is insane. This cannot last”. Sure enough, he was correct. Around 3 months after this Giants game, it all blew up and crashed. Thousands of people lost their jobs and most companies died. “Everything went quiet. All the press went home. Nobody was covering Silicon Valley” (Malone).

Today, Mr. Malone continues to share his knowledge through writing books and on his podcast. Currently, he is working on a book about a startup here in the Valley. He also continues to do his weekly podcast episodes that talk about big companies, AI, and everything in between. Even with the uncertainty of AI, Mr. Malone remains optimistic about the Valley's ability to adapt and thrive. “ I mean, what keeps this town alive is entrepreneurship. We have it in the water” (Malone). As he continues to share his insights through writing and his podcast, he contributes to a better understanding of the complexities of Silicon Valley, its evolution, impact, and future.

In conclusion, Michael Malone's journey from a curious 14-year-old at Xerox PARC to a successful author, professor, and journalist encapsulates the spirit of Silicon Valley itself—driven by curiosity and innovation. Through his pioneering work in technology journalism, Malone has played a pivotal role in documenting and shaping Silicon Valley. Overall, Silicon Valley has had an interesting past and a promising future.

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