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Type founding extravaganza

Monday, 22 September 2008 by [Bill Welliver](#)

It's been a busy and exciting week or two spent in the greater Saint Louis area. First up was the biennial conference of the American Typefounding Fellowship. It was great to catch up with folks I'd met over the years as well as get to know some new faces, too. The mood was decidedly upbeat and I had some good conversations about some of my ongoing projects (such as the composition caster automation project). The final day involved a torrent of storm water, a bridge made from an old truck trailer and a muddy track through the woods not unlike a rally course (oh, and also the obligatory tour of the Skyline Type Foundry).

Following the conference, I stayed in town for Thompson Tech III, in an attempt to get more comfortable with the machine that's been lurking in the corner of the shop for two years. The class consisted of myself and David Smith, as well as the illustrious George Hamilton and Stan Nelson. It was great fun getting to work with everyone, including Sky and Johanna Shipley, our gracious hosts. The long evenings of fascinating stories told by "around the campfire" would have made the trip worthwhile on its own, but to top it off, we were casting good type all week. Overall, the week went very smoothly (I was the only one to have had any drama, a very mild burn on my arm), and I'm feeling pretty good about the possibility of getting my Thompson up and running in short order.

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Pike: An Introduction goes to Press

Wednesday, 18 July 2007 by [Bill Welliver](#)

After nearly three years, *Pike: An Introduction* is finally complete and off to the printers. For those of you not familiar with this little project of mine, *Pike: An Introduction* is intended to be the definitive introduction to the [Pike](#) programming language. Weighing in at almost 300 pages, the book contains numerous examples which coincide with topics of discussion, as well as a chapter on the basics of several popular modules.

An interesting twist is that Martin (who's been helping with this project for a while now) and I are planning on setting aside proceeds from the sale of the book to fund Pike development and marketing projects. That means that, in addition to getting up to speed on your favorite programming language, you'll also be helping to advance and promote Pike.


I expect the book to be available at online outlets such as Amazon or Barnes and Noble in about a month. Until then, you can get your copy from Lulu, our printing vendor for USD 29.95. In addition to getting your book sooner, Lulu's commissions are lower, meaning that a larger percentage of your purchase price will be made available for supporting the Pike community.

Learn more about the book, and purchase your copy today by visiting:

<http://book.gotpike.org/>

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Pike and Middleware

Friday, 16 February 2007 by  Bill Welliver

One of Pike's strong point has always been its asynchronous networking and text handling functionality. These strengths make Pike a natural choice for integrating disparate systems and event processing. In the enterprise space, [Messaging Oriented Middleware](#) such as JMS are typically used as the "glue" that holds various systems together. Unfortunately, many JMS providers do not provide non-Java libraries for use with their messaging systems. One could use JNI and the Java module to access JMS libraries, however that approach (which I describe elsewhere on this site) is cumbersome at best. There has to be a better way, right?

Enter Stomp...

Stomp is a text based protocol designed to be easy to implement, yet full featured. The protocol supports text and binary messages of arbitrary length and the Pike client supports asynchronous message receipt. I wrote a client for Stomp a year or so ago, and used it a bit, but recently spent some more time working on it. Newly added features to the Stomp client include reconnection and off line message sending for more reliable behavior.

Through the use of the Pike [Stomp client](#) and [StompConnect](#), you can connect your existing and new applications to enterprise messaging buses such as ActiveMQ or MQSeries. This opens up a whole world of possibilities, ranging from integration to transaction processing.

Additionally, I added support for Stomp (and possibly other asynchronous messaging systems as well) to the [Fins](#) framework, making it incredibly easy to write applications in Pike that utilize Messaging. I'll be posting some examples of how to use Stomp with Fins over the next few days, be sure to keep an eye out for them.

Posted in [pike](#) | [0 Comments](#) |

Pike Conference 2006 Update

Sunday, 8 October 2006 by  Bill Welliver

This year's Pike Conference is rapidly approaching, but there's still time to attend or participate! A lot of exciting things have been happening in the Pike world since our last meeting two years ago. We've got some very interesting presentations, discussions and activities on tap, so if you're still deciding whether to attend, consider this a nudge in the direction of Riga. :) A free, in-depth Pike tutorial session will also run concurrently with the conference, so if you're new to Pike, or you'd like to brush up on your Pike coding skills, this is a perfect opportunity.

For those of you that may have missed the original announcement, this year's Pike Conference will be held in beautiful Riga, Latvia, from October 18 through the 22nd. Riga's old town was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and getting to and from Riga has never been easier. For more information, send an email to the conference coordinators at conference@gotpike.org, or visit the conference website at:

<http://conference.gotpike.org>

If you know you'll attending, but haven't registered yet, please take a moment to do so now, as it allows the conference team to better plan activities to suit your interests and schedule. Also, we still have spaces for participants; so if you'd like to make a presentation, suggest a topic for group discussion or just want to say a few words in person, do let us know, as we'd love to include you in

the program.

I'm personally very excited about getting to meet everyone (again, even). We always have a good time and a lot of good information is passed around. If you're thinking that maybe you'd like to get more involved with your language of choice, you probably won't find a better chance to chat with like minded folks. Additionally, I've got some very cool things to talk about, so I hope to see you in Riga!

Posted in [pike](#), [web apps](#) and [Fins](#) | [0 Comments](#) |

CSI, eat your heart out!

🕒 Thursday, 28 September 2006 by 🧑 Bill Welliver

Prepare yourself for a particularly geeky diversion. A new gadget arrived via UPS yesterday and already I've got some ideas for what I can do with/to it. The "it" in question is the DigitalBlue [QX5](#) USB Microscope, which I ordered online for about 65 dollars. Intended as a teenage discovery device, the QX5 sports 10, 60 and 200x magnification and a 640x480 image resolution. Don't expect a laboratory grade device, it's made of plastic, but it does sport top and bottom illumination and the ability to disconnect the scope from its stand to go "mobile". Because it's made of plastic, the focusing is a little fussy, and it tends to flex and vibrate, so it's best used "hands off". The software is PC only, but a shareware package called [miXscope](#) supports Macs. Both the supplied software as well as miXscope support a number of useful features, such as movie capture and on-screen measurements.

Even more interesting are the possible modding opportunities. By appearance, the whole affair seems like a webcam strapped to some high power optics, but that may be over-simplifying the situation. This tool would be useful for all kinds of work, including comparison and measurement. The resolution is a little low, but someone suggested that it might be possible to rig up a digital microfilm reader (or scanner, even).

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Fins and FinScribe update

🕒 Wednesday, 12 July 2006 by 🧑 Bill Welliver

I've been working on [Fins](#) and [FinScribe](#) quite a bit lately, and some interesting things have been brewing.


First, in the eye-candy department, I started working with [Dojo](#) 0.3.1, which has some better widgets than previous releases. It adds some quirks, especially with the DHTML effects, but hopefully we'll be able to work through them. I also added a new widget called RTEditor, which extends the Rich text editor widget to be tabbed: one tab allows you to edit text in Rich Text format, and the other tab lets you edit the raw text. As you change from tab to tab, the version from the other tab is brought along with you, so you don't lose content. It's pretty neat, and lets users who are more comfortable with HTML tweak their content.

Second, on the Fins side of things, I've added some developer admin tools. We're hooking into the *pike* -x command, and so far, a new application creation tool is available, as well as a replacement for fin_serve, which should make it easier to run your Fins apps.

Most significant, though, is automatic configuration of [Model](#) objects by examination of the database schema. This means that if you write your database to follow the rules that Fins expects, you don't have to write Model code. It's all done for you... just create a (more or less empty) class for each datatype, and Fins will handle the rest... it's pretty cool. It's also completely optional. If you've got legacy databases to work with, Fins can also use those, but you'll have to resort to increasingly manual tactics.

Posted in [pike](#), [web apps](#), [FinScribe](#) and [Fins](#) | [0 Comments](#) |

New FinScribe release: 0.6

⌚ Tuesday, 27 June 2006 by  Bill Welliver

I'm pleased to announce the release of a new version of the [FinScribe](#) wiki/blog application. Version 0.6 includes a fair number of new features, most importantly the ability to modify and apply ACLs to documents. The application (especially the administration interface) include some very nifty AJAX widgets made possible by using the Dojo widget framework.

FinScribe is built on the MVC framework I've been writing, called [Fins](#), and is written in Pike with support for mysql, sqlite and (hopefully) postgresql. Originally intended as a demonstration application for that framework, FinScribe has taken on a life of its own.


Posted in [pike](#), [FinScribe](#) and [web apps](#) | [0 Comments](#) |

Type Foundry update

⌚ Friday, 16 June 2006 by  Bill Welliver

It's been a while since an update on my type foundry plans has appeared here, so I thought it might be good to recap some of the latest developments.

It's been a busy few months; we finally finished the floor in the foundry area after winter set in early. A new entrance door was cut in the concrete wall in order to allow equipment to be moved in. We moved the two English casters in May and they're awaiting a plan for getting them off their pallets.

About the time we were moving things in, I got a call about a Thompson typesetter down in North Carolina (at Heritage Letterpress, who was in the process of shutting down their hot metal operation). I went down with  [Ian Schaefer](#) who was picking up a composition caster. We pooled our resources for the big move and spent all night driving the truck back to Pennsylvania. We also got lots of spares and some nice composition and display mats. I've also started a [Matrix Inventory](#) to keep track of what faces and sizes I've got. There are still a few faces that I have mats but no wedges, so I'm still on the lookout for those. If you've got spares, drop me a line!



Finally, I have a first pass at a keyboard emulator up and running. This piece of software is designed to fix a lot of the shortcomings of working with the standard pneumatic keyboard, yet still retain the flavor of working in a traditional way. It will output files that can be sent to the caster driving software (not quite written yet) for final casting. Eventually, I'll adapt the keyboard software into something that can take a standard text input file and turn it into an "e-ribbon" for casting.

I guess that about sums up the latest happenings; lots of stuff going on, and I'm excited about finally getting some of these projects wrapped up!

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Spotlight refined: get it for free

⌚ Friday, 16 June 2006 by  Bill Welliver

The folks over at  [MacZOT](#) are at it again. This time, it's a tool that's even more useful than the last. They're looking to give away  [HoudaSpot](#), which is a nifty little front end for Spotlight. Even better, it corrects some of the pesky little tendencies about Spotlight that I've been frustrated with. Plus, with my 100 gb disk drive hovering around 10gb free, I'm motivated to figure out what I've done with the other 90g!

First of all, while the whole "search as you type" thing is a nice idea, the reality is that most of us just don't have the horsepower to spare to make that happen. I'd get two or three characters into my search string, and things would lock up for 20 seconds. Not my idea of making my life easier or faster. HoudaSpot patiently waits till you're done typing in the criteria before it goes searching for your things. Then you can be amazed at how fast Spotlight really is!

Second, you can save your search criteria for use later as a "template" search. Nice.

Third, the search remains live (not sure if that's the case with out of the box spotlight or not. That means if you go moving things around or add files that fit the criteria, they automatically show up in your search.

Anyhow, they're looking to get people to try it out and write reviews today. For each registered review on June 16, 2006, the folks at [MacZOT](#) will knock a nickel off the selling price. If it gets to the end of the day and the price is zero dollars, everyone who wrote in gets it for free. You can also buy it at the current going price, which is a steal anyhow.

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Collaborative editing for Mac: on sale, too!

⌚ Tuesday, 25 April 2006 by [g](#) Bill Welliver

Well, here's an interesting idea I've not heard of before: a company called MacZOT is using bloggers to drum up business for their discount software sales business. I'm not completely sure I understand the concept, but they seem to be offering well known shareware (for the Mac in this case) at a discount.

The software in this case is [SubEthaEdit from CodingMonkeys](#). If you've never used SubEthaEdit before, it's kind of a jarring experience. We first played around with it at the Pike conference in Essen two years ago. It's Bonjour enabled, so everyone in your area who's using the application can collaboratively edit documents with each other. You see the editing as it happens. It's pretty neat. Not exactly what you want for every document, but there are lots of great applications, especially when brainstorming. If you know lots of Mac users and wished you could collaborate more effectively, this is the tool for you.

Anyhow, here's the deal: for each post about it, they reduce the price for everyone by 5 cents. Right now, it's at \$20, which is a pretty good deal as it is. If it hits zero, it's free for everyone who participated by writing about the promotion. They're calling the whole thing "[BLOGZOT 2.0 on MacZOT.com](#)". They also claim that MacZOT and TheCodingMonkeys will award \$105,000 in Mac software, someone else will have to do the math. Perhaps I'm just not young and hip enough to get the edgy names and whatnot, but I like the idea, especially if people write informative posts about any of this.

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