

A TREE GROWS IN MENLO PARK:

As a first step in connecting consumer gadgets together, they wanted to create a device that could control a wide variety of everyday devices, in a sense a remote control on steroids. They began constructing a device they called “*7” (star seven).

They brought in several more developers, and each team member took a piece of the device puzzle – the hardware, the operating system, the networking, the interface, and the software application that would run on the device.

It was James Gosling who took on the task of writing the application for *7. What he quickly realized, however, was that existing programming languages wouldn’t work for what he had in mind. If people were going to depend upon this language to run consumer products, it had to be more reliable and flexible than any other current languages.

The problem raised some essential questions about the nature of software. Why did applications have to be so big and cumbersome to write? Why couldn’t an application run on different processor types without being rewritten? Why isn’t there a sort of “application interpreter” that’s the same for each operating system? That way, the same application code could run on different types of computers and devices.