Twitter Thread by PJ Holden



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So, yesterday my dad (74) was bored and I was doing a jigsaw puzzle so I said over my shoulder "make a facetime call". He said "How?" like all boomers do when they want YOU to do it, so I said, "Get your iphone and hit facetime". She bought me in the phone and said "Open it how?"

"With your finger!" I said, incredulous. She bought me the phone and we both stared at it. I realised I'd never taught him to use it. Most phones have whatsapp, I felt like a dope. What kind of apocalypse father doesn't teach a boomer how to use facetime?

So I said, "How do you think this works?" he studied it and applied his finger to the phone icon, sideways. He struggled for a while with a big dramatic sigh said "Will you please just open facetime?" Apocalypse son was overjoyed: a Teaching moment just dropped in my lap!

I said, "The little icon is designed to do one thing: facetime. Study the phone, study the icon, figure out what Steve Jobs was thinking when they tried to solve this problem (the facetime icon is also the phone call icon, but I explained that part wasn't relevant)

I went back to my jugsaw puzzle. He was next to me grunting and groaning trying to get the ting. I should say that spatial orientation, process visualisation and order of operations are not things he... intuits, I knew this would be a challenge. But it was a rainy weekend.

Eventually he collapsed in a frustrated heap. I said "Explain the part.s' he said "this little phone picture is meant to be a phone, this green button opens the facetime app, this ther icon looks like a phone but isn't" he couldn't figure out the tapping step, a key element!

I said the tool is made to be pleasent but it doesn't have any superflous qualities. Everything that moves does so for a reason" he said "I hate you" I'm sure he believes that he does. I said "You understand everything except how the tool address books works" he sighed.

At this point he said "I don't want to facetime anyone" and marched off. Apocalypse dad went into full "The Road" mode! "Dad! Neither os us will chat today until we open up facetime" he screamed "Augh!" like Lucy Van Pelt. He read a book for awhile.

Eventually he was back on the phone. The top was all dented now, the glass was practically serrated from failed attempts. We studied the icon some more. He really wanted it to be oriented up and down or across the top. The sideways oritentation is very counterintuitive.

He was fixated on orientating the phone in a few configurations and couldn't imagine other possibilities. I compared facetime to other tools. By now we were working on anger-management and perseverance too. He suggested he open facetime with a hammer. There were tears.

I told him stories of some of the great facetimes I'd had over the years. He rolled his eyes. We talked about industrial design and what a funny little device the iphone is. I show how I talk to people with imessage. I rhapsodised about cold calls straight from the phone!

Eventually he had it all figured out. He had the placement of the icon, he could tap the screen and the app would open (we were down on the floor by this point), but the "dudududud" of connecting a call still eluded us. We'd been at this for SIX HOURS on and off. We were bored.

I'd been tempted many times along the way to guide his hand. I wanted him to experience the magnificence of the facetime SO MUCH I couldn't stand the suspense. Neither of us likes talking that much-we've nothing to talk about-so it seemed like a paltry reward for this work.

I'd forgotten how finicky the tool really is, particularly when it comes to flipping the picture. He had it all lined up! But the icon is a little tiny (by design) and you have to really get on top of it to tap it down. You know the feeling? You can mistap the damn thing!

Finally he squeezed down on it and, although it was a mistap, a light went off in his head. Many times throughout the day he'd yell at me "My brain is fuzzy! I can't think of anything else to try!!!" and I'd say "When your brain doesn't work, trust your hands"

He felt his fingure tap on the top of the icon. I saw it in his hands. By this point he'd developed a little ritual addressing his fingures to the phone: starting with it on a vertical axis and rotating it to the horizontal while tapping down in a single motion. A choreography.

He looked at me expectantly, excitedly. After six hours of trying you don't want to express too much hope. Was this another blind ally? The phone had been through hell, label ripped off, dented, sharpened and burred, a veteran of a thousand psychic wars. He knew, though.

He set up again, carefully, and brought the swing-a-way to bear on the apple iphone with the meticulousness of Roger Moore extracting a detonator from an ICBM in the Spy Who Loved Me. A soft pop resounded in the room, so different from all the other sounds we'd made.

He didn't look up. He knew the action. A little sweat appeared. He savoured every tap until the app, as I hoped it would, rewarded him by standing perfectly at attention, saluting his efforts and inguinity. He was elated and carried it to the kitchen in both hands.

He knew this was a commonplace task and common tool but also that this was serious business. He knows his son, and the stock I put in these things. A more IT inclined parent might have figured it out in a minutes. He factored the scale, but was rightfully proud.

I'm proud of him too. I know I'm infuriating. I tknow this is son-theatre in some ways. I suffer from a lack of perseverance myself, and like all kids throughout history I'm trying to correct my own mistakes in the way I educate my parent. He sees through this.

The iphone facetime app is a little voodoo doll for us now. It will reappear as an allegory many more times in his life, you can be sure. He knows this too. But this an allegory of. I wish I had more of those for myself. I wish I ad more stories like this.

The only problem is now he still can't use fucking facetime.