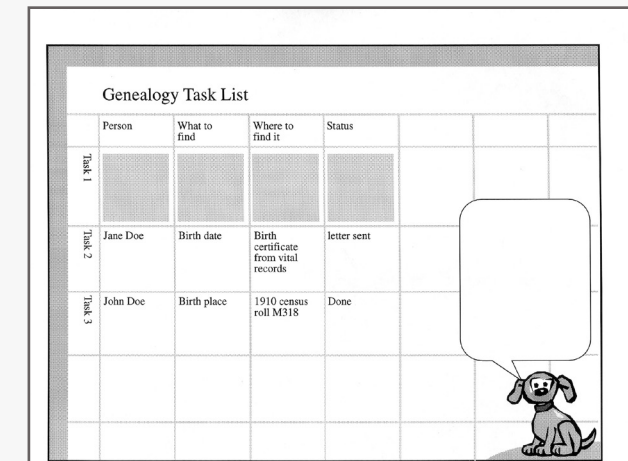
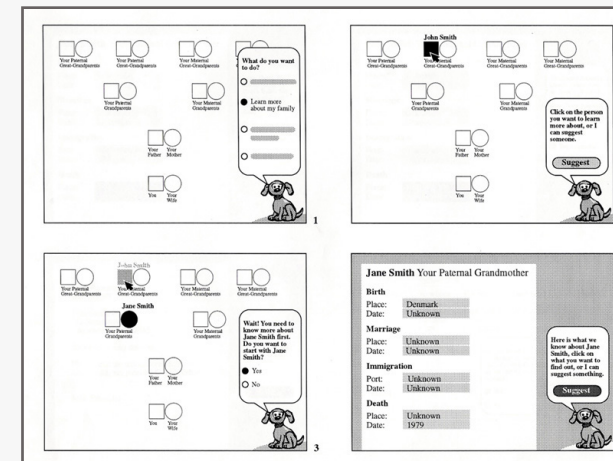
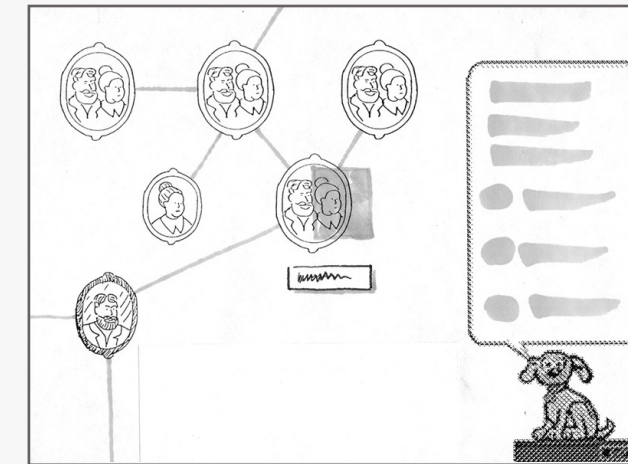
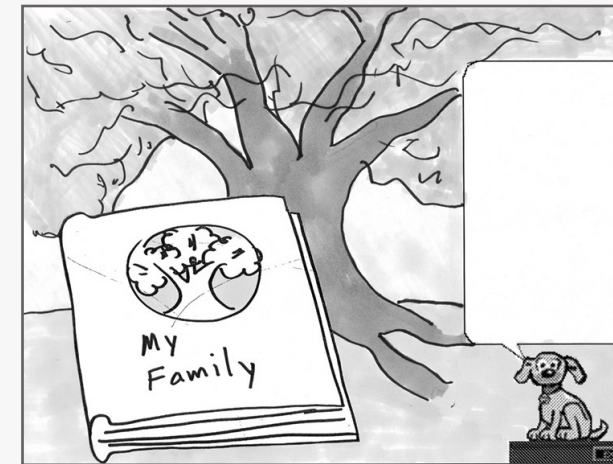


Genealogy App for Microsoft Bob

May, 1995: I accepted an offer from Microsoft to become the Design Lead for The Lifeworks Group in the Consumer Products Division. One of the products the group was slated to produce was a genealogy application for Microsoft Bob. Early in the schedule the Microsoft Bob product line was canceled, but we moved ahead to design a genealogy application free from the constraints of the Bob platform.

One of the main functions of a genealogy app is to display the user's family tree as a diagram that shows ancestors, descendants, and relationships. However, all the genealogy apps of the day produced unwieldy and unattractive family tree diagrams that typically needed to be printed as many pages of hardcopy and then assembled with tape. They were too large to be viewed onscreen without extensive scrolling.

I did visual studies to optimize family tree diagrams in terms of density of information (to eliminate large blank areas that commonly occurred in competitors' diagrams), relevance of



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information, and the types of manipulations afforded. I also wrote a detailed spec of the interactive family tree diagram for our developer team.

The other main function of genealogy apps is to assist users in researching their family trees. Effective family tree research usually required access to genealogy data that mainly existed in just a few large repositories. One of the largest repositories belonged to The Mormon Church. Buying the data would threaten the business case for the product. I advocated pivoting the product into a platform for family tree diagrams that could be licensed to other genealogy software companies.

Unfortunately, mere months into our schedule, the entire product was terminated, and not long after that The Lifeworks Group was eliminated. Soon after that the Consumer Products Division itself was eliminated. These were among the first steps to turn Microsoft “on a dime” in response to Bill Gates’ famous company memo, “The Internet Tidal Wave.”

