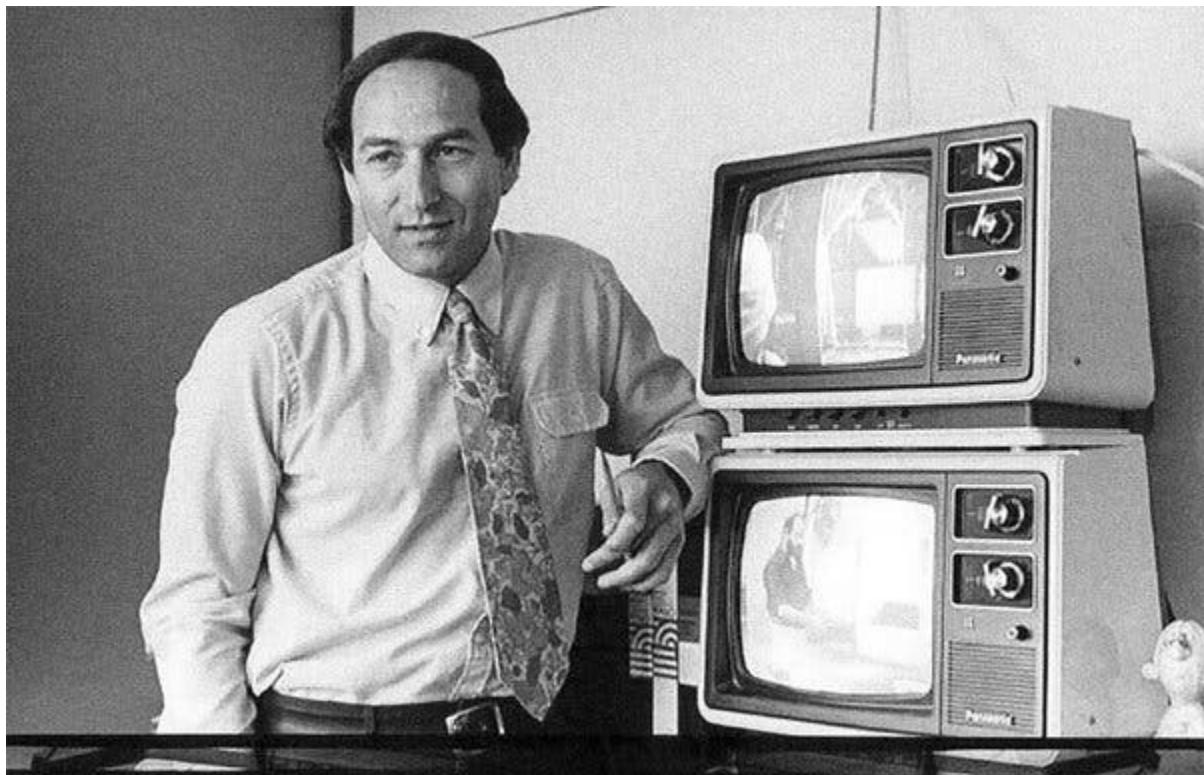


STEWART D. CHIEFET

(September 24, 1938 – December 28, 2025)

Stewart Cheifet, Host of TV's 'Computer Chronicles,' Dies at 87

He spent two decades hosting the PBS series, during the formative years of personal computing. It was seen in more than 300 cities at its peak.



Stewart Cheifet in the 1970s. Credit...The PHLIP Project, College of San Mateo Library.

By [**Trip Gabriel**](#)

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Stewart Cheifet, who enthusiastically charted the geeky formative years of personal computing as the host of a long-running show for PBS, “Computer Chronicles,” which launched in the Bay Area in 1983, died on Dec. 28 in Philadelphia. He was 87.

The cause was the flu, said his daughter, Dr. Stephanie Cheifet Koven.

Mr. Cheifet (pronounced chef-AY) broadcast “Computer Chronicles” from a set in San Mateo, Calif., that in its modest production values was just one step up from the public-

access TV satire “Wayne’s World.” A [mix of news, interviews and how-to segments](#), it introduced early adopters of what were then called “microcomputers” to the first Macintosh from Apple; Windows 95, the breakthrough Microsoft operating system; and a wondrous new communications tool: “electronic mail.”

Video

An excerpt from a 1998 episode of “Computer Chronicles.” Credit: Stewart Cheifet Productions, via the Internet Archives. .

Neither a computer engineer nor a programmer, Mr. Cheifet had a law degree from Harvard and a background in television production and journalism. He launched “Computer Chronicles” while working as the station manager of KCSM-TV (now KPJK), a PBS affiliate in San Mateo, when he noticed a trend: “At that time, people had just started buying Apple IIs and Commodore 64s,” he told Newhouse News Service in 1995. “There were no computer stores. There were no computer magazines. People needed help, and they needed software. So the Users Group was born — a bunch of people getting together on, say, Thursday nights and talking about their computers. We thought, well, why not form our own Users Group and put it on TV?”

Within months of its debut, “Computer Chronicles” was picked up by three dozen public stations and, within a year, it was offered to PBS affiliates nationally. It was seen in more than 300 cities at its height.

Image



Mr. Cheifet in an undated photo with Gary Kildall, an early co-host of “Computer Chronicles.” Credit...Stewart Cheifet Productions, via the Internet Archives

It ran for 19 seasons, through 2002, with 433 episodes. Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos were all guests. In later seasons, Mr. Cheifet delved into [cyberdating](#) and [virtual reality](#). A prescient 1984 episode on artificial intelligence included a researcher who acknowledged the limitations of A.I. applications but predicted that in “10 years, 20 years, these kinds of systems will be quite generally useful.”

Mr. Cheifet was a peppy, speed-talking host who conveyed a boyish enthusiasm about personal computing and the internet. He also steered clear of the utopian gush that suffused the Bay Area magazine *Wired*, or the many Silicon Valley start-ups, which announced so many products that never appeared on the market that they became known as “vaporware.”

Mr. Cheifet hosted a PBS spinoff show, “Net Café,” about the culture of the internet, from 1996 to 2002. By then, he had ditched his suit and tie for a T-shirt and open-necked, black button-down. Taping in “cyber cafes” from San Francisco’s so-called [multimedia gulch](#) or Palo Alto, where keyboard jockeys would pay to connect to the World Wide Web, Mr. Cheifet devoted episodes to hacker culture, “women on the web” and the spread of online disinformation.

“As long as I can remember,” his daughter said in an interview, “he was always really into and curious about new technologies. He really was that techie computer guy, always into the new cool computer, digital watch, early robots.”

Stewart Douglas Cheifet was born on Sept. 24, 1938, in Philadelphia, the oldest of three sons of Paul and Anne (Cohen) Cheifet. His father was a truck driver, and his mother was a bank teller.

He graduated from Central High School in Philadelphia in 1956 and the University of Southern California in 1960 with a double major in math and psychology; at U.S.C., he worked as a news broadcaster on the campus’s radio and TV stations.

After graduating in 1964 from Harvard Law School, where he concentrated on media law, he was hired by the law department of ABC News in New York and then CBS News in a similar capacity.

Moving to Los Angeles within a few years, Mr. Cheifet became a TV legal analyst and covered the trials of the murderous cult leader [Charles Manson](#) and Sirhan Sirhan, who assassinated the presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy.

He and his family lived for a time in American Samoa, a U.S. territory in the Pacific Ocean, where Mr. Cheifet worked for the U.S. Department of the Interior and developed news departments for local broadcasters.

In 1968, he married Peta Kennedy, whom he had met in Paris, where they were both working for CBS. [His wife died in 2024](#). Besides his daughter, he is survived by a son, Jonathan; two brothers, Lanny and Bruce; and five grandchildren.

In 2013, Mr. Cheifet became an assistant professor of broadcast journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno. In an interview for the school's website, he explained how he discovered his calling as an undergraduate when he worked for the radio and TV stations at U.S.C.

“Broadcast was sort of my instinctive passion,” he [said](#). “It was a combination of science and engineering and gadgets and writing, which are the things I love.”