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Hewlett-Packard

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Introduction

Hewlett-Packard, known around the world as HP, is much more than a name on the front of printers and computers. Its story is the story of the American technology industry: a bold experiment begun in a Palo Alto garage that would grow to become a global leader in innovation, helping to shape industries, economies, and the very culture of Silicon Valley itself. Over the course of eight decades, HP has demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt, expand, and influence, leaving a lasting mark on the landscape of American business and society.

Founded in 1939 by two Stanford University graduates, Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard, HP emerged from humble beginnings—a rented garage with a mere \$538 investment—into a revered technology pioneer. Its first products, inspired by curiosity and problem-solving spirit, quickly found practical uses for some of the most influential American companies of the day. Even as HP's product lines grew and its workforce expanded, the company maintained a remarkable dedication to its founding principles: respect for individuals, a passion for innovation, and a commitment to serving its community.

The “HP Way,” as articulated by its founders, became legendary—not just for its focus on creating reliable, high-quality products, but for its transformative approach to management, trust, and organizational culture. HP employees were empowered in unprecedented ways for their era, and many future innovators in Silicon Valley cited their experience at HP as essential to their own entrepreneurial journeys. The company's shifting fortunes, technological breakthroughs, and global reach all stemmed from this commitment to excellence, integrity, and exploring the boundaries of what was possible.

Throughout its history, HP has never shied away from change. From test equipment to computers, from scientific tools to household printers, the company entered new markets, acquired rivals, and at times, stumbled in the face of technological disruption. Major mergers and bold acquisitions marked both periods of phenomenal growth and episodes of deep challenge. Yet, even during times of crisis, the enduring spirit of its founders served as a guiding light, enabling the company—sometimes in new forms—to reinvent itself for the future.

In recent years, HP's story has included one of the most significant restructurings in American corporate history: the division into two independent companies, HP Inc. and Hewlett Packard Enterprise. This split symbolized both an end and a beginning. Each descendant company now pursues its own innovation frontier, whether in consumer devices and 3D printing, or in enterprise cloud, networking, and AI technologies.

This book traces HP's evolution from two young engineers' vision to two 21st-century technology powerhouses. It explores how HP shaped not just products, but people, management philosophy, and the very notion of what an American technology company could aspire to be. Hewlett-Packard's journey—rooted in invention, defined by adaptation, and inspired by a unique corporate culture—remains integral to the ongoing story of American innovation and the future of the digital world.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Dawn in Palo Alto: Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard

The story of Hewlett-Packard, and indeed much of Silicon Valley itself, begins not with a grand corporate strategy or a multi-million-dollar investment, but with the friendship of two young men and a shared passion for electrical engineering. William "Bill" Hewlett and David Packard, born a year apart, would meet at Stanford University and forge a partnership that would reshape the world of technology. Their individual paths, while distinct, converged with remarkable synergy, laying the groundwork for one of America's most influential companies.

William Redington Hewlett was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on May 20, 1913. His father, Albion Walter Hewlett, was a professor at the University of Michigan Medical School. In 1916, when Bill was just three years old, his family relocated to San Francisco, California, as his father accepted a similar position at Stanford Medical School. This move placed young Bill in the heart of the burgeoning intellectual and scientific environment of the San Francisco Bay Area, an exposure that would undoubtedly shape his future. Even as a child, Hewlett showed a keen interest in science and electronics. He attended Lowell High School in San Francisco, where his curiosity and inventive spirit were already evident. Hewlett faced challenges, including dyslexia, which may have contributed to his innovative approach to problem-solving.

In 1930, Hewlett was accepted into Stanford University, a nod to his late father, who had passed away in 1925. He immersed himself in the study of engineering, earning his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Stanford in 1934. His academic journey continued with a Master of Science degree in electrical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1936, and a post-masters engineering degree from Stanford in 1939. Hewlett was known for his love of music and played the trombone in the Stanford University Orchestra, a passion that would later influence one of HP's earliest and most significant products.

Meanwhile, David Packard entered the world a year earlier than Hewlett, on September 7, 1912, in Pueblo, Colorado. His upbringing instilled in him a strong respect for education; his father was a lawyer and his mother a schoolteacher, both of whom encouraged his academic pursuits. Packard displayed an early fascination with science and engineering, constructing his first radio in elementary school. Throughout high school, the tall and athletically gifted Packard excelled not only in his studies, particularly in science, but also in sports, lettering in football, basketball, and track.

In 1930, Packard enrolled at Stanford University, drawn by his interest in electrical

engineering. It was here, in the academic environment of Stanford, that David Packard and Bill Hewlett would first cross paths. They shared classes, but their friendship deepened during their senior year, cemented by a shared interest in electronics and the outdoors. While Packard was outgoing and social, Hewlett was more reserved, a complementary pairing that would serve them well in business. Packard excelled academically at Stanford, becoming a member of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. After graduating with honors in electrical engineering in 1934, Packard briefly pursued graduate studies at the University of Colorado before accepting a job offer from General Electric in Schenectady, New York, in 1935. He worked in the vacuum tube engineering department, gaining valuable experience that would later prove useful.

Despite their differing personalities, Hewlett and Packard found common ground in their intellectual curiosity and their vision for applying their engineering skills. It was during a camping trip after graduation that they seriously discussed the possibility of starting a business together. The seeds of what would become a global technology company were sown in these early conversations between two bright, ambitious Stanford graduates. Their individual backgrounds, though geographically separated in their earliest years, converged at a pivotal moment, setting the stage for an extraordinary partnership rooted in innovation and a shared desire to build something new.

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