

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Carl thinks robot nanny will be a hit

FAILED startup maven Carl worked feverishly on developing his new startup idea of a robot nanny.

He was sure this invention would be his key to fame and fortune; and his escape from the drudgery of being a mere worker.

If Google could make a car with no driver, then he could make a family with no parents — in other words, a robot nanny who could take care of children and relieve parents from the burden of parenting.

Carl imagined the marketing campaign. Every parent would want one. To be a parent and relieved from the burden of parenting; what a blessing that would be.

He thought about how his robot nanny would work, spending time with the child.

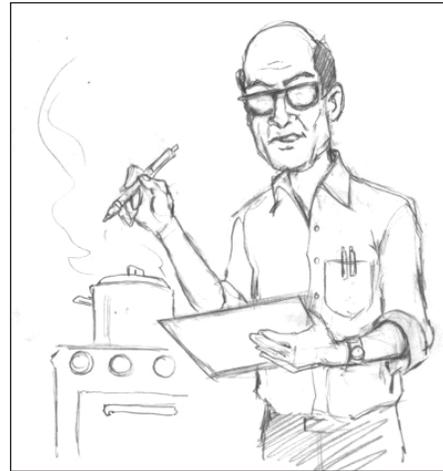
This is part 27 of a 48-part fictionalized serial by John Angell Grant with illustrations Steve Curl.

Palo Alto kids already preferred their devices to their parents, so the society was already half way there.

The robot nanny could do homework with the child. It could bond with the child and be its friend. Children today, Carl felt, were already better friends with their icons on Minecraft than in real life. He knew many boys like that, who were friends of his son Toby.

Of course a robot nanny could play video games with a child. That function would be easy to design.

It would also be important for Carl to think about the criticisms his idea he might encounter, in pitching



CARL

it to funders and potential technical partners. A boy with a robot nanny, for example, might become a source of envy among acquaintances who did not have a robot nanny.

So perhaps there had to be some rules: You could spend time with your robot nanny only at home; you could

not go outside with it. Although, the robot nanny might learn to drive and be able to pick you up in the family car. This would be competition for the Google car, Carl reflected. He got excited about that.

Also, a robot nanny could play catch with a child. Help with batting practice, or tennis; or kicking a soccer ball. There might be a “coach” variant of the robot nanny.

Then Carl reflected, would all robot nannies be the same technologically, or would they be modified for niches. A school, for example, might be interested in the coaching version of the robot nanny, to help with sports and the athletic program.

It was complicated, Carl realized. There was a lot to work out. He spilled out his ideas as quickly as he could.

More tomorrow.