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People

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MY SIDE OF THE STORY

JOAN RIVERS



In an emotional, bitter account she tells of her break with **Johnny Carson**





Martine hopes the Katalavox-controlled wheelchair will "help the disabled transform their lives."

THANKS TO MARTINE KEMPF'S LITTLE BLACK BOX, WHEN PEOPLE TALK, MACHINES LISTEN—AND OBEY

"I'm not a genius," insists Martine Kempf. "Sometimes it's just easier for me to learn things than for other people." At 27, the girl wonder from France plays classical piano, violin and bassoon, flies a plane and speaks three languages fluently. She's also figured out how to talk to machines—by inventing a breakthrough voice recognition microcomputer dubbed Katalavox. With the device, surgeons can guide the precise movements of surgical microscopes using simple spoken commands, while quadriplegics can maneuver their motorized wheelchairs by talking to them.

Weighing only five pounds, Kempf's amazing black computer control box is

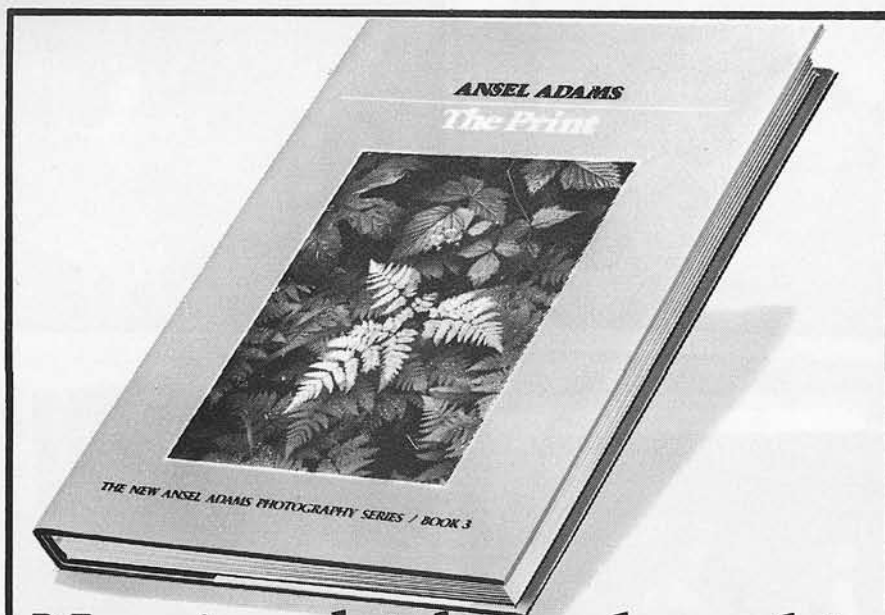
only 9½" by 4". To program it, the user turns on the system, then repeats a command, such as "right," "left," "zoom in" or "zoom out," three times. The computer stores the voice in its erasable-programmable memory, which saves information even after the system is turned off. Martine coined the name from *katal*, which means "to understand" in modern Greek, and *vox*, Latin for "voice."

Recently the Spinal Cord Society recognized Katalavox's contribution to bettering the lives of quadriplegics by giving Martine an award. Last year France presented her with the Prix Grand Siècle Laurent Perrier, putting her in the company of such previous

laureates as Jacques Cousteau, Lord Mountbatten and Mstislav Rostropovich. But when Kempf tried to start her own French company to market Katalavox, the Mitterrand government failed to come through with a promised \$100,000 loan. She headed for San Francisco, where she saw a land of opportunity. Returning to France just long enough to pack her bags, she held a dramatic press conference a few hours before her flight, announcing her departure for California's Silicon Valley.

Although Kempf talks freely of capturing at least 10 percent of the large and lucrative U.S. microsurgery market (her invention is already in use

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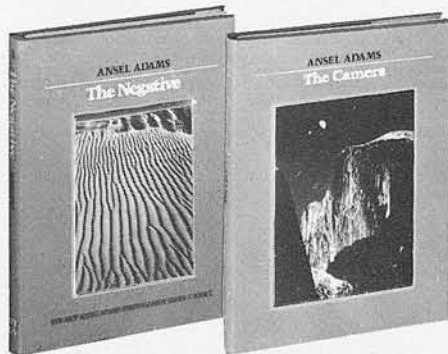
This culminating volume of *The New Ansel Adams Photography Series* on black-and-white photography offers a rare opportunity to look over the master's shoulder as he prepares his legendary, superb prints. From planning and equipping a darkroom to mounting and presenting the finished prints, this practical handbook covers every aspect of creative printmaking. Ansel Adams explains how to choose the appropriate paper and developer, how to master the crafts of burning and dodging, how to use toners, how to avoid "fogging," and much more. Using

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A voice-operated surgical microscope, Stanford's Dr. Vincent Hentz tells Kempf, "is like a car instead of a bike."

Inventors

in Moscow's Institute of Eye Microsurgery, Paris' Rothschild Clinic, Stanford University Hospital and the Mayo Clinic), more than money motivates her. Her father is a polio victim who designed a car he could drive with just his hands and went into business customizing autos for the disabled. "My brothers and I were encouraged to help handicapped people," says Kempf. "Our father tells us all the time that he didn't begin his company just to make money, and this is our philosophy: We do something because it helps."

The inspiration for Katalavox came while Martine was pursuing an astronomy degree at the University of Bonn, 150 miles from her Alsatian hometown of Dossenheim-Kochersberg. Seeing the plight of German teenagers who had been born without arms because their mothers had taken thalidomide during pregnancy, Martine reasoned that a voice-recognition system would help them. First she learned programming on an Apple computer. Then in July 1982 she succeeded in directly transforming the human voice's analog signals into the computer's digital signals. Further refinements enabled Katalavox to respond to a spoken command in .008 of a second (compared with one or two seconds for competing systems).

Others were quick to recognize the invention's potential. NASA is testing Katalavox to see if it can be used on the space shuttle to control cameras mounted on an external robotic arm, and Saab is trying it out to command robots on the assembly line. Kempf is also working with Mer-

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Inventors



Family gatherings often lead to music for Martine, her father, Jean-Pierre, and brother Pierre-Bernard. "We played lots of music, especially at Christmastime."

cedes-Benz to program a mobile phone like the one in *Knight Rider's* KITT, the car that responds to spoken commands.

Martine's home and office is a modern one-bedroom apartment in Sunnyvale, Calif. Her schedule allows her only four hours sleep a night but, she says, "I enjoy the work." Her ambition is to pursue her first love, astronomy, at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena. "It's the best place to study because they are sending unmanned satellites to Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus," she says. "Maybe one day they will man their space vehicles. My dream is to go to Mars. After all, my name is Martine. Perhaps I come from there."

Ten years ago, when Kempf nearly died after eating some unwashed strawberries that were covered with arsenic used in the fertilizer, she made a pact with herself. "I decided I will not spend my life doing nothing," she says. "I want to learn everything that I can and do something to help other people." So far, she has more than fulfilled that promise. —Written by Montgomery Brower, reported by Lisa Bagnatori

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