

WEEKEND'S HOTLIST OF...

TEN MODERN INVENTIONS THAT CHANGED OUR LIVES



1 Sony Walkman
Spawned the iPod and changed the music industry as it became the soundtrack to the morning commute.

2 GPS technology
This satellite navigation system now underpins almost every aspect of Western life, from the satnav in your car to maps on your mobile phones.

3 The barcode These black and white lines revolutionised retail work, and shopping itself. Shoplifting also decreased because customers could no longer swap a higher-priced label for a cheaper one.

4 PlayStation The gaming industry rivals the film business in financial clout, and the PlayStation started it all as it took gaming out of teenagers' bedrooms and into grown-up living rooms.



5 Social networking websites
Revolutionised the way we interact. Facebook is now valued at around £2.75 billion, and the tale of its creation is about to become a Hollywood movie.

6 Text messages Created a new vocabulary and grammar, as well as altering how we use our thumbs, with nearly four million Brits a year reporting some sort of texting injury.

7 Trainers Sports shoes changed fashion and the feet of generations: the Army reports that young people are growing up never wearing leather shoes, so their feet are too soft to wear traditional military boots.



8 Electronic money Gave us credit cards, internet fraud and now, the global credit catastrophe. Thanks.

9 Microwaves Aside from cooking our TV dinners (see below), these electromagnetic waves can also help us communicate via broadband and fibre optics, and they've found a military use in the form of radar.

10 TV dinners Convenience food took hold in the 1970s, changing meal-times, the countryside and the nation's health – not necessarily for the better. www.nsew.org.uk



IT HAPPENED TO ME... I went blind overnight

Cherie Hodgson, 35, originally from Loughton, Essex, lives on the Wirral in Merseyside with her student husband Tony, 36, and their two dogs, Kelly and Davis. Cherie suffers from Leber's, an eye condition that caused her to lose her sight overnight at the age of 19. Her husband is also blind.

Sitting at the steering wheel, I tried to focus as my driving instructor asked me to read out the number plate of the car in front. I'd been suffering from a terrible migraine all day and realised I could see only a white plate with a few black blobs. I told the instructor, who took me home, I went to bed and I didn't think any more of it as I'd suffered from bad migraines for years.

Next day, I felt fine. It was sunny, and I put my sunglasses on and left the house. As I walked down the street, I heard my mum and dad call 'hello'. I turned round, and they told me they'd been right in front of me and I hadn't seen them. This sounds odd, but until someone tells you that you can't see, you just think that what you can see is normal. Thinking about it, I knew my eyesight was a bit blurry but had no idea how bad it was. Mum booked me into the optician's straight away.

I had a battery of tests. I knew things must be bad when I could read only the top three letters on the sight chart; then the optician said he could see something behind my eye and that I should get it checked out immediately. He thought it could be a tumour. I was terrified and couldn't stop crying. I was sent to Moorfields Eye Hospital in London, where I had five hours of tests. The doctors tapped my toes and knees to check my reflexes, and it all seemed fine. I was sent to a neurology unit in London the next day for more tests.

By now I was truly scared. My vision was getting worse but no one could give me any answers. I had three brain scans and loads of blood tests, yet all the doctors could say was that my brain was fine. I had to stay in the hospital for four weeks, by which time my sight had deteriorated. I could see only dark and light shadows and no colours. After a month, they finally diagnosed Leber's, a hereditary condition where the optic nerve and retina are damaged.

Part of me was relieved, because there was no tumour, but then the doctors said my condition was inoperable. The optic nerve is at the base of the brain, and surgeons don't like operating on it as it can cause brain damage.

I was devastated. I'll never forget what the doctor said to me when I was discharged: 'You



"I was incredibly angry, furious with Mum and Dad for having me in the first place. I'd lock myself in my room and refuse to leave the house"

can go home now, you've been registered blind.' That was it. My first thought was, 'I'm never going to get a boyfriend. Who's going to love me if I can't see?' The doctor and my friends tried to reassure me, saying I was attractive and that no one would care if I was blind, but I thought my world had come to an end.

Although I could still see bright lights and blurry movement, there was no way I could continue with my work as a hairdresser. Mum also gave up her job, with the Bank of England, to look after me as I couldn't even make a cup of tea without pouring water everywhere. I was incredibly angry, furious with Mum and Dad for having me in the first place. I am ashamed of my behaviour now. Of course they had no idea I would be born with this condition.

My life had changed overnight, and I had no idea what to do. During the day I would lock

myself in my bedroom; I was so bored. Night-time was easier. My friends would pick me up and we would go clubbing. It was somewhere I could be my old self and dance the night away. Sometimes boys would chat me up but I couldn't see them so they would think I was ignoring them.

After a couple of years I knew I needed to be more independent. I felt claustrophobic and didn't want to be a burden to my parents. So I spoke to my social worker, who set me up in a flat on my own.

I started having occupational therapy. The therapist taught me how to iron, cook and wash clothes. One of my big worries was that I wouldn't be able to dress myself without looking silly. I hated the thought of putting, say, a yellow top on over a pink one. My rehab worker cut the labels of my clothes into different shapes, so a pink top would have a triangle and a white one would have a label cut in half.

Three years after I went blind, my younger sister, Emma, succumbed to the same condition. It was a turning point for me. Emma had always been there for me, but now I knew I had to be strong and look after her instead.

Five years later, I heard about a charity called Action For Blind People in Liverpool, which helps blind people find jobs and rehabilitate. I decided to move up there to see if they could help me. On my first trip to the charity, I met Tony, who had been blind all his life. I always used to have a 'type' of man – blond hair and blue eyes. Tony is dark-haired with dark eyes, so if I'd been able to see him, I probably wouldn't have fancied him, but I loved his voice.

Two years later, I met one of his friends and invited them both round for a party. Tony asked me out on a date and it went from there. He asked me to marry him a year after we'd met that second time and I didn't hesitate in saying yes. He is the best thing to ever happen to me.

We married in August last year and it was the best day ever. Tony is now studying in Birmingham to be a rehab worker for the blind, and I miss him so much. Our plan is to move down to Hereford, where I can study at a college that caters for the blind. I hope to do something involving cookery or fitness.

We won't have children. I've never felt maternal – though I love children – and I would not want to inflict this condition on a child.

For now, we're both very happy. I always say I'm so thankful for going blind because if I hadn't, I'd never have met Tony. ■

Jill Foster

For more information about Action For Blind People, visit www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk or call 0800 915 4666.

CRUFTS BY NUMBERS This year, for the first time in **43 years**, Crufts won't be screened on the BBC, after it broadcast a documentary accusing the Kennel Club of inbreeding • **The dog show, held at the NEC Birmingham, covers 20 acres and has 150,000 visitors** • The Kennel Club has organised Crufts for **67 years**, since it bought the rights from the widow of Charles Cruft, the dog food salesman who founded the show back in 1891