Sage Advice to the new Inventor

I Wish I Knew:

A. .... that when I threw out those sketches of that fantastic game character and the notes that I had stapled to it, I was throwing a piece of my future irretrievably into the waste basket.

B. ... that when I showed that neat piece of code to some of my on-line friends I was blowing my chance to own that idea when it became valuable?
Why didn't anybody in school tell me to save yesterday's "obsolete" notes even though they contained just a rough idea and I had written a much better set of notes a couple of days later?

Why didn't somebody jump up and down and burn into my consciousness the need to treat novel ideas with respect and not blab about them carelessly.
Well, maybe they did tell you and you weren't listening. So why would we want to keep all those notes, like forever? Don't we have enough junk in our files already? This is supposed to be the paperless society!

Well, here are some reasons, for starters:

The next time your boss agrees that "you've got something there" and asks for your notes to try and get some patent protection for that great idea of yours, don't tell him you threw out all your early notes, schematics, flow charts, etc. He'll have cat fits! And the company's patent attorney, or an outside patent counsel, will roll his eyes and sigh.
Ah, yes! Patents! I won't lecture you on the need (or lack thereof) for obtaining patents. They made a huge difference in my life and maybe will in yours. If there is any chance that you may wind up pursuing one or more of them, you need to support them with copious quantities of documentation starting with whatever it was you generated on Day One.

that something you have come up with is original and potentially useful to the company or for licensing to others, then support that idea with decent record keeping. At a minimum, it'll earn Brownie points for you; at a maximum it might become an important part of your history. You never know…

Another reason:

You don't want to look like an idiot if it should come to lawsuit after patents issue and get contested and you need to defend your invention in court….there is nothing like having a complete paper trail of an invention – preferably a day-by-day record – dated and initialed, every last sheet of it, so that when you are on the witness stand trying to convince the judge that it was really you who had that great idea, proving who-did-what is a slam-dunk!
Take it from me: Been there, done that!

1. So, advice Number One: Save all you notes, sign 'em and date 'em!
Patents should have an important place in your life. Learn about them yourself if you haven't been given a really useful introduction to their why's and wherefores. I have been in the interactive video and the electronic toy and game invention and licensing business for the better part of forty years and I would be nowhere if I hadn't learned the ins and outs of patents. Get a good and enjoyable book like my friend Richard Levy's book "The Toy and Game Inventor's

Handbook". Its an eye-opener written with tongue-in-cheek. You'll like it.

2. Advice Number Two: Learn something about the patent system from guys who have been there and made it work for them (it's in the book).
Document everything when you have a really great idea in the middle of the night or when one fell out of a piece of work you were doing on the job. Learn as much about the patent system as you care to absorb; check out your company's position with respect to patents and work within that system. – Finally, there is the Disclosure Document service provided by the USPTO. For ten bucks you can send in a short description of an invention of yours and get a date-stamped receipt of your cover letter from the Patent Office. For twenty-five dollars they send back copies of all of your pages, each date-stamped. If there is ever any litigation that involves the concepts you disclosed in that document, then at least you have a piece of paper that establishes the date of your invention. Easy to do – worth every penny. If nothing else, having expressed in a Disclosure Document what you think you invented and having done so in clear terms on a couple of sheets of paper does wonders for your understanding of your own stuff and your ability to communicate it to others who are entitled to know about it (like your manager, if you are employed). Then mail it off with a check. Better yet, have someone competent and trustworthy double-check it and add further inventive content, if possible. Then list him or her as a co-inventor and have that person initial each page alongside your own hieroglyphics.

3. Advice Number three: Make use of the USPTO's Disclosure Document program.
Check into your company's position on that subject.
Enough said! The best of luck to you! Ralph H. Baer - www.ralphbaer.com