

God's Lonely Programmer

Terry A. Davis (1969 - 2018)



Early Life:

Terrence Andrew Davis was born on December 15th, 1969 in West Allis, Wisconsin as the seventh of eight children. Terry and his siblings were raised Catholic, but later he declared himself as an atheist due to his thinking of the brain as a computer.

Davis grew up with access to his father's Apple II, leading him to develop an interest within computing and programming. In his teenage years he had a Commodore 64 in which he found an affinity for the assembly language.

Davis graduated from Arizona State University in 1994 with a master's degree in electrical engineering. During this time, he was employed at Ticketmaster where he programmed operating systems, giving him experience in something that he used later in his life.

Mental Health and Religion:

In 1996, Davis began experiencing regular manic episodes and suffered delusions of government agents following him, leading him to abandoning his car in the middle of Texas. Davis was sent to a mental hospital where he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and was later declared schizophrenic. From 1996 to 2003, he was admitted to a psychiatric ward every six months. During these stays, he went through a revelation and "talked to God", which turned him religious again.

Once he got out of his mental hospital, Davis wanted to "live like Jesus" and donated all of his belongings to charity organisations, he proceeded to move back in with his parents and collect disability payments. Davis lived out the rest of his as a devout Catholic, saying that God talked to him directly and even that God gave him answers to his questions, saying that the divine word can be given through randomness, which Davis implemented into his later operating systems.

Downfall:

On August 25th, 2017 Davis was arrested on a domestic battery charge for beating up his father. After spending some time in jail, Davis lived in a van his parents gave him where he would stream on TempleOS.org. He refused family and fans help, such as giving Davis a place to stay, or pay for hotel rooms. All throughout these years, Davis uploaded videos onto YouTube and streamed onto his website.

In 2018, Davis struggled with periods of homelessness and incarceration. Davis was also off his medication as he believed it limited his creativity. In Davis' final video, one that was uploaded hours before his death, he mentioned that he removed a lot of his content as he did not want to "pollute" the internet and that "it's good to be king".

On August 11th, 2018, Davis met his fate when he was struck by a train in Oregon. It is unknown whether his death was a suicide or was accidental, but Davis' impact on the people he entertained was felt through tributes and donations to organisations helping ease the pain of mental illness.



TempleOS was Davis' most well-known project, it was made over the course of a decade, with instructions from God telling Davis to include specific features, such as a 640x480 resolution, 16-colour display, and a single audio voice.

LoseThos:

In 2008, Davis created a subreddit and made posts for his new operating system, called LoseThos. This OS was originally made for people who like to mess around with these kinds of systems and programming in general. This OS was not meant to be a competitor to any other OS's such as Linux or Windows.

The OS itself was written completely from scratch using a customised version of C that Davis made himself called C plus at the time, being a middle ground between C and C++, later renamed to Holy C. Because the OS was written in this language, Davis created his own compiler for it making it not be compatible with anything else.

This OS was very easily attacked by basic malware and viruses leading Davis to implement no network functionality to avoid this problem.

TempleOS:

In September 2012 Davis released LoseThos under a new name, SparrowOS, although it would not be named that for long.

In March 2013, Davis had found the perfect name to call his OS, he dropped the name SparrowOS and went with TempleOS, this name is referencing to the fact that he designed the OS to be the Third Temple prophesised in the Bible.

This OS had come with many programs that one could to talk to God in, such as one called "After Egypt" where you can be given random Bible verses or where a stopwatch is used to generate pseudo-random text which was meant to be a message from God. TempleOS also came with its own version of flight simulator along with many games.

Possibly the most impressive thing about TempleOS is the fact that the entirety of it was created by Davis, with it being written in a mixture of Holy C and assembly. Davis had written his own compiler and kernel for the OS too.

Cultural Impact:

Due to the fact that Davis was such a character, he grew a cult following over time starting from when he first uploaded the original LoseThos, but it is most apparent when Davis' started uploading video logs of himself and streaming himself doing live offerings to God and reading hacker news. Fans would regularly tune into streams to get the chance to be able to talk to Davis.

In 2014, Vice wrote up an article about him, leading Davis to gain an even bigger following along with Motherboard who also wrote an article.

Although Terry A. Davis to the average person might come across as a schizophrenic man with delusions of God, his fans look past that and see a very gifted programmer that could have become the next big name in tech had it not been for his illness which hindered him from thinking fully rationally. It is an incredible feat for a single person to create operating system all by themselves, with many people from OSNews mentioning that fact and how computing can still be a hobby to people. There is a reason that Davis self-proclaimed the title, "The greatest programmer to ever live", and to an extent it is true.

Following Davis' death, many fans of his paid their tributes to him through videos about him, posts on the TempleOS subreddit and through donations to a mental illness charity. Davis' work on TempleOS continues in a fork named "Shrine".

These tributes really show how Davis' had affected people's lives and that the man was not a joke to any of these people but rather a person they could look up to and learn from.

References:

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