When I decided to start writing a blog I knew I had to come up with a good title. I went through various names before settling on Software Journeys. I also struggled to answer the “What should I write about?” question. Should I go deep technical like Jon Skeet and Eric Lippert, or focus on business/tech like Eric Dietrich. After staring at my domain name SoftwareJourneys.com for a while it hit me. This is a journey dummy. Write about your journey through the software profession. I firmly believe how one views the world is strongly influenced by their journey through it. The people you meet, the experiences you have, all have a profound impact on your values and beliefs. Some of my viewpoints are different than most, but that’s because my journey is different than most. What worked for me may not work for you. Thus I will write about deep technical stuff, how to survive and thrive as a technical person in the typical corporation, how to hack your life to get the most out of it, and random stuff.

**Background**

I started getting paid to write software somewhere around 2000, but I am not your stereotypical software developer. As a kid growing up in the late 1970s and 80’s I did not have a passion for computers. I did not own a Commodore64 or any early apple product. In fact, I made it all the way to my high school graduation in 1989 without ever touching a computer. Looking back at my high school yearbook we did have a computer lab, but I have never seen it for myself. To get out of taking an art class, I took a year of typing (on an electric typewriter). Looking back I feel that was one of the most valuable classes I took in high school, and it was by accident. Funny how a class I took in 1988 which felt was a waste of time has helped me so much. Long live the keyboard.

After graduating from high school I did not go to college, at least not right away. Like most people from my socioeconomic background, I went into the trades. From 1989 to the mid 90’s I was a bricklayer, roofer, laborer, landscaper, mechanic, glass block window installer, and performer of various other ‘odd’ jobs. My not touching a computer streak continued well into the 90’s. Somewhere around 1995, I was getting sick and tired of making $10 an hour, having no medical insurance, and getting laid off each winter. At some point, someone somewhere said “Hey you should get into computers”. Thus the journey began.

At first, I thought I wanted to be an electrical engineer. As a result, I enrolled in the engineering program at Cleveland State University. Then, switched to computer science. It was at this time that my non-touching the computer streak came to an end, and that typing class I took long ago started to pay dividends. Some years later... I graduated with a computer science degree just in time to witness the 90s dot com bubble burst. Armed with a computer science degree and zero experience I was ready to go.

**Entry Level Something**

For the first 8 years, my career was a mix of PC setup, technical support, systems integration, network support, and software development. My first job out of college was at a 10 person startup that developed software for the manufacturing industry. During my tenure I did not write a single line of code, rather I traveled to various factories across the United States installing our software, configuring PC’s to run our software, addressing hardware, network and other issues with our software. See the pattern. This job lasted less than 2 years. I, along with the rest of the technical staff was let go shortly after 9/11. On the surface, this did not seem like a great job, but looking back it was a good first job for several reasons.

1. **I was required to travel around the United States alone.** At the time this was terrifying, as I had never traveled much before! I was responsible for making all my travel arrangements. I was responsible for shipping all hardware to the site and making sure it arrived in one piece. I was responsible for managing all my expense reports.
2. **I was the face of the company while on site.** I had to train anyone who was using our software. I had to answer any questions technical and non-technical while on site. I had to make sure everything was working as expected. As a result, I quickly learned to dance around questions I had no clue how to answer with “Let me talk to my team and get back to you”. It was at this point I started to get my first lessons in “Corporate Speak”.
3. **Basically, I learned to be a responsible adult.**

**Entry Level Developer**

My next job was another 10-12 person startup. My responsibilities were very similar to my first job except this time I was going to write code! The time management, communication/writing skills I acquired at my first job, and my ever-expanding vocabulary of “Corporate Speak” were starting to pay off. I was still doing entry-level work, but I felt I was doing it better. I was at this company for 6 years, and in that time I wrote some of the most embarrassingly horrific software anyone has ever written. But this job was important for a very specific reason. At some point, I became **“self-aware”**. No, I did not launch the missiles in an attempt to destroy humanity, but it was at this time I had several important realizations.

1. I became aware of a greater community of software developers. It was at this time I started listening to software podcasts and reading blogs.
2. I started attending local meetup groups.
3. I became aware of the need to have a mentor.
4. I became aware of the need to surround myself with people who can push me to do better.
5. For the first time, I started to see this not as a job, but rather as a career.

Armed with my new-found self-awareness I left for greener pastures.

**Software Developer Inching His Way to a Senior Title**

I landed a job as a developer in another startup. But this was no ordinary startup (actually it was). In the 8 years I was there, we grew from 15 people to over 150. It was here that I was formally introduced to Agile principles, practices, and modern software architecture patterns and practices. This job was critical in pushing my career to the next level for the following reasons:

1. I was now surrounded by great people who were passionate about their jobs. This pushed me to be a better developer.
2. I now had several mentors and my learning really took off.
3. I started going to regional conferences.
4. I became confident in my abilities.
5. I developed a good case of “Imposter Syndrome”.

For 6 out of 8 years this was and still is the best place I ever worked. I left this company not long after a restructuring event forced all the original executives, and along with it, all the fun out.

If you have been keeping score you will have noticed that throughout my entire career I have worked exclusively at startups. That is no coincidence. My non-traditional background left me woefully unprepared to run the gauntlet that is the modern corporate interview process. Throughout my career, I have had many interviews with medium to large companies, none of which panned out. If the personality test didn't mess me up the tech trivia, or some other ridiculous test did. For me getting hired at a startup was relatively easy.

This fact was starting to bother me. Was I destined to have my entire career play out in the league of small business software development? After the restructure, I could see the writing on the wall, but I did not want to go to another small business. I wanted to “fix” this perceived problem of me not being able to get hired at large organizations. So I set out to learn as much as possible about the interview process and how to master (i.e. game) it. Think of an interview much like giving a presentation at a conference. Some of it is fact-based, some of it is theater, some of it is smoke and mirrors. It’s basically sales & marketing and most software developers are really bad at sales & marketing. I spent a year learning and practicing the art of the interview. And it paid off.

**Senior Software Developer**

In 2017 I landed a job at an insurance company with a market cap of around 6 billion. Goal achieved! I now work at a large company. This is where I currently sit today. A senior software developer building .Net applications for the insurance industry.

**The Future Is Not Set…**

I know I referenced the same movie twice in one post. But this brings us to fall 2019 where I sit at a career crossroads. This is the part of the journey that has yet to be written.