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FYE – Career Exploration Project

My first experience with computers was playing around on my father’s desktop at home. He was a military contractor designing missiles, and ran a very specialized computer with an operating system called ‘SuSE Linux’. I grew up on that system, and on Linux. I would bring home games made for Windows 98 or 2000; my dad would show me how to get them to run on SuSE. Over time I picked up a knack for the system. When I was fourteen my family moved from our house in Madison to our current home five houses down the same street. In a rare display of compulsion, dad purchased a DSL internet connection for our new home, though he was still adamantly opposed to wireless networks for security reasons. Later that year I decided that I wanted a computer of my own for school. I didn’t have much money of my own, but I knew that a local thrift store usually had rejected computers for sale. Over several months I squirreled away yard mowing money and used it to buy guts out of the computers at the thrift store. Instead of buying one broken computer, I would bring a screwdriver with me and disassemble the desktop in a back room of the store. Then I would find a part that looked like it would work and purchase it. By the end of the year I had my very own desktop, built out of scrap, and housed in two shoeboxes taped together. Eventually I rebuilt the computer with the help of one of my teachers. At one point I purchased a wireless router, which I kept hidden in a drawer in my room for several years while it provided me with a wire-free internet connection. I taught myself C and C++ before 9th grade, and then moved on to website design and HTML.

To very briefly summarize important happenings in high school, I met a girl in a mandatory health class. We spoke a little throughout the semester, and remained acquaintances through our junior year. In our senior year of high school, she learned that I did not plan on attending prom, so she asked me to be her date to the event. Things worked out and we’ve been dating for 7 months now. Which is great and all, but doesn’t seem like something that would impact my decisions about a future career. Well, Charisse has Cerebral Palsy, a motor control condition that keeps her from being able to walk or speak like most other people. I believe that I can develop adaptive technologies to give Charisse, and people like her, their independence back. As best I could tell, computer engineering was the most capable at combining my computer skills with my goals in life, and it is my currently listed major.

The Holland Career Survey returned “realistic” and “investigative” as my top personality types. Both of these link to careers that I believe either follow along with computer engineering or are still possibilities with a computer engineering degree. Both of these attributes, given that they are accurate and in some way more pronounced than any of the others, play well into designing computer and robotic platforms for a specific audience. As my highest scoring personality, the “realistic” category details many careers that I have both expressed interest in or would care to learn more about. Setting aside my personal major of “I’m going to change the world and you guys didn’t make a class schedule for that” and career objective to design devices for the handicapped, the “computer and electronic product manufacturer” career interests me the most. Arriving at that conclusion is difficult at best because of my interests. I love welding and metal fabrication, and the idea of becoming an underwater welder for the Navy or for scientific research fascinates me. I do all of my own work on my (ancient) car, and have the occasional daydream of designing vehicles or opening an auto shop. Both of these alternate routes are enveloped by the “realistic” career suggestions. I am not reluctant to explore careers, but ultimately I am going to make my decision on how well I feel I can make an impact on other peoples’ lives.

Finding information about designing computer platforms hasn’t been easy. While I was college searching my junior year, I was able to speak with several knowledgeable professors at Kettering University, but since then have not been in contact with anyone of that quality at UAH. My family doesn’t have any computer or electrical engineers, but my dad has always been more than informed about computer systems and willing to help me learn about them. Other than the handful of people I’ve encountered, Google has been my leading source of information on anything. Nearly everything I know about computers has come from searching for information on Google, and I regard what computer classes I’ve taken as meek and fairly useless in comparison. When I decided to list myself as a computer engineer while applying to UAH, it was only after reading every informative CPE article I could find on Google.

Values are difficult. What constitutes a value? How do values measure my career plan? Why three of them? No idea, but I do have a few notions of how I want my future career to play out, so I’ll consider them values and see if it works. Value number one: I want my job to be awesome. That should be everyone’s goal, do something that you think is awesome and get a kick out of. Otherwise, I personally feel the whole idea of getting what you want out of life has been missed by some construct of forced priorities like paychecks (big ones, not ones needed to get by). I get a kick out of working with computers and building robots, big checkmark there. Second, I want my job to help others. This could also mean “be fulfilling”, but the idea is that although working on cars is awesome, I don’t think it’s fulfilling enough to be my dream job. Helping people overcome physical inabilities, however, does seem pretty fulfilling to me, another checkmark. This leads directly into my third value: my job needs to be new. Mechanics have to study how something is put together or built by someone else and then fix it. I want my job to not follow a prescribed format that someone else created. In regard to mechanics, I’d rather design the car instead… No, not even that. I’d rather design the concept car that looks nothing like any other car ever. Yeah. I think that’s absolutely possible in the world of rehabilitation, and that’s my last checkmark on the list.