

Linus Torvalds

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Personal life

Linus Torvalds was born in Helsinki, the capital of Finland on December 28th, 1969. Even though he was born in Finland, he considered as a Finish-American software engineer because he took American citizenship since he worked in the United States of America for many years.

He is essentially the founder of Linux (more accurately Linux kernel), the Unix based operating system, as well as the creator of the distributed version of git and the diving logging and planning software known by Subsurface.

Torvalds has won many awards during his long career in software engineering, including the 2012 Millennium technology Prize, the 2014 IEEE Computer Society Computer Pioneer Awards and the 2018 IEEE Masaru Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award.

Linux

As a student Torvalds started learning how to code in C and that's how his software engineering journey began. In those years he came across UNIX operating system, but because it was expensive he considered using MINIX which is a smaller version of UNIX. Another thing that Torvalds found quite annoying is that there was no source code for a vast number of operating systems or programs. Those were essentially two most important reasons why we can say that Linus Torvalds is one of the most important software engineers in the world. He was an advocate of free software (Linux operating system has been free since the beginning) and he wanted all source codes to be public. Torvalds then decided to make a completely new operating system which would be based on both MINIX and UNIX operating systems that would be free to everyone. Here is his first announcement on the MINIX newsgroup comp.os.minix about the creation of his new operating system:

Hello everybody out there using minix-

I'm doing a (free) operating system (just a hobby, won't be big and professional like gnu) for 386 (486) AT clones. This has been brewing since april, and is starting to get ready. I'd like any feedback on things people like/dislike in minix, as my OS resembles it somewhat (same physical layout of the file-system due to practical reasons)among other things.

I've currently ported bash (1.08) and gcc (1.40), and things seem to work. This implies that i'll get something practical within a few months, and I'd like to know what features most people want.

Any suggestions are welcome, but I won't promise I'll implement them :-)

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One month after that, he announced the first version of his new operating system, shortly after the first came out the second one which was the official version that featured two system utilities: it was able to run both the bash shell and the GCC. Torvalds uploaded his source code to a network so that everyone can study the code. The original name for the new operating system was Linux, but because Torvalds thought it was egotistical he changed it to Freax (free, freak and MINIX). However, his friend Ali Lemmke created a folder on his server called linux, so that became the name of the new system. Because the source code of Linux was on the network anyone could study and add stuff to the code. That enabled many programmers from all around the world to help Torvalds develop the new operating system.

As a result of his hard work, Torvalds was offered a job as an instructor at the University of Helsinki where he could teach as well as continue the development of his new Linux operating system. However, as Linux was improving and after years of working at a University of Helsinki, Torvalds decided to change something and accepted a position at Transmeta Corporation in Santa Clara in California's Silicon Valley.

At the time, Linux was getting so important that people started comparing him to Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, although the difference was immense since Gates was a millionaire and Torvalds wasn't making almost anything from Linux, which has changed later on when Red Hat VA Linux presented some stock options to him.

That boost was followed by an even bigger boost. Many really famous and important companies (Oracle, Intel, Netscape, etc.) decided to support Linux as an alternative to Microsoft Windows simply because it was free and it had a lot of potential. Soon Linux started being for Internet servers and networks. One of the most successful free web servers, Apache, was first written for Linux.

Shortly afterwards Linux became one of the most important operating systems that we know today, which was mostly due to Torvalds' personality and hard works as a software engineer. That personality made him create a free operating system and the time he did it was the best time possible because computers were cheaper and could be bought by basically anyone, so people couldn't afford operating system like Microsoft Windows and Linux was a perfect alternative since it was free. All of those aspects make him one of the most influential software engineers ever.

Git

Maybe one of the greatest aspects of Torvalds is, as he says: “open source is the only right way to do software”, and he really proved that with making Linux free as well as being open source. However, some criticized him for using proprietary BitKeeper software for version control in Linux kernel. In his defense he also said that he always uses “the best tool for the job” which BitKeeper was back then, but because he was criticized for it, he created a free-software version of BitKeeper called Git.

Git is widely used by software engineers all around the world as a system to track changes in computer files and coordinating them among multiple people. Today, that became the most important tool when doing projects in groups.

Sources

<http://www.linfo.org/linus.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linus_Torvalds

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Git>