

A 10-Year Journey at Cal

How I left then found my way back to Berkeley

Alex Krentsel, 4/21/2024



Full Circle Moment



Me, at this same (!!) Regents' Alumni Reception, in 2016

Outline

- Prelude: Heading West
- Act 1: A Cal Cub is Born
- Act 2: Young Bear Leaves the Nest
- Act 3: Cal Bear Comes Home
- Lessons Learned

Prelude: Heading West

Immigrant parents from Ukraine and Russia.

Grew up curious and indecisive:

- Chemistry? Lawyer?
Translator? Diplomat?
- No clue where I'd end up...



Getting into Cal

- Ended up at Cal somewhat-accidentally
 - Hadn't even *heard* of R&C when I got it, pure luck.
 - Interviewer: Prof. Scott Shenker from the CS department.
- One of 5 kids from the *entire state of Kentucky* in Class of 2019.



Scott Shenker



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- One of 5 kids from the *entire state of Kentucky* in Class of 2019.
- One of 1 kids from anywhere near my town in upstate New York.



Scott Shenker

Act 1: A Cal Cub is Born

Early Memories

A New World

- Moved into Foothill
- Huge, overwhelming school
 - Ask me my student ID...
- Late-night waffle-fries
- Messy, messy dorm room



(First) 4 Years at Berkeley

Searching for Community

- Freshman Years: (unsuccessfully) trying to fit in
 - Tried clubs I was “supposed to”
 - Turned to passions to look for community
- 2nd-4th Years: Finding Community
 - Music (UCB Symphony Orchestra, Carillonist)
 - R&C
 - Teaching (Course Staff, BEAM)
 - Plenty of Other Failed Attempts



Teaching

Started as a curiosity, became a deep passion.

- Tutored for EE16A
- TA-ed EE16A, CS61B, CS189, CS168
- Taught elementary-schoolers science after-school



R&C at Berkeley

Not involved in RCSA proper, but...

- ROHP Committee '15-'16
- TEDxBerkeley Committee '18-'19



2015-2016 ROHP

Constant Support in the Background

- Confidence and belonging
- Class registration/housing perks
 - (my college best friend)
- Supportive advising staff



2018-2019: TEDx Berkeley

Act 2: Leaving the Nest



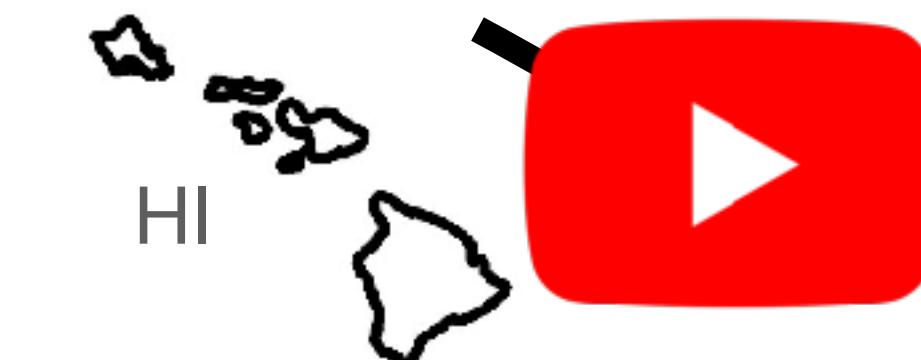
A Meandering Path



A Meandering Path



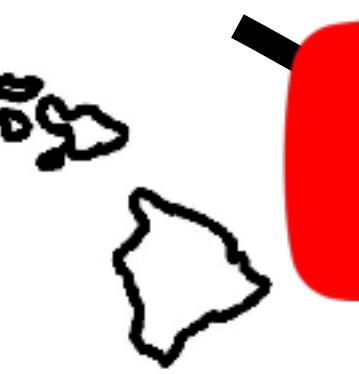
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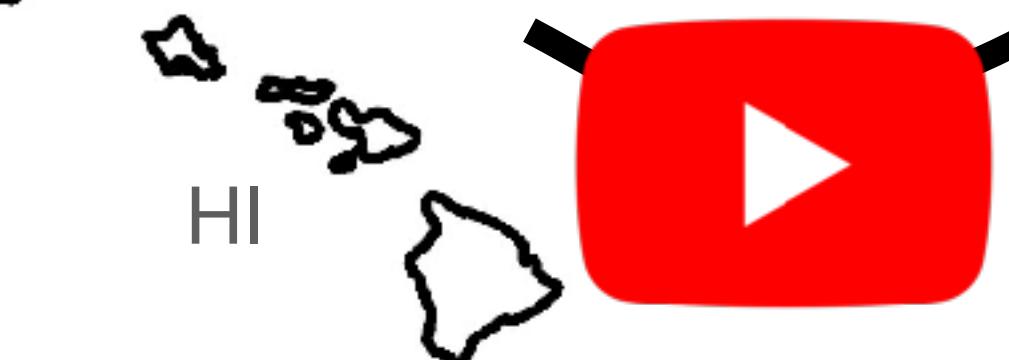
The collage includes:

- A top-left image showing two men smiling outdoors.
- A top-right image of two men smiling indoors; one wears a grey hoodie with a green tree graphic, and the other wears a yellow hoodie.
- A middle-left image of a YouTube Premium trial offer: "YouTube Premium Get YouTube without the ads", with "Skip trial" and "1 month free" buttons.
- A middle-right image of a YouTube Premium trial offer with the text "Wish videos kept playing when you closed the app?", "Get background play with YouTube Premium", and "SKIP TRIAL" and "1 MONTH FREE" buttons.
- A bottom-left image of a person's hand holding a smartphone.
- A bottom-right image of a dark screen with a blue "1 MONTH FREE" button and a "SKIP TRIAL" button.

A Meandering Path



A Meandering Path



CSCI 100

Q Search C YouTube Channel

- Announcements
- Calendar
- Filter Gallery
- Mock Interviews
- Schedule
- Staff
- Syllabus

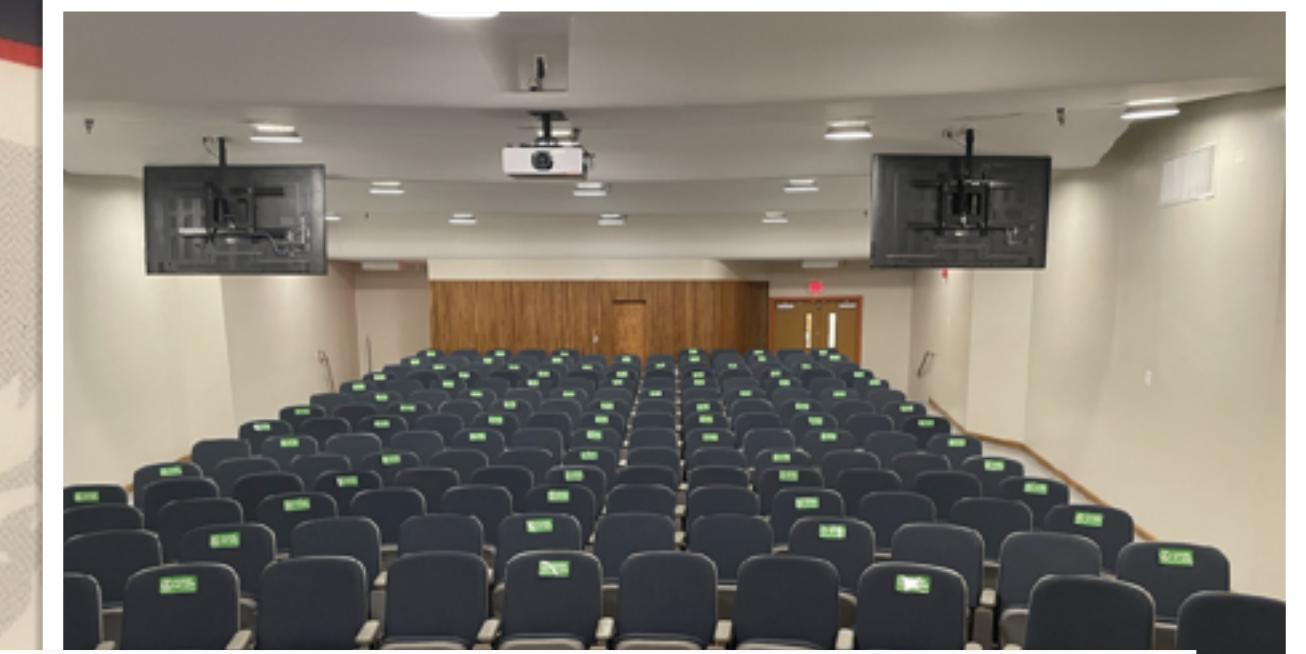
This site uses [Just the Docs](#), a documentation theme for Jekyll.

Howard CSCS
Intro to Computer Science

About the Class

CSCI100 is an introductory class designed for students with no formal exposure to computer science or programming. The goal is to provide a gentle but thorough introduction to computer science that will prepare students to either take further computer science courses, or use computer science in their field of study.

See the [Syllabus page](#) for more details on course policies.



Scott Re-emerges

Sent a Merry Christmas email to Scott, mentioning being disillusioned with work.

Scott replied back encouraging me to try research at work, mentioned a group.

I started helping out a few hours a week in spare time.

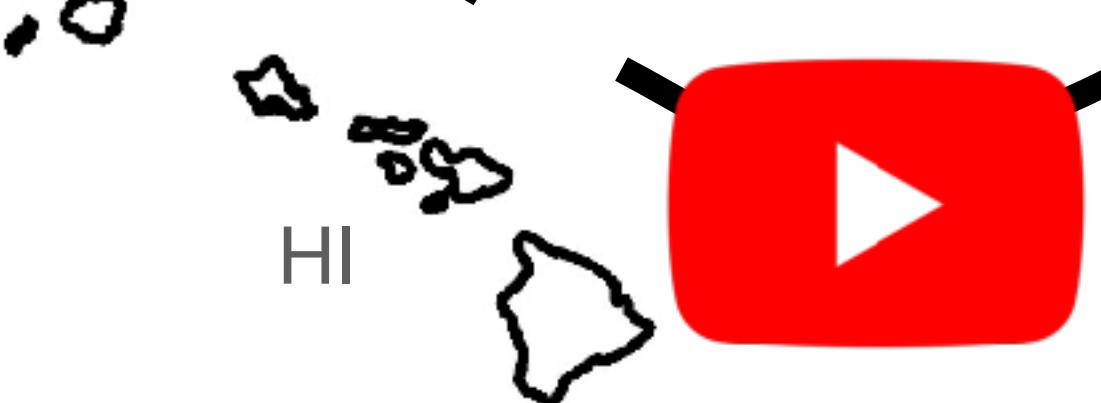
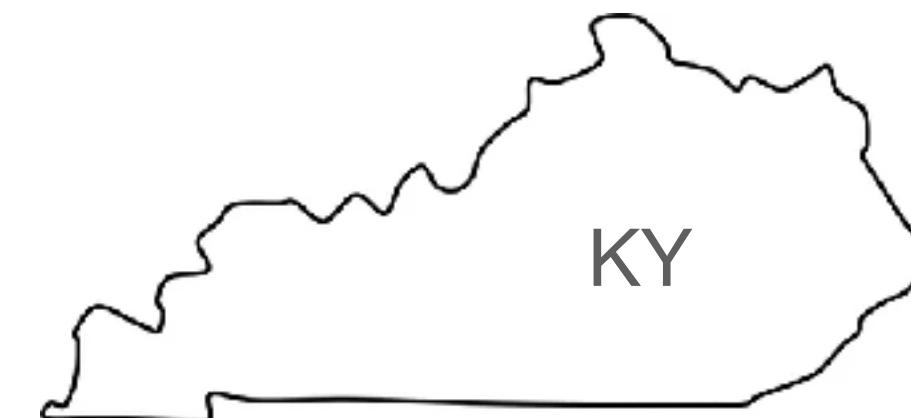


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HI

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Research at Google

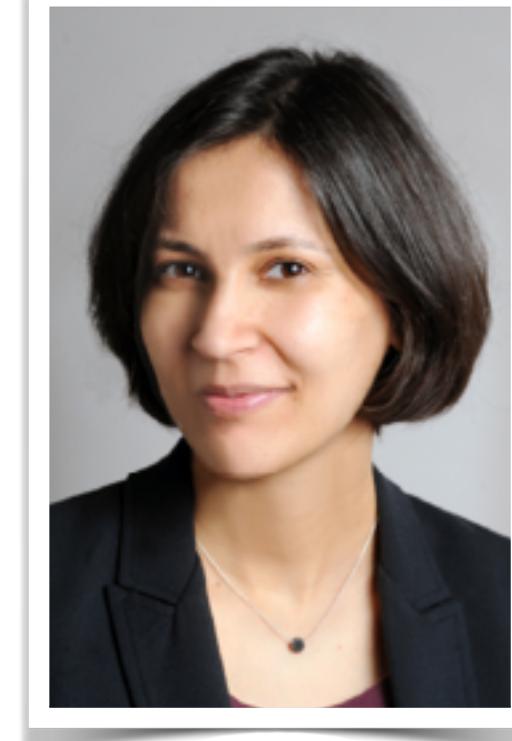
Act 3: Cal Bear Comes Home

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Research at Google

A Meandering Path



Research at Google

PhD at UC Berkeley

Déjà Vu...

- Office in Soda Hall
- Research in Systems
 - Internet Architecture
 - Anything to do with How the Internet Works
 - Formal Verification
 - Proving that a system will *always* behave
 - Teaching CS
 - Lectured Intro to CS in Ethiopia last summer
 - Part-time work at Google as a Systems Researcher



Lessons Learned

The Challenges Don't Stop After Upperdivs

The Real World...

The transition to the real world:

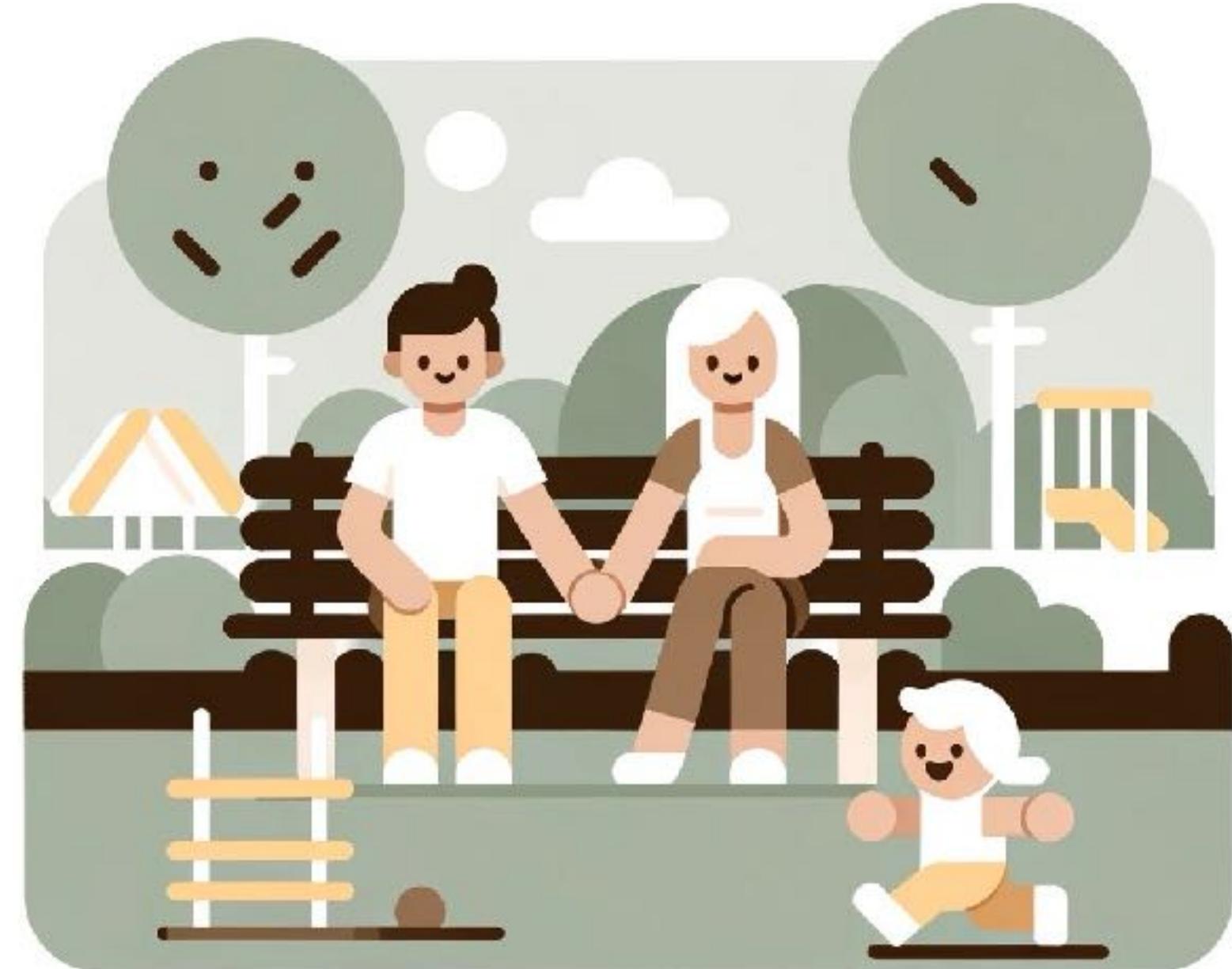
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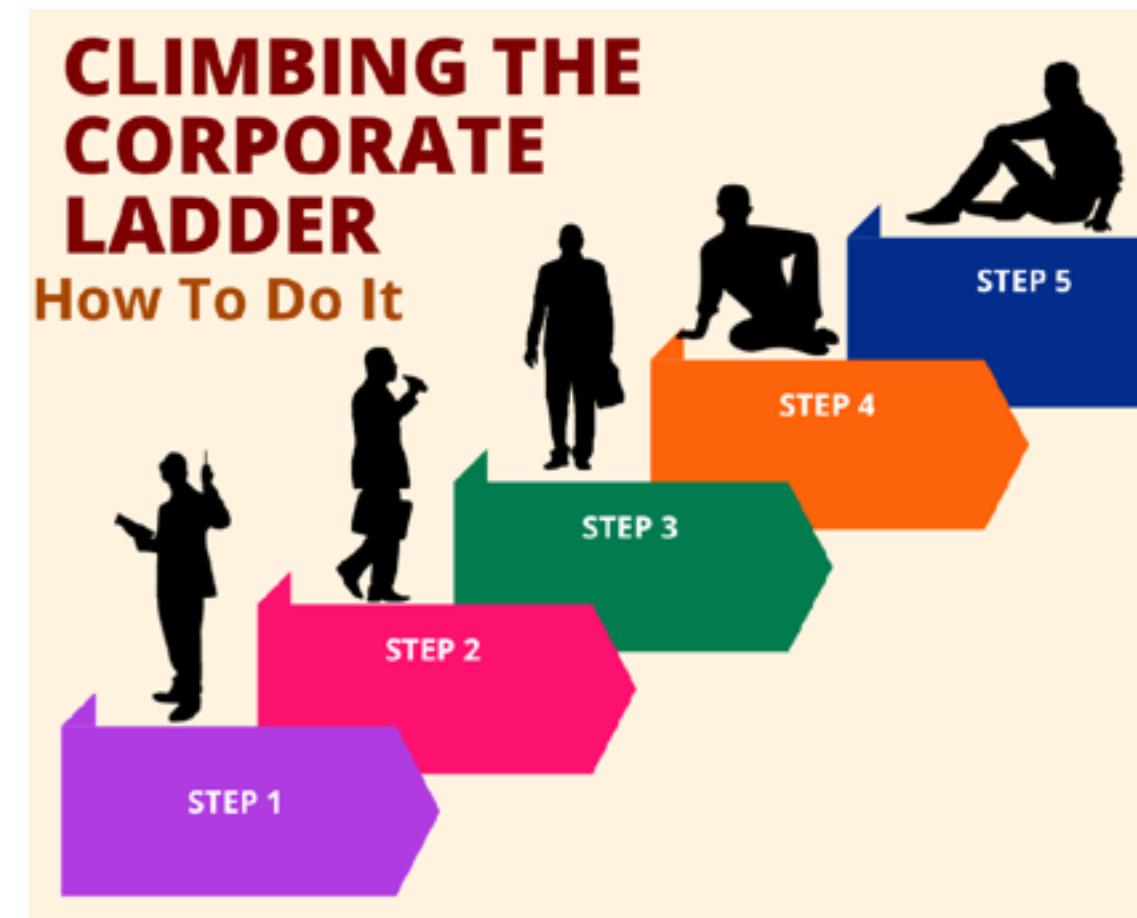
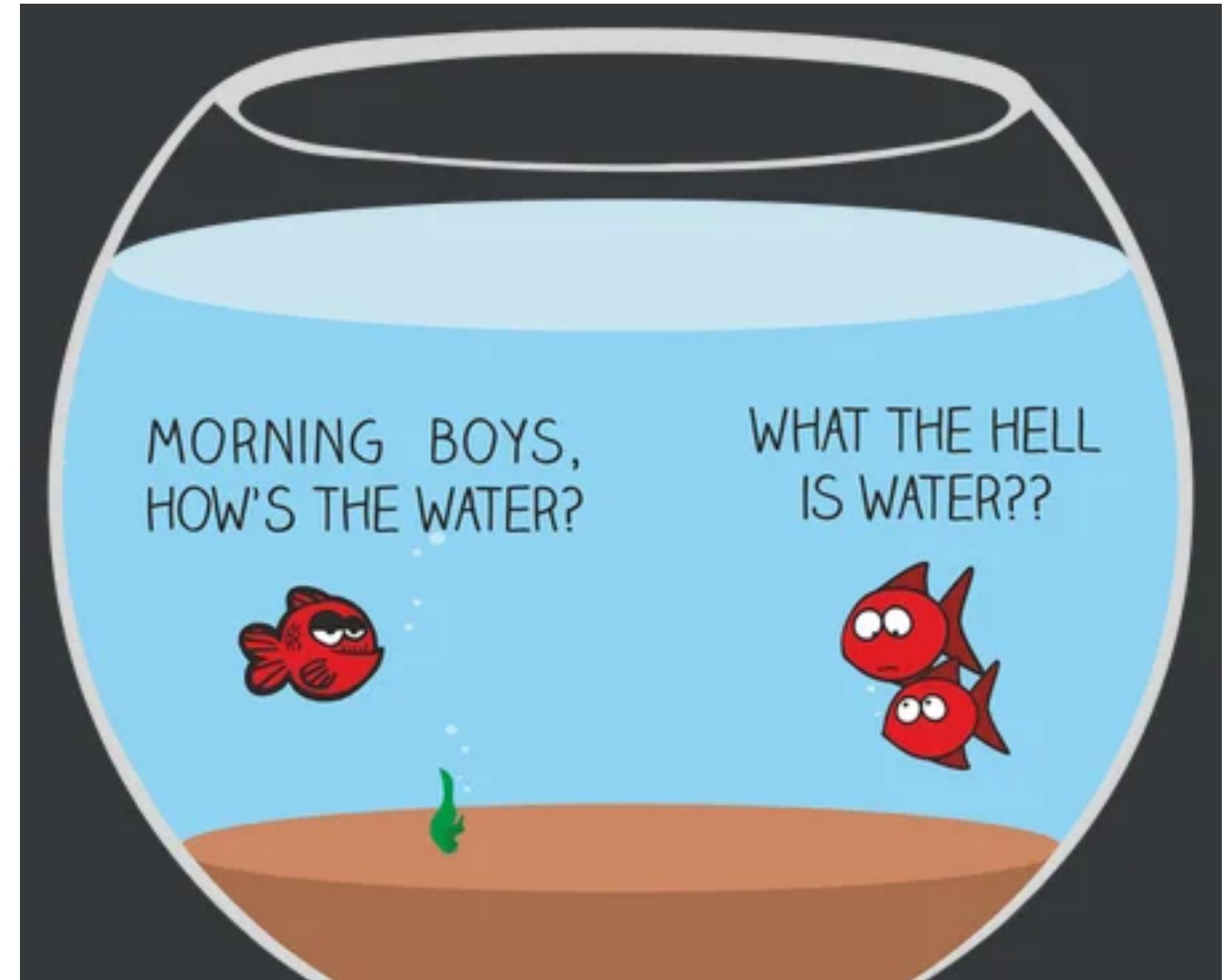


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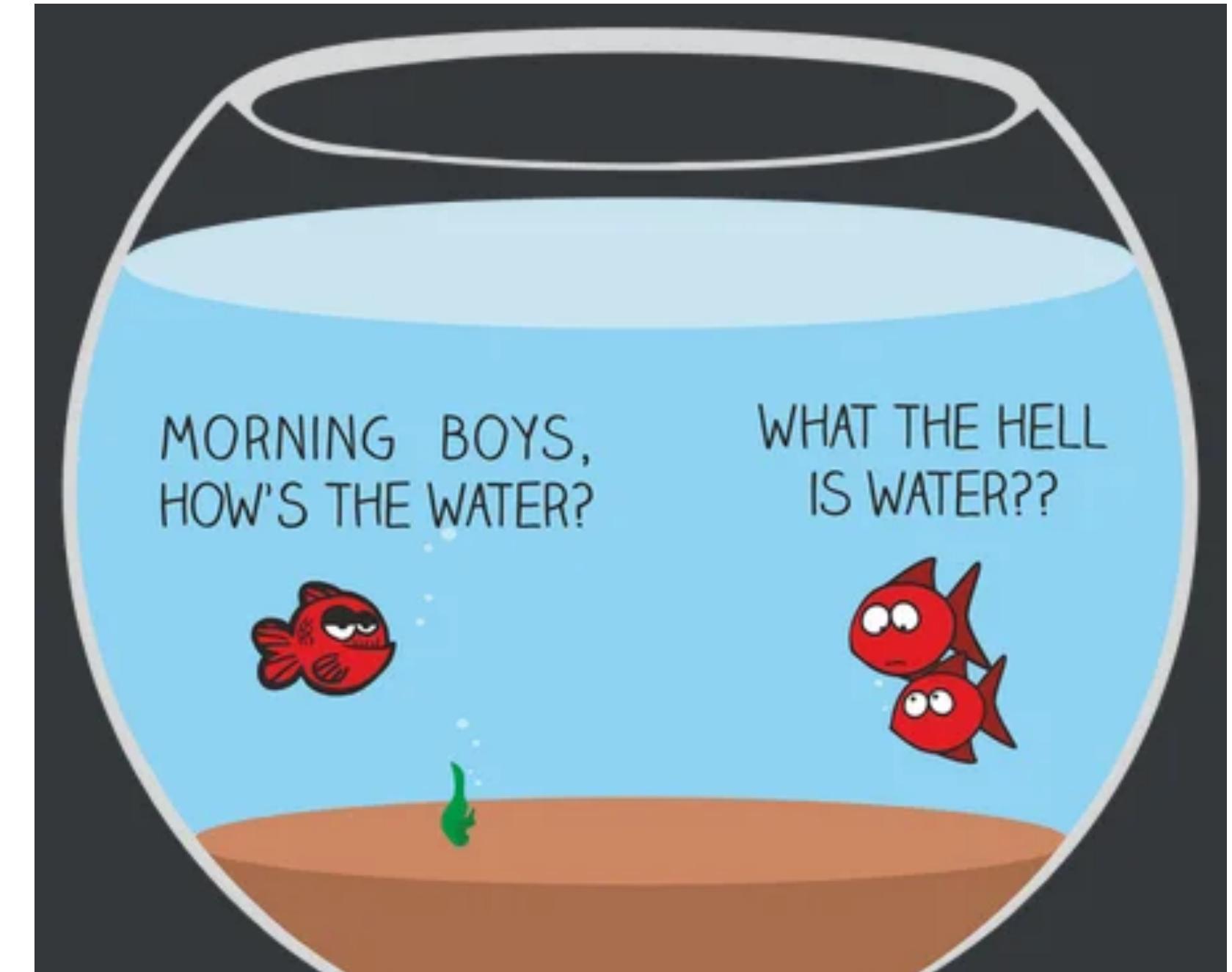


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Life becomes an exercise in figuring out *who* you are



Figuring Out Who You Are

- Continue to Explore
 - Early is the time to take risks, try things
- Seek out (and maintain) mentors
- Be open to connections, stay curious
 - Search for people driven by their passions



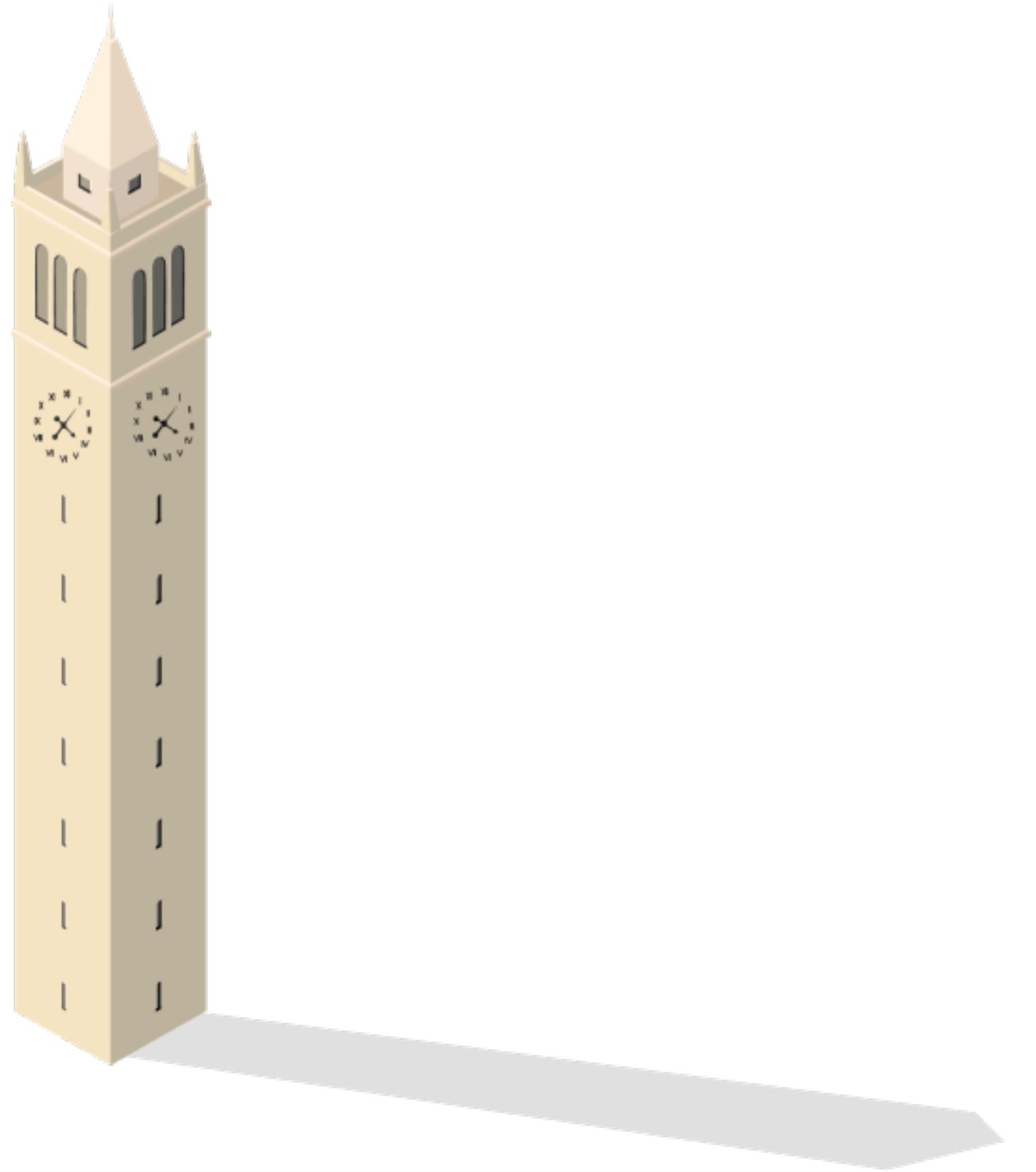
Agency is Key to Happiness

- Easy to start to feel boxed in or unhappy
 - Remember: you can make a new choice and pivot *any day*, and change your circumstances.
 - “Agency is realizing you can just DO things.”
- It’s *certainly* not too late

“The universe is 90% gates that look locked but simply push open.

The other 10% are actually locked but, if you ask nice, people will usually just let you in.”

Jake Cooper (not famous)



Go Bears!



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Backup/Extra Slides

Berkeley's Gift

Berkeley gave me:

- Alumni community. Incredible actually just how many Berkeley folks there are around
- Grit and resilience
- Pride in public education
- Passion for education at scale, accessibility, mobility through education

Misc. Lessons Learned

- Consistency – small steps every day.
- Learning to say no.
- *Explore*. That is your primary job.
- Find and follow your passions
- It's never too late.
- Don't be afraid to ask.

Finding Mentors

- Find people that have something in common with you (Cal Alumni!)
 - Does not have to be someone famous! Can be a TA, or more senior student
- ...