<h5> This is the story of how, after a 15-year hiatus, I got back into web development and computer programming. </h5>

*TL;DR – I did some web design stuff in high school that didn’t amount to much, got discouraged and distracted, and programming fell out of my life for about 15 years. Fast forward: worked for Amazon by accident, wanted to switch from customer relations to product management, but kept hearing that I needed an MBA (boring) or more tech knowledge (cool!). Then I started an apprenticeship through Bloc. Now I’m coding again.*

I took my first web design class when I was 14. It was a summer program at the <a href=””> South Carolina Governor’s School for Science and Math</a>. During a two-week residential program, I learned basic HTML and FTP uploading, hosted through a company called StasNet. I basically just lifted a bunch of anime screenshots off other websites and put together an homage to my favorite characters. My instructor had not gone into details about the <a href=””>DMCA</a>.

When I went to pick my high school classes, I wanted to take computer programming, but had to make it past geometry and algebra II before they’d let me enroll. I kept poking around at my dinky fan page until the summer after my freshman year. I got to do a more ‘advanced’ web design program at the <a href=””>Art Institute of Atlanta</a>. Somehow this course still didn’t touch on CSS, but we covered DreamWeaver and Flash. So, I designed a slick looking site with a Flash video of “borrowed” images my favorite anime characters, because still no one had explained the DMCA to me. To be fair this was only 3 years after the DMCA had passed, so maybe it wasn’t as big of a deal then. Also, my final project came home with me on a zip disk. Yeah. A zip disk.

I was excited and kept tweaking and adding more and more to my couple of sites. Even wrote some horribly angst-ridden fan fiction and put it up. Then, all of a sudden, poof…Stas Net was gone. I went to log onto my account and *404 page not found*. A few days later, same. A month…same. No warning e-mail, no banner on the homepage, no notice whatsoever and the sites I’d poured so much time into were gone with no trace. Of course I hadn’t been smart enough to back it all up, so my code that I’d tweaked and inched just disappeared into the ether.

It was okay though, because a friend of mine told me about Geocities. I tried recreating my site but had trouble finding the photos I’d used and remembering the formatting I’d used, so it was a pale comparison. But I was excited because junior year was rolling around and I was enrolled in a programming course for C++ and BASIC! Then, two weeks before school started I got a call that the computer programming teacher had quit and there was no replacement, so I had to choose a different elective. I picked an art class and that was that. My Geocities tweaking dwindled. I spent more time doing speech and debate and other after school clubs, and, without conscious effort, programming dissolved out of my life.   
  
In college, I decided to major in Historic Preservation and Urban Studies with a Spanish Minor. I thought about taking a computer science class in college, but was deterred because of the high-level math prerequisites. Math was not my strong suit, and I was on scholarship that required a 3.5 GPA, so I stuck to the humanities, where I excelled and that sweet, sweet scholarship money was safe. So, I went out into the world, worked as a City Planner in Kansas for 2.5 years, decided it wasn’t for me, then bounced around odd jobs for another 1.5 years before moving back to Charleston, SC, where I had attended college.

Three weeks after moving back to South Carolina, I got a call from a staffing agency saying that a publishing company, On Demand Publishing LLC, needed customer service help. I couldn’t find much info about the publishing company online, but I figured I needed a paycheck and could always leave if things were bad. Three days later I walked into the headquarters for CreateSpace, Amazon’s paperback book self-publishing subsidiary. I learned about a world of print-on-demand software platforms and manufacturing systems I never knew existed. I really enjoyed helping authors achieve their dreams, and was fascinated by the complexity of the systems we were using to keep the ever-growing ship afloat.

I went from a temporary customer service agent to a full-time position in six months. 12 months later I was promoted to a senior specialist, and nine months later, in 2013 got promoted to Executive Customer Relations, the highest customer-facing role in the organization. In that role, I was a bridge between highly escalated customers and CreateSpace and Amazon executives including directors, VPs, SVPs, and occasionally even Jeff Bezos. I was responsible for mitigating sensitive situations with authors threatening lawsuits or negative press, diving deep into large scale issues that impacted tens or hundreds of thousands of customers, and working with business and software development teams to make long-term plans for customer experience improvements.

I got to a point where about 50-60% of my time was spent on project and program management. The more I worked with our dev teams, product managers, and business leadership, the more I wanted to be part of the creative process. I still felt like a lot of my time was spent being reactive – fighting fires and responding to negatively impacted customers – that it felt like the work I was doing wasn’t **really** making the platform better. In 2015 I started looking for entry level program and product manager positions. Amazon encourages employees to briefly meet with hiring managers of jobs they’re interested in for an informational session. Time and again I heard from hiring managers that they were looking for people who had 2-3 years spending 100% of their time on product/program management, someone with an MBA, or someone with more technical (read, software development) knowledge.

I couldn’t magically wake up with three more years of experience and spending two years and $40-75k on an MBA sounded painful, but learning more about software development sounded fun! After researching a variety of programs, I settled on Bloc’s software development track (SDT) apprenticeship. Unlike boot camp programs, Bloc’s SDT apprenticeship is more in-depth and covers computer science fundamentals like algorithms and data structures. Most boot camp programs are 12-16 weeks. The minimum time to complete Bloc’s SDT program is 54 weeks.

So, 16 years after starting my journey into front end web development, here I am, back where I started: learning, coding, and cursing at my computer.