To: Graduate Program in Software Engineering, University of St. Thomas

From: Angela J. Holden

Date: January 15, 2019

Re: Admission Essay

Dear Graduate Admissions,

Please accept this admission essay as part of my application to the Graduate Program in Software Engineering at the University of St. Thomas.

I have been a frontend developer since 2014, but my story as a developer began in 2009 while I was a paralegal in a Minneapolis law firm. This is when I started podcasting and learning about web technology. Up to this point, my only exposure to HTML was a Myspace page I had developed. But my interest in code far outweighed my interest in social media. And as I produced more podcasts, I started blogging to support the shows I published.

In 2009 free blogs, like Google Blogger, provided access to frontend code to make adjustments to the look and feel of a page. The satisfaction of finding a line of CSS and adjusting the padding on a header was thrilling. Within a couple of months I purchased a hosting account and registered a domain name on Yahoo.

My new hosting space came with a drag and drop WYSIWYG, but no option to explore the code. The excitement of designing and publishing a page that was connected to a domain name was great, but after a few months I was restless without access to the HTML or CSS. This set me down a path to learn about code, and to make a web page look exactly how I envisioned it.

My first formal introduction to frontend development was an adult education class at North Hennepin Community College. I signed up for a two evening Introduction to Adobe Dream Weaver where we learned how to use HTML tables for layout, and basic CSS for styling. I had purchased Adobe Creative Suite 4 but was completely lost on how to use any of the software. I tried watching Lynda.com videos with no success. An adult education course was a natural choice to get started and ask questions.

This class was the jump start I needed to begin understanding HTML and CSS. After weeks of struggling, I was able to build a website in one weekend. I felt unstoppable, and it changed the course of my entire life. For the first time I felt like I was meant to do something; web development.

By the fall of 2010, I applied to the M.S. in Technical Communication program at Metro State in Saint Paul and started down a new path. For all of 2011 and 2012, I worked my full-time job as a paralegal, went to graduate school two nights a week, and taught myself web design and development every spare moment I could find. By the start of 2013, I knew it would be a year of major change. I was ready to shake things up.

While I was in graduate school I was introduced to WordPress and soon had an arsenal of development skills. I could install WordPress on a server, I had a local environment setup on my PC, and I knew how to deploy changes from my development site to a production site using FTP. I could make extensive edits to a WordPress theme with HTML and CSS, and started learning some PHP.

I decided I was going to quit my job in as a paralegal and make a career change by the end of that year. I was ready for a big change, so I sold my house as I was finishing graduate school, and I moved to San Diego after the holidays at the end of 2013. Within two weeks of moving, I found my first position as a frontend and WordPress developer in January 2014.

I worked non-stop for two years in southern California as a WordPress developer. I was either employed at an agency, a contractor at an agency, or I did freelance work. I took any job someone was willing to pay me for. I accepted work I had no idea how to do, and I figured it out. By January 2016, I had been freelancing full-time for six months and decided to move back to Minnesota, where I freelanced and was self-employed for another two years.

In February 2018 I accepted a frontend developer position at the University of St. Thomas in Marketing, Insights and Communications (MIC). I also made the switch from WordPress developer to frontend developer. I wanted to learn new content management systems and new programming languages, and I wanted to be exposed to new processes and learn to work in a team.

Eventually my goal is to move away from frontend development and gain a deeper understanding of backend development and software engineering. My experience as a WordPress developer exposed me to databases and MySQL, and I have an interest in database management and administration.

I am mostly self-taught. I would not change the thousands of hours I have spent teaching myself frontend code and WordPress development. I didn’t just learn development, I learned how to solve problems. I learned that I am a determined, creative problem solver who delights in the ability to build websites and provide solutions.

A couple of the things I hope to gain from the software engineering program is structure and fellowship. I’d like the structure of a classroom environment, and the fellowship of other students who are also learning software engineering. I want the credibility and networking that come with a graduate degree from the University of St. Thomas. I believe my career potential is limitless with an MS in Software Engineering.