Linus Torvalds

Linus Benedict Torvalds (/ˈliːnəs ˈtɔːrvɔːldz/ *LEE-nƏs TOR-vawldz*,[3] Finland Swedish: [ˈliːnʉs ˈtuːrvɑlds] (◀) listen); born 28 December 1969) is a Finnish-American software engineer who is the creator and, historically, the main developer of the Linux kernel, used by Linux distributions and other operating systems such as Android. He also created the distributed version control system Git and the scuba dive logging and planning software Subsurface.

He was honored, along with Shinya Yamanaka, with the 2012 Millennium Technology Prize by the Technology Academy Finland "in recognition of his creation of a new open source operating system for computers leading to the widely used Linux kernel."[4] He is also the recipient of the 2014 IEEE Computer Society Computer Pioneer Award[5] and the 2018 IEEE Masaru Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award.[6]

Linus Torvalds	
Torvalds in 2018	
Born	Linus Benedict Torvalds 28 December 1969 Helsinki, Finland
Nationality	Finnish (by birth) American (naturalized)[1]
Alma mater	University of Helsinki (M.S.)[2]
Occupation	Software engineer
Employer	Linux Foundation
Known for	Linux, Git, Subsurface
Parent(s)	Nils Torvalds (father) Anna "Mikke" Torvalds (née Törnqvist, mother)
Relatives	Sara Torvalds (sister) Leo Törnqvist (grandfather) Ole Torvalds (grandfather)

Contents

Life and career

Early years

Torvalds was born in Helsinki, Finland, on 28 December 1969. He is the son of journalists Anna and Nils Torvalds,[7] the grandson of statistician Leo Törnqvist and of poet Ole Torvalds and the great-grandson of journalist and soldier Toivo Karanko.

His parents were campus radicals at the University of Helsinki in the 1960s. His family belongs to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Torvalds was named after Linus Pauling, the Nobel Prize-winning American chemist, although in the book *Rebel Code: Linux and the Open Source Revolution*, Torvalds is quoted as saying, "I think I was named equally for Linus the Peanuts cartoon character", noting that this makes him half "Nobel Prize-winning chemist" and half "blanket-carrying cartoon character".[8]

Torvalds attended the University of Helsinki between 1988 and 1996,[9] graduating with a master's degree in computer science from the NODES research group.[10] His academic career was interrupted after his first year of study when he joined the Finnish Navy Nyland Brigade in the summer of 1989, selecting the 11-month officer training program to fulfill the mandatory military service of Finland. He gained the rank of second lieutenant, with the role of an artillery observer.[11] Torvalds bought computer science professor Andrew Tanenbaum's book *Operating Systems: Design and Implementation*, in which Tanenbaum describes MINIX, an educational stripped-down version of Unix. In 1990, he resumed his university studies, and was exposed to Unix for the first time, in the form of a DEC MicroVAX running ULTRIX.[12] His MSc thesis was titled *Linux: A Portable Operating System*.[13]

His interest in computers began with a Commodore VIC-20,[14] at the age of 11 in 1981, initially programming in BASIC, but later by directly accessing the 6502 CPU in machine code. He did not make use of assembly language.[15] After the VIC-20 he purchased a Sinclair QL, which he modified extensively, especially its operating system. "Because it was so hard to get software for it in Finland, Linus wrote his own assembler and editor (in addition to Pac-Man graphics libraries)"[16] for the QL, as well as a few games.[17][18] He wrote a *Pac-Man* clone named *Cool Man*. On 5 January 1991[19] he purchased an Intel 80386-based clone of IBM PC[20] before receiving his MINIX copy, which in turn enabled him to begin work on Linux.

Linux

The first prototypes of Linux were publicly released later in 1991.[8][21] Version 1.0 was released on 14 March 1994.[22]

Torvalds first encountered the GNU Project in 1991, after another Swedish-speaking computer science student, Lars Wirzenius, took him to the University of Technology to listen to free software guru Richard Stallman's speech. Torvalds used Stallman's GNU General Public License version 2 (GPLv2) for his Linux kernel.

After a visit to Transmeta in late 1996,[23] Torvalds accepted a position at the company in California, where he would work from February 1997 until June 2003. He then moved to the Open Source Development Labs, which has since merged with the Free Standards Group to become the Linux Foundation, under whose auspices he continues to work. In June 2004, Torvalds and his family moved to Dunthorpe, Oregon,[24] to be closer to the OSDL's headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon.

From 1997 to 1999, he was involved in 86open, helping to choose the standard binary format for Linux and Unix. In 1999, he was named by the *MIT Technology Review* TR100 as one of the world's top 100 innovators under age 35.[25]

In 1999, Red Hat and VA Linux, both leading developers of Linux-based software, presented Torvalds with stock options in gratitude for his creation.[26] That same year both companies went public and Torvalds's share value temporarily shot up to roughly US$20 million.[27][28]

His personal mascot is a penguin nicknamed Tux,[29] which has been widely adopted by the Linux community as the mascot of the Linux kernel.[30]

Although Torvalds believes "open source is the only right way to do software", he also has said that he uses the "best tool for the job", even if that includes proprietary software.[31] He was criticized for his use and alleged advocacy of the proprietary BitKeeper software for version control in the Linux kernel. Torvalds subsequently wrote a free-software replacement for BitKeeper called Git.

In 2008, Torvalds stated that he used the Fedora Linux distribution because it had fairly good support for the PowerPC processor architecture, which he had favored at the time.[32] His usage of Fedora was confirmed in a later 2012 interview.[33] He has also posted updates about his choice of desktop environment, often in response to perceived feature regressions.

Currently, the Linux Foundation sponsors Torvalds so he can work full-time on improving Linux.[34]

Linus Torvalds is known for vocally disagreeing with other developers on the Linux kernel mailing list.[35] Calling himself a "really unpleasant person", he later explained "I'd like to be a nice person and curse less and encourage people to grow rather than telling them they are idiots. I'm sorry – I tried, it's just not in me."[36][37] His attitude, which Torvalds considers necessary for making his point clear, has drawn criticism from Intel programmer Sage Sharp and systemd developer Lennart Poettering, among others.[38][39]

On Sunday, 16 September 2018 the Linux Kernel *Code of Conflict* was suddenly replaced by a new *Code of Conduct* based on the Contributor Covenant. Shortly thereafter, in the release notes for Linux 4.19-rc4, Torvalds apologized for his behavior, calling the personal attacks of the past "unprofessional and uncalled for" and announced a period of "time off" to "get some assistance on how to understand people's emotions and respond appropriately". It soon transpired that these events followed *The New Yorker* approaching Torvalds with a series of questions critical of his conduct.[40][41][42] Following the release of Linux 4.19 on 22 October 2018, Linus went back to maintaining the kernel.[43]

The Linus/Linux connection

Initially, Torvalds wanted to call the kernel he developed *Freax* (a combination of "free", "freak", and the letter X to indicate that it is a Unix-like system), but his friend Ari Lemmke, who administered the FTP server where the kernel was first hosted for download, named Torvalds's directory *linux*.[44]

Authority and trademark

As of 2006, approximately two percent of the Linux kernel was written by Torvalds himself.[28] Because thousands have contributed to the Linux kernel, this percentage is one of the largest contributions to it. However, he stated in 2012 that his own personal contribution is now mostly merging code written by others, with little programming.[45] Torvalds retains the highest authority to decide which new code is incorporated into the standard Linux kernel.[46]

Torvalds holds the "Linux" trademark[47] and monitors the use of it,[48] chiefly through the Linux Mark Institute.

Other software

Git

Torvalds began development on Git, a piece of version control software that would later become commonly used, on 3 April 2005. On 26 July 2005, Torvalds turned over maintenance of Git to Junio Hamano, a major contributor to the project.

Subsurface

Subsurface is a piece of software for logging and planning scuba dives. Torvalds started the project in late 2011, and Dirk Hohndel became the head maintainer in late 2012.[49] Subsurface is free and open-source software distributed under the terms of the GNU General Public License version 2.[50]

Personal life

Linus Torvalds is married to Tove Torvalds (née Monni)—a six-time Finnish national karate champion—whom he first met in late 1993. Linus was running introductory computer laboratory exercises for students and instructed the course attendees to send him an e-mail as a test, to which Tove responded with an e-mail asking for a date.[8] Tove and Linus were later married and have three daughters, two of whom were born in the United States.[51] The Linux kernel's *reboot* system call accepts their dates of birth (written in hexadecimal) as magic values.[52][53]

Torvalds in 2002

Torvalds has described himself as "completely a-religious—atheist", adding that "I find that people seem to think religion brings morals and appreciation of nature. I actually think it detracts from both. It gives people the excuse to say, 'Oh, nature was just created,' and so the act of creation is seen to be something miraculous. I appreciate the fact that, 'Wow, it's incredible that something like this could have happened in the first place.'" He later added that while in Europe religion is mostly a personal issue, in the United States it has become very politicized. When discussing the issue of church and state separation, Torvalds also said, "Yeah, it's kind of ironic that in many European countries, there is actually a kind of legal binding between the state and the state religion."[54] In a story about the March LinuxWorld Conference titled "Linus the Liberator", Torvalds is quoted as saying "There are like two golden rules in life. One is 'Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you.' For some reason, people associate this with Christianity. I'm not a Christian. I'm agnostic. The other rule is 'Be proud of what you do.'"[55]

In 2010, Torvalds became a United States citizen and registered to vote in the United States. He is unaffiliated with any U.S. political party, saying, "I have way too much personal pride to want to be associated with any of them, quite frankly."[51]

Linus developed an interest in scuba diving in the early 2000s and went on to achieve numerous certifications, which later led to him creating the Subsurface project.[56]

Awards and achievements

Awards and achievements		
Year	**Award**	**Notes**
2018	IEEE Masaru Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award	IEEE Masaru Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award is conferred by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers for outstanding contributions to consumer electronics technology has been named in honor the co-founder and honorary chairman of Sony Corporation, Masaru Ibuka. 2018 Ibuka award was conferred to Linus Torvalds "For his leadership of the development and proliferation of Linux."[6]
2014	IEEE Computer Pioneer Award	On 23 April 2014, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers named Torvalds as the 2014 recipient of the IEEE Computer Society's Computer Pioneer Award. The Computer Pioneer Award was established in 1981 by the IEEE Computer Society Board of Governors to recognize and honor the vision of those whose efforts resulted in the creation and continued vitality of the computer industry. The award is presented to outstanding individuals whose main contribution to the concepts and development of the computer field was made at least 15 years earlier.[57]
2012	Internet Hall of Fame	On 23 April 2012, at Internet Society's Global INET conference in Geneva, Switzerland, Torvalds was one of the inaugural inductees into the Internet Hall of Fame, one of ten in the Innovators category and thirty-three overall inductees.[58]
2012	Millennium Technology Prize	On 20 April 2012, Torvalds was declared one of two winners of that year's Millennium Technology Prize,[59] along with Shinya Yamanaka.[60] The honor is widely described as technology's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.
2010	C&C Prize	He was awarded the C&C Prize by the NEC Corporation in 2010 for "contributions to the advancement of the information technology industry, education, research, and the improvement of our lives".[61]
2008	Hall of Fellows	In 2008, he was inducted into the Hall of Fellows of the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, "for the creation of the Linux kernel and the management of open source development of the widely used Linux operating system."[62][63]
2005	Vollum Award	In August 2005, Torvalds received the Vollum Award from Reed College.[64]
2003	Linus (Moon)	In 2003, the naming of the asteroid moon Linus was motivated in part by the fact that the discoverer was an enthusiastic Linux user. Although the naming proposal referred to the mythological Linus, son of the muse Calliope and the inventor of melody and rhythm, the name was also meant to honor Linus Torvalds, and Linus van Pelt, a character in the Peanuts comic strip.[65]

Linus Torvalds receiving 2018 IEEE Masaru Ibuka Consumer Electronics Award from ICCE 2018 Conference Chair Saraju P. Mohanty and IEEE President James A. Jefferies at ICCE 2018 on 12 January 2018 in Las Vegas

2001	Takeda Award	In 2001, he shared the Takeda Award for Social/Economic Well-Being with Richard Stallman and Ken Sakamura.
2000	Lovelace Medal	In 2000, he was awarded the Lovelace Medal from the British Computer Society.[66]
1998	EFF Pioneer Award	In 1998, Torvalds received an EFF Pioneer Award.[67]
1997	Academic Honors	In 1997, Torvalds received his master's degree (Laudatur Grade) from the Department of Computer Science at the University of Helsinki. Two years later he received honorary doctor status at Stockholm University, and in 2000, he received the same honor from his *alma mater*.[68] University of Helsinki has named an auditorium after Torvalds and his computer is on display at the Department of Computer Science.
1996	9793 Torvalds (Asteroid)	In 1996, the asteroid 9793 Torvalds was named after him.[69]

Media recognition

Time magazine has recognized Torvalds multiple times:

- In 2000, he was 17th in their Time 100: The Most Important People of the Century poll.[70]
- In 2004, he was named one of the most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine.[71]
- In 2006, the magazine's Europe edition named him one of the revolutionary heroes of the past 60 years.[26]

InfoWorld presented him with the 2000 Award for Industry Achievement.[72] In 2005, Torvalds appeared as one of "the best managers" in a survey by *BusinessWeek*.[73] In 2006, *Business 2.0* magazine named him one of "10 people who don't matter" because the growth of Linux has shrunk Torvalds's individual impact.[74]

In summer 2004, viewers of YLE (the Finnish Broadcasting Company) placed Torvalds 16th in the network's 100 Greatest Finns. In 2010, as part of a series called *The Britannica Guide to the World's Most Influential People*, Torvalds was listed among *The 100 Most Influential Inventors of All Time* (ISBN 9781615300037).[75]

On 11 October 2017, the Linux company SUSE made a song titled "Linus Said".[76]

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See also

- Linus's law
- Tanenbaum–Torvalds debate
- Tux
- List of computer pioneers

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Further reading

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External links

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- Linus Torvalds: Linux succeeded thanks to selfishness and trust (https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-18419231)
- Torvalds interview (http://www.itwire.com/opinion-and-analysis/open-sauce/44975-linus-torvalds-looking-back-looking-forward)
- Lawsuits involving Torvalds (https://curlie.org/Computers/Software/Operating_Systems/Unix/SCO/Boycott%2C_Lawsuits/Torvalds%2C_Linus/) at Curlie