**Interview with Daria (Dasha) Gurova**

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**Your full name:** Daria (Dasha) Gurova

**Age:** 27

**Interests:** I like fitness, I like to go on hikes a lot, that is what I like most about California, the scenic nature. I like dancing, I used to do modern dance for 10 years.

**Where are you from?**

The Ukraine. I was studying marketing, public relations and tourism in Ukraine, but I had to leave and seek asylum in the United States. I came here when i was 19 and I never lived by myself before. It took me a long time, about 4-5 years to adjust to the culture and find work so I never finished my marketing degree. During that time I was in survival mode, I was bartending and stuff, gathering and saving. I have been in the US for seven years now.

**What did you do before 42?**

I was bartending in New York, so I was basically doing any job I could come across, I also worked in the jewelry business. At some point I felt like I wanted to learn something new and be challenged. I was more comfortable in the country and was making okay money bartending, but the thing was I was not feeling great, I really wanted to make a change. There was a point where I felt like I had to step up and I didn’t want to pursue a career in marketing anymore.

**What did your family think about your decision to attend 42?**

They were very excited, but at the same time my mom was worried about me because she imagined that coding is difficult. She supported me very much and still does, and tells me, “you can do this, you are the smartest girl in the world.” She is a little bit in the past when it comes to technology but when I told her I was going to try 42 she was excited.

**Did you have any programming experience before 42?**

I didn’t have technical experience, it wasn’t just zero experience, it was minus 20. I didn’t know what terminal or command line meant, I was so lost. That was why it was intimidating, but at that point I was excited to try something new. I knew I could do better, so I felt like there wasn’t anything I could lose by trying 42.

**Did you have any robotics experience before 42?**

I had zero experience with anything technical.

**How did you hear about 42?**

How I got to 42 was so random. My friend sent me a link to an article about 42 opening in the United States, and told me they are free and encouraged me to pursue it. I thought it’s too good to be true, so I didn’t take it very seriously at first. But the thought was in my head already and I found myself coming back to it over the course of a month. I found the link again, and thought, “what is going to be worse, trying it or not?” I felt insecure about the logic test, I didn’t fail, so then when they answered that I passed the tests that was interesting because it was getting real. I had to decide whether I should go or not.

**What was the piscine like?**

So I came in April 2017 for the piscine, and I remember the first day at breakfast I was with my roommate but she was a freelance web developer. They asked me if I had any experience and I said zero, and they looked at me like I was crazy. They told me I was brave, because they wouldn’t have come if they didn’t have experience. I got scared a little bit, the piscine itself was a pretty emotional ride. I felt lost all the time and I failed almost everything. That was the hardest part, but I learned a lot about myself. In 2 weeks our piscine shrunk in half, I was like, “omg people are running away!” I don’t know what was keeping me going, it’s hard to explain, I felt overwhelmed, but at the same time eager for what was to come.

**What was it like when you received your post-piscine decision email?**

I finished the piscine and didn’t think I would get in, but I had been working like crazy all hours and all days. So I went back to NY and when I got the acceptance email the feeling was similar to when you unwrap presents. I spent all summer in NY saving up, and in September I came here. I thought I would only last for 5 months, and than I would be out, it is so funny to remember that now.

**How does the 42 cadet program differ from the piscine?**

It definitely is more relaxed in a way, not easier, but it involves more of your own time management. What I realize now is that in the piscine they were throwing all this work at you everyday to teach you how to manage your time better. You can’t keep up in the piscine, so it is important to try to learn time management because in the regular program you have slightly more time, but for me it wasn’t the case because I didn’t have much knowledge of programming. As a cadet I still had to work a lot to make the same progress as people who are more advanced.

**How did you get involved with the Robotics Lab?**

I was in the regular program at 42 for 5 or 6 months, and than I started in the Robotics Lab with the build out. In a month or two Dan said he was going to make a machine learning (tensorflow) piscine, and that was the first piscine he was trying out. So there were some requirements, there was a beginners exam and you had to be level 5 at that time. It was also hard, because it is pretty different from what we were doing in C but it opened up my eyes and was so much fun and is still so much fun for me. So currently we are learning more advanced topics in machine learning and I really enjoy it. It is a learning curve, but worth it, soon enough every other app will have machine learning algorithms running.

**What is your favorite aspect about being part of the Robotics Lab Team?**

My favorite part is whatever we do, the projects that we work on have real life impact, so it is just more exciting to work on something that you think will contribute to the future one day. I feel like the Robotics Lab is like family to me now, we spend so much time together. I feel like I have learned how to work in a team because it is a small space and we grew very close and we work with the same goals in mind. I was part of the team that built the Robotics Lab, because we built everything for ourselves and it feels like our own creation. It felt impactful, and you become more attached to what is going on when you help to build something from the ground-up.

We all have our own strengths and it works out well. And it is a great experience when it comes to getting a job in the future. A month ago I was piecing out the prototype of what I modelled. Since I am in the Robotics Lab I am learning so much in different directions, I am doing C programming, python, machine learning, Java, 3D modelling and hardware. So I am diversifying my skill set, I am not just on one path and I am exploring stuff so I can find what I like out of all of this the most. It is not like I am working on only one thing and getting tired of it.

Dan is an inspiration, and for me personally I never see how far I can go, I never thought I could last more than 5 months in school. It is just unbelievable what I have accomplished after 9 months. Dan is an inspiration to me because he never runs out of interest for what he is doing, he is always searching for papers and seeing what is going on in these fields. And he pushes us when he sees we are getting a little bit tired or feel like we are failing in something, but pushes us in a good way.

**What projects are you involved in right now in the Robotics Lab?**

The main projects that we are doing with Robotics Lab right now is subvocalization. EMG is basically electrical impulses from your muscles. The idea behind that is, when you talk to Siri there are things you don’t want everyone to hear, or you want to do a private note, so the idea of this project is to recognize the signals from the muscles from your throat/vocal cords, We are using sensors on the throat area and we are then pronouncing words. With that data we can train a machine learning model to see which muscles are working and learn what signal is produced. Eventually you won’t have to talk out loud, it will just read your muscle/electrical signals. I am also doing 3D modeling, that is one of my interests, it is great because we print out our own parts because we can’t find them on the market, they are pretty custom. We have 3 or 4 printers, so we use Fusion 360 that allows you to 3D model. Dan has extensive experience and has taught me a lot.

I did a little bit of work with Sigfox, and I did seismic activity but it was more data processing because I was analyzing the data from recreated movements from an earthquake. I am taking the C intermediate exam every week, i am keeping up with the C language because it is a great foundation in programming and as a way of thinking. For Mycotronics, Annie and I did some marketing stuff for it, at that point I was working more on our other project MIND UI. But Mycotrotronics is an awesome idea and has potential to be very useful on Earth and in Space. Being 3 months in the Robotics Lab, I work so much more than I was by myself. I feel more motivated and committed and the projects we do are great.

**How do you find help with your projects?**

Before I joined the Robotics Lab, besides Google, I have a couple of friends here who would help me. I was stuck on one project, I was pretty stuck because it involved 3D geometry formulas, and I had to implement something I didn’t understand. I was sitting there feeling really unsure of how to resolve it so I just stood up, looked around and asked for help from a peer. I found a guy who I had corrected before and I knew he knew how to do it, so I asked him for help and he just started drawing stuff and explaining it to me. Also if you can't explain difficult things in an easy way, than you don’t understand it.

**What is your favorite thing about 42?**

It is a place where you can evolve. The curriculum and the style of pedagogy at 42 is so different and it’s refreshing. Besides learning how to code I learn a lot about myself every day. If I got a traditional 4 year degree I would be behind in knowledge and in debt. So I really hope this school succeeds. The old way of schooling is not working, so that is the most exciting part for me, to be part of something that is changing the way we learn.

42 in my life it was the game changer, there was before 42 and after 42. Coding is the best field to grow, it will take you forever to learn what is available already, but it is impossible to stop and there are always new things to learn. I feel like coding is such an essential skill today, like many people I once thought programming is kinda magical, and I was eager to learn this magic. I guess for me it is like food, this knowledge nourishes my brain. Now I don’t know how I ever stop, because there is so much work to do. :)

**What is your favorite thing to do in the Bay Area?**

My favorite things to do involves nature, it is so beautiful here, and it's just a crime not to see all this beautiful, breathtaking stuff. I always love the ocean and the beach, when I moved to California I was excited about the sun and beach. But other than that I didn’t have much time to do stuff in the Bay. I like going to San Francisco sometimes.

**What is your dream job?**

It depends(laughs). Right now it is in machine learning, but it changes almost every month. There is still a lot to learn and do and that is why it is a dream job, and hopefully one day I may do it. Machine learning may change the way we do things, and have an impact.

**Do you have a quote or saying that inspires you?**

“If you’re going through hell, keep going.” – Winston Churchill

It’s just undeniably good advice:)