I was five the first time I tinkered with a computer. My father was an electrical engineer, so we always had intranets, custom computers, and networks. I loved using things like AutoCAD, coral draw, his engineering tablet, and was fascinated by his oversized laser printer. By junior high, my father introduced me to the inspect element tool and shortly after I began building my first website. It wouldn’t be impressive by today’s standards, but it was the beginning of a passion for computer graphics, user experience testing, the web, and technology.

By high school, I found my niche in aviation and the military, had joined AP classes, and received my first associates’ degree two weeks before graduating from West Central Valley High School. I knew early on I wanted to go to Iowa State. I had been to campus a few times for various extracurricular activities and summer clubs including IAYI, girl scouts, FFA, and science fair. In 2004 I started my ISU adventure. The road to my bachelor’s program included intramural sports, volunteerism, a part-time job in web design, a bar job, CAP flights, ROTC, a sorority, and leading multiple clubs on campus.

I enjoyed school and knew I wanted to someday get a graduate degree, but struggled with a few classes outside my interest areas, like statistics and art history, that brought my GPA down. I realize GPA is important to being accepted as a full time graduate student and believe I have advanced my career and grown up significantly since my undergraduate degree. I probably will not stop taking classes that challenge me and are outside of my interest areas just to boost my GPA, but can promise that I will work harder and do my due diligence to maintain good grades and continue to learn, keep an open my, and believe I will flourish under the tutelage of the HCI professors.

After my bachelors, I traveled and settled into advertising work in Minneapolis. The Twin Cities community opened up a new and innovative world for me. I quickly joined clubs like MIMA, AdFed, AMA, AIGA, Art Buddies, and even helped start a couple of groups including SMBMSP, CoCo, and WAM. In Minneapolis, I discovered a real passion for new media, SEO, UI design, and UX research. After leaving advertising agencies and startups I opened up my own digital agency and began consulting with corporations and digital agencies. Throughout my travels and various job opportunities I never stopped learning or having a desire to share knowledge. Once I started my own agency, I began public speaking and discovered a love for teaching and researching new fields in UX design and new media.

Eventually I moved back to Iowa and began a career working for one of the leading government contractors for defense, intelligence, and civilian government. I’ve moved up the ranks and have been with the company for almost four years as a Senior UI/UX designer doing application development for health and civilian solutions related to big data. My goal is to earn a PhD is HCI from Iowa State University so that I can continue to advance my knowledge and gain new opportunities to share information about UI/UX. I also believe a PhD would help further my career in UX design and program management.

One day, I would like to be involved in think tanks related to HCI, 508 compliance, CMMI, and new media – these generally require graduate degrees. I would also like the opportunity to teach at the university level and to research HCI and new media to further advance the industry that I love and have dedicated my life’s work to. To accomplish these goals I have continued my philanthropic work with multiple charities like WOI, Hyperstream, and am even in the process of starting my own 501c3 for doing events for non-profits related to social justice issues and education in technology. The next step, for me is to get accepted at ISU as a part-time student in the HCI PhD program and begin learning and developing research opportunities.

In Malcom Gladwell’s book Outliers he says it takes roughly ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field. I started working with, on, and around computers and application development at a very young age, but probably fell in love with this field because there are so many facets, new codes to learn, and it seems like every day there is a new innovation or advancement. The opportunities for research seem limitless; which makes technology and HCI, in my mind, a field that will never be boring and I look forward to the opportunity to contribute.

After speaking to clubs/career fairs on campus I began researching the program and have introduced myself to the HCI counselor, dean, and a few professors. I’ve also met with Professor Geoffrey Sauer to discuss HCI, my application, and desire to join the program. These meetings have made me even more excited at the prospect of rejoining the professors and students at ISU. It is my hope to begin classes in the spring semester as a part-time degree seeking student.