

## Phase 1

I was supposed to be a doctor. Computers, screens, terminals... why in gods name would I make a career out of that? *That's for people that want to stare at a glowing rectangle for the rest of their lives! I want to get out into the world!* Well, at least that's what I thought until about two ago. Then, COVID made its lovely appearance.

With COVID raging in the beginning months of 2021, I was enrolled in an Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Ph. D. program at Texas A&M. Having studied biology with the original intention of pursuing an M.D., this seemed like the logical next track. I feverishly attempted to find work in the industry. The funding limitations the pandemic imposed, my reliance on public transit, and mandated multi-year commitments made finding a position nearly impossible. As a result, I worked a series of odd jobs to cover the bills. Odd jobs being odd jobs provided no stability and my fiscal situation was soon untenable. I saw no other option besides heading home until the program started in the fall.

While planning to move my life back to Minnesota, a conversation with my then roommate kept me in the city and radically altered my life's path. I explained my situation and all of the factors that made my life on the East Coast no longer an option. After listening with growing eagerness to speak, he explained that the startup that he works at had an opening that would remedy all of my issues with no strings attached. I thought this all sounded too good to be true, but I took the jump anyway. After all, what did I have to lose? I was already broke.

The position was a catalyst for my career change into the tech industry. My initial work involved essentially data filtering: I was tasked with confirming the presence of a firearm in a video frame. To be frank, I did not find this stimulating. I was, however, obsessed with the Matrix-looking field that the 'wizards' would type into, manipulating the servers to their will. I pestered and prodded all of the senior members of our team to teach me what in God's name they were doing. They explained... and explained... and explained. To their pleasant surprise, I had a bit of knack for it. After this realization and several months of training, I became the company's System Administrator.

My time as a System Administrator was formative. I learned a smattering of IT and general Tech principles through the myriad projects that I worked on. These tenets included Linux administration, help desk and its administration, cloud deployment and management, SaaS deployments, APIs and Webhooks, GitHub Repository management, hardware deployment and management, and more. After covering such a breadth of topics, I found myself drawn towards machine learning model development or cybersecurity.

Machine learning was the easiest to get excited about. The company utilizes machine learning models on RTSP streams to analyze key frames for firearms with the intent of reducing firearm deaths in the US. The relationship between ML and its impact was cut and dry. People on that team were using programming and a deep understanding of data principles to help people. Additionally, they got to play with big ideas. If they had a question or a problem, they could construct a model or a program to address it. This was similar to what attracted me to biology, complex issues that could be addressed logically. The major difference was speed. Having worked in a fruit fly lab, *drosophila melanogaster*, every iteration of an experiment took at least a month, making mistakes hugely costly in time. In data science, you can iterate at a rapid pace. Given the speed and tangible impact, the choice to no longer pursue my graduate degree became clear, and I withdrew from the program.

I continued to work as a System Administrator for about six months before one of my bosses approached me with an opportunity. Happy with my work ethic and having seen my interest in the subject, he asked what I would think about becoming a Data Scientist. I, naturally, was ecstatic and jumped at the chance. He explained that I would be attending the Flatiron School in January before joining the AI team for continued training. I have never been as excited for a professional opportunity as I was in that moment. I worked with increasing anticipation until the Flatiron course began. By then, it was all I could talk about. This brings us to present day.

Though my journey to Flatiron was neither deliberate nor linear, I understand the life opportunity laid out before me. Not only will I immediately begin contributing to a company with an excellent mission, I am learning skills that will serve me well beyond my time there. Machine learning will never solve every issue or be completely void of human input; however, machine learning has a capacity to improve the life of every organism on this planet unlike any other technology. That is massively exciting and something that I am elated to be given the opportunity to partake in. Data science at Flatiron is the path to get to this destination and become a Data Scientist.