

Biography of Linus Torvalds

Linus Benedict Torvalds is perhaps one of the most famous computer programmers in the world. He is best known for the creation of Linux.

Torvalds was born on 28th December 1969 in Helsinki, Finland. His parents, who were both journalists, named him after the Nobel laureate in Chemistry, Linus Pauling.

Even though he is Finnish, his family belonged to the Swedish-speaking minority.

Torvalds was surrounded by an educated family and thus started reading from an early age. His biggest influence was his grandfather, Leo Toernqvist, a professor of statistics at the University of Helsinki, who purchased one of the first personal computers, the Commodore Vic 20. However, it was not packed with features and Linus was quick to notice that. He began making programs using the BASIC programming language.

His first personal computer after the Commodore Vic 20 was Sinclair QL which he purchased with his savings in 1987. As there was a lack of software in Finland, Torvalds decided to modify and program it.

Being already a programmer himself, Torvalds attended computer science at the University of Helsinki in 1988. In 1990, after fulfilling his mandatory service in Finland, he took his first class of the C programming language and Unix.

In 1991 he purchased an IBM-clone personal computer and was ultimately disappointed with the MS-DOS operating system. He then switched to MINIX, a UNIX-like operating system that was deemed his getaway to start working on Linux.

Torvalds probably hadn't visioned the impact that he was going to have on the world in the future.

Linus Torvalds's Famous Email — The First Linux Announcement:



Linus Benedict Torvalds



Hello everybody out there using minix -

I'm doing a (free) operating system (just a hobby, won't be big and professional like gnu) for 386(486) AT clones. This has been brewing since april, and is starting to get ready. I'd like any feedback on things people like/dislike in minix, as my OS resembles it somewhat (same physical layout of the file-system (due to practical reasons) among other things).

I've currently ported bash(1.08) and gcc(1.40), and things seem to work. This implies that I'll get something practical within a few months, and I'd like to know what features most people would want. Any suggestions are welcome, but I won't promise I'll implement them :-)

Linus (torv...@kruuna.helsinki.fi)

PS. Yes - it's free of any minix code, and it has a multi-threaded fs. It is NOT protable (uses 386 task switching etc), and it probably never will support anything other than AT-harddisks, as that's all I have :-).

The first version of the operating system was released on September 17th of 1991 with the first official release coming a month later. It featured both the bash shell text only-interface and the GCC.

Although Linus originally named the operating system Linux, he wanted to call it Freax (a combination of free, freak, and the letter X deriving from UNIX). However, his friend Ari Lemmke, who administered the server, had already created a directory for it called Linux

Torvalds released Linux under the GPL (GNU General Public License) that was developed by Richard Stallman, a free software movement activist, and programmer. This license would allow end-users the study, use, share, and modify the software.

Torvalds' Kernel was also topped with Stallman's development of free programs that were important components available to all Linux distributions. Version 1.0 was released in March 1994

With individual and corporate developers contributing to the development, Linux soon took off and with that, it saw a huge increase in users. With the success of his operating system, Torvalds was assigned instructor at the University of Helsinki, a position which allowed him to continue his contribution to Linux. That's where he met Tove Minni, who later became the mother of his three daughters.

Version 2.0 was released in December 1996 and included huge improvements in performance. By the end of the 20th century, Linux was installed in over seven million computers. The success of the operating system was followed by criticism from both the developer of MINIX (that Linux was based on) who claimed that the kernel approach was obsolete and Richard Stallman who criticized the operating system's name, insisting that it should be renamed GNU/Linux.

In 1997, Linus decided that it was time for a change and moved to Silicon Valley where he worked at Transmeta Corporation until 2003. In the meantime, he continued to work on Linux.

In 1999, Red Hat and VA Linux, both leading developers of Linux-based software, had presented him with stock options in gratitude for his creation. When the companies went public, his net worth rose to around \$20 million.

In 2004, Torvalds and his family moved to Oregon to work for the Open Source Development Labs (OSDL).

Part of Linux's success was the support it received from big corporations and Microsoft competitors. IBM perhaps had the biggest influence in the corporate world by investing a billion dollars in the research, development, and promotion of Linux. Linux was on the path to becoming the leading operating system in the largest data centers of the world.

Although he created one of the most important pieces of software, Torvalds made close to nothing during the first years of the development. This was perhaps one of the reasons why Linux succeeded in the first place. If Torvalds was against free software, Linux wouldn't be what we know of today. Instead of being interested in wealth and power, he used programming for the joy of it. Needless to say, at the end he was rewarded with both power and wealth.

References:

1. <http://www.linfo.org/linus.html>
2. <https://archive.org/details/justforfun00linu>
3. <https://web.archive.org/web/20040626044423/http://www.linux.org/info/linus.html>