



# BUY THE TICKET.

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HOW JSCONF CHANGED MY LIFE

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# TAKE THE RIDE.

Today I am here to talk to you about how JSConf (and the people around it) literally changed my life. And not just once, but over and over again. We'll get into that in a bit, but first ...



Hi! I'm Charlie. <CLICK> You might know me from such places as...



@INDEXZERO

GITHUB

TWITTER

the Internet.

Or the Github.

Or the Twitters.



I created and now help run EmpireJS and EmpireNode <CLICK> with a bunch of other really rad people. Many of whom are here today. One of them just introduced me. And I'm not just talking about the core organizers. None of what we've done in New York would be possible without the help and support of the Chris & Laura and the community they helped create and nurture.



**A SPECIAL THANKS TO MATT BERGMAN  
FOR MANY OF THE HISTORICAL PHOTOS**

A special thanks to Matt Bergman for many of the historical photos you are about to see.



# LIKE THIS ONE

Like this one of the Williams clan. But now that you know who I am and why I'm here ...



I want to talk about Pirates. <CLICK> \*ARRRRRRRR\*. This is a photo of Chris Williams at JSConf 2010, which was, for reasons I still have never asked about pirate themed.



ARRRRRR <CLICK> It's kind of a funny story how I ended up at JSConf 2010. Even back in 2010 JSConf sold out, albeit a bit slower than it does today.



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I know this because my roommate at the time was trying to win a ticket by competing in ScurvyConf. ScurvyConf was sort of like Reject.js in America before Reject.js existed in Europe. Because remember: this was back in 2010. It was organized by Kyle Simpson and I think it only happened in 2010.



Speaking of history, here's a fun fact: if you go back and look at the speaker lineup for JSConf 2010 you will notice that although there are a lot of speakers still around today (many of them spoke here at last call), there is only one project discussed in 2010 that is still active:



That's right: Node. That's only five short years later. This is a leading indicator both to the importance of Node and the importance of the fact that in reality ...



despite how we all feel about our work. <CLICK> People <PAUSE> <CLICK> are more important than software.



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But back to our story. This is a photo of me from ScurvyConf. That's me right there, in the background. I was in the background because back then JavaScript wasn't all that important to me. I didn't even do it professionally back then. I was more concerned with:



That's right. \_.NET.\_ I was way more interested in things like Types. <CLICK> and Silverlight. <CLICK> and XAML. Silly XML. Go home, you are drunk.

And if you've ever done .NET you might know that the community can sometimes feel like this.

# TYPES



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**TYPES**  
**SILVERLIGHT**  
**XAML**

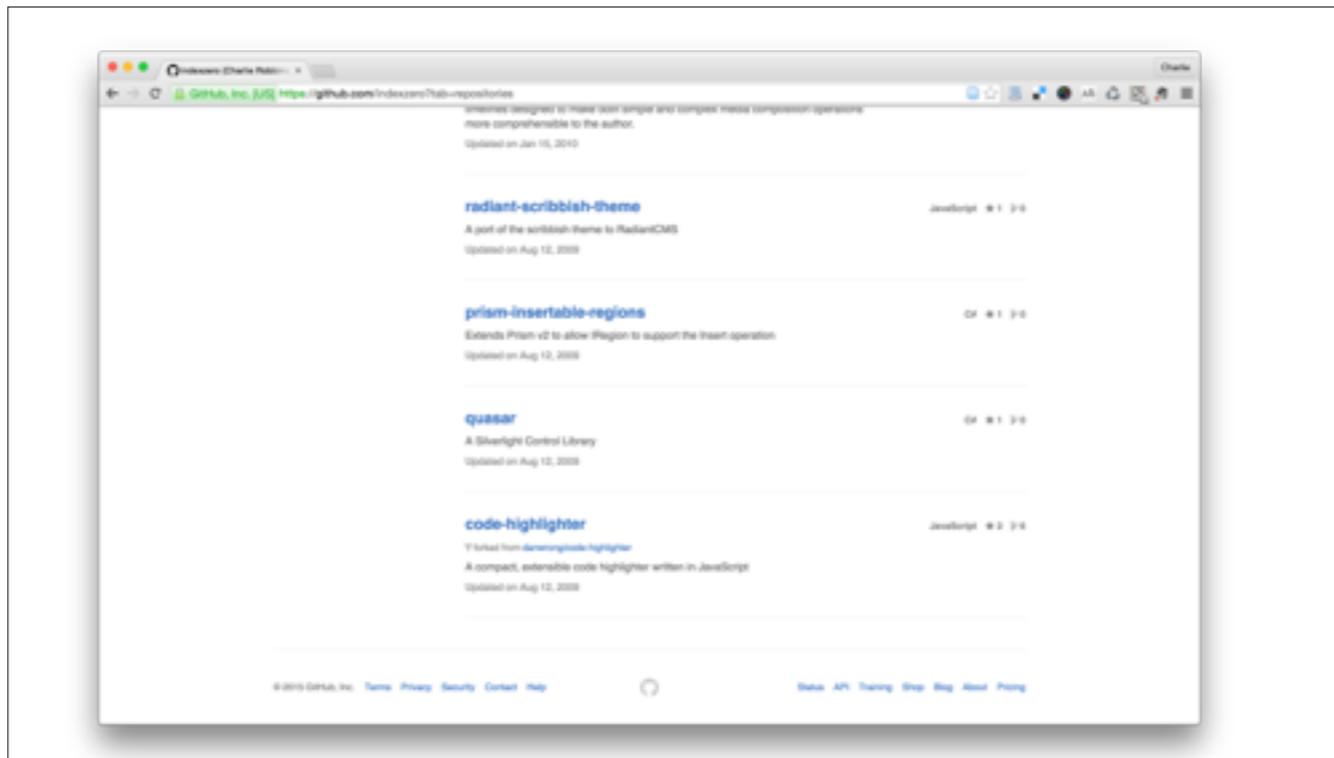
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# TUMBLEWEEDS.CS

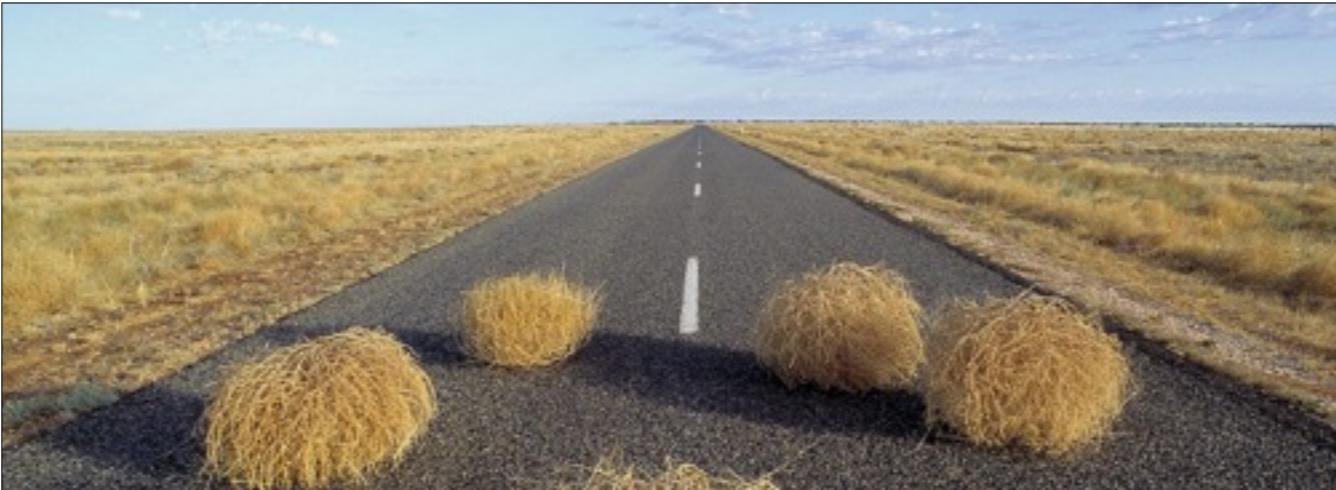
And that's not make a point of being disparaging or negative but to describe how I felt back then. I was REALLY trying to connect with people. I went to conferences. I wrote open source. Because although I wasn't interested in JavaScript yet I was very interested in Open Source.



Seriously, it's still there on the very very bottom of my Github profile. <CLICK> So I tried <CLICK> but ...



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# IS THIS THING ON?

Tumbleweeds <CLICK>. That was more than 5 years ago so things may be very different today, but back then I just didn't get much traction.



Separately from my sea of tumbleweeds I was at just about my wit's end with Silverlight, WPF, and XAML as a technology. <CLICK> But luckily...



Separately from my sea of tumbleweeds I was at just about my wit's end with Silverlight, WPF, and XAML as a technology. <CLICK> But luckily...



... my former roommate had been attending NYC.js, a local meetup in New York City organized by Brian Mitchell. <CLICK> This and Ryan Dahl's talk on Node at JSConf 2009 had make me really start to pay attention to JavaScript.

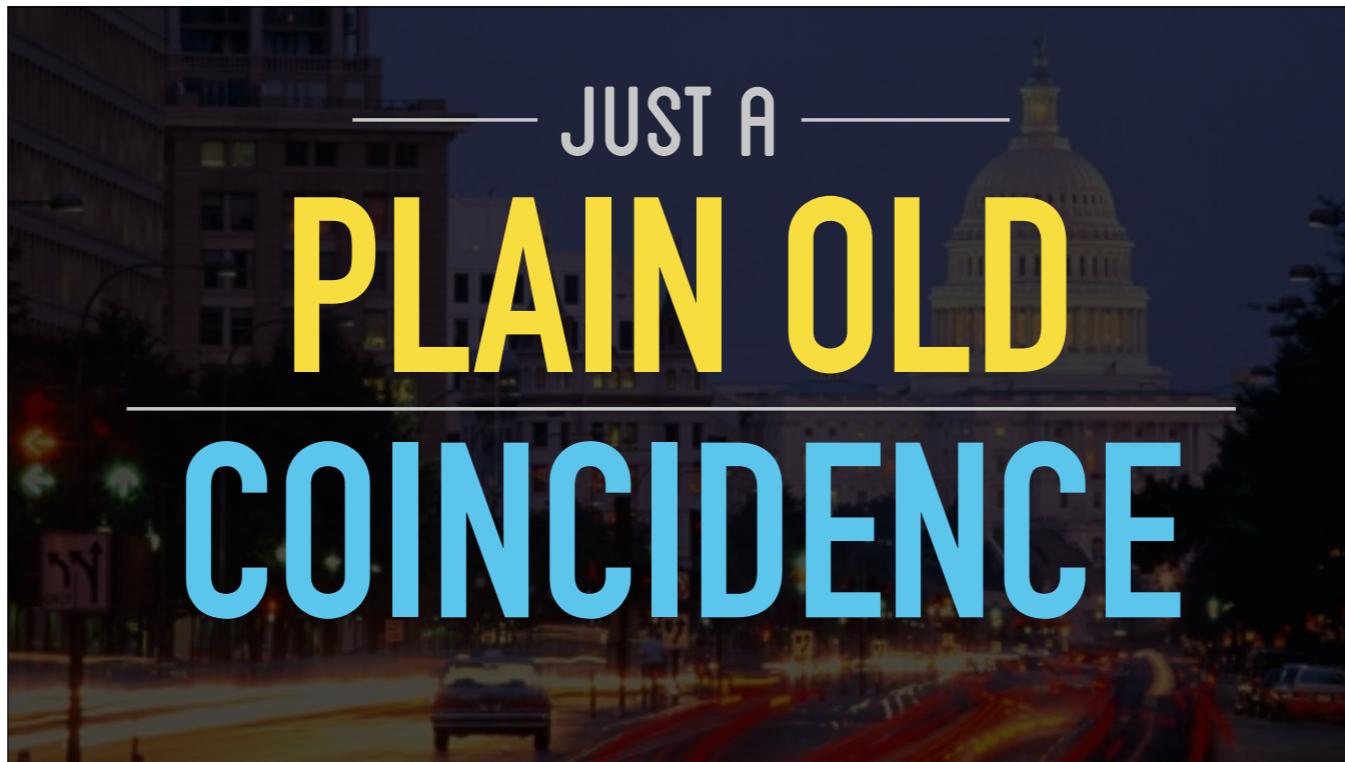


**VAR RESEARCH = REQUIRE('COLUMBIA');**

So I started dabbling with JavaScript. I was dabbling with it as part of my research at Columbia. The research I was doing happened to take me down to Washington D.C. a lot to work on a museum installation at the National Museum of Natural History.



So that weekend in April 2010 I just happened to be in Washington D.C. with nothing to do. <CLICK> I didn't have a master plan. So I figured:



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WHY  
THE HELL  
NOT?



Why the hell not?



And so by coincidence I was in D.C. at the same time my roommate had decided to try win ScurvyConf, so he could get a ticket to JSConf.



## I MET THIS COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE

Based on my previous experiences at .NET conferences I wasn't expecting much. So when I went to ScurvyConf I was completely blown away. <CLICK> In just a few hours I knew I had made really meaningful connections with really amazing people. Amazing people that were all interested in JavaScript. It was the feeling of belonging that I had been searching for in other technologies I was using at the time.

So needless to say after just that small taste of JSConf my feelings on JavaScript, quite simply, were...



## BABYFACES.JS ... BUT SERIOUSLY

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# THEN I WENT HOME.

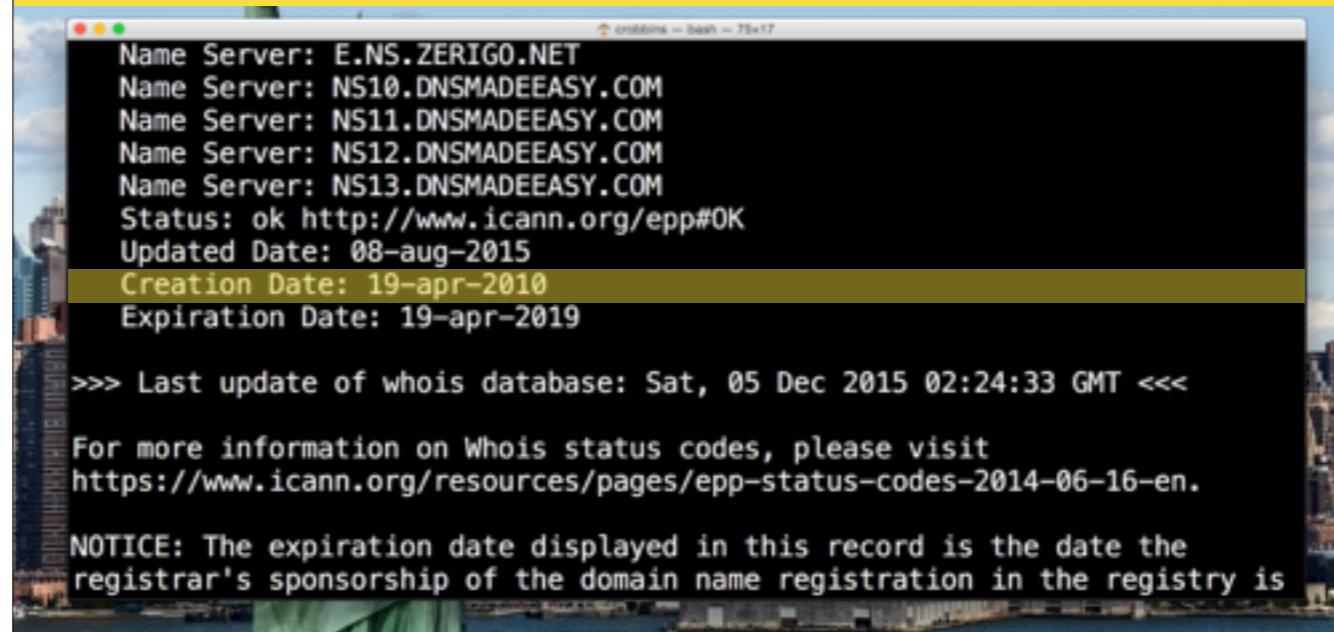


I went home and I knew there was something I had to do. I just didn't know what it was. I really didn't think that a domain name I registered just two days later <CLICK> would be so very important to the next few years of my life.

That domain name was <CLICK> nodejitsu.com.

<PAUSE> At this point, I believed in JavaScript <PAUSE> and I believed in node thanks to JSConf. And more importantly I was absolutely taken by the JavaScript community. So JSConf was already off to a pretty good start on making a change in my life.

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```
Name Server: E.NS.ZERIGO.NET
Name Server: NS10.DNSMADEEASY.COM
Name Server: NS11.DNSMADEEASY.COM
Name Server: NS12.DNSMADEEASY.COM
Name Server: NS13.DNSMADEEASY.COM
Status: ok http://www.icann.org/epp#OK
Updated Date: 08-aug-2015
Creation Date: 19-apr-2010
Expiration Date: 19-apr-2019

>>> Last update of whois database: Sat, 05 Dec 2015 02:24:33 GMT <<<
For more information on Whois status codes, please visit
https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/epp-status-codes-2014-06-16-en.

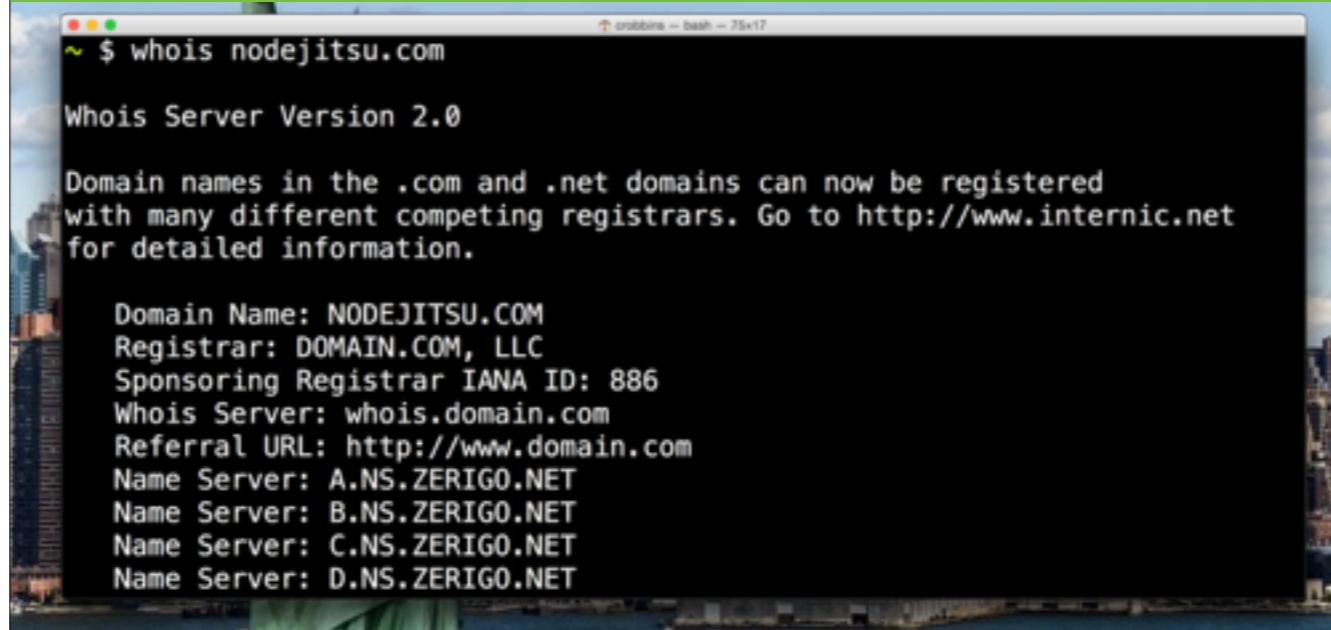
NOTICE: The expiration date displayed in this record is the date the
registrar's sponsorship of the domain name registration in the registry is
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# \$ WHOIS NODEJITSU.COM



```
~ $ whois nodejitsu.com
Whois Server Version 2.0

Domain names in the .com and .net domains can now be registered
with many different competing registrars. Go to http://www.internic.net
for detailed information.

Domain Name: NODEJITSU.COM
Registrar: DOMAIN.COM, LLC
Sponsoring Registrar IANA ID: 886
Whois Server: whois.domain.com
Referral URL: http://www.domain.com
Name Server: A.NS.ZERIGO.NET
Name Server: B.NS.ZERIGO.NET
Name Server: C.NS.ZERIGO.NET
Name Server: D.NS.ZERIGO.NET
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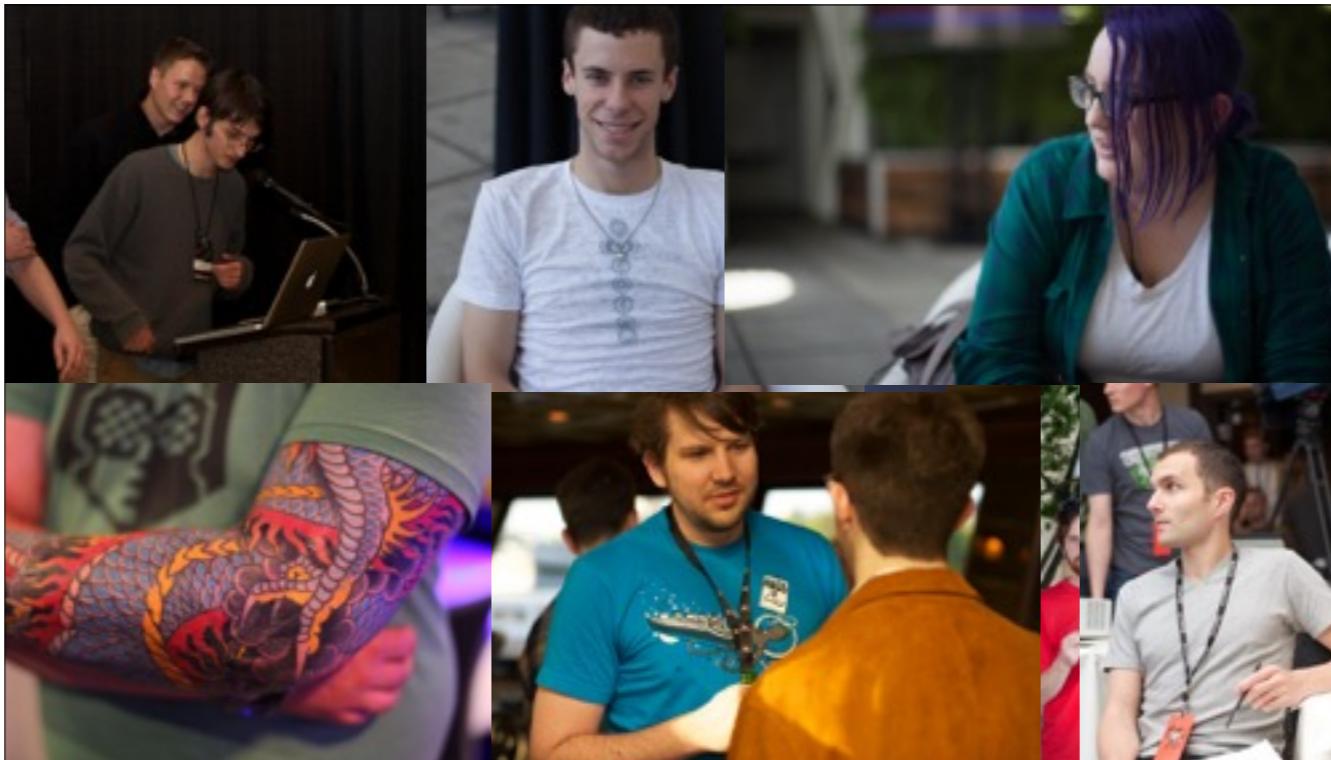
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During this time I met this gentlemen: Mikeal Rogers.



By early 2011 Mikeal and Chris were already working on something called NodeConf.



And (because of Nodejitsu) I was running Node in production when I probably shouldn't have been. It often ended like ...



**BUT YOU TOTALLY FELT LIKE ...**

But you totally felt like...



Every time you got it the system working in production it was this huge rush. For me anyway. Which is why I ended up writing so much Open Source. That and because I think it's important. And still do (more on that later).



So strangely enough (to me anyway) I was invited to speak at the first NodeConf.

And at NodeConf I did "a big reveal" for software that nobody cares about anymore. In fact, it's been formally deprecated. Like so many other conference talks the technology fades into the background. The software wasn't (and isn't) important, what we were doing was important.

And the people we were doing it with were important.



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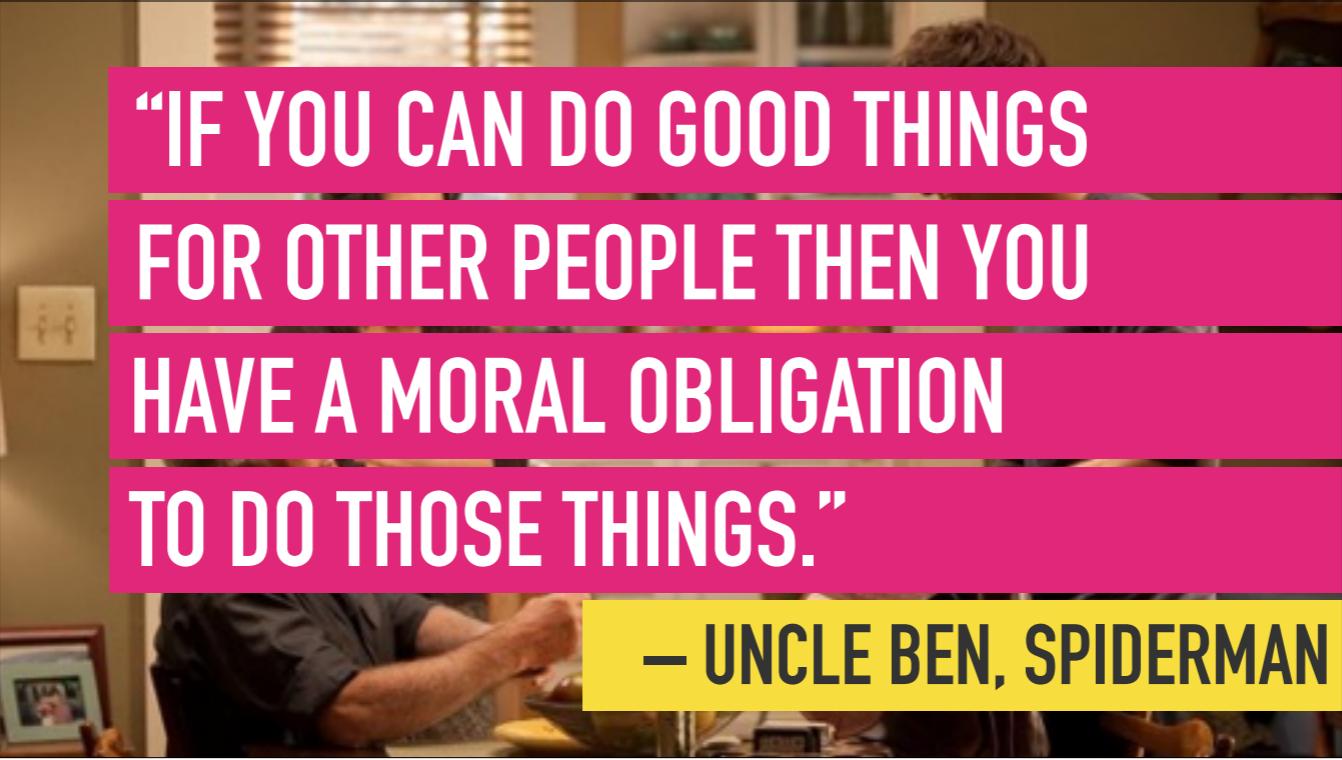
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**"IF YOU CAN DO GOOD THINGS  
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**— UNCLE BEN, SPIDERMAN**

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Obligation. Responsibility. That is why I decided to start EmpireJS; because I felt I had an obligation to help the local community that mattered to me. It mattered to me for a pretty run-of-the-mill reason: I'm from there. <CLICK>

I am a native New Yorker, and I think it's the best city in the world. Some other folks do too:



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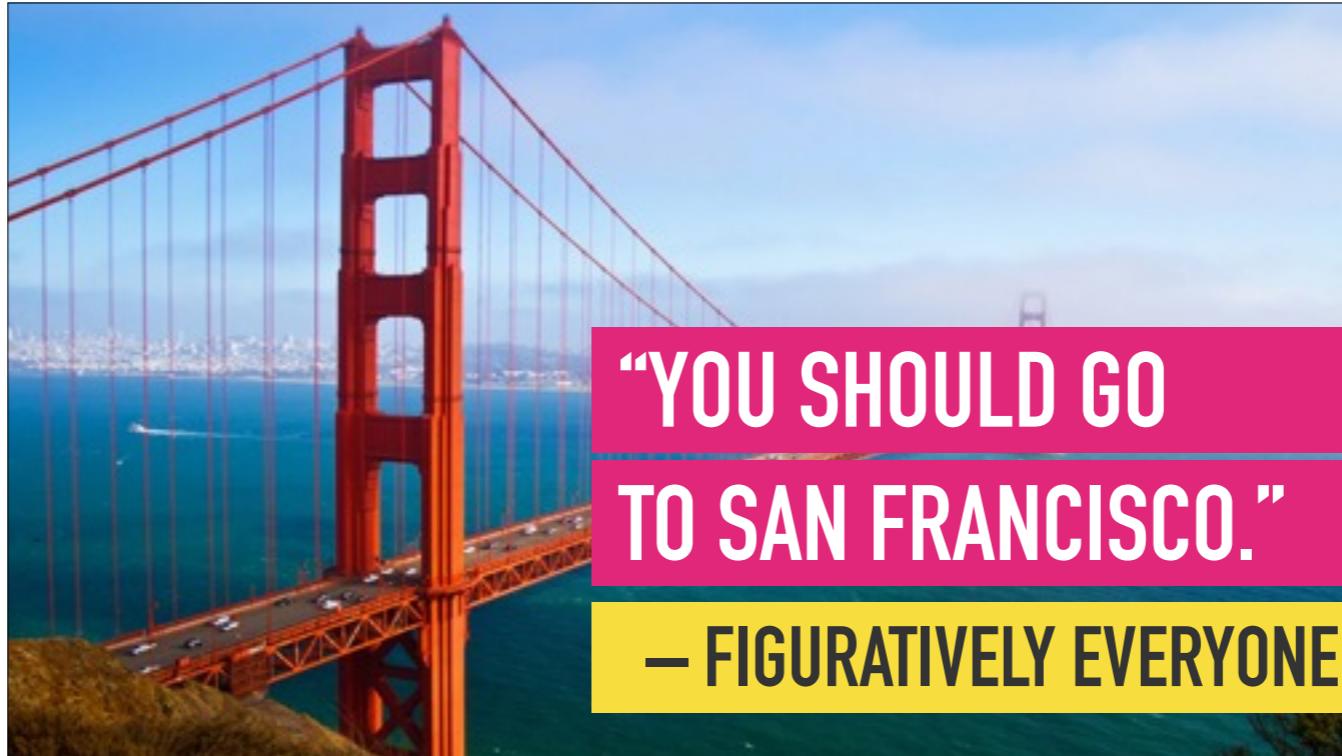
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San Francisco. <CLICK>. When you're from somewhere and you love it and everyone keeps telling you that you can't do what you love to do in the place that you love you will get enormously frustrated. And you'll do just about anything to make that place a better place to do what you do even if that requires moving mountains for the community around what you do.

2012

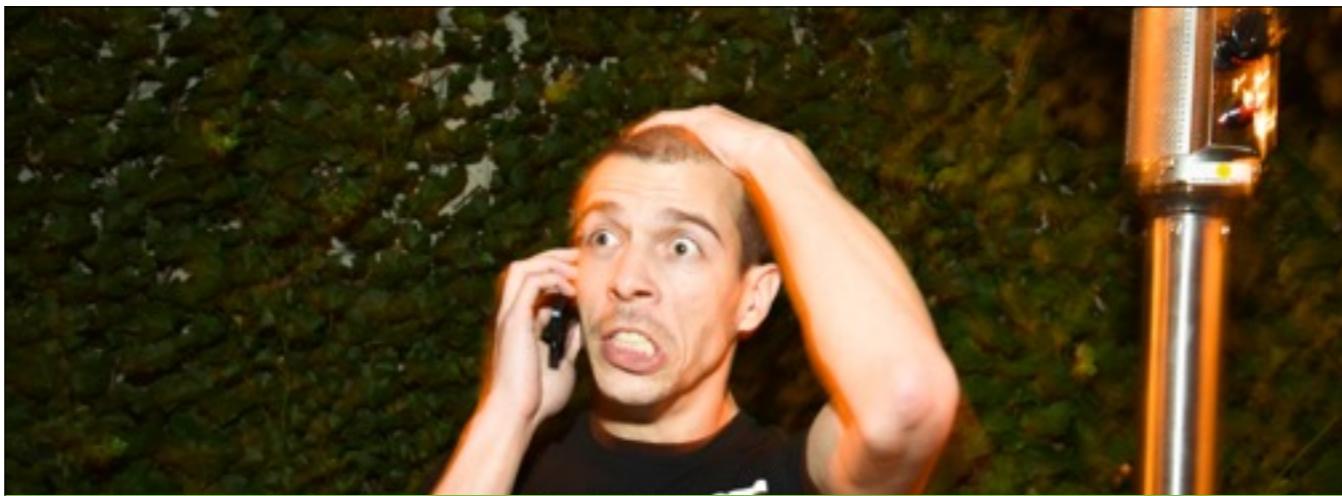


## RUNNING A CONFERENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME

Doing things like. <CLICK> Running a conference for the first time. This was in 2012 now <CLICK>. And anyone who knows, running a conference THE FIRST TIME is kind of like:



Complete and utter confusion. You really have no idea where to start. You know you want to do it, but that's about it. Thankfully I had the support of Chris and Mikeal so that when I got like this...

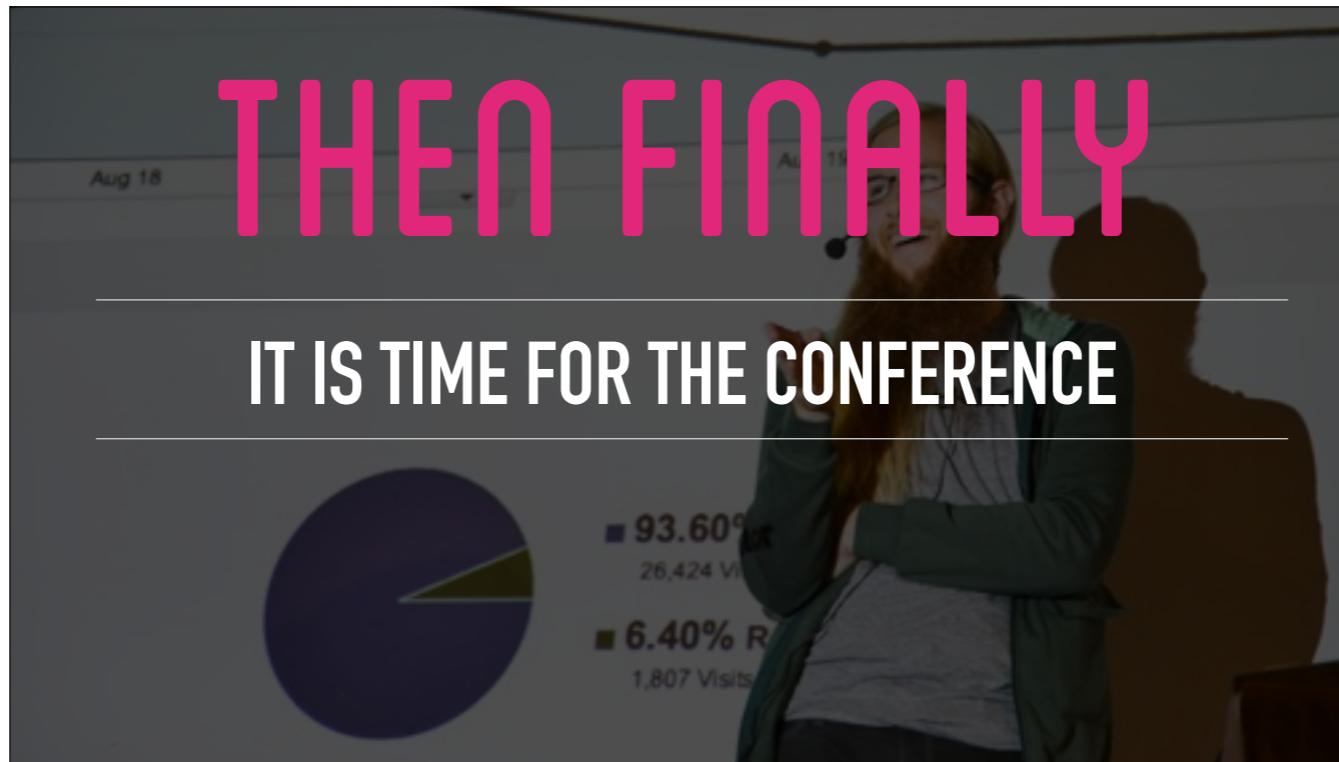


I COULD BE LIKE...

...I could be like...



Then the day of the event comes...

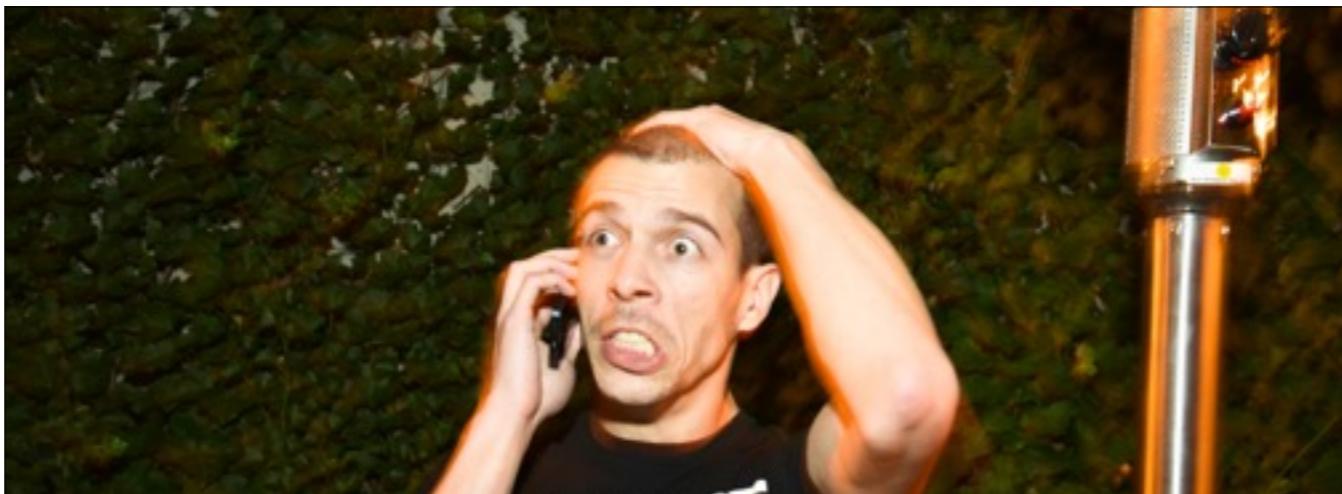


Then the day of the event comes...



AND YOU'RE BACK  
TO FEELING  
LIKE

...and you're back to feeling like...



**BUT THANKFULLY...**

... but thankfully ...

# NO, THANK YOU, CHRIS.



I had the support of JSConf. Which of course meant lastly...

IT'S TIME FOR



THE FAMILY PHOTO . . . AND THEN . . .

It's time for the family photo. And then ...



<CLICK> IT'S A WRAP! Which means for most organizers ...



... means time to relax.



If you have any sanity left. Which this photo clearly shows we did not in 2012. Then <Click> In the end you feel like.



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Or to put it in someone else's words ...

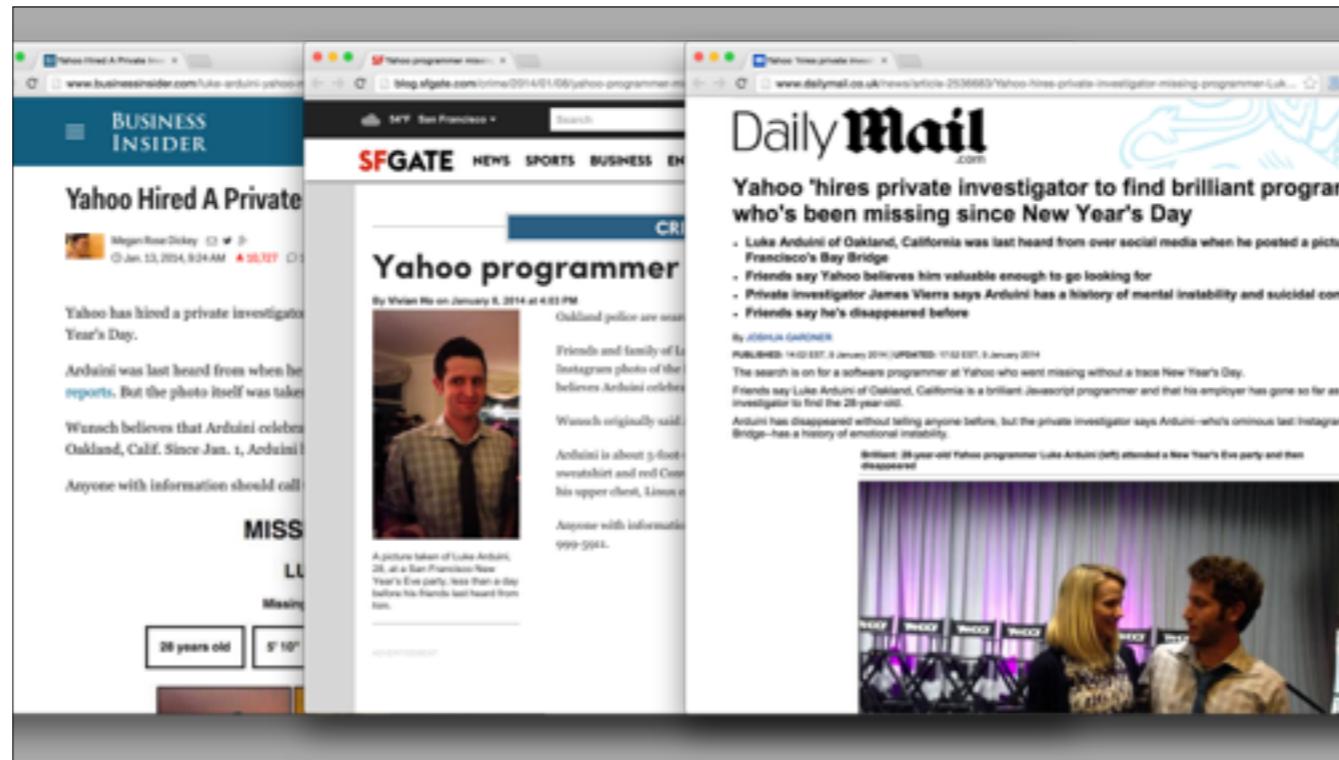


**“Organizing and running EmpireJS in 2012 was some of the most (stressful) fun I’ve had. It felt like purpose. I hope it continues for years to come.”**

**- LUKE ARDUINI**

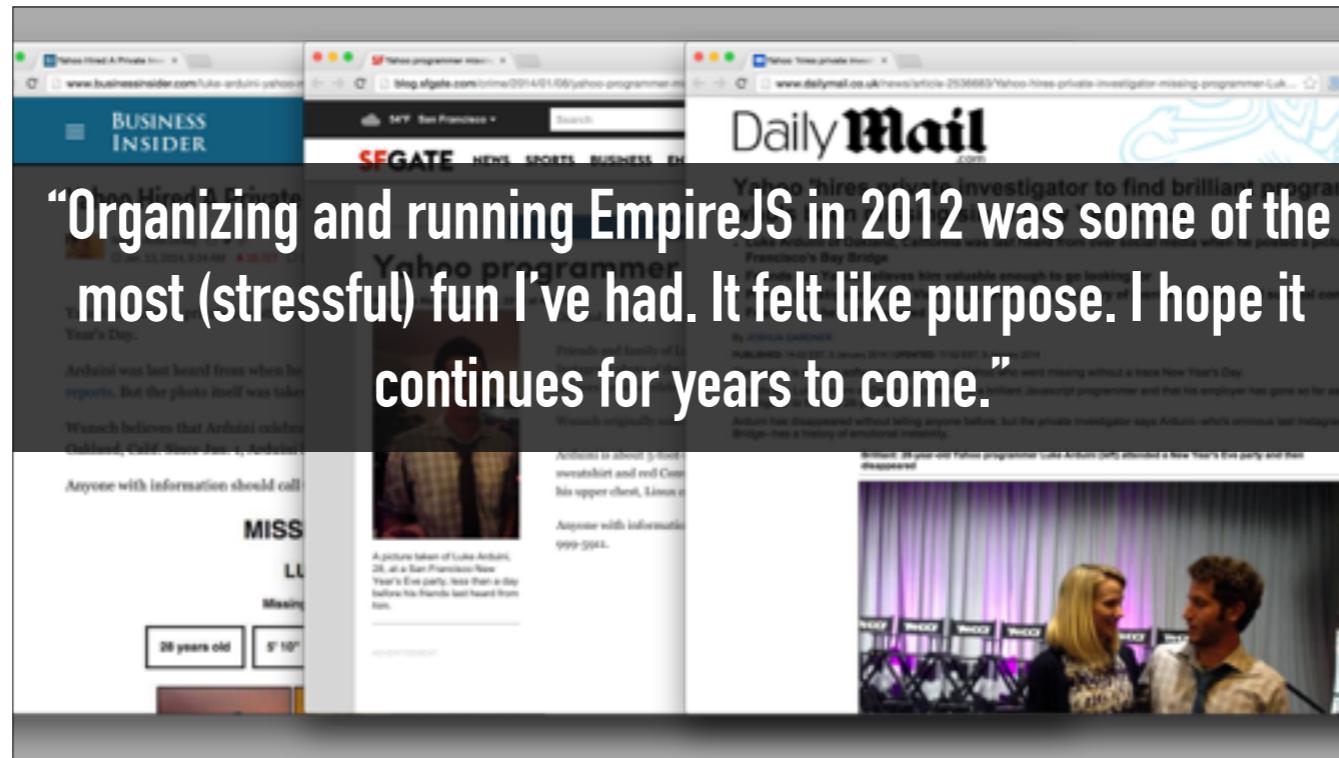
I'll let you read it to yourself because I simply can't read it out loud. Even almost two years later I still can't sort out all my feelings when I do. It is from one of the first EmpireJS organizers. <CLICK> Luke Arduini.

Without Luke EmpireJS would have never happened in 2012. Sometime in 2013 Luke decided to move to Oakland where he took a job at Yahoo. And, wow, this is still really hard to talk about, but here we go.



Less than a year after Luke moved to Oakland, and a little more than two years after we ran EmpireJS together <pause> Luke decided to take his own life. And that is one of the shittiest things I've ever had to deal with. Mainly because I didn't have too much experience coping with loss.

But I did know how to run a conference. <CLICK> And if that quote wasn't both the best and worst reason to run an amazing conference I don't know what is. So ...



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**"I GOT WITH A  
SICK TIGHT CLICK  
AND WENT ALL OUT"**

**— RAEKWON**

... in the worlds of the immortal Raekwon. <CLICK>



Catherine Lopez, Juan Buritica, Justin Moses, and Adam Sontag are some of the hardest working people I know. But despite all of their help, deep down, <PAUSE> I was still feeling like:



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What had happened only a few months earlier just increased the feelings of responsibility and obligation I had as a conference organizer to a near breaking point level. At times I wasn't sure I was going to make it through. But I kept doing my routine at the time, which included attending the local BoroJS meet ups.



It was at one of these that helped mold those feelings into doing something good from such a terrible tragedy. It was a suggestion from one of the BrooklynJS organizers, Brian Brennan, who was also very close with Luke. To have EmpireJS “make a donation in Luke’s name” [CLICK](#)

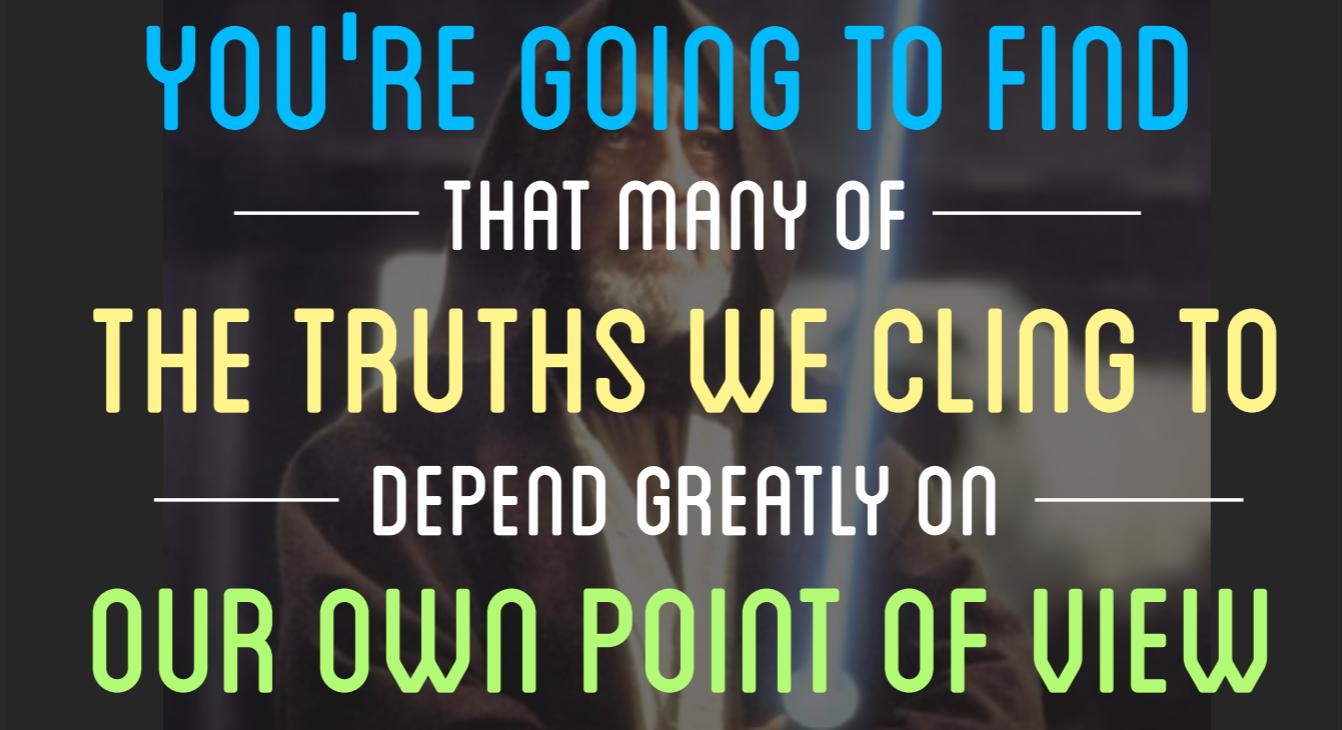
Yes, I realize now I have a lot of Brian’s to thank in this talk.

All in all we donated over \$3,000 to a suicide hotline in New York from money the conference took in and from selling the EmpireJS 2014 t-shirts. It still doesn’t feel like enough, but it was something that made sense.

Without JSConf I probably would have not known Luke. And despite the difficulty I know it made me a better person. To find the courage to turn bad things into good things.



Depending on your own point of view. So after EmpireJS 2014 I was back to feeling like I was after JSConf 2010.



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I was inspired. And very motivated. So I thought:



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... “How about I start another conference? That sounds like it will be easy.” Oh wait a minute, that’s right. I forgot. It’s a ton of work.

So much more quickly than before, inspired and motivated became...



COMPLETELY  
— UTTERLY —  
**OVERWHELMED**

Completely and utterly overwhelmed. So I went back to first principles.



Expanding out and not up is the power of JSConf. <CLICK> These individual JSConf family events are powered by new and motivated organizers.



So I new I had to find new people to help. Catherine Lopez <CLICK> was the only core organizer from the spring who had the time to donate again in the fall. Thankfully <CLICK> Tracy Hinds. <CLICK> Matt Walters. And <CLICK> Chris Abrams. All stepped up to make EmpireNode ...



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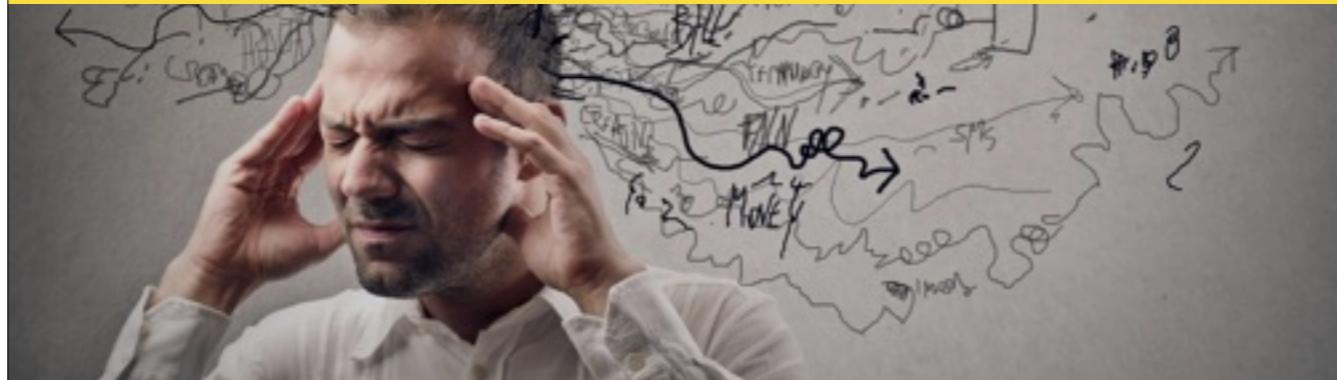


... a sweet success. And yet ...



... a sweet success. And yet ...

# STILL LINGERED BUT BURNOUT



... the burnout still lingered. It still does today. Even though I was being more responsible and helping bring up other organizers to really take over when I knew I couldn't do it. In fact ...



Matt Walters <CLICK> & Chris Abrams <CLICK> ran EmpireNode 2015 with myself and Tracy acting solely as advisors. <CLICK>



# WHY DOES EVERYONE DO IT?

The lingering burnout I felt at EmpireNode <PAUSE> when writing the abstract for this talk <PAUSE> and later when compiling it led me on a search. A search for meaning in WHY everyone who runs a JSConf event does it.

We all use the word “community”. I myself said it at least a few times in this talk, but to me it’s just a word. A word used to a point in vernacular where it <PAUSE> (almost) <PAUSE> no longer has meaning. I’m not saying I don’t care about people, because the truth is quite the opposite.



But WHY are all these people so important? Why are they worth all this work and this effort? I'm not saying they are not, but I am asking for tangible reasons to why.

I rewatched this talk from Chris Williams in 2012: finding love in a bit. It was a talk he gave after he had quit Twitter for almost a year following JSConf 2012. He had disconnected himself from the popularity contest many of us (myself included) fall victim to.

The saddest thing about this was that I was literally in the room when Chris gave this talk, but I was so overwhelmed and plugged in that I was not truly present for it. Or perhaps I was not ready for the things he was saying.

But I am now, and the best pieces of advice (to me) in that talk were two things:

Number one. <CLICK>



Be silly. Not snarky.

And I realize that I am not exactly the right person to be saying this. I realize that I am perceived as a very intense and serious person. But being serious about your work and taking YOURSELF seriously are two completely different things.

What kind of face are you making right now? What kind of face is your neighbor making? Are you smiling? Why not? Try this: smile. Right now. Smile at your neighbor. Make a funny face. Make a mean mug. Do you feel different about them now?

Number two. <CLICK>



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Number two. <CLICK>



Disconnect. And REFLECT. Even if it is just for one day a week. Even if it is just for ONE HOUR OF ONE DAY A WEEK. Make it a practice.

It might not be easy at first. In fact it may be the most difficult thing you do all week. Try something new while you're disconnected. For example: leave your phone at home. Go for a walk. Talk to your friends. IN PERSON. Go to the library. Read a book. Get some exercise. Build something new. Meditate. Watch a movie with someone you love.

Following my own advice ... <CLICK>



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# REFLECTED ON JSCONF AND REALIZED

I put my focus recently towards reflecting <CLICK> on JSConf. What I realized is that the community JSConf events create is a direct function of the feeling of belonging that we (AS ACTUAL PEOPLE) can create.

You can't just say "community" and one will appear out of thin air. You can't talk about "community" like it is some giant living in the hilltops that comes down to visit the townspeople from time to time. You have to build it. Yourself. Because if you don't, <CLICK> who else will?

You build it by being kind. And helpful. And not getting in fights on Twitter. And not excluding people from events you have. And having the courage to tell those around you who do that it is not OK to be exclusive. Because communities are fragile. And precious. And something worth standing up for and defending.



I put my focus recently towards reflecting <CLICK> on JSConf. What I realized is that the community JSConf events create is a direct function of the feeling of belonging that we (AS ACTUAL PEOPLE) can create.

You can't just say "community" and one will appear out of thin air. You can't talk about "community" like it is some giant living in the hilltops that comes down to visit the townspeople from time to time. You have to build it. Yourself. Because if you don't, <CLICK> who else will?

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This photo is one that I constantly come back to whenever I am searching for meaning. This is the “pale blue dot”, a photograph of Earth taken on February 14, 1990, by the Voyager 1 space probe from a record distance of about 6 billion kilometers.

There is an amazing quote as recited by the immortal Carl Sagan which accompanies it.

“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every “superstar,” every “supreme leader,” every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

So ...



LET'S  
**CREATE**  
— THAT FEELING —  
**OF BELONGING**

... Let's create that feeling of belonging. And ...



**MAY JSCONF BE WITH YOU.**

... And let's change the world.

Don't forget.

Take this feeling home.

Go do something with it.

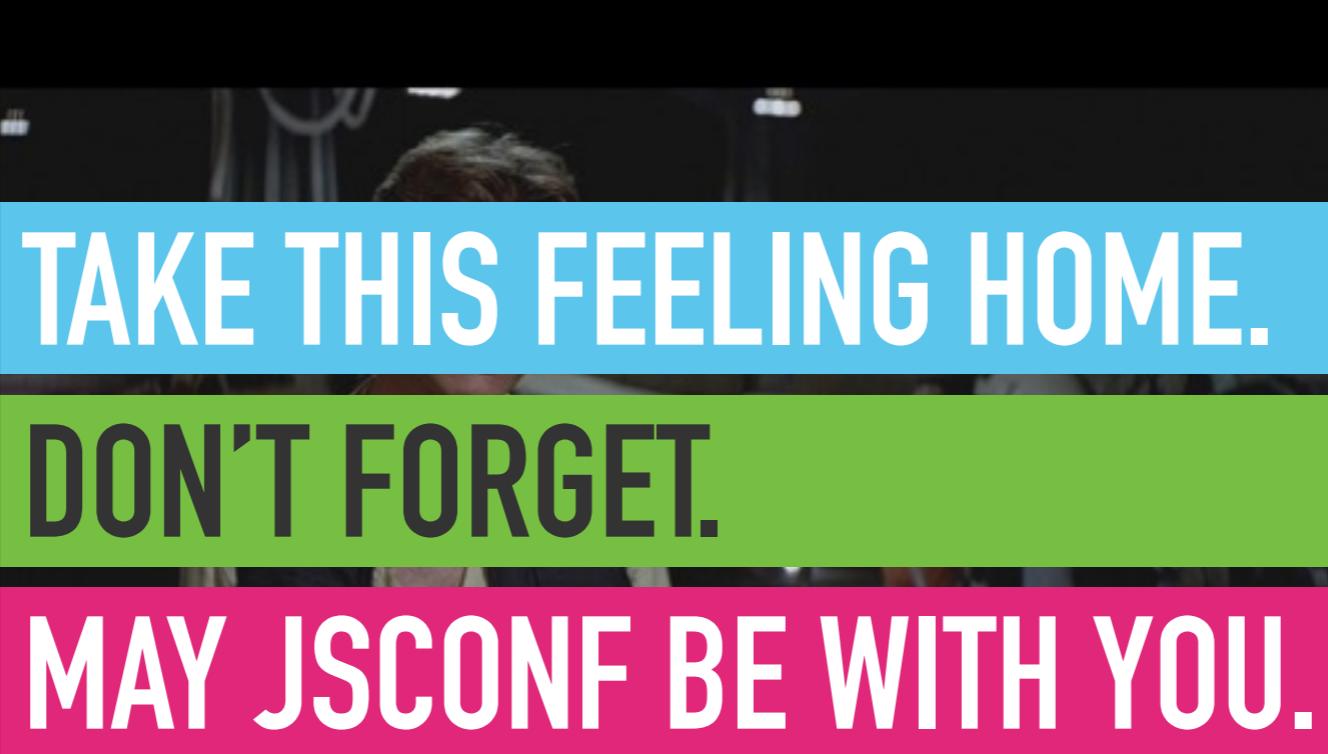


... And let's change the world.

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... And let's change the world.

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**GO DO SOMETHING WITH IT.**

**TAKE THIS FEELING HOME.**

**DON'T FORGET.**

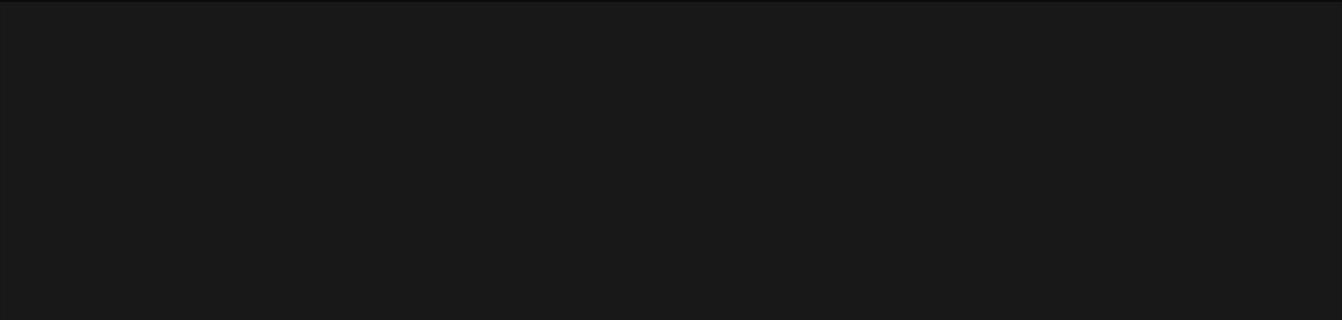
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**BUT WAIT!  
THERE'S MORE**

LET THERE BE  
VIDEO MONTAGE

BUT WAIT!  
THERE'S MORE