

CONSULTANT: Matt Swails
AGE: 23
RESIDENCE: Asheboro, NC
OCCUPATION: Unknown
INTERVIEW DATE: July 30, 2016, approx. 11:30 am
LOCATION: Durham Farmers Market @ Durham Central Park

Matt Swails and one of my other consultants, Julia Whitehead, were both volunteers for a solar energy non-profit organization that had set up a booth next to mine at the market. Matt and I began with the standard audio introduction (e.g., name, age and residence). He was already familiar with the Millennium Memory Project, having talked to Julia and his other colleagues.

So when the year changed, I was seven years old, if I did the math right. And the only thing I really remember was being on the couch with my parents and little sister. We all stayed up that night. My parents drinking champagne, and just chilling on the couch. And I remember watching the ball drop and everything. We were all just hanging out, having a good time. I think we all fell asleep on the couch [laughs] afterwards. So yeah, that was a good memory. I haven't thought about that in a while, until you were over here.

Do you remember your family being concerned about the Y2K Bug? Or do you remember that? I should preface it: do you remember the Y2K Bug?

Um, I remember hearing about it. That young, I don't remember, you know, I didn't understand what that was all about. But I definitely remember being older, looking back on it. It was kind of a concern about all the computers taking over and stuff like that. And I don't think my parents were, not that I remember, no.

Do you remember what it was like trying to use the Internet back then? Did you all have a computer at home?

[laughs] Yeah, we did. It was the old dial-up. You couldn't use the phone and the Internet at the same time. Yeah, we had a family computer for – I don't remember what year it was – but I just remember being like, cued into it.

A family computer? Meaning, *the* computer for the family?

[laughs] Yeah, exactly. One computer, in one room, yeah. It was fun. Me and my sister, we really got hooked on it and started playing these really old video games and stuff like that. And again, being on the Internet, again, I was too young to really know what was going on, but it was the same thing, dial-up and all that.

Do you remember what music you were listening to at the time? What was on the radio?

[laughs] I gotta say, my family was pretty religious back then. So we listened to a lot of Christian rock and stuff like that. I have very vivid memories of us driving our – we had like a blue van or something – listening to Christian rock and stuff. I could probably still sing the words if I heard the song again [laughs].

“Open the Eyes of My Heart”?

[laughs] Yeah.

I remember that one. Cool, man, all right. It’s been a long time, and you’re pretty young, but if somebody asked you, “What was life like in 1999?” What would you say?

I would say it was a lot less busy. Back then, my sister and I, we went out into the neighborhood and hung out with kids until it got dark, and then we would come inside to the house, you know?

And you don’t think kids are doing that anymore?

No, no. Because I have a younger brother who just turned 17, so he kind of grew up with the internet and computers and all that, and he’s a really big computer gamer. He’s kind of a nerd. So all he knows is being connected, and all these video games, and computers and all. But I distinctly remember back then, going out in the summertime, getting up early and going out, riding my bike, hanging out with neighbors for the entire day. I don’t feel like kids do that anymore.

Other than that, do you think things are better or worse than they were then?

Um, in some ways better, and in some ways worse. I really believe that all of this technology has reduced our attention span a little bit. Probably as connected as the world is, I feel like we’ve drifted apart in terms of like, face-to-face conversations, really empathizing, and having to face-to-face conversations with people. Really understand where people come from. It’s so much easier now to hide behind an anonymous screen name and call somebody an asshole from across the world. So I feel like we’ve lost a little empathy, but in terms of society and a species as a whole, I think we’re making advances.

I thanked Matt for his time and ended the interview.