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My Linux Story

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My Introduction Computers

I got my first computer around 1992, after the personal computing hobby had been around quite a while. I know I felt so far behind. I remember feeling so lost and thinking I'd never know what I was doing. But it didn't really matter because I never dreamed of doing anything actually computer related. The truth was, I just wanted a nice word processor from which I could print nice papers. I was in college and type written papers were required and typing for me meant spending more time correcting errors than actual research and writing. A computer seemed like the perfect answer.

I bought a second hand Tandy 2000, by Radio Shack. It had everything and only cost \$500. It had some version of DOS on it and the computer guy put on a few programs for me. Well, I used it without ever thinking of checking for a modem until I quit college in my Junior year of nursing school. That's another story, but two words will suffice - sponge bath! Well, and two more - dying patients. I would never be happy nursing.

But I returned to college in Fall 1998 and realized my old Tandy was a dinosaur. The papers the other students turned in weren't in Dot Matrix. They had fancy fonts and pictures! I had to get a new computer.

I purchased my second computer at the local army base PX for \$500, a Pionex I believe. It wasn't top of line, but about second. It came with Windows 98, and excellent tech support. It wasn't long before their friendly support staff was walking me through modem replacement, driver installation, and ultimately reformat/reinstalls.

I wasn't into a year using it before I became disenchanted and paranoid. Very paranoid. I feel so silly now, but I was so worried that some "hacker" would break into my machine in the few minutes I spent on the dial-up connection that I had bogged the machine down with a firewall, antivirus, and spyware hunter. grc.com mean anything to anyone? I had hacked this file and that file trying to keep my private information private and cover tracks and reformatting about every 3 months. That's what it was averaging. About every 3 months. Then someone mentioned Linux.

Enter Linux

I spent much of 2000 trying to convert to Linux. I tried SUSE, Red Hat, and Mandrake among a few others. I always tucked tail and went back to Windows. ...until Mandrake 7.2 hit Wal-Mart shelves in the Fall of 2000.

All of a sudden I could get a decent screen resolution and KDE 1.99 (a 2.0 beta that it shipped with) was actually usable. ...or understandable. There was a list of applications in the menu instead of a bunch of directories (anyone remember the old 1.x menus?) Well, I was inspired enough to try and get my modem and sound working. See,

everything else was working just fine either out-of-the-box or using the Mandrake Control Center. I never went back to Windows again.

Well, it took a week of booting to Windows to look something up on the internet and booting back to Mandrake to try something before my modem finally dialed, but I've never felt so excited and proud in all my life.

My ISA sound card took another week, but it was much easier now. I could search from Mandrake and by then someone had said the fateful word "Google" to me. It took a bit more voodoo to get ISA cards to work, but within another week I was listening to system sounds and music files.

Well, with the release of the 2.4 kernel that same fall I was able to use NVIDIA proprietary drivers and I was well on my path of discovery. I spent a few years learning Linux and helping others on the Mandrake mailing lists and Usenet users group.

Broadband had hit during 2001 and I had my firewall making me invisible, but mainly I felt this big sigh of relief. My paranoia was gone as was the weight of the world. I loved Linux and the commandline made sense. I never was able to form any patterns or retain all those mouse clicking routines used in Windows, but I could understand what was going on in that terminal. I was home.

I switched to Gentoo in 2003 and started this website in 2005. The rest is probably history.

It's All in the Timing

I was lucky to have switched to Linux when I did. I tried lots of other distros just for fun. I began experimenting with Howtos I'd run into. Back then howtos weren't "apt-get this, tick this box, and click OK." Back then they were 'get the source here, and the patch here and this one here, and open this file and replace this function with that one, then do this and that to this config file and then recompile this other program using this patch and edit its config file, then patch the kernel...' No mention of dependencies usually, you discovered them when you started to compile. Me and Texstar used to write back forth - "Hey hey! I got this to work! Here's a screenshot." Those were the days. It's all too easy now.

But that was considerably easier than it had been in the '90s. This is why I have such respect for the really old guys that have been using Linux since "real men write their own drivers" and why Linus is my hero. This is why I shake my head at those who ask, "Is Linux ready for Prime Time?"

Hell yeah, it's ready - and has been for quite a while.

[Linux](#)

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