

I remember my mother telling me about when she taught me how to read. Bright and early on Sunday mornings, my parents would go to the large mailbox outside our small 2 bedroom apartment and fetch the mail and the Sunday newspaper. They would walk in, and I would immediately bolt for the newspaper. I would rip off the plastic wrapping, toss the Sunday papers aside, and stare at my weekly treasure: store flyers.

I remember opening the rubber-banded flyers and spreading them out on the floor around me in a semicircle. Department stores at 6 o'clock, clothing at 9, and technology flyers at 12, the most precious of all. There lay stacks of Circuit City, Best Buy, Fry's, Sears, and all my favorite stores' weekly advertisements, complete with every consumer product I could dream of. I remember picking up each one and seeing the wide eyes of a 6 year-old staring back at me through the colorful, glossy paper.

My mother would sit by me as I scanned each page religiously, making sure to never accidentally skip a section. She would point to words and have me read them aloud. I remember sounding out words like "jewel case" and "answering machine", and I can still picture the puzzled look on my father's face when I asked him why a camcorder cassette couldn't hold the same amount of video as a VHS cassette, since they both looked the same. This innate curiosity followed me throughout life, but when I applied for college, I wasn't entirely sure about what I wanted to do. All I knew was that technology was the only thing I could understand. I had gone through life being the local geek who could usually help people with their computer problems, be they my parents, friends, or teachers. I didn't want to major in anything technology related, because I felt like I would end up filling the stereotypical Indian "IT guy" role. Then again, I wasn't much good at anything else, so I unhappily applied for college as an information systems major.

In my first two weeks of school, I felt like switching into something different. I felt shameful of my technology major when people would ask. I felt like it was so boring and bland compared to majors like biochemistry and 20th century British literature. But most of all, I was afraid that I would be living my entire life in a cubicle, listening to people complain about some company laptop that had defective speakers, or of a person around the world telling me that "they wanted to talk to someone else about this issue". I was afraid of locking myself into a room where I would constantly feel like I had missed some incredible opportunity that would have taken my life in a better direction with a future brighter than that of a monitor with a knowledge base question on it.

Walking into Dawn or Doom, I didn't really know what I would get out of it. I knew that some professors would be giving presentations over their research and how their outcomes could

help humanity. I knew that the information given would be fairly basic and would provide a general overview of complex research without any details or challenges faced on the work that was done. I thought I would watch some presentations and go home. Life would go on.

Life did go on, but in a direction I wasn't expecting.

The first presentation I attended was about "Writing in Technology". I saw four journalists sitting on stage talking about their experiences about writing about science and technology, and I was amazed at just how much effort goes into creating stories for people to consume in just a few minutes. Being someone who consumes lots of online tech journalism, it was incredible to see what happens behind-the-scenes. I loved hearing discussion about how social media was changing the way that people tell stories, and how new platforms like Periscope and Snapchat are becoming real multimedia outlets for people to consume content on in real-time, and how job titles such as "Social Media Editor" are becoming more and more important as publications need to reach their audiences in more ways than before.

I learned about Mars, and how it's currently our best option towards life outside of Earth. I learned that many of Mars' current landforms show signs of water and ancient oceans at scales that would have rivaled Earth. I saw fanned deltas and vast river systems that I thought had never existed. Even more, I was fascinated by the incredible ingenuity shown by the people at NASA in landing each rover on the surface; I had never expected to ever see a physical manifestation of the word "skycrane" here on Earth, let alone on Mars. Most shocking, perhaps, was learning that a rover's biggest threat was not wear from the difficult terrain, but rather dust collecting on the surface of solar panels, rendering our little explorer unable to warm herself during the icy nighttime.

I saw Purdue's own professors demonstrate touchless interactivity solutions that could fundamentally change the face of modern healthcare. University graduate students demonstrated controlling a robotic humanoid robot through virtual reality, with the ability to conduct precise surgical operations in rural areas or combat environments that lacked resources for more comprehensive care. I had the opportunity to control a robotic surgical assistant and experience its speed and precision firsthand. Though this impressively futuristic solution is not without its pitfalls, I still marveled at the prospect of a surgeon being able to save the life of someone thousands of miles away. I had never thought about how such serious problems could be solved simply with modern technology and sheer human ingenuity.

I left Dawn or Doom with a sense of comfort. I felt like I belonged in a community that was changing the world, and that the major I chose was the major I was meant to be in. I felt like I needed to add a chapter to the book that was being written before my very eyes.

I found that the room I was afraid of locking myself into was really a door into a new world. A world that was beautiful and futuristic, on the verge of a new era brimming with knowledge and understanding. Today, I stepped inside that boundless room, threw my keys behind me, and ran without ever looking back.