



Miranda Forwood

Miranda is a software engineer and project manager with the Australasian CRC for Interaction Design (ACID).

I'm a software engineer as was mentioned and also a project manager at ACID and I did get into IT in a very strange, roundabout kind of way. I know if my mum now, when she tells people what I do, they're kind of like, what? That's really strange, how did she get into that because I did dance and drama at school. I did design and technology and I get in trouble for saying this but I did like Maths A, but don't tell anyone. Maths B's good and so yeah, I really don't, and people ask me how I got into IT and I don't really know, I sort of fell into it. I think, I grew up in the country so we got a computer pretty late. I got it when I was 15, I sort of discovered the internet and thought, wow, this is great, thought I'd take some HTML classes just sort of outside of school 'cause we didn't learn that at school when I was there and just thought it was cool and then somehow decided I wanted to be a graphic designer. Tried to get into that, turned out I can't draw. I tried but I didn't get into TAFE but yeah - I ended up just taking some IT subjects at uni and I discovered I liked it. I mean it was only six years ago or seven, I can't really remember how it happened but I discovered a double degree with IT and Creative Industries at QUT and thought, great, I can use both sides of my brain, I can do the creative sort of arty stuff even though I wasn't that good at it, I still liked it and also do the IT stuff and we, yeah, we just did programming and that and I discovered I was good at it, and I'm like, it's really fun, sort of creating something that people can look at.

In what I do, I write all that crazy code that most people wouldn't understand and you can show like a pretty picture or something 3D on the screen or people can interact with it and play with it and that's definitely one of the most rewarding parts of my job. It's seeing people's faces when they sort of play with something that I've made. My first game that I made at work was actually a little java game for your mobile phone. If your phone's java-enabled, you can play this game. It was actually a kid's game called Hooter and Snoz, where the idea of this purple character is to throw bubbas at sharks and the sharks die and sort of sink into the water. So, yeah, this was my first thing so that was pretty cool to be able to see that on a phone and actually my boyfriend's nephew played with it, he was five at the time and he's, you know, never played with a phone before and he was like, oh, this is cool, and he got the hang of it. So that was definitely a very cool thing to work on and I mean that stuff's fun but I also work on things that are helping the community and rewarding for me and people who use them as well.

I worked on a project called diversionary therapy, which is currently in use at the Royal Children's Hospital burns unit. It's basically, it uses a technology called Augmented Reality, which is, if you've heard of virtual reality, it's similar but instead of being fully immersed in a virtual 3D world, it's sort of superimposing 3D things onto the real world so it's all sort of technical but Google it. Google it and it'll come up. We've created this device that we give to children in the burns unit, who, when they're having their dressings changed, 'cause it's a very painful procedure. And they hold this device, you've got little markers, you can change them in and out and it's actually a story but instead of just watching a movie or playing Nintendo, you've actually got a lot of control over the story, so you sort of, when you tilt the device, the scene actually moves, so instead of using a joystick or a keypad or something like that, the way you're actually moving this thing is basically just a big blue thing, and it's got a screen on like a computer and yeah, you move around and interact with it and it's actually been, they're doing studies with it at the moment.

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It's actually been proven to reduce the pain by 50% I think, so they don't have to take the drugs anymore so that's really exciting. It's just been done in a medical conference in Tasmania recently as well so that's one of the projects that I'd really like to talk about because it's IT, I get to do the fun programming stuff, see the pretty pictures and then actually help people as well so that's a really cool thing to work on.

And as I mentioned before, I wanted to be in a creative environment and I work in research as well so we basically just get to make cool stuff. Seriously one of my project managers on a project I worked on a year ago, said, Miranda, we're going to make something cool and it's going to be on phones and it's going to be great. And that was pretty much the specification I got at the start and it ended up being about, we remixed audio by shaking your phone, like you'd say something into your phone, and then you'd shake it like this and then it remixes using a complicated algorithm that I've written, spits something, different audio back out at you, basically a lot of the movement stuff, we have that in the phones as well.

We've developed a game where, similar to this diversionary therapy stuff, it's like a simple little maze game, I don't know if you've seen those little things, I'm being very descriptive, where you've got a little metal ball and you move it around the maze, we've actually got that on a mobile phone without having to move the keypad. You just tilt it around like this and it moves the little ball through the maze trying to get it and we actually exhibited that and a number of other mobile phone games in Melbourne at the Australian Centre for Moving Image and so that was really fun as well. Like I said before, seeing everyone's faces and talking to everyone about the stuff that I've made, which is like, I like people as well. I don't like sitting in front of my desk all day just going, oh. So yeah, I realised, I said to my boss after that I realised that was sort of one of my favourite parts of the job, that I actually really liked talking to people about what I do and that kind of stuff so, and from that he's sort of given me project management jobs, a year out of Uni, which is really quite nice.

And I work in a small company, which has also allowed me to sort of move up a bit in a quick time, and surprisingly we've actually got a lot of women. They're not necessarily in IT roles, but in our head office, there's 20 people or something I think, but most of the time, it's just all women and it really freaks the guys out. We had a guy come over from a company that I worked with in New Zealand and they're all guys there, they're very sort of hardcore computer scientists, who came over and sort of said, where are the guys? I'm like, oh we've got them in a dungeon downstairs. We do, we've got a room. I was working there for six months downstairs, it doesn't have any windows and it's, we didn't mean for it to be just the guys down there, but since I moved back upstairs, yeah, we had the guys in the dungeon, but I shouldn't say that.

And yeah, like I just wanted to mention a bit of travel as well. I haven't gone anywhere near as exciting as Jenny. I'm hoping to, fingers crossed. But I've so far been to New Zealand four times, I think, which is really nice. It was big for me. Before I started this, I hadn't even been on a plane, so, and Melbourne as I mentioned as well. We actually went for a workshop to Tangalooma. I got to feed dolphins for work the other week. People in my office decide that they can't be productive at work, so we have to go somewhere else to work. So we went to Tangalooma basically and that was for me another really exciting workshop, project for Nokia research centre in Finland. I can't talk about that one. It's a secret. So I can't tell you what we're doing with that but basically when I was at a conference in New Zealand, they approached us, we were showing that mobile phone movie round and they said, wow, that's really cool. We want to pay you guys to do some research for us.

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And so that was definitely a very cool thing, to have Nokia 'cause I've like always had Nokia phones, so I'm like, oh I'm such a fan. And so that was very cool, for them to approach us. And we're working on that at the moment, which is another very exciting thing and yeah, it's, I don't know if it's come across but yeah, I love my job because there's so many different aspects to it. I do get to sit in front of a computer, which I like to do sometimes. I wouldn't be in IT if I didn't, you know, like my computer, even though you do want to throw it out the window sometimes, that's normal. I say, I don't understand the outside, I wrote the programs. So, it's great, I do get to work with people, I've done a little bit of travel, have rewarding projects and it's really challenging. Working in research, we're constantly pushing the boundaries, trying to think up new things, trying to go, alright, well this is how it's been done for the last ten years, what can we do to make it different, easier, more fun, all sorts of things like that.

Another project, just come to mind is, at my work we've actually got this huge 3D game world so it's basically like a first person game, if anyone plays games, but it's actually an accurate representation of the Carnarvon gorge area of, I think it's Western Queensland. And so it's recreating the Aboriginal environment from 20,000 years ago or whatever. So you're actually, you go through the camps, you light the fires, you ... you know, chase the kangaroos, you do all this and it's education, they're taking that out to schools to sort of educate kids about how the Aboriginal way of life was then, but in this really awesome looking 3D environment. So that's another cool project that we're working on as well, which is very successful.

So, that's all I want to say. Don't be scared of doing anything like this. Like I said, if I was, when I was your age, if I was sitting here, I would have been like, I can't do that, 'cause you know, I didn't know what I wanted to do up until, it would have been the April of Year 12, and I'm like, oh my God, I'm in Year 12, I've got to figure out what I'm going to do so then, and that's when I decided I wanted to do graphic design. So it's still not, didn't even end up here. So if you like something, just follow it and people always say to me, like I've spoken at different events like this and had the parents come up to me and say sort of, oh I need my child to do chemistry or physics or whatever. I'm not saying they're bad, they're good, but then the kids said to me, oh but I really want to be an artist as well so it's just like, I mean there's so many ways you can combine all sorts of things like this and just think, hey, I kind of like doing that, I kind of like doing that, I'll do this at Uni and yeah, just have fun with it and I'm sure they'll be so many awesome jobs by the time you guys finish Uni. It's going to be exciting.

Good luck.