

## Internet

by

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Friendship. It can be found anywhere, and usually in the least place you expect it to be. In my case, I found it on the internet.

To be as accurate as possible, I must go back in my mind to the summer after eighth grade. I was fourteen years old, going to a normal public school in the city of Shakopee. I lived in an average yellow house, was a mediocre trumpet player in the school band, got below average grades in most classes except art, and was unfortunately classified as a “classic underachiever.”

That’s what anyone knew about me. But the 300 or so students in my grade all knew I was a nerd. I am, by nature, very clumsy, both physically and verbally. I also back then had a habit of singing to myself between classes, and kids would laugh at me. Plus I had a crush on one of the most popular guys in school, and it was hopeless because he laughed at me too.

I hate being laughed at.

Anyway, I was starting to hate me too. My grades dropped low, lower, only because I didn’t see a point in doing work. I became one of those depressed teenagers, wanting to be popular, the right clothes, the right friends, something to make that guy look at me. Nothing worked. Ever.

Then, just after school ended and I thought I could go back to my room and lock myself in there forever, we got a super speed internet connection. I played around with it when I had nothing else to do.

In my search for something to sweep me away from this godforsaken place, I electronically stumbled upon what is known as a ‘message board.’ Someone would post a message, and you could reply to it. Like a very slow chat. (I was no stranger to chat rooms back then - I found them to be vulgar and tasteless, a waste of time.) Clicking through the list of topics, I spied a few interesting topics, like “atheism” or “video game violence.” I found myself amazed at the fact that people at this board had genuine intelligent conversations, and even debates. At once, I joined in, and when I got to know the people there, they were people just like me -- outcasts, nerds, and geeks.

I had finally found a place where I fit in. These people backed most of my ideas, and there were no immature idiots out to “cyber” or “hook up.” I spent most of that summer hanging around on that message board. Of course, sooner or later, the board broke down, and our small group of 20 or so relocated about five times before we found another stable one, continuing our debates at a new URL like nothing had happened.

There were lots of funny moments too. Random word usage was pretty common, and whenever I felt rotten, someone always cheered me up yelling “CABBAGE!” or by hitting me with a monkey or a trout until I was giggling so hard at the computer that my parents would stare at me funny. Also, since my handle was “Bluberri” at the time, many people squished me or put me on muffins.

It’s fun, you know, when you can do anything verbally.

“I am king. Bow, you fool,” Vegeta typed one day.

“No you’re not. I have your crown and scepter, see?” I replied.

He then chased me around with a butter knife, cut me up and had a nice Bluberri sandwich.

There are so many advantages to making friends on the internet, if you're the right type of person, which I am. No one online knows for sure what you look like, how old you are, even if you're male or female, unless you tell them. The only measure that really counts is your intelligence, and if you type with the literacy of an adult, you're generally taken as one.

But if you type like a nine-year-old, ("too day at school was liek so funay!!1") most people won't care what you think, even if it is a good opinion. This is also a cruelty if you're cursed with bad spelling or grammar skills. But, since that doesn't apply to me, on we go.

I was getting more and more absorbed in this non-existential world where everyone was equal unless they typed like they weren't. The first half of that summer was nothing but computer. My parents kept trying to drag me away from it. My dad, quite experienced with such things, resorted to turn off the internet connection every night at ten manually with a line of Unix code that read something like `000 ip down`. With some careful observation on my part, I figured out the opposite of that command, `000 ip up`. Then I was able to converse with my online friends until the wee hours of the morning, punching the `000 ip down` command when I needed sleep. My dad never knew. Shh, don't tell him.

Things went well and I was a happier kid. When ninth grade started, I was able to make a few shallow, untrustworthy 'friends' that served one purpose of having people to hang out with so it didn't look like I had none. It wasn't school I cared about though - it was the online stuff.

I scraped by in school, my parents pushing me all along the way, knowing I could do better.

My addiction worsened when Dad showed me a website that had html tutorials. This stuff was easy. Using the knowledge that it granted me and other resources, I coded up my own site, unceremoniously titled “Bluberri’s Crappy Web Site.” I titled it “crappy” because it was, compared to some of the other websites I’d seen, and loaded it with utter junk - little animations, an anime screenshot gallery, some poems, a story I’d started. Of course, I didn’t think it was junk at the time. My friends liked it - they even went so far as to ask if I could code up some stuff for them too. I obliged.

A while after that, after I got a scanner, I started a new site of art and poetry. This I titled “Mercury Dreams, Jupiter Wonders” but soon took off the last two words, along with the “berri” on my screen name. Mercury Dreams remains my art site and life, and I update it often enough with my “blu” handle when I can. I’ve started doing online comics too, and even though I’ve grown up and matured a little, I still visit that little remote message board that has, in a way, watched me grow up - the group that took me in when I was feeling especially down, whom I go to for advice, who has been with me through death of family members, change of residence, my compulsive online lies (they all thought I was 25 for a time), and my first boyfriend.

It doesn’t matter that I don’t even know some of their names or whether they’re male or female or how popular they are in school. What matters is that we help each other. They’ve been emotional support to me - and I help them back when I can.