

Homage to Just A Geek

October 14, 2013



A few months ago I read [Wil Wheaton's 'Just a Geek'](#) and enjoyed it tremendously. Wil gave an unflinchingly honest and humorous look into his life. It made me reflect on mine. This is my little homage to [Wil's book](#).

An autumn morning a few days ago

Merciless clock and a light breakfast get me going and out of the door before 8am. Often that's before my wife and 2 year old boy or wife get up, but this morning they do.

I'm at the door when Eino, my little guy comes up to me and says (in Finnish).

- Daddy goes to work.
- Yes, daddy goes to work.
- Daddy drives fast (grabbing my leg)
- Daddy tries.

Then he asks for a hug and kiss, wife too, and our cat begs a nose-kiss, and I'm on my way.

The morning is quite beautiful, crispy. I drive the beach road in Helsinki area with the sea warmer than air whisking up a pale fog. Morning sun turns it to a wall of white, hiding the ocean, where nearby islets show only as silhouettes. Aware that soon enough sun will do the northern trick and stay down most of the day I just enjoy the glare. Gravel crunches under tires of my rather creaky 20+ year old bicycle as I speed up and feel mighty fine.

Just under 10 kilometers away, in Helsinki center, awaits my workplace, an old and respected game company. I have the pleasure of leading art production for a game. We have a great little team. I enjoy it like no job before. But I must say none of this, what I have in my life now, came easy to me.

An autumn morning 9 years ago

I wake up slowly in my singles flat past 11 am. It was another long night of single-player gaming and reading. Since it is late I start the day with lunch, a packet of spinach lettuces with jam which I figure is healthy not realizing how little spinach there is or protein or anything else positive for that matter. Then few meters to my desk and I'm at work, 60 minutes and I'm done. The too rare and random web design and illustration jobs I have are like that. I get by with them, unemployment support and dreaming of winning the lottery.

Soon I'm out of the door. The apartment building I live in is a good lonely distance from Tampere center and offers forest trails right from the front door. I run a lot, it keeps me reasonably sane and unappealingly skinny. The forest is beautiful, dark evergreen with rays of sunshine slipping through the trees and touching ground at pleasant angles. I have an eye for beauty but am not feeling it now – what I feel is discontent.

I'm 27 years old but have no proper profession. I have almost a degree in Cultural Anthropology which I am in no hurry to finish or interested in as a job. I have had a graphic design business of my own for 5 years, on the side of studies, but have no contact network, no success worth mentioning or real interest to continue.

What I do enjoy and think I can do is multimedia/games/movies/animation, mainly the artwork and animation side of it. Still despite my projects and studies(I focused on Multimedia clearly more than my major) I've only done some random jobs of the type.

The issue in brief is lack of contacts (most jobs go to people someone knows), the lack of valid degree and especially(and this is in hindsight) not having that important first trainee position which I never apply for because I think I won't be valued if they don't pay me from day one. (Very poor thinking right there)

I moved to Tampere to escape getting stuck in my studies at Jyväskylä University and to do Animation Production diploma course. However the program taught me nothing new and I also failed my personal one-man animation production attempt – was stumped by technical issues and lost the momentum realizing how huge project I had undertaken and how slowly it progressed.

I am restless, disillusioned and worried my life is going nowhere. I have moved 2 times within one year from one shared flat to another, looking for something not knowing what, and finally to border of Tampere to be in peace and alone. Same applies to relationships, pretty much.

In stark contrast my friends are doing so well in their studies, professional lives and relationships that there is no comparison with their lives and mine.

I return from the run with a mild high from endorphins and for some time I can forget all that crap and can think. Standing sweaty and energized in the Spartan apartment I feel a need for new approach. I will build an animation production in small steps and make a learning material out of it and will apply for a grant to do it all. And I will forget graphic design and develop my 3D skills with more diligence, especially the hardest part, characters.

Autumn morning in 2010

I walk my wife to the door, kiss her and wish her a good day at work. I put tea on boil, power up my computer and move our pre-teen feline beast off my keyboard. It goes with a flick of a tail and disapproving purr. I check where I was with work last night and it is looking good. I almost forget the tea, going to shop or even cooking for my wife as I delve deep into a project I am optimistic about.

In many a regard things have not changed. I'm still energized by ideas and projects. I'm still more unemployed than not and now officially so as I have recently closed down my company. I'm a partner in another company, we make movies, but that isn't helping my lack of income. I have a resume worth showing, including 5 years of game work for a high rated (freeware) game, and have made a demoreel and a personal animated short movie. In many ways last 6 years have been a lot better than the low point of 2004.

But things have come to a head. I'm married and we're been planning on having a baby. This isn't about me, self-development and making just enough to get by anymore. It is about family and responsibility. I feel a pressing need to succeed and have been burning midnight oil for 2 years now.. I pretty much pass out once a week from lack of sleep. We've talked I should get a job at supermarket or something, anything.

It is not as if I hadn't tried. Lately there has been a major Recession which may have stumped my serious attempt with a proper demoreel in 2009. Then again I have found the reel broke a few basic rules, so maybe it was me. Yet I know I am good at what I do. This year I got into GamePro recruitment program and was, in their words, their first and foremost offer to game companies for Art. However all companies initially looking for a 3D artist backed away from the program before it could start.

Regardless of all this my latest venture has me excited and optimistic, once again. I've been writing a computer graphics blog on and off for 8 months and it has gathered some momentum. With recent tutorial competition wins I've been inspired to create a commercial tutorial about 3D Animation Character Creation. I feel very confident I can make a good product. Hell, I've been fiddling project like this since 2004.

Sometime in the afternoon our little cat monster does an inspired rip-a-rip on our sofa and gets me off the computer for a while, chasing her. After the cat is satisfied I still remember her, apparently not caring what type of attention it is, it leaves the furniture alone. Unable to focus I do my customary open positions-check. There's an UI artist inquiry from an unknown company called Supercell. I do not specialize in UI but what the heck, a quick application can't hurt.

Next day I have an interview and sign a contract a day later. Work starts in December. Turned out they needed an animator and a 3D artist and I fit both bills. And almost on the same day that I start the work my wife gets a positive on pregnancy test.

I am my choices. (I am not Jack's colon. I don't get cancer and kill Jack.)

Even though it was a lucky change that had me meet the right people at right moment, I believe my choices got me here. I chose my focus in 2004. I have done 3D since 1999 but choosing it over other things gave momentum. I chose not do work I don't have passion for – I rather did projects (often unpaid) that helped me improve. In the end, especially as I was a complete dumbass and never thought about applying for a trainee position, it was my choice to live many years as a starving artist. And in the end it was worth it.

What kept me going was some unfounded belief in myself. Had you told me 9 years ago where I would be now, I would have believed you and said 'Good, that's sounds about right'.

So there you go. This is the truth and for me putting it out here it is scary. Like most people who write I also try to show only my good side. But in a way it is a facade even when it is true.

If there's anything I hope you take home from this is that it is never too late to start anew. And if you are young, say around 27, and don't yet have a career or are unhappy with what you do now.. if so then please shut up and do something about it.

Thanks for reading and I believe I can take your feedback (with only a little dread) should you choose to give it. Please do. And for a more personal, entertaining and interesting story go read [Wil Wheaton's book](#). It kicks ass.