STEM SPOTLIGHT

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B.S. in Computer Science   Simmons College
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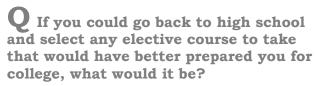**Q** **How did you select your college major?**

A Not until I took my very first computer science course, when I was a sophomore in college!

Q **What was the biggest influence in your selection of major/ career?**

A My first comp-sci course and professor, Nanette Veilleux, was a huge influence. I had always excelled at math and science, but also loved writing, history, and political science. I wasn't one of those kids who programmed for fun on my Apple IIE (and I'm still not), so it wasn't until college that I discovered a love for computer science. In my first course, with an amazing professor at Simmons, I just loved the idea of putting abstract concepts into practice. Computer Science was a perfect fit for me.

Q **If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college, what would it be?**

A I would have taken computer science, of course, which at the time wasn't offered at my high school. I also would have done more science -- even though I liked it, I stopped at the minimum of biology, chemistry, and physics. Looking back, I have no idea why I didn't take AP Physics or something like that. It would have prepared me better, and I know I would have liked it!

Q **What is your favorite aspect of your job?**

A I've always loved how hands-on it is. You learn something in class, then go and do it. It's very satisfying.

Q **How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?**

A Computer science has a tremendous impact on society both globally and locally. Our field is behind the technology we use every day and the internet access we can't live without. It can also be a force for good in local communities. Here in Memphis, people use social media and the tools of technology to improve the local landscape. Recently, there was a huge online campaign to save a historic old architectural building that used to house the Tennessee Brewery. Imagine projects like that without computer science behind them!

Q **What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your professional career?**

A For me, the most interesting part of computer science is seeing how people bring their personal experiences, expertise, and creativity into their roles to solve highly technical problems. When technology and creativity are building off each other and influencing each other, that's when we can create real change and innovation.

Q **What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?**

A Well, I'm not excited about it *first* thing in the morning. Coffee first. Then, it's exciting to think about the kinds of change we can engender. Back when I was a software engineer at Amazon.com, before deciding to teach, I could make a few code changes and impact millions of people. A computer scientist can really make a difference in people's lives through all kinds of different experiences.

Q **What advice would you share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?**

A Computer science is very accessible these days. If you want to try programming, find a tutorial and try it! If you learn better in a classroom, take a class. It's easy to get your feet wet, and see if computer science is something that resonates with you. And reach out to people, too. There are lots of jobs out there for computer scientists, it's not necessarily all programming all the time. People are doing great things -- find out what your friends and friends of friends are doing and how they're doing it.