



Paintings, Endings, and Thank Yous



August 4, 2023



Kristi Skinner

I've been thinking about endings with this program coming to a close. I thought maybe I could share some peoples last paintings to kind of go with that theme.



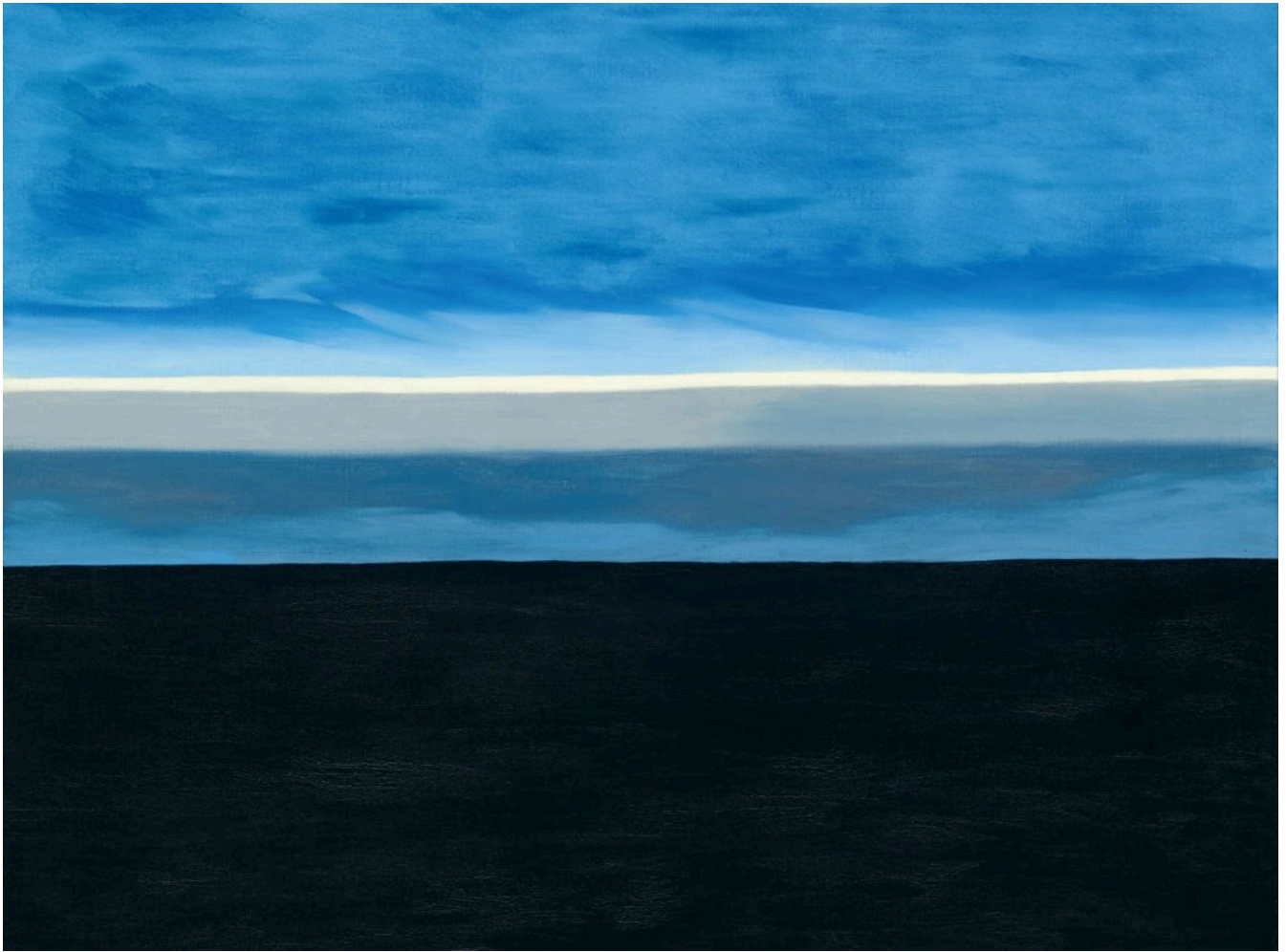
Mark Rothko's last painting, *Untitled*, 1970. This is his only painting painted in a single color as far as I'm aware. (that is to say, a single paint color, not his only monochromatic painting)



Many believe this to be Van Gogh's last painting, *Wheatfield with Crows*, 1890.



Pablo Picasso, *Self-Portrait Facing Death*, 1972 painted just hours before he passed at 91 years old.



Georgia O'Keeffe. *The Beyond*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 30 1/16 x 40 3/16 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

Georgia O'Keeffe's last unassisted painting (to my knowledge) she painted with assistance after going blind, so it's not the last painting she ever created, but the last she saw.



AP 2/10 of Lichtenstein 96

Modern Art II 1996 Roy Lichtenstein 1923-1997 ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation Collection 2015 <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/work/AL00382>

I'm not 100% sure this is Roy Lichtenstein's last painting, it's probably not (turns out its really hard to figure out which one was last unless people are meticulous about dates), but

it was painted one year before his death.

Anyway those are some “last” paintings to share on my “last” day, but the thing is it isn’t really my last day like it was for these artists. I still have a lot to go. and I’m excited to see where I end up. Anyway I should probably stop talking about art and start talking about what I had planned to say in my last blog, which is the last few days and thanks to everyone for all they did.

so first, the symposium: The symposium was so scary. Socializing with strangers is difficult for autistic people, myself included. And loud rooms with many conversations are a struggle because I’m hard of hearing. But I think I did okay. And my team really helped out when I couldn’t hear and stepped in when I needed talking breaks. My grandparents came to see the symposium. I didn’t think that I needed someone to come see what is done this summer, so I wasn’t even going to tell anyone, but on a whim I asked my grandparents who live pretty close if they’d want to come to the symposium. It really did feel good having family show up to support me. Grandpa wasn’t able to find parking, so only grandma was able to come in, but it really made the experience a lot less scary for me. And people were very kind to her and everyone wanted to meet her. That made me happy.

Andric and Curtis were amazing at the symposium. I could tell that Andric was struggling with the same social anxiety issues as me but he is so brave when it comes to it. He once said that he even though he’s scared of public speaking he wants to do a good job so he works through it, which is very impressive. Yesterday we have our exit interviews as well, which required sitting in front of a camera all by ourselves as well as in a group. Andric did well both times despite being scared. Curtis, as the only one in our cohort who is an extrovert, was loving the whole thing. And truthfully I was too, albeit in a very different way. Below the fear was excitement that other people were hearing about, understanding, and getting excited about what we were doing. It was scary but fun to talk to people about how we designed our prototype and show them the game asset trailer I made and watch them play the prototype and ask insightful questions. It felt good when Hila and Jorge (the grad mentors on our team) came by to see our poster. Even though they knew what we’d done all summer, they’d been there after all, and helped us make the poster, it was nice to have them come support us. People were overall very supportive. Imtiajul was very excited to be there and smiled practically the whole. We got good questions from Eliot and Stephen. The whole experience, even the bits I was nervous about, was worth repeating. I’d even let people take our pictures again even though I hate being photographed.

We're having a goodbye lunch today and I'm nervous for it. Like the symposium I just don't know what to expect. But I'm so thankful for this opportunity and I'm really glad I came here this summer.

now to the thank yous:

Allison: you were a great roommate. You always cleaned up and took out the trash when I forgot and are so sweet in every way. I could not have asked for a better person to share a room with. It was a pleasure getting to know you and I will miss you.

Amy: You're also a fantastic person to share an apartment with. You never seemed to mind when I make messes or was loud or just a generally bad roommate, so thank you. I loved discussing knitting with you and talking about all the various things that pop into my head. I loved hearing you play the piano the other day. I will miss you as well.

Andric: You made this project a million times more fun. Not that it wasn't already fun, but I love working with you and collaborating with you. I appreciate your ability to calmly discuss even the things you're very passionate about. I like how, when we disagreed on things it was never an argument. You always tried to see my point of view and always explained your point of view to me so that we could make the best product possible. I will miss hanging out with you and making you smile.

Curtis: Thank you for always making sure I was able to hear. You would check in and ask about how I was hearing in situations where most people just assume I can, and I appreciate that. You are a very efficient worker and I hope that I learned some of that from you. I also appreciate all your efforts to make people go out and do things. I enjoyed getting to know you a little better at hickory park the other day, as did Jake.

Ayman: It's been nice having another art person around. I enjoyed talking about ProCreate and drawing and seeing how your friend group did all those amazing animations and stuff. I will also miss you randomly coming up to my computer and asking "what are you doing" every few hours.

Nadya: I loved trying to find a pie with you at the fair, and talking with you at the pool, and just overall spending time with you. While I didn't get to know you as well as I would have liked, your happy personality makes you so easy to be around. You ask really great questions in luncheon lectures and I will miss seeing your smile.

Rebekah: thank you for being the mom of the group and taking us out to the pool. I really enjoyed being problematic and chaotic at the pool and I liked talking with you about iPads. You're very fun to talk to and I appreciate how you always ask good questions about grad school in our luncheon lectures.

Tim: it was nice getting to know you. You have interesting perspectives on things and I

benefited from learning with you. I enjoyed arguing about what a sandwich is, and I really enjoyed helping you learn how to put your hair into a bun. I think you will do amazing things in the future and I hope you have a good time being an RA this school year.

Kimberly and Evrim: Thank you for having me on your team. I've really enjoyed learning about Storm Lake and education. Even with busy summers you both made the time for our group and I appreciate that very much.

Ezequiel, Hila, and Jorge:

Ezequiel, thank you for always explaining things when I didn't understand, and waiting until I did understand to keep moving forward. I will miss working with you.

Hila, thank you for letting me try out your game. I loved shooting the paintings. And thank you for all your help with Unity and Blender. I really enjoyed learning from you and will miss working with you.

Jorge, Thank you for always answering our questions, even the potentially very dumb ones. You are very kind and always help make things easier for all of us. I enjoyed playing some of the games you suggested we try, and I will miss working with you.

Alex: I really enjoyed learning about SolidWorks (even though it may not have looked like it) and I loved the MCA. I've been wanting to learn about additive manufacturing for a long time but haven't had the opportunity. Thank you for believing in me, and for telling me that you believe in me. I often struggle to believe in myself, so having someone else tell me they think I have what it takes is very impactful. Thank you for making octoXRbunny for us and going the extra mile to make something for us to remember this program by. Also thank you for letting me read your research, as well as suggesting the additive manufacturing book. I really enjoyed reading both (thought I haven't finished the AM book just yet).

Dr. Gilbert: Thank you for being so kind. I'm grateful that you took the time to check in on all of us and I enjoyed hearing about Namibia and all the things you did there. Thank you for sending me the link to that talk you gave.

Glen: Like you said at the symposium, you kinda snuck into the background, but I know you were doing a lot of stuff there in the background that I'm thankful for. So thank you for that, and for talking to my grandma, and for generally being kind.

Dr. Winer: I appreciate your directness. When I began to talk about what I wanted for my career you noted that engineering would be helpful to add to my education. This was something I hadn't really thought too much about, but after looking into it I realized how valuable it could be to me, and added biomedical engineering as a minor in my program. I'm already really enjoying learning about it, so thank you for the suggestion.

Heliya: Thank you so much for being so caring for all the interns. I appreciate how

supportive you have been and your kindness when my aunt passed away, as well as willingness to help made the whole situation much easier than it otherwise would have been. I am incredibly thankful and will miss talking with you.

Imtiajul: Thank you for always keeping track of the interns and making sure we were safe. I enjoyed listening to you talk about how your daughters educational experience is so different from your own and I appreciate you taking the time to walk my grandma out of the symposium the other day.

Sarah: Thanks for coordinating everything and checking about food allergies and making sure I got messages when I didn't respond right away (sorry about that). Also thanks for all the food you made us!

Lynn: thanks for checking in on us so often! And for the snacks! And for encouraging me to bring my husband to VRAC to show him around. He LOVED the building and seeing all the engines and stuff. I'm slowly but surely trying to convince him to come back to school, and this definitely helped.

Paul: Thanks for letting us use the assets you had for unity. And thanks for making the filming and photography stuff as painless as possible. As well as setting up different slack channels and stuff, I feel as if the contributions you made to our program were very often unrecognized so if I missed some, thanks for those as well.

Anyone else that I may have missed: I'm sorry there are simply too many people and I'm terrible at names. Everyone who taught us or who gave luncheon lectures or who came to the symposium made this REU special and I'm so thankful to everyone for being so welcoming and encouraging. I am very grateful to have had this experience and to have met all of you.

Anyway, that's all. I hope to see some of you again when I come back to ISU in the spring as a student!



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Aulasy



[August 3, 2023](#)



[Kristi Skinner](#)

Another day, another art piece on my mind. This one is not terribly famous, but its a favorite none the less. Made in 1907 by Henry Ossawa Tanner the painting is called, “The Disciples See Christ Walking On Water” and it depicts... you guessed it, the disciples seeing Christ walking on water. But the painting has very little grandeur for such a pivotal an event. The monochrome blue of the painting lends a bleakness to the painting that brings to me a feeling of aulasy (yes, I had to go looking for this word to describe what I was feeling, and yes the word is made up, but so are all words). That is what I take away from the painting at least, this feeling of realizing that great events can never be expressed in their fullness to those who didn’t experience them.



Now I'm not saying that this REU is in any way as amazing a moment as seeing Christ walk on water, but the feeling here is the same. We were told that these blogs were twofold in use, one to help us remember what happened during our time here, but also to help future REU students get a sense of what it could be like here for them. So, if you're from the

future and you've stumbled upon this blog and are considering this program, be aware that, though we try, we can't give a full idea of what it's really like. We're just out here using our words to paint incomplete pictures of events no one else will feel as deeply as we do.



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I hate starting over



[July 31, 2023](#)



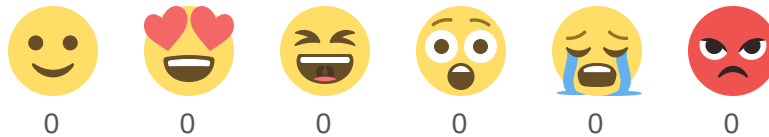
[Kristi Skinner](#)


I fundamentally disagree with the concept of a “fresh start”. There is no such thing in reality. The idea of a fresh start relies on the premise of being able to truly let go of the burdens of one's past and just starting over, but one can't unlearn themselves of the lessons they've learned. They can change their job, their school, their friends, their church, whatever, but wherever one goes, they're still the same person, and they still carry the same burdens. But, regardless of my feelings about fresh starts, I often still manage to find myself starting over. Just as annoying as a fresh start, but without the hope. This program was always meant to be temporary and I knew that going in, however somehow going back home feels like starting over, which was unanticipated. I have to begin my life again. I've been in a VRAC bubble and soon it's going to pop. I have to resume getting my degree, and then one semester later, start over yet again, with a transfer (hopefully) here to Iowa State. Change is hard for me as it is for most people, but this change is good. This change is a mark of growth. And that I am happy about.

This morning while getting ready for work, my husband asked me if I got what I wanted out of this program, and quite honestly I did not know the answer. I see two reasons for this: first, I think I very much misunderstood what my role here would be when applying and therefore what I wanted was rather limited to imaginary constraints imposed by my own lack of understanding, and second, I can no longer really remember what I had hoped for, because as my understanding of this place grew, I began to forget the ideas I had before. It's kind of like how, if you read a book before you see the movie, when you imagine the characters, they look one way, but once you watch the movie, you cannot un-see the way the movie made them look. So also is looking back when compared to looking forward. I

look back now and I cannot remember how I imagined here to be, since the memory overwrites the dream. [insert “strange the passage of time” gif here]



So after my husband asked me if I got what I wanted out of this program, and after I finally got my brain to stop pondering how it was unable to recall what I had once imagined, he asked me a question that was much easier to answer, “Did you learn?” and the answer is unequivocally, yes. Yes, I learned. I have learned more than I could have imagined about so many different things. I have learned about research, and 3D printing, and rural Iowa. I have learned about blender and unity and grad school... but most importantly I’ve learned about myself. I have learned about my limits and I have learned about when I can push them. I have learned about how I prioritize things and I have learned about what I am actually capable of when I give my best effort. I have learned that I do not have to accept the limits often imposed on me because I am disabled, and I have learned that God will give me the strength as necessary to keep going. Overall, that’s a good list. I think, regardless of if I accomplished what I wanted to, I have accomplished that. So once again, thank you everyone who made this opportunity possible. I am very grateful.



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The Treachery of Images

 [July 28, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

We’re talking about art again, but its a metaphor. There’s a famous painting made in 1929 by René Magritte called “La Trahison des Images” or, in English, “the Treachery of Images” It’s a beige background with a pipe on it. Underneath the pipe it says, “Ceci n’est pas une pipe,”. In English, for the French impaired folks here, that means, “This is not a pipe.” odd for a painting that clearly depicts a pipe. But therein lies the treachery, because it *isn’t* a pipe, it’s simply a representation of a pipe. You can’t pick it up, you cant load it with tobacco and use it to smoke. It’s not a pipe. Some people were confused at this paintings meaning thinking, what else could it be? they look at it upside down, sideways, try to see in it other images, but they aren’t there, because the only thing in the painting is a pipe (a picture of one, really).



I think about this painting a lot. I wonder how René Magritte would feel about the world now. If he saw a pipe in VR, I wonder if he would still agree that it wasn't a pipe. You can't smoke with it, but you can pretend to. You can use your hands and "pick it up" you can "load tobacco into it" and you can even make it appear to be smoking. And you can do all that without actually doing anything at all. I think about how technology gives us so many tools and how those tools are often "fake", and yet their impact is very real. Anyway, that's what my nerd brain is hyper-fixating on right now this idea of how virtual reality is somehow both tangible and intangible, and how crazy it is that we are alive in a time where we get to experience it.



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Edit

ANDRIC SMILED!



July 26, 2023



Kristi Skinner

Okay so, long story short, I noticed like 2 days into the program that Andric refuses to smile without hiding behind his hands. An example:



So of course, it became my mission to get a picture where he wasn't hiding his smile. The thing is, it's really easy to get him to smile. You can literally just say, "Hey, Andric, don't

smile,” and he’ll immediately smile. With how easy it is to get him to smile you’d think taking a picture of it would not be difficult... but it was. First, I reviewed the pictures we took with Paul, but no dice. All those smiles were fake. Then I tried surprising him, but he was faster than me, always catching when I was trying to get a picture. Next I tried reflections. If I was taking pictures of other things, he didn’t seem to react, so all I had to do was catch his reflection in a photo and I was golden. Alas, this didn’t work either. Not only was I never able to locate any reflections in time, but the few times I got close, he *still* caught me. That is until we went to Storm Lake. I was tasked with taking photos to use on the posters and such. Andric was so engrossed with the game and the students that he didn’t notice when I took his picture most of the time, and I was able to finally get the picture.



There it is! Weeks of attempting to get the picture and all I had to do was make sure he was sufficiently distracted. Anyway, he claims that he saw and just “Didn’t mind anymore” but I don’t believe him. Anyways, this all to say I’ve successfully completed my mission. And Andric, you should really stop hiding your smile 😊



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A Somewhat Obvious Epiphany

[July 26, 2023](#)[Kristi Skinner](#)

Growing up I wanted to be a million different things, and as an adult that hasn't changed as much as I'd like. I want to believe it's because I like too many things. The only subject I would say I dislike is math, and once I caught back up, I didn't dislike it nearly as much (I had an idiopathic stomach condition that started around middle school and continued on into my first year of college which caused me to miss a lot of school, making math very difficult). History is fun because you learn about all these crazy things that went wrong and yet we're somehow still here. Biology is fun because I get to learn how people work, and that's unbelievably cool, and there's always something more to discover. English is fun because reading and writing are how we communicate with the world and books and journals are how others communicate with us. Music was fun because of the people. All these wonderful things, how was I supposed to pick just one to spend my life learning about? The thing is, that question is wrong, only I didn't realize it until I got here. I don't know how I got the idea that I can only learn about one thing, or maybe two, but there's no reason to limit myself in that way. Everything we do requires different parts of the various things we've learned. Art and biology and math and history and every language I've ever tried to learn is useful. Learning about pottery or history is useful, just like how learning statistics (albeit in a different way) is useful and I don't have to choose. Maybe this seems obvious to other people, but it never has been for me. The idea that I don't have to limit my learning to just biology, art, or specifically related things is amazing to me. So that's the biggest thing I think I'm taking away from this experience. I don't have to limit myself when it comes to learning, and all the knowledge that I have can be harnessed in some way, even the things I never considered useful. Even pine needle basketry (which btw do not get into unless you're willing to spend HOURS making a teeny tiny basket. It's cute but it's time consuming).



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OctoBunny needs a name

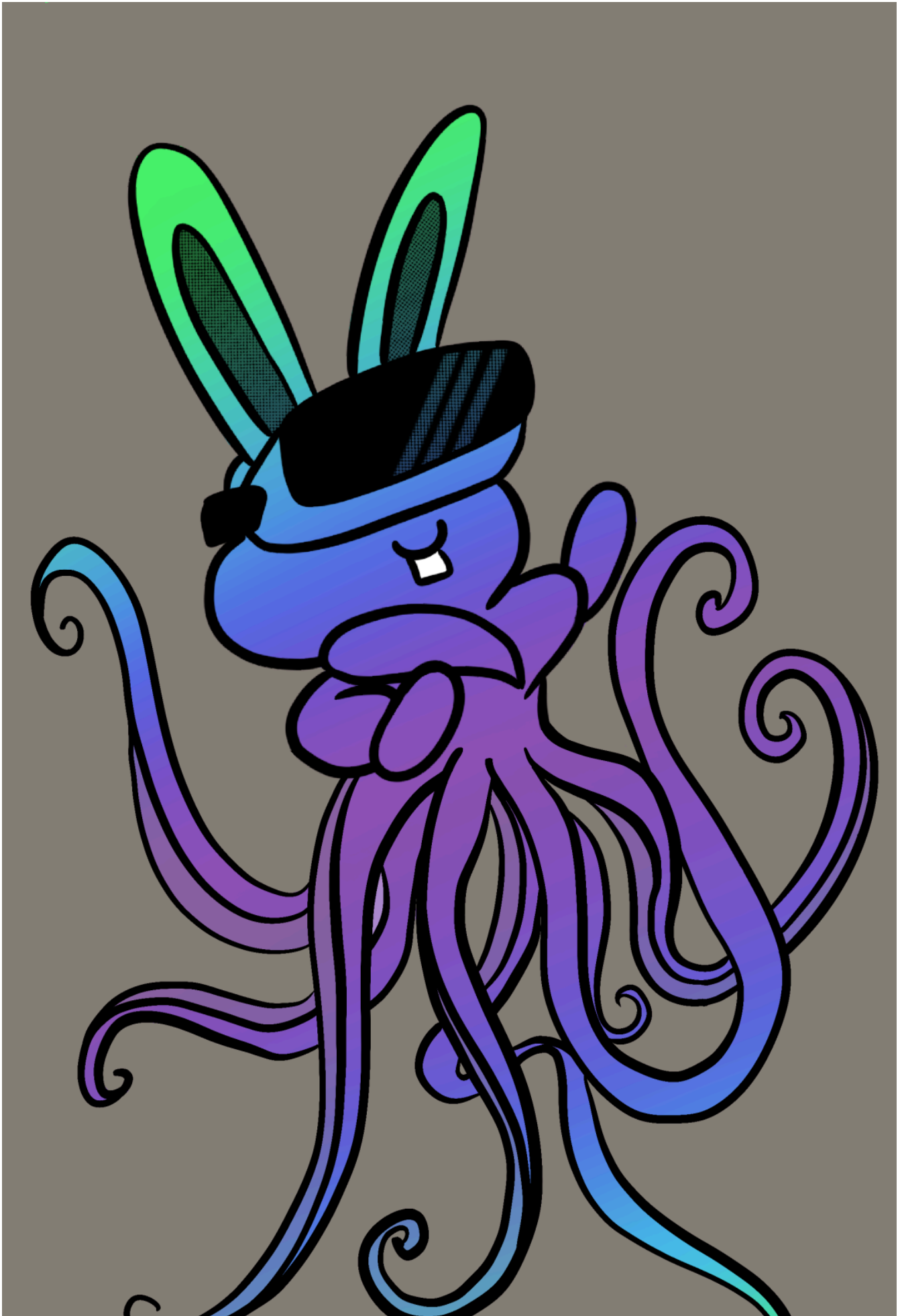


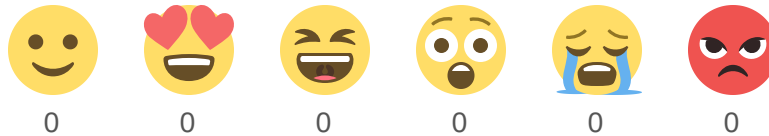
July 21, 2023



Kristi Skinner

Ayman drew this cute bunny with a VR headset. I had to redraw him for our T-Shirt design because he needed to be only one color. Then someone he got tentacles. Idk I redrew him again. This poor bunny has been drawn 3 times and still doesn't have a name. I think he should be called Marvin, but I'm open to suggestions.





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I'm all out of Spoons (I'm so lost without them)

 [July 19, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

(Title is meant to be read to the tune of “I’m all out of love”)

As many of you are already aware, I am on the autism spectrum. While I’ve mentioned this a of times, I don’t think I’ve really gone into detail of what that means specifically for me. Most of the time, it doesn’t mean much because I have low support needs (I have level 1 autism, which is the “mildest” form of autism) and for the most part, I self-regulate and manage my struggles without too much in terms of accommodations and allowances. But it does mean I have to be careful about how much I commit to and how I schedule big things in my life, as well as it means that I have to work a bit harder at mastering certain social things and I have to be very intentional and strict with myself about my time management. The reason I’m mentioning it now may seem obvious to some of you, and others not so much, but I think I might have flown a *little* too close to the sun these last few days. I’m finding myself now at a point where I have to be very careful, or else I may end up overwhelming myself. I’m hoping that this blog will serve as a bit of an explanation for how autism personally impacts my life and give a bit of context to some of the more weird choices I may make in the next few days.

Because I’m autistic sometimes I find that I need breaks at times when other people don’t; things that don’t make other people tired take a lot more out of me. Some of the big spoon

thieves in my life (the things that take away my energy) are things like loud spaces, social interaction, presenting things, wearing uncomfortable clothes, and doing new things. In the last two days I've encountered all of these things. Because of that, I need a few days to build back up my spoon reserve (if you have no idea what this whole spoons thing means, I'm referring to spoon theory, which you can look up for more info, but basically its just a theory about how people with chronic illness or other conditions, such as autism, have to manage their energy levels and pick and choose what they do in order to prevent themselves from burning out). It's hard being this busy and this social when I'm autistic because for the most part, people are unaware of my limitations unless I bring them up, and I tend to push myself right up to said limits because I hate the idea that I have them.

While the last week has been great, it's been pushing at my limits. We didn't get home from Storm Lake until fairly late last night, and we had a presentation at 9 this morning. Long hours of socializing, presenting and trying new things (Like leading a focus group) have worn away at me. The presentation this morning made me nervous. I am not fond of public speaking. It's especially hard for me to not fidget (stim) when I talk, and I struggle with making the right amount of eye contact as well when addressing a group. But, thankfully these things are now over and, regardless of the struggles, both the Storm Lake visit and the presentation went over pretty well. It was nice being able to practice giving a presentation before our big serious ones later in the program.

So for the next few days I'm going to focus on recovering spoons. For me, this means a few things. First, I have to cut out all the things in my schedule that I don't *need* to do. This means saying no to extra events like hanging out with my fellow interns, or going out for meals or to the movies. It means eating foods that I know won't bother me. I jokingly call this my "toddler food", because most of my safe foods are very basic and the kind of food that little kids enjoy (PB&J sandwiches, buttered noodles, chicken nuggets, you get the idea). It means choosing to eat my food at the office or in quiet places instead of going to the cafeteria which has lots of people and loud noises. It means forcing myself not to work after I get home from work, even though I do enjoy it. It means going to bed earlier than normal. And it means being kind to myself and not being mad that I need to take these steps for the sake of my mental health. The good news is that in VRAC I feel as if I can do these things. And what's even better is the work for the next few days is perfect for this kind of recovery.

Now that the actual data collection is done (yay) its time to analyze it (also yay, but not as loudly). This means that we'll be taking the answers gathered from our surveys as well as

the transcripts from our focus groups and we will be reading and studying them until we figure out what we learned from them that are important. This probably sounds a little vague to some of you, but I'm not really sure how better to explain it. Basically, we gathered a lot of information in a few different forms, and we have to review it and tag it and find patterns, and document the themes and patterns we find. This is the perfect kind of work for when I'm getting to this point. Not only do I love reading and looking for patterns, but the somewhat monotonous solitary tasks are great for allowing me time to recuperate while also still maintaining productivity. Right now I am waiting for the audio file from my focus group to finish transcribing so that I can begin tagging some of the common themes that were touched upon by the students. I am excited to actually get to review what they said and I think it'll be really fun to try and condense that into it's most concentrated ideas.

Anyway, this was a bit of a longer blog but I think it's important that I share a bit how having autism (and ADHD) can impact me, because the way that people learn about these things is through the people around them and I think it's just nice when people understand a little bit more about how I act and why I do things the way I do. And I also think it's good to share these things because I didn't know I was autistic for a long time because I didn't know that the struggles I faced were not things that everyone went through. It was through hearing about these struggles from other autistic people that I began to understand what was going on. Before then, I believed that these differences were personal flaws that were somehow my fault. I think explaining them and not being ashamed of how I am different is essential to the management of my differences, and explaining my needs helps me later if I do need to advocate for myself. If you actually read all the way through this, I'm impressed and I award you 47 awesome points. Congratulations, and thanks for listening.



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Gearing up for the Storm Lake visit



[July 17, 2023](#)



[Kristi Skinner](#)

Tomorrow our team is taking a field trip. We're going to Storm Lake to show some students there the prototype we're creating and to get their input on what they think would make the best game for them. A lot of what we've been working on needs to be done today in order for the visit to go smoothly. It is nerve-racking to think about. A lot of our actual research will be done tomorrow. We'll be taking Surveys, as well as leading focus groups, demoing our game prototype, and leading a storyboarding activity. I am very nervous about the focus group and storyboarding part of the day. Being AuDHD, I tend to struggle with certain social things, such as managing groups of people, and new people are particularly difficult for me. While I'm fairly used to working with young children, teens are not my forte (not even when I was a teen). I know in the end I'll be thankful that I'm pushing myself beyond my comfort zone, pushing myself to be social and participate more, but this program has required a lot of that, and right now, I would really like a few days to stop being social.

After the Storm Lake visit, you might think we get a bit of a break, but not really. While the other two projects have been able to get a head start on their posters and presentations for our various events, our team hasn't been able to do much, because a lot of the presentation will be about stuff we have yet to do. So once we do have our visit, we'll immediately have to start analyzing the data from our visit, gathering that information, finding out what there is to learn from it, putting it into our presentation, and getting ready for the end of this program. It's crazy to think we're so close to finished already. I feel like we only just began a few weeks ago. Looking back, it's been a very difficult summer for me, being away from my husband, dealing with the loss of a loved one, being put into situations that are not the most comfortable for me, working full time again (I wasn't because of school). But the things that have been the hardest are the things I've learned the most from. So hopefully, this visit tomorrow will continue that pattern.

Anyway, hopefully I'll have good news to report in a few days. As for now, I should get back to making sure everything is set for tomorrow.

Oh, I re-drew an old drawing this weekend and even though it's like 5 years old I still love it. I call it Emo Ariel. If you laugh, you probably have the same sense of humor as I do. If you can't read it, she's saying, "I wanna be where the people aren't".





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Thank You

[July 13, 2023](#)[Kristi Skinner](#)

This week has been tough, as I'm sure those keeping up with this blog can tell, and I just want to take a minute to be thankful for the care I'm getting while I'm here. The grad mentors care about me, check in on me regularly, and listen when I express frustrations. Because of this, when I needed time off this week to see a sick relative, I felt safe enough to do so, which isn't a given for me. Instead of worrying about what would happen if I dared to ask for time off, I was able to get it, and with very little hassle. And when the family member took a turn for the worse and the scheduled time off I was granted didn't work out, I was able to easily change that time to be sooner so that I could see my aunt one last time before she passed. I am so grateful that not only I was given this chance, but that I was reminded multiple times it was okay to ask. I was reminded the importance of family and reassured that asking for this time wasn't somehow a failure on my part, and I didn't feel as if the request would be used against me later. This has not always been my experience. Requesting time off has been a hassle, has been something I dread doing, and something I avoid at all costs. In the past, taking, or even asking for a day off has resulted in passive aggressive comments about my commitment to my job, or other punishments (though, of course they're never called this) to make up for the request. I am beyond grateful for how supported I feel in this environment, by these people, and in the REU. So this post is just to say thank you to everyone who is making this program so supportive and making VRAC such a nice place to work at.

When we got here someone said that this REU was an effort of love, and I honestly thought it sounded disingenuous to say that, but I see it now. The people here really care about us, individually, and care for us, and try to give us the best training they can. We are given homemade meals regularly, they check in on us individually on a regular basis. When we express concerns or frustrations they listen, and they give us advice. It is truly wonderful to be in a work environment that actually feels positive for once. So yeah, thanks everyone. I really appreciate it.

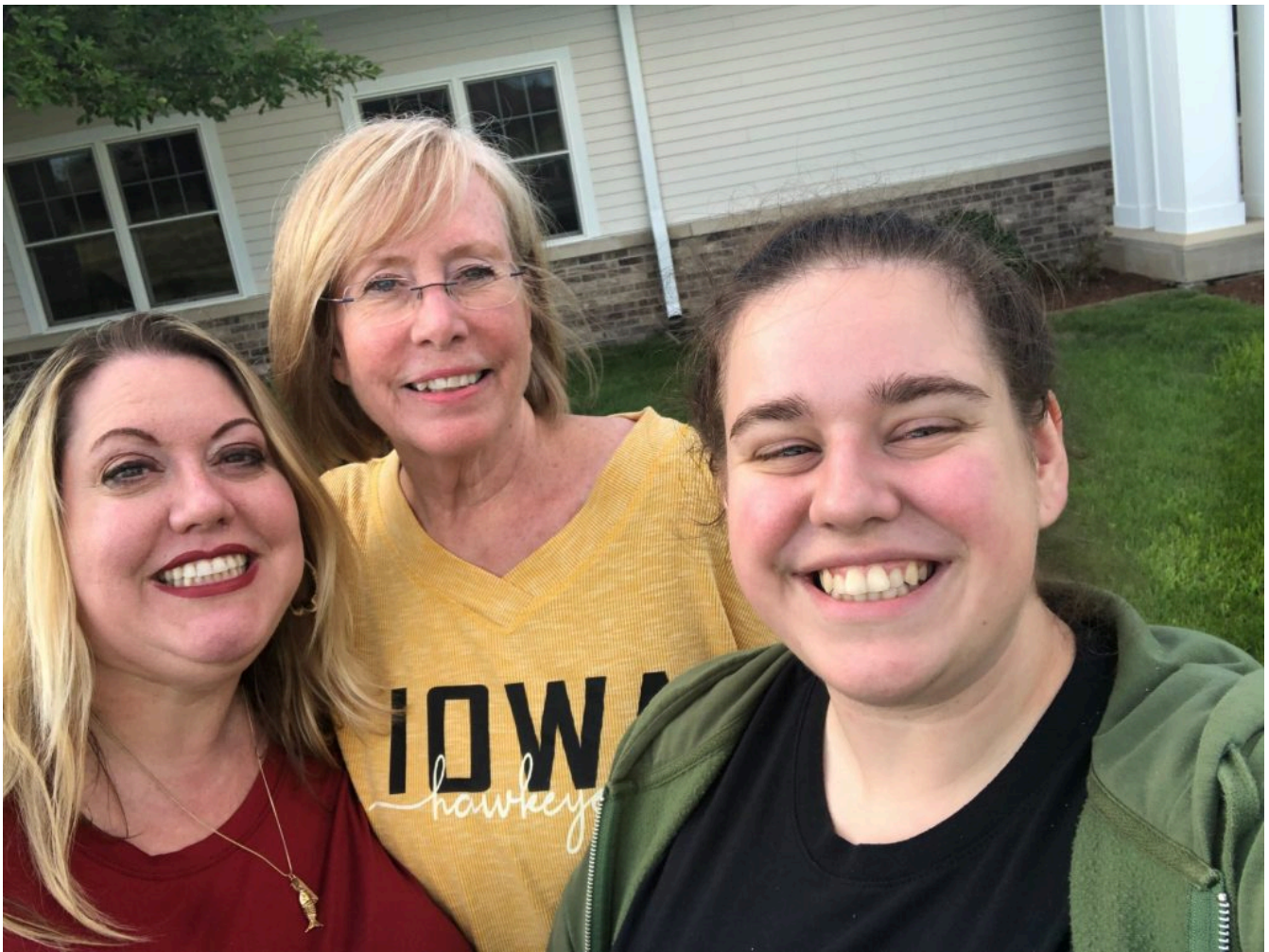


photo of my mother, grandma, and me from yesterday when I went to see my family. Even though the reason was sad, I want thankful to be able to see my family.



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Uncategorized



2 Replies

Edit

No thoughts, empty head



July 10, 2023



Kristi Skinner

I feel as if last week leeches me of all my creativity. I want a nap. I don't know how the shortest week of our program felt like the longest. Speaking of short, so is this blog post. Now a haiku:

my mind is tired
i'm trying hard to think right
slowly my eyes close

(my mind is tired Haiku by sami girl, 2008)



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Short week, long days



[July 7, 2023](#)



[Kristi Skinner](#)

This week is almost over. I am shocked. This happens basically whenever we have long weekends, but I find myself confused about what day it is and thinking it is earlier or later than it really is. Like for instance, yesterday (Thursday) I called the optometrist (because I ran out of contacts and spent the whole day saying “yes I do wear glasses” which got annoying very quickly) and I scheduled an appointment for today, because my brain had confused Thursday for Friday... and then I had to call the optometrist back and reschedule my appointment for a Saturday instead... But even though the week has flown by the days have been LONG. I’m working on both my MCA (which I’m presenting today) and my internship long research project. I’m having a good time, but as expected, I am very tired. I also took a pasta making class last night that two of the folks here at VRAC put on for us. It was fun. I haven’t made pasta in a while. I tried to make orecchiette pasta with limited success. It took a lot to get the pasta to stay in the shape, so I only ended up making a few. They cooked up nicely though, so that was fun. I also helped make some bowtie pasta which was a lot easier. It reminded me of making dumplings. The idea is very similar, just different folds and a slightly different dough. I think it would be interesting to experiment with making dumplings using pasta dough and typical pasta ingredients as the filling. I think it could be faster than making ravioli and also, maybe just as good, but who knows, maybe its disgusting.

So my MCA (stands for main course activity, and is basically a self guided project I get to do while I'm here), which I've talked a bit about but not really explained, is a 3D printed camera with replaceable lenses so that I can test out how effective 3D printed translucent plastic is and being translucent. (spoiler alert: it's not great). The original plan was to print the camera, print the lenses, and then use a light meter to test the lux inside the camera with each different lens, and then without a lens to see how much light is or isn't making it into the camera. I hit a few snares, like the fact that none of the lenses are actually useful as lenses (shocking, I know) and that I couldn't find a light meter that was small enough to fit inside the camera. But, I learned a lot about printing and I made a really cool camera that actually works. Or well, it will work once I get film. That's one of the things I like about the camera obscura (the kind of camera I built), that it actually doesn't need a lens in order to work, so event though the lenses I created aren't functional, I still was able to print a working camera.

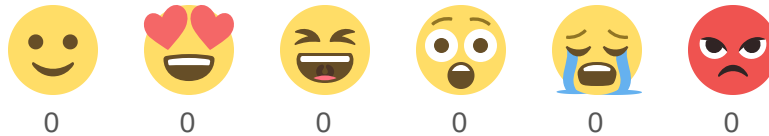
also, I've been working on some drawings and design stuff for my main research project. I will share some of the doodles I worked on, but suffice to say I'm really enjoying it.



This is the camera I printed! It may not look like a lot but trust me it's one of the coolest things I've ever made.



And this is one of the characters I drew for the game. She's a cyborg, which is why she has the glove on. The design is a bit messy and I'm trying really hard not to focus too much on all the things that are wrong, which is something I have done in my art for a long time. I try to remember that a year ago, two years ago, I used to dream of being able to draw the way I do now. And its hard to remember that when it feels from my perspective that I haven't been getting better at art in a long time. But, this picture I liked making and even though there are parts that I see as wrong I'm trying to focus on that.



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The Acquired Inability to Escape



[July 5, 2023](#)



[Kristi Skinner](#)

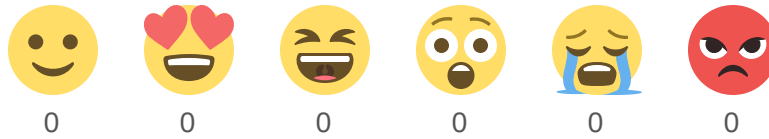
in 1991, Damien Hirst created the artwork, “The Acquired Inability to Escape” which was an artwork consisting of a glass office cubicle that had an ash tray and cigarettes on top of a desk with a swivel chair next to it. As an art piece, its not much to look at and honestly, it's pretty depressing, but I love the name. The Acquired Inability to Escape. Sometimes that's how I feel about different things in my life, that I, by my own choices, have acquired the inability to escape them. But what if we had changed the art and kept the name? What if, instead of an office, it was a house, and what if, instead of cigarettes, it was a family? Would we still see tragedy? Or, would we think, “yes, this is a good thing to be inescapably linked to”? I like to believe that if Damien Hirst had continued his series, he would have eventually gotten around to homes and families, and I like to believe that it would have juxtaposed the bleakness of his office related work with bright living rooms, vibrantly colored kitchens, and cozy dining rooms. Although, based upon his other work, that's probably not true. All this to say, I think I have quite recently acquired a new inability to escape.



The Acquired Inability to Escape 1991 Damien Hirst <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/work/T12748>

I think, that after this internship I will be trapped in research. I took this internship specifically to find out if it was something I truly wanted to do for a living (because guys, it soooo much school and wouldn't it just be the worst to go through all that school only to find out that I hate research?) so I'm glad that I'm having as much fun as I am and I'm glad that I seem to love this kind of work. Now of course, this is only a taste, so grain of salt, but I love learning, and research seems like a way to spend my whole life learning. How could I say no to that? So yeah I think I love research and I think I might be hooked. I love feeling as if I am helping to discover something unknown. I love to think that instead of just consuming from the wealth of knowledge in the world, I could one day contribute to it. I don't have much more to say, honestly, just wanted to put this out there. I love my job and I'm going to be sad when it's over. But I'm pretty sure this experience has given me a

better idea of the trajectory of my career, so I'm also really grateful too. That's all. See y'all later!



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It's been an eventful week

 [July 1, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

This week has been crazy. I have felt busy basically from the beginning of this REU but this week was more. We had our regular tasks, but our MCA really started this week and also some students from storm lake came and visited us. The MCA took a lot of brain power and the students took a lot of time. I'm not complaining, it's been good. I enjoy feeling like I've accomplished something by the end of the day.

Because of how busy we've been I honestly kind of lost track of the blog. Then I woke up today and realized it's been a minute. But honestly there's not a lot to tell. Meeting the storm lake students and working with them on co-designing the game was amazing and thought provoking, and has made me realize just how complex getting into and going to college can be. I mostly escaped that because when I first applied, I only applied to Faith. There wasn't really any concern I wouldn't get it because they have high acceptance rates and because I was a third generation student at that school (which they say doesn't make a difference but I'm skeptical that it truly doesn't) the other programs and schools I went to had relatively easy applications and I never really applied to more than one school at a time. I always just knew what programs I wanted to be in and never really shopped around for colleges. Not that this is inherently bad, but I guess I never realized how rare that is.

My MCA has been really fun. I attempted to make a functional gimbal and despite seeming easy it's been... well not great. I won't go into too much detail but basically the print just keeps falling apart and I went to alter the files to fix it in blender and because of the way the file was saved I'm not able to fix it. The pieces are too loose so I thought making the print smaller would help but not only did it *not* solve the problem but the entire print basically just melted. Not sure what that was about, but I'm going to pretend it was the machines fault and not mine. After that (don't worry, I will make a functional gimbal, just

maybe not soon) I started working in making an embossing machine. That worked... sorta. The prints were fine but they didn't slot together as perfectly as I would have liked. Next week I'm making a pinhole camera. I could talk about cameras all day, but I'll be brief. For this I'm making a pinhole camera that's been adapted to hold lenses. Pinhole cameras don't actually have lenses which is unbelievably cool, but I got curious about how different lenses affect how much light gets exposed onto a piece of film. So basically I'm going to get a bunch of different lenses and test them out with a light meter. Also, I'm planning on printing one with transparent plastic. I also want to test diffraction grating to see how that alters the amount of light being exposed.

Anyway, that will be fun, but what I'm really excited about is testing out my camera with thermal film. While the plastic I'm using to make my camera is opaque to visible light, the Google rabbit hole I accidentally fell into the other day taught me that PLA isn't always IR opaque, meaning that sometimes infrared light can travel through it, sometimes it can't, and sometimes it can but not very well. I wanna experiment and see if this camera would make a decent thermal camera if I wanted to (because thermal film makes the COOLEST looking pictures and if you don't believe me look it up.) I know I could always just use one of my other film cameras if it doesn't work, but the idea of doing it on my own is significantly cooler.

Aside from that the only thing that happened this week is I hit a 500 day streak of German on Duolingo. That was fun. Makes me feel like I can actually say "yes" if people ask if I know some German. So yeah it's been a week, it's been great and I've done a lot. I'm thankful for the long weekend and I will probably spend the entire time thinking about cameras and storm lake and steampunk (it's related to our game, promise). Hope y'all have a great holiday weekend too!



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3D Printing and Thermal Cameras (plus who won the game)



[June 26, 2023](#)

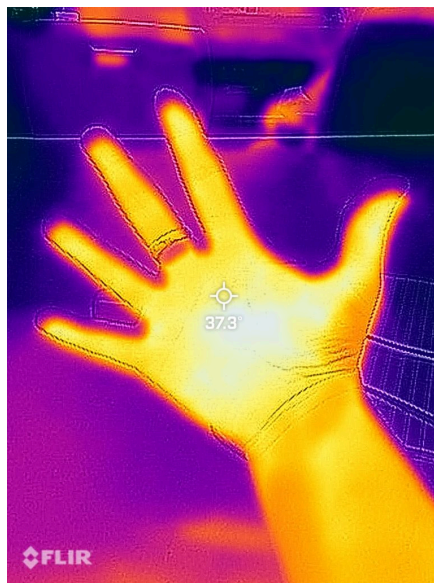
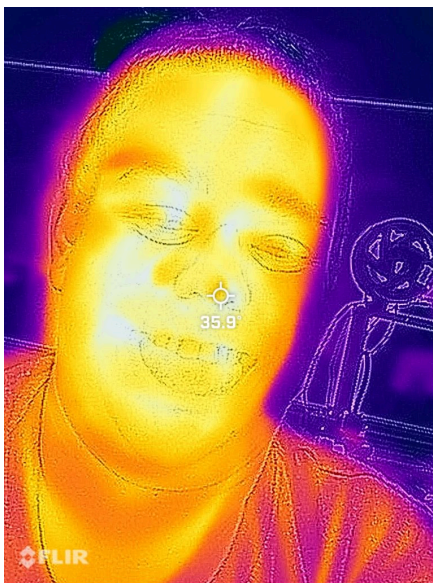


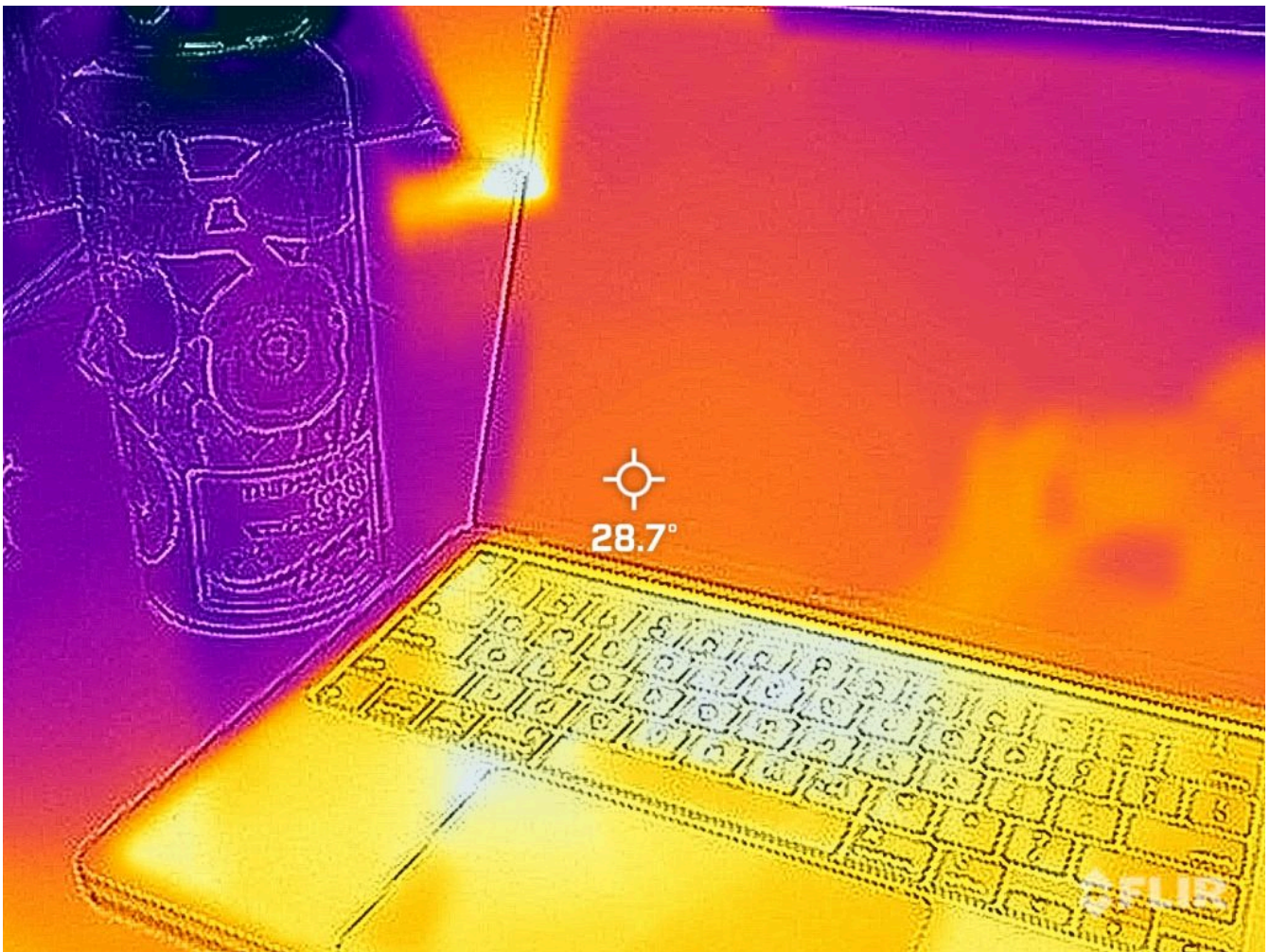
[Kristi Skinner](#)

So here's a thing I'm super excited about: my deeper dive group is in 3D Printing. For those of you following along at home, our deeper dive is a project that we get to do where we get to actually decide what we're doing, as apposed to being told what to learn about or do. I was assigned to the 3D printing group which was the one I really *really* wanted to do. I love learning about additive manufacturing and I'm having so much fun thinking of different things I could do once I learn how to print well. As previously mentioned, it's something I've been interested in for a while. Anyway I've got a ton of ideas of things I can do for that.

On a related note, I got to play with a thermal imaging camera today. I've never actually used one before so that was really fun! I took a few videos and pictures. I don't know exactly what I expected from a thermal camera but it definitely was more fun than I thought it would be.

I am aware of how derpy I look in the photo. Idk what to say I hadn't really figured out how to calibrate the lines to the thermal, plus well the face I was making didn't help.



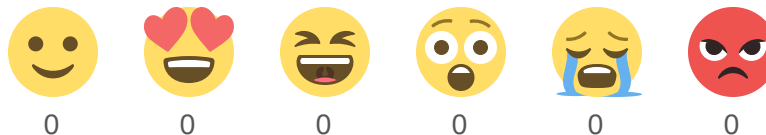



Now for the part you've all been waiting for so patiently (note: this is to be read sarcastically): Who guessed the lie? And the winner is: Nadya! Congrats. Here's a refresh on the statements along with if they're true or not.

1. **My favorite color is orange.** This is true. Has been since like 5th grade.
2. **I was the first girl born into my father's family in 144 years.** Also true! Tracing back to before the American Civil War, there are no women in my dad's family that didn't marry into the family. All the children born were boys for generation after generation, until me.
3. **I wear mismatched socks everyday.** Yep, this is true! started in 4th grade, Mom thought it was a phase. I have yet to get over the phase.
4. **I've attended 4 colleges as a student, a total of 5 different times (this is to say 4 schools and one of them twice).** True. I went to CCH for film school, then FBBC study Biblical Worldviews, then DMACC to get EMT training, then Oxford University for art history, then back to DMACC for an associates that will fold into the bachelors in pre-medical illustration that I'm hoping to get.

5. ***When I was in 8th grade, I wanted to be a medical examiner until I realized how smelly morgues are.*** I was a weirdo, and this is true.
6. ***I have 5 left handed siblings.*** This one seems more shocking than it really is, but it's true! I have two younger sisters, both lefthanded, two younger brothers, also left handed, and one older brother who is also left handed. Conversely, I'm right handed.
7. ***My favorite numbers are 7, 21, 27, and 47.*** True, but honestly there's not much to say about it. They're just good numbers.
8. ***I am older than Google by less than a week.*** This is false. Google is older than me. Just barely! in fact, according to my mother, I was due to be born the day BEFORE google, but I guess I decided to cook a little longer.
9. ***I HATE cilantro.*** (aka coriander) True. it's nasty. Tastes like someone poured dish soap on raw onions and then presented it as a meal. Don't know why people like it so much
10. ***I have every word to the 2005 movie adaptation of Pride and Prejudice memorized to the point that given silence and two hours, I can play the entire movie in my head like I am a DVD or streaming service.*** This is true. I've done it three times. The first on a random day just to see if I could, and the other two times on a transatlantic flight after finishing the books I packed.

Anyway. That was fun! thanks for playing! talk later.



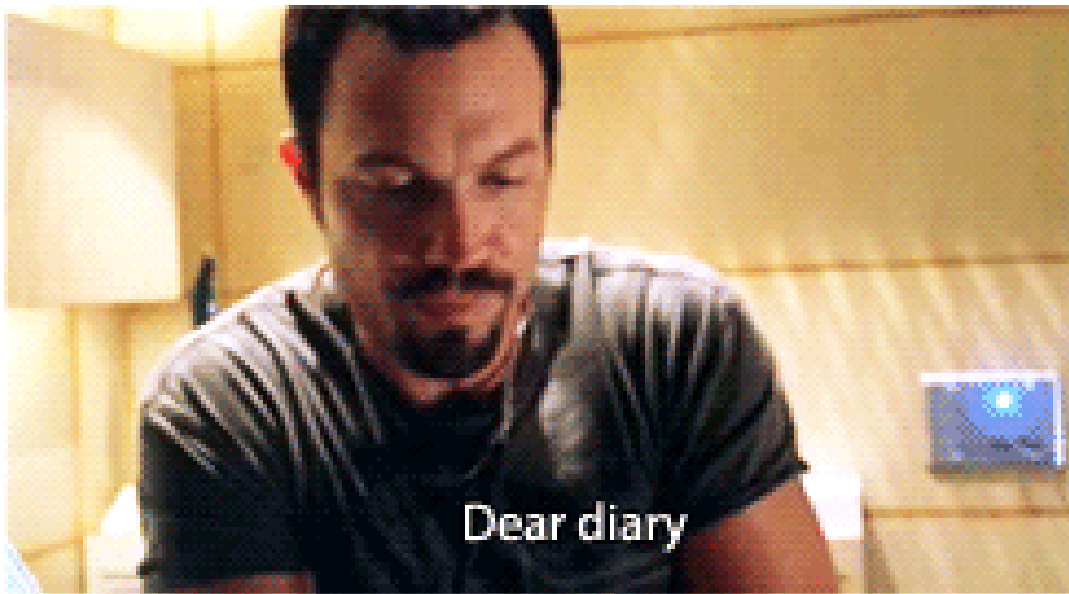
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Let's Play a Game

 [June 21, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

Every time I get onto the website to write a blog post, this scene from Firefly runs through my head where Jayne is “reading” Simon’s diary (for those who haven’t seen Firefly, just ignore this part) and I get this weird feeling realizing that, in fact, people are reading what I’m saying. It’s not as if this is a new thing; I’ve been writing essays since third grade, I’ve had an op-ed written up in a local paper, and a short story in a literary magazine. I should be used to people reading my words and yet... somehow this feels different.



So yes, I recognize that blogs are not *actually* diaries, but also, I think they function- at least for me- in a relatively similar way. And, even though I've been journaling since I was 14, it's never been something I shared. Beyond this, I've recently fallen out of the habit of journaling and in the absence of my normal journal, this blog has become sort of a de facto diary for me. With this in mind, remember that I am much less polished of a writer and person when I'm just spilling my thoughts out, rather than when I'm writing something to be presented. And, even though this is being read and by extension presented to people, it has an entirely different context which informs the level of fluidity of style and grammar that I'm allowing myself to take which normally, for "published" work, I would not. I'm saying all this because as I reread some of my blog last night I noticed an absolutely atrocious number of spelling and grammar errors that I had somehow missed, and I feel- maybe unnecessarily- that I should apologize for them. So this here is an apology, and also a thanks for not being grammar police about it.

As I was sitting there thinking about the people who hardly know me reading this blog, I thought, I may have been working with many of them for a few weeks, but we haven't known each other for very much time at all. I think it's important you all know some things about me. However, just telling you would be no fun, so I've decided to make it a game. You don't have to play, obviously, but I would very much enjoy learning what things people think are true about me and what aren't. So I'm going to say 10 things about myself and you all can guess which one you think is a lie. And if you'd like, you can make your own and I'll guess what is true and what isn't. You don't have to come up with 10 things either, it can be just one true thing and one lie, or any number of truths. Basic rules of Guess The Lie however, is that only one thing can be a lie, and you can't use outside sources to

discover if something is a lie or not (i.e. no googling or internet stalking). Ready? Here we go!

Guess the Lie:

1. My favorite color is orange.
2. I was the first girl born into my father's family in 144 years. All the women married in, and only boys were born.
3. I wear mismatched socks everyday.
4. I've attended 4 colleges as a student, a total of 5 different times (this is to say 4 schools and one of them twice).
5. When I was in 8th grade, I wanted to be a medical examiner until I realized how smelly morgues are.
6. I have 5 left handed siblings.
7. My favorite numbers are 7, 21, 27, and 47.
8. I am older than Google by less than a week.
9. I HATE cilantro.
10. I have every word to the 2005 movie adaptation of Pride and Prejudice memorized to the point that given silence and two hours, I can play the entire movie in my head like I am a DVD or streaming service.

Some of these might be obviously true to some people given that I probably have already mentioned them, being the chatterbox I am, but I wonder, will anyone know which one isn't true? The answer will be in my next post so guess now while you can! (or don't. It's not like I can control your actions.) May the odds be ever in your favor.



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Uncategorized



4 Replies

Edit

This is Only The Beginning



June 19, 2023



Kristi Skinner

Because it's only Monday I don't have a ton to say about this week yet, but the weekend was pretty fun! On Saturday we all went hiking at the Ledges, and then afterwards I got to

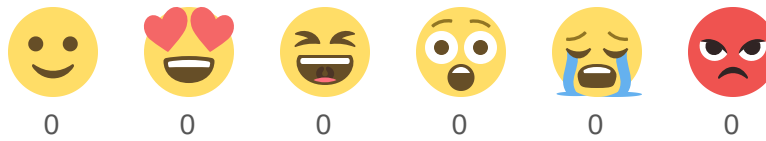
go to my Grandpa's birthday party which was pretty fun. I had a tough time explaining to my family exactly what I'm doing this summer. I guess I would get used to that, because most of the time when I mention my internship or future career goals, I get a lot of blank expressions in response. After that, the rest of my Saturday was relatively calm. In fact, I did nothing and it was amazing.

On Sunday, after church, my husband, dad, step-mom, three of my siblings and I all got together to take family portraits. We decided to take them here in Ames, as that was most convenient. Since my brother went to Iowa and we've been Hawkeye fans our whole life, my dad had us take some of our pictures in Hawkeye jerseys. we got a lot of less than friendly. After pictures, we went out to dinner and wished Dad a happy Father's Day.

Today we started a new course in Unity. It's complex, but so far pretty fun. Unity is the engine we'll be making our game with so, it's good that we are learning how to use it. Anyway, that's basically all. Hopefully this week is as productive as last!



My family taking pictures under the campanile in our Hawkeye Jerseys (kids faces were removed for privacy, not because they're disliked or something lol)



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[Edit](#)

HCI- bad user interfaces

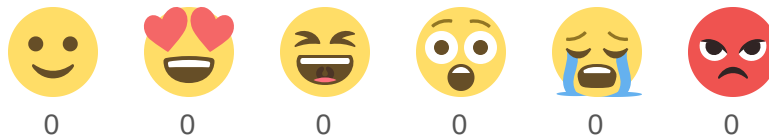
 [June 18, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)



we were given homework this week, to document interfaces that are frustrating to use and discuss why they are this way. Any family reading, feel free to skip this one it's mostly just me complaining about issues I wish weren't issues.

it's important to note that I am an iPad user, and instead of a standard laptop, I carry an iPad. I prefer the versatility an iPad has and for the most part find it much better for me than a standard laptop. But this schoolyear, I noticed that there are some compatibility issues with using an iPad for school. There are some school required programs that just don't work on iPad, like proctorio which is a proctoring service I had to use for tests. Another one was called "myMathLab" with "Stat Crunch" which mostly worked on my laptop except for the dropdown menus which- for no apparent reason- worked until you needed a sidebar menu which only worked with computer mice/trackpads or keyboards, and not by touch like the rest of the program worked. I spent the whole semester needing to use arrow keys to manage any sort of statistical function I wanted to do in Stat Crunch. Another frustrating interface was called Mastering Assignments which is a homework system I needed for most of my science classes. Mastering Assignments uses interactive assignments that the student must complete, and while it worked fine for most things, it did not for drag to match questions. Because dragging a pen or finger on an iPad is an indicator to scroll the screen (such as one might do with a mouse or a scroll bar) when one would click an item to drag it to the place it needed to go, the item could be activated and would drag... but so would the screen. As the item moved, the screen moved so moving the item to the place it needed to be on screen was very frustrating. I don't have visuals to explain any of these situations, but suffice to say it was very irritating. about half of my assignments had questions that required using the drag function, so I had to use an alternate computer whenever I wanted to finish those parts of the assignment. The

compatibility issues of many applications with iPad makes the user experience occasionally very frustrating.

The other very annoying UI issue I've been dealing with is on my Xbox. When I arrived here, my husband set up the Xbox for me, but since we didn't have internet yet, I had to deal with that myself. Setting up the internet was very irritating. I attempted using my personal log in code for about 20 minutes before giving up and using guest access. Guest access works fine, except that it takes 10 minutes to load, requires typing on an Xbox, which just isn't pleasant, and then after the internet says its working and you leave the "internet access" menu, it'll spend 5 minutes trying to load something, only to tell you that the internet isn't in fact working, and you have to try again. After three tries I realized that it's because you first have to sign into the guest internet, authenticate the access on a separate tab (both of which I was doing) and THEN you have to go to yet a third tab and VERIFY that you authenticated the internet access. Nowhere does it indicate that this is a necessary step, but I have yet to get the internet to work without doing this step, which leads me to believe that it is. And while this is annoying, the more frustrating part is that it must be done every single time one wishes to use the internet on the Xbox. Because I've been tasked to play a lot of video games for research purposes, (BTW, the cool factor to getting paid to play video games has not, and will not go away) I am using my Xbox a lot, so I have to sign in to the internet a lot and it is tedious. Anyway those are some of the bad user interfaces I've had to deal with. That's all! Thanks for listening to me complain.



 [Uncategorized](#)  [1 Reply](#)

[Edit](#)

This was unexpected but I'm not complaining

 [June 16, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

I'm not sure why I had this idea that a internship in HCI would require only left brain tasks, but before the program I was prepared to put art aside for the time being and work on learning the logical stuff. This is the stuff I'm not so great at, coding, math, all the difficult concepts I have to work 3 times as hard at to understand. I knew- abstractly- that learning these subjects would ultimately fold into my skillset and be useful, eventually, for my medical art career, but I had this notion that it would be years of hard studying before any

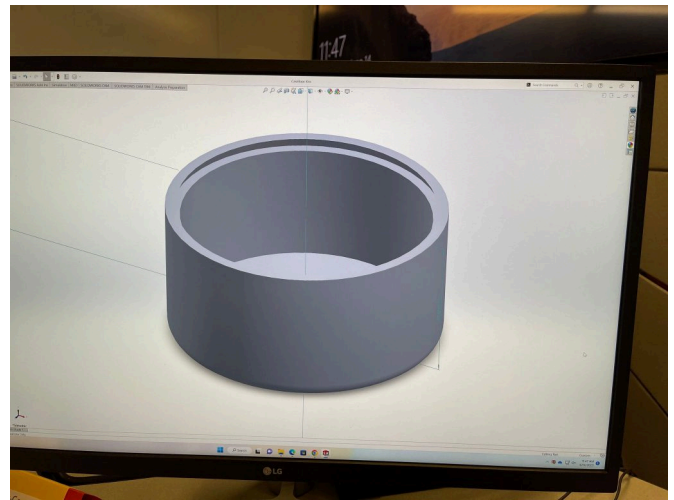
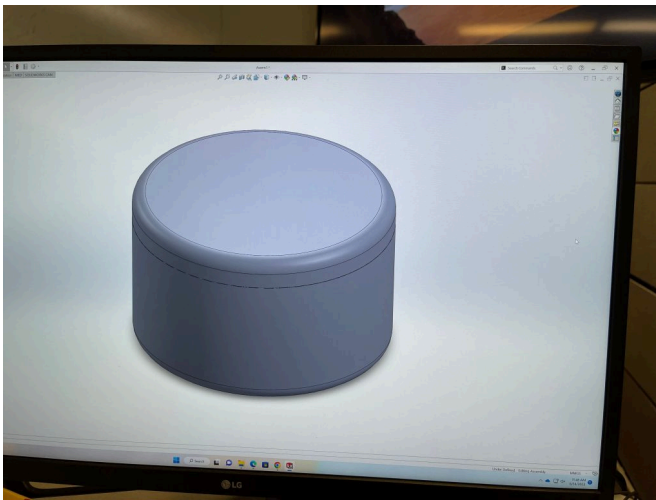
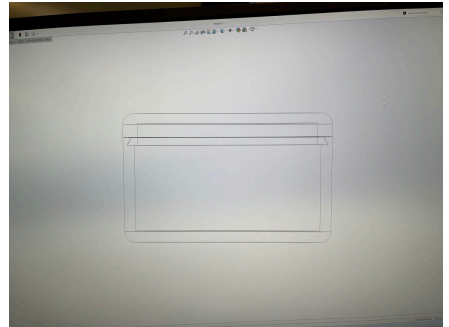
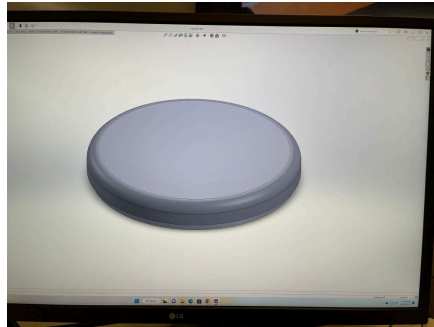
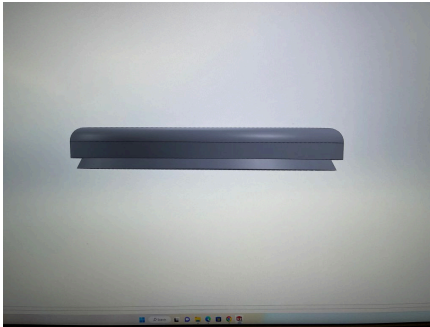
of this “computer stuff” (I hate how non-specific this term is, but non-specificity is how I viewed it before coming here) would eventually tie into what I want to be. This is not the case. Already I’m seeing art and medical illustration related applications to practically everything we’re doing. The concept of HCI is so much more closely related to art than I had realized. I had a vaguely similar experience this year in school when I started my sociology class. I will try to explain this well, but it may not make any sense. When I started my sociology class and we started defining sociology and what it relates to, I had a moment of realization of how big and interconnected everything is, and it left this feeling of, for lack of better descriptors, *sonder* and just general awe of the universe. HCI is the same. We start defining things and I see how interdisciplinary and large the concept really is and I feel as if there isn’t now, and never will be a way to grasp the vastness of it. And art isn’t tangential to HCI: it’s at the very heart of it.

So I’d been thinking, “when I get to this program, I will learn what I can, and one day it’ll make me a better artist and a better hire, but it’s not useful to me yet’. And then I got here and immediately realized I was wrong. It’s useful *now*. It’s making me a better artist right now.

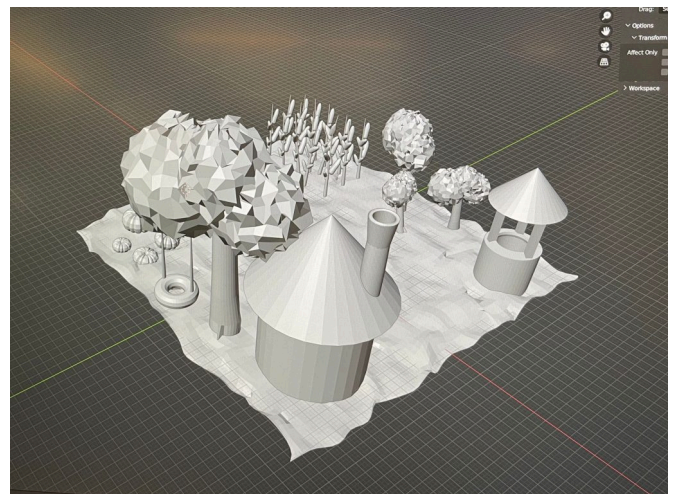
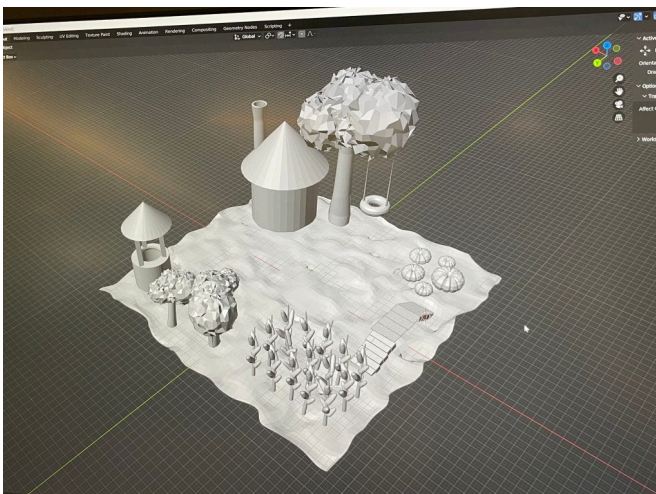
Day one, we did a tour of VRAC and I got to see virtual and augmented reality up close for the first time and I thought, “yes, this is what I want to do. I can use this to make surgery simulation programs, or videos that students can watch to better understand the complex processes of the human body.” then we talked about 3-D printing and again I thought, “this is what I want to do. I can use this for so many different things. I can go into bioprinting, I can use it in the line of children’s toys I’m designing,” (btw, have I mentioned I’m designing a line of children’s toys? Because I am, and I love talking about it) Even coding, a thing which scares the life out of me, I can immediately see the appeal and uses.

This week we’re working on learning 3-D modeling which was the one thing I immediately recognized from the get-go as “useful” in my eventual career as a medical illustrator. I thought, surely, being an artist, this will be easy for me... I guess I should get used to being wrong because SolidWorks is probably the most complicated computer program I’ve ever used. I mean, it just did not make sense. That being said, it’s getting better, and I was even able to create a little box and lid that snap together. That was cool. But then came Blender. Thank goodness for Blender because I was about to go *insane* feeling like I’m the only one not understanding what’s going on. Blender clicked almost immediately and I’m having so much fun using it. I’ve created so many little things and absolutely LOVE using it.

Also, I've been doing some drawings on top of it all. That's super fun. I made a little design of everyone in our group. I think it's pretty cute, but it's only a rough draft right now. anyway this all to say, I'm glad I applied to this program even though I didn't even know what HCI was when I did. I'm really learning a lot.



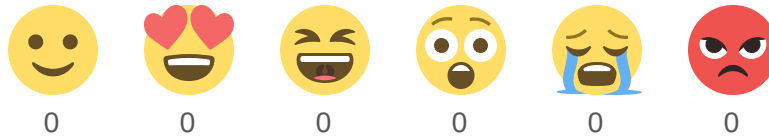
Here are some pictures of the little case that I designed in SolidWorks. It's a pretty simple design but for someone who literally couldn't grasp the basics like 4 days ago, I'm proud of it.



And here's some pictures of the little "farm" I made in blender. It has a well, a shack, a few trees, a tire swing, a cornfield, a bridge, and a little pumpkin patch. I think it's cute.



This is the little design I was talking about. The interns have taken to collectively calling our group the “VRAC bunch”. and this is a rough doodle of us as the VRAC bunch in with kind of a brady bunch vibe. Anyway, yeah, I’ve been doing art. LOTS of it. That’s unexpected, but definitely a good thing too.



 [Uncategorized](#)  [2 Replies](#)

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New week, New lessons

 [June 13, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

Last week we were taking classes on how to code. It was really difficult, and if I’m being honest, I was worse at it than expected. While I have been learning some coding stuff this year, I’m still pretty new to it and I felt that the pace of the course was not set with beginners in mind. This said, I learned a ton and can definitely say that while I am not where I want to be with coding, I am much further along than I was before.

But, this week we’re learning other things, specifically SolidWorks and Blender, which are two different types of modeling software. I thought that being an artist would give me a leg up in this area, but again I find myself struggling. Our SolidWorks instructor said that while an art background will probably help in Blender, it won’t do much for SolidWorks, which – go figure- is all we’ve worked on so far. I’m trying not to let the difficulty of these courses discourage me. I am learning a lot, and much faster than I would in other places, but it is very difficult.

We also started working on designing a t-shirt for our program. Yesterday we brainstormed and I’ve been mocking up one of our concept ideas. I don’t want to say too much about the specifics because I’m not sure who all is reading this and I think the design is meant to be somewhat of a secret. We were advised not to look at past REU’s t-shirt designs because it might influence the design we chose, and it’s meant to be unique. A few people looked anyway in order to “make sure we didn’t accidentally come up with the same idea”.

Tonight we are going to a park. I don't know what we're doing there but I'm hoping it doesn't involve too much exercise. Thus far, the programs attempts at making me exercise have not gone well. We played volleyball in an unairconditioned gym, which would have been fine if I wasn't still in my work clothes and also- as I learned that day- deeply afraid of the volleyball. Let's just say I would have killed it if we were playing dodgeball. They also had us do yoga, but it was like speed-running a yoga class. We kept switching poses faster than I could keep up, and as a larger individual, some of the poses required levels of flexibility my body just isn't capable of. My knees were killing me by the end because of the hardwood floors, but it wasn't all bad. Towards the end we spent about 10 minutes just lying on the floor. *That* I was good at.

Anyway -yoga and volleyball aside- I'm having a good time. I'm learning a lot about myself and my limits and where I can push myself. I'm going to keep pushing myself as much as possible and learning new things. I recognize that my desire to be the best at everything can occasionally cause me to want to give up prematurely, but I won't do that here. I am going to learn all that I can and remind myself I don't have to be the best, I just have to be better than I was before. That I can do. I'm glad to be here and I can't wait to see what the rest of the week brings.



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Uncategorized



1 Reply

Edit

Reu Playlist



June 9, 2023



Kristi Skinner

Okay so, I'm a big fan of mixtapes and custom playlists. now, I've been told my taste in music is terrible but honestly I don't care. I like it and since I'm the one listening, that's what matters right? But I was reading through the blogs yesterday and I saw that Amy added the song she was listening to and I was like, "that's cool. I'm stealing it." so this is a playlist of the songs I have been listening to on repeat while I'm here. I will warn you, there's no real theme or genre to these, so as a playlist it's kind of terrible, but I have a specific reason for all the music I'm listening to. Without further ado, I present: Kristi's Reu Playlist.

This song is all emotion. I like to imagine its the story of my life. If that's the case, I'm about a minute thirty in. That's where things are a bit repetitive but they're growing to something bigger. You can tell now that the music is building and you're starting to get excited for what's next. I love this song.

I like to listen to this on the way to VRAC. It sounds to me like the kind of song that gets played during the title-sequence of an early 2000s movie while they're showing b-roll of a protagonist walking around the city.

I could see this song also being a title-sequence song. Mostly though, it just makes me want to be happy and dance around. When I hear this song I can't help but smile. I listen to it when I feel like the world is going a bit too fast for me.

I'll be honest, this one is just for the vibes.

I just like this song. It is an example of the the whole being greater than the sum of its parts

Someone once described this song as, “the soundtrack of the universe” and I really like that description. To me, it embodies the feeling I imagine God felt when he created the world. It makes me feel triumphant, which interestingly related to the name of the band who wrote it. Sigur Ros is icelandic for Triumph Rose or something similar (I don’t speak Icelandic). The song means Jumping in Puddles and it’s about fighting tough things and getting back up when things are hard. my favorite lyric is, “Og ég fæ blóðnasir // En ég stend alltaf upp” which I believe means, “And I get a nosebleed, but I always stand back up”

Honestly, I mostly like this for the trumpet line in the opening of the song. It also reminds me of my childhood because it was one of like 8 songs on my childhood iPod.

This one is for when I feel like I can't give anything more. It was my top song of 2016, but randomly it came back into my daily plays even though I hadn't heard it in years.

Huge tone shift here. This ones a little on the nose and a tad cringe but, well, so am I. I like listening to this song loudly, and if you're not a loud music person, I would suggest skipping it. (Grandma, I'm talking about you. You won't like it.)

This is my calm down song. I listen to it when I need to be away from the world for a minute. It's not for everyone either, but I love it.

Anyway, that's really it. I'm a creature of habit and once I latch onto a song I keep it, so these are the songs I've been stuck to recently.



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3 Replies

Edit

What Do You Want to be When You Grow Up?



June 8, 2023



Kristi Skinner

Everyone gets asked this question a lot as a kid. And for me, the answer changed every few years. First it was brain surgeon, then medical examiner, then cinematographer, then

EMT, then briefly I was convinced I would be a nurse (a horrible choice, really) until finally landed on medical illustration. I realized I kept flip-flopping between a medical field job and an art related job. Then, one day, I was scrolling the internet, browsing scholarships (I'm really not sure why, I hadn't even applied to school yet, but I was) and I saw a scholarship in which students took pictures of microscope slides they thought were pretty and then the slide determined to be the prettiest won the scholarship. It was advertised as a "science art" scholarship and I was like wait, is it really that simple? Is "science art" a thing? So I looked it up. Turns out it absolutely is. And that's how I found medical illustration.

Yet, in all the years of being asked "What do you want to do when you grow up?", I never imagined I'd end up here. I wasn't even aware "here" existed. That's the funny thing about the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?", Once you decide what it is, there's a very definite- often stereotypical- expectation of what being that thing will mean. For medical illustration though, I had no stereotype to work off of. I had no idea what it meant, just that it sounded like something I'd love to do. The more I researched it the more I realized how varied it can be. Medical illustrators can work in hospitals or research centers or on law offices or even from home. I didn't know what path I'd end up on, had no clue where I'd go. So when people ask me what I'm going to school for, and I tell them, the next questions are ones like "what is medical illustration?" Or, "how does that work?" Or the ever dreaded, "so how long will you be in school?" And I stumble through answers that are too complicated to casually discuss. Because medical illustration is about as specific a field as "sports". If someone says, "I want to work in sports" we would all laugh because it's not much of a plan. But, because the field of medical illustration has so many emerging and new technologies, it's hard to pinpoint the exact thing I want to do within the field. So I generalize. Then people ask how long I will be in school and I shudder, because there is no definite answer right now. Maybe I will just get a bachelors. maybe I'll join a masters program, but if not, will I try for a Ph. D? There is no one way to become what I want to be, since what I want to be is unclear. Beyond that, it's not as easy as simply *stating* what I want to do. I actually have to go *do* it now.

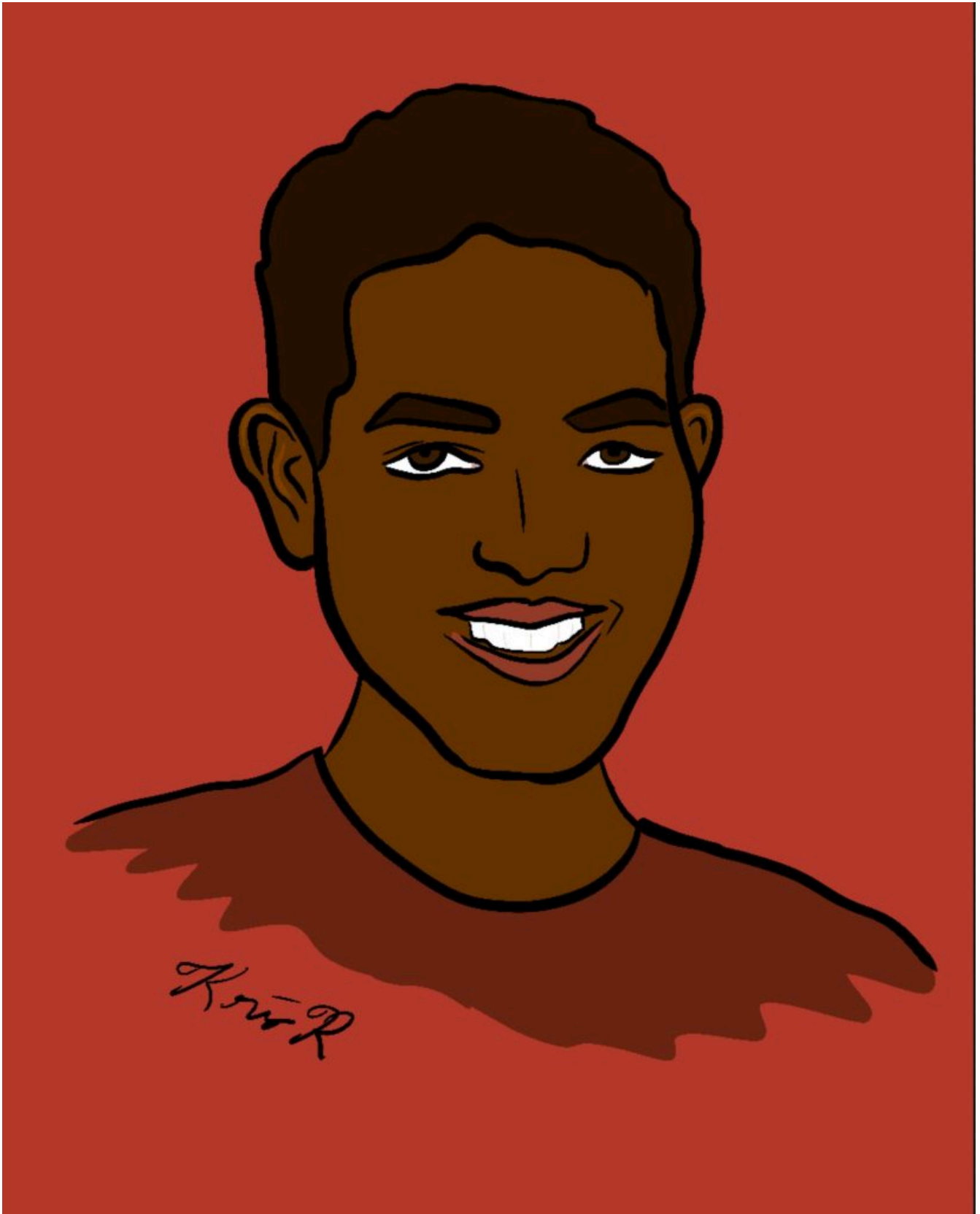
Now, however, I've realized there's been a distinct change in the question that I've been asked all my life. I didn't notice it at first, but eventually people stopped asking me what I want to be when I grow and began asking me, "what are you doing these days?" With the implication, of course, being that either I already grew up (a ridiculous notion, really), or that I should already be what I wanted, or clearly on the path to it. Yet, if someone were to ask me that question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I still wouldn't have a definite answer. I still don't know how this field or my love for it will change in the next few

years. Will it get more specific? Maybe I will determine I want to work in bio-printing or surgery simulation production, but maybe I want to go into research. Maybe I want to be part of the group of medical artists that push this field further. There are no answers yet, but this part is clear: where I am now is an important part of getting there.

Here, in this program, I am asked similar questions. They suggest grad school and promote research and I worry that somehow I do not belong. I never truly considered grad school as something I am capable of until recently. Today in our Luncheon Lecture, we discussed the options, and how the world we are in today can so easily and quickly change that we have no idea what the options will be by the time we're finishing our schooling. So with this in mind, I'm making a list of the things I think I need in a job, and I'm widening my view. I can focus on, "well I want to be this one specific thing" but who knows how the goalposts will have moved by the time I get there? So this is what I need in a job: I want a biological or medical component to my work. I need to be creative. I have to be working on something useful. I want to be learning. These are the goals I am working towards in a career. For now, I'm focusing on medical illustration because that seems to be the way there for me, and honestly, that's all I need to know now. I have at the very least three more years to figure the rest out.

Speaking of art, I decided it would be fun to draw some pictures of all the other interns. Just quick doodles. These are sketches of the two interns on the project with me. I'll post a few more at the end of my next blog.





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💻 **1** Reply

Coding



June 7, 2023



Kristi Skinner

We're learning to code this week. Coding is very difficult to me and it doesn't come naturally. I've tried to learn how to code before, with very limited success. Every method I've tried feels a bit like being dropped into the deep end and being asked to swim. I usually drown in such situations, but I'm trying to look at it as if it is a rogue-like game. A rogue-like game (a term I only became aware of because it is the very type of game my team is working on) is a game in which you have to fail in order to succeed, and in which each failure builds upon the previous ones and makes you stronger. Learning to knit was this way for me. I had to start over about a million times before I finally made my first piece (an only semi-functional potholder) Coding might be a rogue-like process for me. and the good news is this: I have already created my very first successful program today without help. It's not a very interesting program, but it works, and that's good enough. It converts degrees Celsius into Fahrenheit. Below is a picture. It's messy, and only half functional, but so was the potholder. anyway, that's all. Better get back to it!

```
/*float degreesF;
std::cout << "Temp in F\n";
std::cin >> degreesF;

float Celcius;
Celcius = (degreesF - 32) / 1.8;
std::cout << Celcius;*/

float Celcius;
std::cout << "What is the Temperature in Celcius?\n";
std::cin >> Celcius;

float fahrenheit = (Celcius + 32)*1.8;
std::cout << fahrenheit;

return 0;
```



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1 Reply

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We are Sending Letters Today



June 5, 2023



Kristi Skinner

As some of you may be aware, I am a huge fan of letters. I like receiving them, writing them, and reading them. I also love epistolary novels, and even won first place in contest for writing an epistolary short story. Then today I thought, what is a blog post other than the body portion of a letter? And with that in mind, I decided today's blog is going to be a letter. Please enjoy this letter style blog post.

Dear friends, family, and other people snooping on my blog,

I've been thinking about space lately. Not as in the final frontier but as in the space that we take up and how our environment can completely alter any situation. Moving to Ames for the summer has made me more aware of the space surrounding me, and what things help make my space something I'm comfortable in.

VRAC (the place in which I'm interning) is a great space. The minute I got here I could feel it. I don't have any clue how a space can so perfectly embody this feeling of learning, but the way it's set up, the way people move in the space, even the way it sounds is so conducive to discovery. My new apartment is nice too. I was worried about living in a dorm, being away from my husband, and sharing a space with relative strangers but so far it's been nothing but good things.

I feel as if our personal spaces are well designed for learning. My desk at VRAC- though fairly empty right now- is nice. I'm lucky that I got a spot that allows me to see everyone in the room, not just my project team. The conference room where we do a lot of our classes and lessons is right next to the intern desks and that's very convenient. I don't know what I expected of the space at ISU, but this is definitely better than my imagination. The only complaint I have is that VRAC doesn't have bathrooms so we have to make sure to bring our keycards to get back in if we have to go. But honestly the fact that we have keycards allows me to play out "I'm a scientist working in a fancy lab" dreams makes it worth the slight hike.

Anyway this all to say, the space is good, not just physically, but it's great for me mentally. It's allowing me to step back from myself a bit and take a break from all the chaos of my

everyday life. While I am here my priority is to learn and grow. And that's not only exciting but it's relaxing, in a way. I don't necessarily know how to verbalize why, but it's nice to feel as if I'm doing something that's helpful beyond the specific minutiae of the actual things I'm doing. I can see how doing them is growing my knowledge in the field I'm attempting to make a career in.

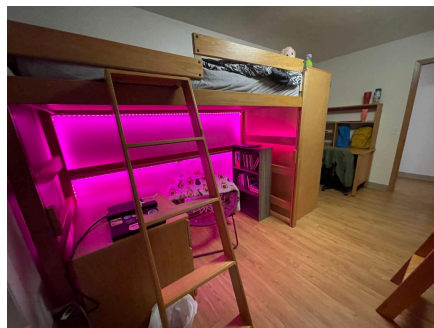
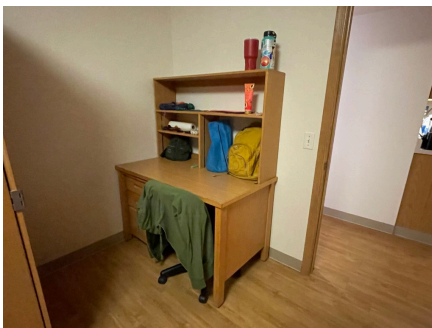
I'm excited for this week. We're learning to code! I don't know a lot about coding. I started learning Java in January, but I quickly stalled out as the way that I was attempting to learn just wasn't working for me. Hopefully this time I'll get a bit further. They're starting us with C++ but the game that my team will be working on is in JavaScript. I'm a little worried about the coding languages getting mixed up with all the other things going on in my head. I know programming languages are not the same as spoken language and our brains don't store them the same way, but part of me is afraid it'll only confuse me further, like how more and more often I just forget how to speak properly because I can't remember what words are English and what words are the other languages that I've studied. On the other hand, the fact that I've been able to comprehend as much as I can of said other languages gives me hope that while- yes coding is very different- it won't be nearly as hard as I'm working up in my head to be. Here's hoping that's the case! Work is starting back up again soon so I should go! Talk later!

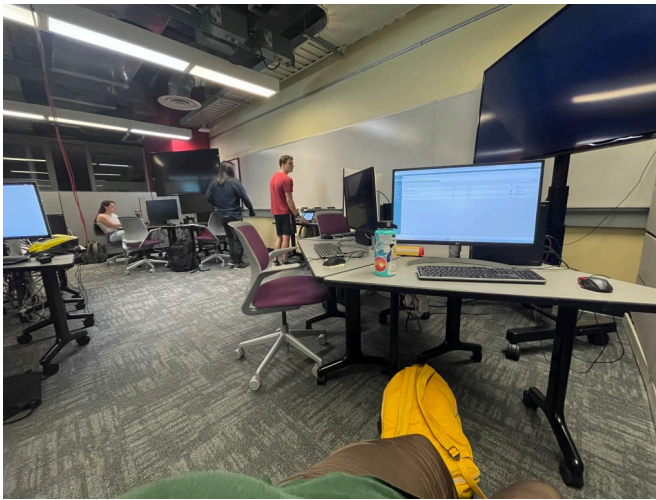
Love long and prosper y'all,

Kris Skinner-Rathjens

P.S. Here are some pictures of (my) space.

Jake was very excited about installing these lights and I am definitely not complaining. They absolutely improve my studying. How could you not want to sit and read under lights like these?





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Myers-Briggs Personality Test

 [June 2, 2023](#)  [Kristi Skinner](#)

Today we were asked to take a Myers-Briggs test to determine our personality type. I've taken one before, and I was pretty sure I knew what I was going to get. Still, I tried not to let that sway my answers anyway. I got INFP-T which stands for introverted, intuitive, feeling, prospective, with the subtype turbulent. On the 16 personalities site, they call this the mediator. It was fun to see what the other people in the program are. One of my teammates was also an INFP, and the other was an ESTJ, which is basically the "opposite" personality type. I think this could be interesting to see how we work together given this. I know that in the end what personality types a test defines us as doesn't really matter too much but it can be a good starting place for beginning to understand these relative strangers I've been paired up with.

Today we also had some product demos for various things being made and happening here at VRAC. I really enjoyed all of the demonstrations. A few of them were hard to understand, but the ones that I did were fascinating. I think it's crazy how even though they're working on things and concepts entirely different from the things I'm interested in, I can see the application for my own interests. I'm really enjoying being part of this program and I already can feel how I'm learning and changing how I perceive HCI. Here's hoping next week is just as fun! Anyway, here's a picture of me sticking my tongue out.



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Reflecting on the first few days of the REU

[June 1, 2023](#) [Kristi Skinner](#)

When I applied to this program, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to get in. Even though I only had a vague idea of what we would be doing, I was really excited by this world of undergrad research. My primary emotion though was nervousness. What if I wasn't good enough? What if I didn't understand what was going on? How can I actually be a positive impact in this internship?

I felt nervous all the way up until the welcome dinner. That's when I started really meeting the people in this program. I met the fellow interns who would be working on the project with me, and I met the people running the program. After that I was a lot less nervous. Everyone here has been so kind and I can tell that they really want me to learn. The environment here and the attitudes about learning are something I've never experienced before. So often learning is seen as a means to an end, something done in order to be able to reach an entirely separate end-goal. In VRAC learning is done for learning's sake.

While I came here with very definite ideas of what I wished to take out of the program, I'm already learning that what I expected and what I get might be very different. I anticipated working all day for a single goal, learning through the work, and to some extent being tossed into the deep end. This is not the case. Already I have learned so much and the program is well structured with good access to educational resources that I never anticipated. I know now that I will leave here a more educated person, but I also see that, while I will be in charge of my own education, I am not alone in it. There are people here who wish to see me exceed as much as I wish it myself, and are willing to help me do so. I am so excited to see what else I learn while I'm here, and I can't wait to see where this is going.



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2 Replies

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Hello world



June 1, 2023



Kristi Skinner

'tis I, the frenchiest fry



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2 Replies

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