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<http://blog.youngpup.net/>

Married, Finally!

Susan and I had our civil ceremony last week.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2009/10/married-finally.html>

Heat

There's a heat wave in San Francisco this week. Waking up this morning in the warm house with the windows open and a breeze blowing instantly transported me back to Susan and I's apartment in Manhattan. On summer mornings just like these, we'd wake up late and walk languidly together to union square for iced coffee and a waffle at [71](#), trying to absorb as much of the warmth and the company as possible before splitting up to our respective startups.

Thanks New York, you taught me how to live and introduced me to a great friend. Thanks San Francisco, for reminding me.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2009/04/heat.html>

Ad-hoc solutions to systemic problems do not scale (or: "stop bitching and get back to work")

Today at work, for the hundredth time since I've been there, somebody complained about how they have to log in over and over again to various internal services, and asked if there was any known solution. And for the hundredth time since I've worked there, people suggested various workarounds, including Greasemonkey scripts, bookmarklets, and third-party software.

For the hundredth time, people pondered why authentication (especially web authentication) sucks so bad, and wondered why biometrics hadn't taken off yet. The people who worked on the software in question heard their cue, and like clockwork, chimed in to defend why it really was necessary and useful to type your passwords twelve times at the beginning of each day.

The bit flipped, the algorithm advanced, and self-appointed security nazis popped out of the woodwork to yell at people for wanting to save their passwords and shave a few seconds off their morning routine.

The thing is, real security experts never chime in on mailing lists telling people what to do. Real security experts know that talking to people one-by-one is pointless: next month there will be a new n00b asking the exact same question, doing the exact same retarded thing.

Instead, real security experts -- people who want to achieve change in general -- work silently behind the scenes to change the system so that the players are automatically guided down better paths.

I see this pattern all over the place, not just in software, and it drives me crazy. Think of all the effort expended trying to save the planet by changing peoples' behavior one-by-one. If the planet needs saving, we are screwed because running commercials encouraging people to turn their thermostats down isn't going to make any difference at all. If the planet needs saving, we're going to need a concerted effort to find a systematic solution to a systemic problem, not people keying each others' SUVs and touchy-feely TV commercials.

Working on mass market software has taught me that you can't educate everyone. Even if you could reach them all, people are mostly lazy, dumb, and preoccupied. If you really want to make a change in this world, you need to change the system, not the people.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2009/04/ad-hoc-solutions-to-systemic-problems.html>

Love, Paraphrased

Her: So sad. After Katrina, peopled died just waiting for emergency response to get water to them.

Me: Wow... One thing I can guarantee: you'll never die of thirst in a hurricane aftermath. I'd go steal some or something.

Her: I know.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2009/02/love-paraphrased.html>

More on the gay marriage thing

I got a couple responses to [this post](#) taking issue with my description of marriage as a basic human right. I agree that is an overstatement; I was just being lazy with words.

I want to clarify, because I think this is actually a really interesting (and tragic) issue.

Equality is the basic human right at issue here. The government should not give preferential services or benefits to people based on their sexual orientation. I hope we can all agree on that much.

The problem is that civil unions are not, and probably will not ever be, equal to marriage. The reason is that the term 'marriage' is used throughout the legal system and is defined to be a man and a woman. Thousands of laws have been written referring to the term 'marriage' with that definition, and it would be incredibly costly to update all those old laws.

In programming terms, what we have is a [legacy system](#) problem. The old system was written to assume that the concept of 'Marriage' in the religious sense and 'Marriage' in the legal sense were the same thing. Ideally, we would just rewrite the old system to work correctly and be done with it.

Unfortunately things are not so easy. Rewriting and passing all those laws would be a gigantic undertaking, and would not be a wise use of legislative resources given the other problems we are facing.

So the practical thing to do is redefine the term 'Marriage'. This would be a quick fix to update all those old laws to have the correct new behavior.

The thing that frustrates me is that I think most people would be in favor of this if the issues were clearly presented to them. It isn't complicated, and I really believe the number of people who actually want to restrict other people's rights is small.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2009/01/more-on-gay-marriage-thing.html>

Punk rock poet

I never thought that there'd be room for punk in poetry, but in retrospect the fit should have been obvious. I saw Calvin Trillin last night on teevee, and even with the crossed legs and tweed jacket, it's hard to disguise: the guy is a total badass. Check out this sample:

Cheney's Head: An Explanation

One mystery I've tried to disentangle: Why Cheney's head is always at an angle. He tries to come on straight, and yet I can't help notice that his head is at a slant. When Cheney's questioned on the Sunday shows, The Voice of Reason is his favorite pose. He drones in monotones. He never smiles--Explaining why some suspect don't need trials, Or why right now is simply stands to reason That criticizing Bush amounts to treason, Or which important precept it would spoil To know who wrote our policy on oil, Or why as CEO he wouldn't know What Halliburton's books were meant to show. And as he speaks I've kept a careful check On when his head's help crooked on his neck. The code is broken, after years of trying: He only cocks his head when he is lying.

-- From [Obliviously On He Sails](#). I now have bus reading material.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/12/punk-rock-poet.html>

Rich

Ye olde "[if you were rich...](#)" thread came up HN again the other day.

It occurred to me recently that I have no idea what I would do if I were rich. I used to think about it from time to time, whenever work was especially frustrating, and the daydream usually included lots of sitting on the beach and margaritas.

But I realized that sitting on the beach would probably not keep me happy for very long. I think doing nothing, I would quickly get bored and depressed.

Even if you don't have to work, you still have to do something. There are a lot of hours to fill between breakfast, lunch, cocktail hour, and dinner.

I'd probably at least continue programming as a [hobby](#). But I feel like I might just as easily want to try something else. You only go around once, and it seems like a shame to waste it all on one occupation. But I don't have anything in mind, either.

It's a weird feeling realizing that even though work sometimes sucks, and having to work definitely sucks, there isn't anything in particular you'd rather do instead.

Edit: In typically boodman style, I kept editing this post obsessively after posting it. Tessa shared it and [quoted](#) an earlier version of the last paragraph:

It's a weird feeling realizing that even though work sucks, you don't even know yourself well enough to know what you'd rather do instead.

Poll: which version is better?

I think the version Tessa quoted is more along the lines of what I originally meant, but I pulled it back a bit at the last minute.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/12/rich.html>

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I turn 30 today.

Back when I picked the name of this site, I had just started my first full-time programming job. I was really enthusiastic, learning quickly, and breaking lots of furniture. My manager at the time made a joke that I was a bit of a "young pup" of an engineer.

I of course responded with "what's wrong with being young? I'm never getting old!" And when I started publishing code, I picked a domain name that rejected the idea of ever aging.

It's hard not getting old and grumpy. A visit to the DMV alone can age you a couple years. I keep this domain name around partly to remind myself to be enthusiastic, learn quickly, and break some furniture every now and then.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/12/young-pupnet.html>

Old Hotness

A few months ago, I bought this motorcycle from Manny (of [Uncontrol](#) fame) because he was moving back to New York and didn't want to just sell it on Craigslist. I finally got around to getting a permit and learning to ride it.

It is a 1972 Honda CB350. Manny modified the handlebars and added an electric starter, but other than that, it is stock. It had one owner before Manny, who mostly kept it in a barn.

Update: Manny says the mufflers are also new. He changed them from 4 into 4 pipes to 4 into 1.

At first I couldn't get it to start (the battery had died), so I was playing with a few things, trying to debug it. It's easy to see how in the 60s and 70s kids could learn about engines just through experimentation. The mechanisms are all really simple and straightforward. You can pull on the clutch or throttle and visually trace how it works.

I intend to use it mostly to get to work and [Mama's](#) on Sunday.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/11/old-hotness.html>

Orange County lets me down, again

Cool interactive charts found at [latimes.com](#).

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/11/orange-county-lets-me-down-again.html>

Bittersweet Obamaday

Please excuse any bad grammar, I was out last night celebrating with friends.

This is the first time I felt really strongly positive about a politician. I hope that I'm not being overly influenced by a campaign that was tuned specifically to work on my demographic. I hope that there really is something there, and that Obama can manage to follow through on some of the progress his name has become synonymous with.

Unfortunately, it's not all flowers and light. Somehow, at the same time most Americans decided to take a big step forward, it appears a majority of Californians decided that about 5% of the population should be denied the basic human right to marry.

:: sigh ::

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/11/bittersweet-obamaday.html>

Moved to the SF Google office

As of last Monday, I've permanently moved to the Google San Francisco office. A few of us from my team moved up at once to establish the remote northern outpost.

I'd really gotten tired of the 1.5 hour commute each way to Mountain View. Instead, I now go about 15 minutes by subway followed by 10 minutes by skateboard. Other options are a 20 minute bicycle ride or 10 minute motorcycle ride. It's also great to be able to do things after work in the city.

Reminder: This blog is now about personal stuff only. I've moved posts about my work to a [new site](#).

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/11/moved-to-sf-google-office.html>

The great work/personal blog split

I finally finished something I've been meaning to do for a long time now: I split apart my work and personal blogs.

From here on out, this blog will be about personal matters: traveling, cat pics, that kind of thing. The programming stuff has been moved to aaronboodman.com.

Thanks!

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/11/great-workpersonal-blog-split.html>

These go to eleven: Cuil launches

So [Cuil](#) launched, and they show eleven search results by default, which is a [good start](#).

I'm not sure yet how truly useful the 3-column search layout is, but my initial impression was pleasant. The results pages feel like they have more information, without feeling overpowering. The lack of ads certainly helps with that.

Other positive things: I really love the visual and interaction design, very slick and modern, but still very fast. I like the "related categories" presentation. I've never seen this done well, but it worked for me here. I also happened to note that the source is clean, clear, and nearly valid XHTML. Nice to see this attention to detail.

There were some bad misses for me with search results. I get zero results for "skateboard wheels", even though the suggest feature knew the phrase. I also initially got zero results for "aaron boodman" (the horror!!), but when I did the search a second time, it worked. Perhaps just a launch issue.

But there were also some pretty good search hits. "nsIXULAppInfo" returns good results, which is a relatively obscure search.

I think I will give this a shot over the next few weeks. I think it might be better for more open-ended researchy-type searches, and less good for "I just can't remember the URL" type searches.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/07/these-go-to-eleven-cuil-launches.html>

People suck, they must all be destroyed

I had a very good friend back in OC who used to say this whenever someone irritated her. We worked at [Kinkos](#) at the time, so it happened frequently. She would put a big dramatic pause between the two phrases, and sort of mutter the second part under her breath. It always cracked me up.

Where I work, the management provides a nice [commuter service](#) where they send buses all over the area to get us to and from the office. It is an awesome benefit, and the only reason urbanites like me can work there.

I guess I have been maturing or something recently, because I usually take the same shuttle now: 9:10 AM, every day. So I get to see the same people, and their habits, day in and day out.

There is this one guy who usually sits across from me. I get in at the first stop, and though I prefer to sit on the aisle side (there is a little more room to stick your feet and elbows out), I always slide in to the window seat because the 9:10 shuttle is always nearly full. It seems pretty rude to me to occupy the aisle seat with the window seat empty when people are piling in looking for seats.

So every day, this guy comes in on the second stop and sits in the aisle seat across from me, and puts his bag and jacket on the window seat. At the third stop (which is the busiest) he eyeballs everyone as they get on, hoping that they will not ask him to scoot over. Invariably, the bus is nearly full, so invariably, someone does. I've never actually witnessed this guy get to hold onto his empty window seat, I don't know why he keeps trying.

Anyway...

[Dimitri](#) had this idea for JavaScript Tennis, based on [Photoshop Tennis](#), from back in the day. Seems like a great idea to me. I'm trying to think of a good first layer.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/02/people-suck-they-must-all-be-destroyed.html>

Mom knows best

...what has been hurt can be healed, what has been torn in pieces can be put together, what was dysfunctional can be imagined into something better, what was crushed can be built up again, even by a mollusk (given enough available calcium) ... VOTE, dammit.

<http://bugyou.blogspot.com/2008/02/its-super-duper-tuesday.html>

BTW for any Californians reading: I just found out that the democratic primary is open this year. That means that if even if you haven't registered democrat, you can still show up at the poll and vote!

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2008/02/mom-knows-best.html>

HTML5 SQL Player using Gears

Dimitri Glazkov is a developer from Birmingham who has been following Gears and HTML5 development. He wrote a wrapper around Gears that adapts the Gears SQL interface to the [HTML5 Database](#) specification and a test page to drive it:

[HTML5 SQL Player](#)

Notably, this wrapper is very faithful to the spec. Everything is asynchronous where it is supposed to be -- even opening a transaction is non-blocking, just as it is in the spec.

This is done by implementing a client-server protocol between a Gears [WorkerPool](#) (the server) and the wrapper API (the client). Each SQL statement the client needs to execute is proxied to the server using `SendMessage()` and the client waits for an asynchronous callback containing the result. A typical SQL transaction will contain many statements and these all must be routed to the same Gears Database object on the server.

For an interesting read, check out the source. It is a really good example of mapping an single-threaded asynchronous API to a synchronous multi-threaded one.

It's nice to see this work being done. It shows that as long as the basic web development model of JavaScript/CSS/DOM is preserved, developers can deal with pretty dramatic API differences.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/11/html5-sql-player-using-gears.html>

New Gmail infrastructure launches! Congrats to Dan!

Whee.. [the new Gmail frontend is launched](#).

When Dan [joined the company](#) two years ago, I didn't know what to expect. I only really knew him from his work on [Thirteenth Parallel](#) and from talking to him on [dhtmlcentral.com](#).

I was worried for his sanity when he got assigned to Gmail, because it is one of the oldest and biggest JavaScript applications at Google. Therefore it was also the most, err, crufty :).

I offered to try and help him transfer to a newer project, but surprisingly, Dan did not want to leave. He dove in to the cruft, initially on [Gmail Chat](#), but over time more and more on core Gmail. He began agitating for change, which culminated in this new design.

At Google, we dogfood all our products. That means, among other things, that we use Gmail all day for all our internal mail. I don't know of any other company producing web mail that can claim that. It also means that we have really high standards for these products. 500ms latency is usually considered **great** for a web application, but for something you use all day, it just won't cut it. Because of this, the Gmail team has been to hell and back several times over the course of this project, trying to shave milliseconds off frequent operations.

As one small example, one team member reverse-engineered `jscrip.dll` to figure out how its GC algorithm worked, and was horrified to find that it had [hard-coded, arbitrary limits](#) on how many objects could be allocated before a GC would occur. This led to an insane amount of effort optimizing the code to reduce the number of allocations in core code paths.

Congratulations to the team! I'm really looking forward to the new features this design enables.

Back to work

Well, we've been back from the trip for about four days now, but without the requirement from work to return to PST, I'm still going to bed at four or five every morning.

Thought I had better finish up posting our pictures, before the goog swallows me up again.

It was a great trip. I wish that Hong Kong was less smoggy; I'm not sure if I could live there if it is always like that. And Japan was very interesting, and incredibly beautiful, but I think I would tire quickly of the constant attention to manners and protocol.

[Tokyo, Kyoto, Hong Kong 2007](#)

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/10/back-to-work.html>

Hello, from Tokyo

Susan and I finally forced ourselves to take much-needed time off. We arrived in Tokyo yesterday at 3pm local time (11pm for us) and will stay here another two days before a quick 1 day visit to Kyoto, and then five days in Hong Kong.

I was a little scared about navigating successfully in Tokyo and finding fun things to do, given that neither Susan or I speak a word of Japanese. But last night went about as smoothly as I could have possibly hoped for. We found our hotel without problem, and went off in search of dinner.

Our guide book recommended a particular [yakitori](#) bar that was supposed to be English-friendly. Following the bell hop's careful instructions, we were able to navigate to the subway, and then to the general area of [Ginza](#) that should have contained it with no problem. But when we arrived, we were distracted by what I have since learned is called "[yakitori alley](#)". We spent the night sitting outside, drinking, eating grilled meats (Susan insisted on ordering intestines, cartilage, and gizzards -- I got chicken and pork :-)), laughing, and trying to talk with the couple that happened to be sitting next to us. Through broken english and body language, we were able to tell them how long we were staying, our itinerary, how long Susan and I have been together, that we are engaged ("promised" was the term they understood), and we even got some sightseeing tips. We bought a round of sake in thanks of the herculean effort they expended trying to remember English words and phrases it appeared they hadn't used in years.

On the way home, I realized I was still hungry so we shared a bowl of ramen in a random shop near our hotel. English appeared to be a non-starter, so we just pointed to what other people had, which turned out to be bamboo shoot ramen. The fact that were pretty drunk by that time can have nothing to do with the fact that I think that was one of the best noodle bowls I've ever had. The noodles were so fresh and chewy, they must have been made hours before.

So, a good start. Today, our only must-see is the [fish market](#). After that, we'll just see where our feet take us.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/10/hello-from-tokyo.html>

Simulating include() in workers

Gears has an outstanding bug to create an include() method for workers. Once implemented, you should be able to do something like:

```
google.gears.workerPool.include("dojo.js");
google.gears.workerPool.include("mylib.js");
```

```
// Use libs here
```

One of the reasons that we have prioritized other things over this new API in Gears was that we knew you could emulate it using XMLHttpRequest and eval().

Well, this turns out to be tricky in IE. In Firefox, you can just do:

```
var global = self;
function include(url, callback) {
  var req = google.gears.factory.create("beta.httprequest", "1.0");
  req.onreadystatechange = function() {
    if (req.readyState == 4) {
      // DOESN'T WORK IN IE :(
      global.eval(req.responseText);
    }
  }

  req.open("GET", "dojo.js");
  req.send(null);
}

include("dojo.js", function() {
  include("mylib.js", function() {
    // Use libs here
  });
});
```

But the eval line does not work in IE. In IE, eval() always runs in the calling scope, no matter where you get the function. The way people typically get around this in IE is to use the execScript method, but since that is a method on window, not a built-in part of JScript, it is not available in workers.

Luckily, the Gears timer implementation includes the script form of setTimeout and setInterval, so you can use it to workaroud this problem. Here is the code that works in both IE and Firefox:

```
function include(url, callback) {
  var req = google.gears.factory.create("beta.httprequest", "1.0");
  req.onreadystatechange = function() {
    if (req.readyState == 4) {
      include.callback = callback;
    }
  }

  // Hack to workaroud the fact that global.eval() doesn't work in IE.
  google.gears.factory.create("beta.timer", "1.0").setTimeout(
    req.responseText + "\ninclude.callback()", 0);
}
```

```
}  
}  
  
req.open("GET", "dojo.js");  
req.send(null);  
}  
  
include("dojo.js", function() {  
  include("mylib.js", function() {  
    // Use libs here  
  });  
});
```

This is a dirty, dirty hack, and the lack of a synchronous form of include() remains an annoying problem. But until we get the include() implemented in Gears, this seems to be a workaround.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/09/simulating-include-in-workers.html>

Gears - M1: complete; Next up: M1.

Chris Prince, my co-tech lead on Gears, has posted the news that you can now download a [developer build of Gears 0.2](#).

The Gears team organizes its [roadmap](#) in a very simple way. We plan for 6 week milestones (actually this last one took longer, we might adjust the length) and we only have three of them. They are:

[M1](#): Now [M2](#): Next [M3](#): Later That is, M1 is the milestone we are working on now. M2 is the milestone we will work on next. M3 is everything else.

Of course, since these are all relative terms, we never actually get past M1. At the end of each milestone we re-prioritize everything and come up with a new list of M1 tasks. The obvious metaphor here always makes me smile :).

I've found this system very pleasant to work with. More complex systems with multiple competing attributes like priority and severity always confuse me.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/08/gears-m1-complete-now-on-to-m1.html>

New York bound

People who have been reading this blog for a long time (hi mom!) might remember that I long been obsessed with New York. It's my most favoritest of all the places I've lived.

Susan and I are going back for a visit next week. I'll be working during the day, but if you're in the area and want to have dinner or a beer, leave a comment.

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/08/new-york-bound-next-week.html>

Announcing Gears (and Gearpad)!

This morning, I had the pleasure and terror of announcing [Google Gears](#) in Sydney, Australia.

As part of the design process for this project we experimented with taking several different types of applications offline. I thought it would be fun to try and take my old AJAX notepad, Halfnote, offline, and the result is Gearpad:

[Launch Gearpad](#)

It's basically just like Halfnote, but if you've got Gears installed, you can go offline and continue to edit your notes. When you come back online, everything will be synchronized.

Gearpad supports seamless movement between connected and disconnected operation without any specific "offline mode". This is accomplished by treating the Gears [database module](#) like a buffer, writing changes to it immediately and trying to push those changes to the server separately, when there is a connection. See the code in the [Gears SDK](#) for more detail.

It has been an incredible pleasure working on Gears. I really believe in the incremental approach to improving the web, and I have always wanted to work on browser APIs. On this project I was able to do both while working with some really great people.

Gears isn't done. Actually, it's hardly even started. We have some ideas for what's next, but what we really want is to hear what you think should be next. Join the [mailing list](#) and let us know. This is going to be fun :).

<http://blog.youngpup.net/2007/05/announcing-gears-and-gearpad.html>
