

My name is David, and I Am Science (AKA my origin story)

Description

In the week since Science Online 2012 ended, there has been a lot of discussion over different social media platforms about the experience, what could be done differently, the highs and lows and most importantly, what could be discussed next year.

I've made a lot of new friends since the conference, and have already started discussing topics for next year.

But, this post isn't going to be about that. This will be about something that came up after the conference by Kevin Zelnio.

Kevin wrote a post on his blog [here](#) about how he ended up in science and called it [#IAmScience](#). In the post, he outlined how he ended up where he is today, and that not everyone takes the standard A → B path to end up involved in science. This one post spawned a whole host of other people online to share their stories, and this is mine.

I've talked on my blog before about how, as a child, I was obsessed with dinosaurs. That was my first real exposure to science and that there were cool jobs involved in the study of living (or extinct) things.

I was always a smart kid, and this gave me an outlet to channel my love of information and learning. I would consume books about dinosaurs by the bucket-load, and would beg my parents to take me to the museum again and again, just on the off-chance I'd see something new or learn a cool tidbit.

My parents obliged more often than not, and bought me books, videos, wooden fossil duplicates and more.

This passion for paleontology sustained me for many years, but it eventually gave way to something else: acting.

All the world's a stage

My family, especially my dad and older sister, are movie buffs. We have seen just as many classics as current movies, and I grew up with this love of film and theatre. So, it really came as no surprise that I eventually stumbled into acting.

And boy, did I love it, especially acting in musicals.

My first role ever was in a summer camp production of Beauty and the Beast, where I played Belle's horse, Phillipe. Those of you who know your Disney movies know that it was not a major role, but it was enough.

The following few years, I acted in a bunch of musicals in school, camp and beyond, even landing the main roles in a few of them. For more on my acting, you can see my post on LabSpaces [here](#).

But science was always there.

Throughout middle school and high school, I continued to be fascinated by science. I'd do experiments, learn whatever I could, absorb knowledge like a sponge and tell everyone I met about all the cool things I learned. My aptitude was in biology, specifically, animal biology.

I loved learning everything I could about animals, from weird facts to behaviors to ecology and diet.

However, like all things, my love for biology was almost extinguished.

In grade 10 Biology, my teacher was horrible and sucked all the fun out of science. He gave the class so many problems that parents complained, but nothing ever changed.

Once, during a group lab, one of my friend's aunts passed away, so he went to Vancouver for the funeral. Unbeknownst to us, he took all the lab material with him, so we could not hand it in.

We all got a zero.

After much hubbub and calls by all of our parents, the teacher eventually relented and gave us all what we deserved. But, the whole experience with that class made me realize that science just wasn't fun anymore.

My parents, however, convinced me to take grade 11, just to "keep my options open" and I am glad they did.

The teacher, Mr. T, was fantastic. He was funny, energetic, passionate and not afraid to answer complex questions. And my marks skyrocketed along with my interest.

I still remember, after getting 100% on our genetic test, I asked him about variation in sex chromosomes from sex-linked disorders. And, after class, using nothing but a pencil and paper, he explained to me about "crossing over" (where chromosomes occasionally touch and exchange whole portions of their genomes with each other).

That one explanation opened my eyes to a world of science that I never even thought about.

It was then my future was decided: I was going to be a vet, combining my love of animals and passion for science.

The times, they are a changin'

Veterinary school was never really an option, though, after a visit to the allergist.

My sister was allergic to fish, so we never had any in the house. But, when she went backpacking through Europe, my parents thought it was the ideal time.

And, let's just say it didn't go well.

The allergist said I was allergic to fish and needed to carry an Epi-Pen, as well as dropped the bomb that I had a mild allergy to dogs and cats. It was nothing serious, but enough that could warrant medication and potentially wear off.

“And I don’t know about you,” he said in a somber tone, “but I wouldn’t want someone operating on my dog or cat who had watery eyes and was sniffing.”

So, as quickly as the dream popped into my head, it was gone. But then, my dad mentioned pursuing a PhD, becoming an expert in a field and working in that area.

“And what do you love?” he said.
“Animals!” I responded enthusiastically.
“Well, that would be zoology then, wouldn’t it?”

Animal obsessed

So, that was my goal.

I went to university for biology and zoology, and loved it (even when I said I didn’t, which was often).

In my second year, I took the “Animals” course, and met a new professor called Dr. K. He was bright, engaging and really funny, so he was perfect for such a dense subject.

As the semester went on we got talking about our likes, dislikes, the course, my future, etc! and he became a mentor of sorts. He introduced me to different professors, encouraged me to take a variety of courses and helped steer my education in the way I wanted.

I even took his fish biology class in fourth year (luckily, there was no lab component).

To boost my resume, also in second year, I also started writing for the school newspaper. Nothing permanent, but I would write on occasion about cool research at the university, interesting things that were happening in biology around the world, and more. My favourite piece I ever wrote was an In Memoriam piece to a hero of mine, Steve “Crocodile Hunter” Irwin, who perished in an accident with a stingray.

But the writing was always secondary to biology.

Then, during my fourth year, Dr. K approached me about doing research work in his lab. But how, I asked, since he worked in a fish lab and I was deathly allergic? As it turned out, he was looking to branch out to other animals, and would start up a whole area of the lab, just for me, using frogs as test animals.

How could I say no?

So, for a year, I worked there, adapting fish procedures for frogs, under the guise of an amazing grad student named H, and I loved it.

THIS was what I was meant to do, I said.

But once the experiment was over and the analysis began, I became listless. I didn't like the sedentary being I was slowly becoming, by being attached to the lab bench every day performing the same chemical tests on tissues again and again. I loved the science and what I was doing, but I felt that what I was doing was not what I wanted.

A subtle shift

I realized this, as fate would have it, around Christmas of that year, when my grandfather passed away.

There was a moment, sitting in a chair at the retirement home where he had been living, where I asked myself "if I don't want this, what else can I do?"

And then my sister did something.

She pulled out the latest article I had written for the school paper, and said that I've greatly improved as a writer.

"Huh, a writer," I said to myself. "No one ever called me a writer before."

Sure, English teachers and professors had complimented me on my writing, and my lab reports were always well done, but I figured that was because I read a lot.

So I thought about it while I continued to work at the lab.

Writing was something I never considered before, so I spoke to some professors, relatives and parents about it, and "journalism" kept popping up.

I could still learn about science, which I loved with a passion, and share it with others, which I had been doing ever since I was a little kid in the museum "science journalism seemed like a good fit.

So, crossing my fingers, I applied to some journalism schools in Canada for the Masters program, and got accepted by the most reputable one in the country.

It was a struggle going from science writing to writing about science, but I learned a lot and never strayed from my love of science.

Even though I am no longer attached to a lab bench, I am still tethered to science. I read copious amount of material, I blog and I share my love of science with an enthusiasm that knows no bounds.

I Am Science.

[I Am Science](#) from [Mindy Weisberger](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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