

Life After CERN: What is it, does  
it exist, and if so: is it worth it?

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# Who are you again? Who let you in?

- CERN is the reason I still live in Geneva
- Internship in September 2000
- PhD student (Physics) Jul 2001 – Dec 2006
  - NA60 experiment (SPS)
  - A lot of C and C++ programming
    - DAQ: DATE
    - Monitoring, reconstruction: ROOT
- Fellow at the CERN IT security team Jan 2007 – Dec 2008
  - Mostly Perl 5



# Then you left? Why?

- TL;DR: because I had to.
- The end of the 2008 was a grrrrreat time to end a contract
  - What housing crisis?
- The year 2009 for me was... “interesting”. I worked:
  - Singing and playing the guitar at bars (and 1 wedding)
  - “Barback” at a pub and a nightclub
  - Maths tutor
  - Removal man
- All the while having difficulties landing interviews
- Did I mention I didn’t even have a permit?



# Enter Cisco

- Started working for Cisco Systems in Nov 2009
  - But not exactly my first foray into the private sector
  - The offer call was amusing
  - So was the lack of an end date on the contract!
- A bit of culture shock after 10.5 months out of an office
  - Waddya mean **daily** meetings at 9:30am?? What's an "am"?
- A bit of culture shock after CERN
  - Dedicated software testers
  - Emphasis on software quality
  - Many experts on the team, but on different subjects

## But what about the perks?

- Worked frequently from home, didn't have to punch in
- 25 days off a year + possibility of buying more days off
  - No shutdown though...
- Got sent to the US for meetings
- Possibility of paid-for training courses
- I was allowed to go to programming conferences on company time
- Performance bonuses

# What did you actually do?

- C++ middleware
- C API
- Python feature tests
- Networking protocols
- Cross-platform code
  - OSs: Linux, Windows, Mac, iOS, Android
  - Architectures: x86, PowerPC, ...
- Learned a lot
  - Unit testing
  - Multithreaded programming
  - Advanced C++ template metaprogramming
  - The D programming language

# Cisco – the bad and the ugly

- The initial project finished, we were all moved to different ones
- C++? Hah, no. C90 it is for you.
- “New” colleagues with... *archaic* views on software development
- Stress and frustration
- I started looking for a way out
  - Golden handcuffs

# Kaleidic & Symmetry



- Approached at DConf 2016 (on Cisco's dime!)
  - I'd been a speaker in 2014 and 2015
  - I'd done a lot of open source D work in my spare time
- I'm technically my own company in Switzerland
- I'm a consultant to Kaleidic Associates
  - Which in turn consult Symmetry Investments
- Mostly D programming but also Python, C++, bash, ...
- Fully remote work

# Takeaways (no, not curry)

- Work is work, it doesn't really matter what sector you're in
  - But some people will discriminate against you anyway
- Private sector != getting fired willy nilly
  - Nobody gets fired for doing nothing, people get fired for getting in the way
- Flexitime and working from home also exist in the private sector
- I don't miss the public sector, but wouldn't say no either
- Learn things you like for fun, you never know where they may lead
- The people you work with are more important than most other aspects
- All you need for politics to occur is enough people to gather