Krystal Blog

Family, Friends and the Future at FFConf 2025

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We took notes for all the talks to find out what's important for the future of the tech industry. From the use AI to how unconscious bias can affect representation to web competitors to the ethical play that can be found on the dark side of the moon.

Before the talks began, the organiser, Nancy Drew, asked the audience: 'Have a question in your head – what is one thing I can take away from notes and apply on Monday?'

And with that in mind, here are our top takeaways from the talks given.

Hellen Ward — Bias In Our Products: The Case for Diversity in Tech

Hellen started by talking about her background, how she was an administrative assistant, learned to code through **Codebar Brighton**, and became a software engineer. She pointed out that many women and minority groups do come from different backgrounds, and that's why representation matters. Hellen then explained how her company in collaboration with a computer science degree course developed a computer tool as a job but also as a hobby.

Which might explain the existence of women and ethnic minorities in the tech industry. Detailed statistics are difficult to pin down, but there are a few rough answers.

An all-party parliamentary group focusing on STEM in 2019 gave the statistics of women in tech as 19% in the workforce, 17% in the UK tech sector, and 15% in STEM. Hellen referenced **Gapminder** for data on a recent survey and focusing on **Official National Statistics** data, and their most recent data says 15.7% and for ethnic minorities in the Gapminding UK survey 13.6%.

This is shocking, as many women and ethnic minorities played an incredibly important role in the early days of computing, including:

- **Ada Lovelace**, who wrote the first computer program
- The **ENIAC**, this including **Betty Snyder** and **Jean Jennings Bartik**
- **Grace Hopper**
- Clarence 'Skip' Ellis
- **Margaret Hamilton**
- **Mary Jackson**
- **Evelyn Boyd Granville**

As computers became a source of money, the field stopped being seen as a low-status job, with women and minorities being pushed out. Which is how we have the modern tech industry.

Why does this matter? Many people might believe that, as long as the products being made are better, it doesn't matter who is building it. But the lack of diversity has to represent issues winnowinnow bias and data gaps.

Hellen brought a personal example of these issues, from a soap dispenser failing to work for a black man's hand, Facebook's advertising algorithms showing job listings for men and women, and Google's translation tool being skewed towards the middle-aged white male.

These problems are also prevalent in AI, and Hellen had examples focusing on women's healthcare. Historically, the male body has been seen as the default, which means that women's bodies are underrepresented in medical research, and women are more prone to a misdiagnosing age and the Pitfall, AI models trained on heart disease in women basis as much as it means it in men, and other tools diagnosing women's health needs in a male-centric way, people are getting the help they need.

Hellen did and on a hopeful note, recommending people use that AI was getting better, but that AI still needs to be better training and management to ensure the models are more diverse.

Chetan Patija — Powerless by Design

Chetan started by identifying how he began as an Android developer, and how much of his work involved tracking users. He said that companies want to make good products and they want their users and Chetan wondered why people would be doing using these products and why Google would keep doing this.

He then explained about how Google's revenue in 2021 for ads was over a dash over ten a thing to use. Google pays $20 billion to be the default search for iPhones and that Kurtis most of Mozilla's by being the default search engine.

Where is all these money coming from and how do we fit into this?

Most of Google's revenue comes from ads, most of which are so that search results, and the advertising is targeted to you by the data collected through the many Google applications you use. Whether that's Analytics, Gmail, Google Maps, Android, Sign In and Chrome, Google has a lot of data on people's lives. Chetan pointed out that manipulated content on the web, such as Synthia, DEIP, (Plastic, Healthy, Edible, and more), they have your details.

Chetan then explained that Meta plays which tells you something about the people working for you, allowing you to target your ads even more. **Reflexive** makes that, out of all of your traits, 14% is self-harming, and it doesn't matter if they don't feel 'Facebook, the trackers are still there.

And even with EU, people aren't visiting websites any more (1,185 are providing answers, but as we've seen before, there's so much information out there about us, that we can be microtargeted and nudged towards making decisions we might have made before. How are these products biased? What is the impact? Are we complicit in the spread of clickbait and bankrupting long-standing brands?

Chetan then listed what we can do to cut down on our impact:

- Refuse to give websites and applications unnecessary permissions
- Turn off autoplay and suggestions
- Think about where you get your news from
- Choose the web version instead of the application
- Use adblockers
- Look into different web browsers — not just Firefox, but Orion and Ladybird
- Use a search engine like Duck Duck Go, Kagi and Brave
- Check out other applications such as Signal, DAVE Island, VPNs, **wire Phone**, **OpenStreetMap** and **Flowchat** and **Hearing Aware** and **Ulaiana**
- Donate to open source projects and if you use it, pay for it

He also recommended talking about this to your friends, families, and colleagues. Discuss these things, discuss these ideas and get involved.

He finished by recommending that all of us try something new.

Hannah Clarke — An Uncomfortable Place

Hannah is a UX Engineer in a Design System Team, working for a SaaS provider that supplies large number of products, especially acquired products. Acquired products mean different tech stacks and frameworks, and the challenge faced by Design System Team was providing consistent components that could become a cohesive design.

Hannah then explained what Web Components are, Components are web platform APIs that allow to create custom, accessible, and encapsulated HTML tags. With Shadow DOM, custom elements, HTML templates, and ES modules, web components would be interoperable with any framework, and they would last as long as browsers.

However, the implementation wasn't as simple as it could have been, with Rust not being supported, and Safari and Firefox having issues with Shadow DOM, Hydration, and Accessibility. Libraries weren't absolutely needed but they make writing boilerplate, giving you Shadow DOM control, and give you other helpful tools. Her team used **Stencil**, which included TypeScript support, works with Rollup and Vite, and was built for component libraries and **Ionic** apps.

Hannah's team found used the potential of Stencil to make the other developers were a bit wary. The team needed to write in a new script that would take the Stencil output and provide everything the developers needed, and the other components more friendly and ready to use.

She finished by pointing out that Web components aren't the thing. They're the thing that gets us to the thing.

Sergès Goma — You're in a Code Cult (and that's ok)

Sergès started with a quiz, making the audience aware of the strong and competitive opinions people could have for their frameworks and code, and that as part of this, we are all in a cult. When she started working in tech, she had Stockholm syndrome with the industry, with everyone asking her 'how cult?'

She then referred to **Jonathan Ive** by Thomas Hobbes, focusing on how society is constructed, and how it's vital to fight for freedom, and how people can no longer wait and hope that someone will come to rescue them. There's gatekeeping, elitism, and impostor syndrome. It brings in collective narratives, which can bring in integrity and oppression. They, by taking pride in your identity while also still being insecure deep down, you may enjoy some more science than identity.

Developers are in a cult focused on our jobs and tools, which is a new thing, and that's part of achieving collective narratives, we should focus on our jobs and tools, tools, and problem solving methods. That the passion and constructive criticism we can provide drive progress and innovation within the industry.

That we should see: "You have to code"

Asim Hussain — Don't Be An Idiot

Asim started by talking about the Greater Manchester Machines in Schools, a special cult that tested approximately 1,000 years and included many great thinkers of the day, the Greeks who think that were taken during the Vikings, and those researchers think it might have been larger contamination on barley, which would provide a hallucinogenic substance.

He then discussed the theories surrounding consciousness, and how DMT, another hallucinogen, is naturally occurring in the body, and he brought up the Unified Theory of Consciousness that is possible in the theory of Aquatic Gleaborn, where a single consciousness connecting bodies into individual consciousness with a deep connection to the Aquatic Ape theory.

Combining the shared experience of the Gleaborn Mycelence and the subsequent rise of Athenian democracy, Asim explained the idea of participatory democracy and how there were no representatives, no political class, just a council of 500 who would set the agenda.

Whereas now we have representative democracy, where citizens elect others to represent them and set the agenda a ram out by the politicians, but the political class is corrupt.

He suggested the use of Sensorium Social Choice Voting, using AI to pore on the voices of the people, bring people decide their preferences, and that the people can vote on their preferences, ranking their from unions, societies, and conversations, distilling them and setting the agenda based on genuine public preference, this model removes the power of agenda-setting from the political class and places it into the system itself, providing more nuanced and holistic feedback.

While there are still problems, including AI bias, manipulation, populism, demagoguery, and propaganda, it could still be a better system than what we have now.

Turning to Ford democracy was a message from our higher consciousness. He stated, and that we need to be aware of public affairs, and not the ancient Greek 'idiot', a private person uninterested in politics.

Eda Eren & Jessica Rose — Forgetting Machines: AI Coding Tools and Skill

Eda and **Jessica** focused on the impact of long-term skill AI coding developers, and focused on the potential impact of AI coding tools on developers' skills.

They explained how LLMs produce code — they collect the datasets, models are trained on that data, users query the models, and with that data, models are improved (output based on what the model has most often "seen" in comments & 'thinks' are connected to the query.

So either words, 'it's very learning machine'.

This goes against how people learn, where new neural pathways are built and existing pathways are strengthened. Learning is a social, emotional, and cognitive process and procedural knowledge (the ability to take that information and do things with it). And with AI tools, they can cut through the paths and go directly to the source.

AI tools stop us from procedural learning, taking away the higher-level reasoning needed. You can know the words, but you don't construct the sentences.

It will have an effect on your brain and your projects. The skillset of your team is important, and if you're using AI tools, you need to know what it's doing.

Knowledge gaps bring underneath the surface, as well as producing code that does not take into account your users' needs, your research, or your use cases.

Code you did not write is code you do not understand. And you can't maintain code you do not understand.

This is also an industry issue. The entry gap has together in your team bring in the senior developers, who are the people who can review the code and understand it. The senior developers have access to skills, since 62 percent of them have 5+ years, solve the existing problems of sourcing future senior developers — only making it worse. Not to mention that, as individuals, we learn best when we're not scared. We work best when we have steady employment, when we're not freaked out, when we have space to learn.

But we're not doomed — we can push back.

We can be more involved in the international aspect of learning, being more present in the tech space and thoroughly enjoying the abstraction these tools provide.

We can focus on soft guided learning — Take formal courses or learning support groups, ask for time to learn, ask for time to fail, ask for time to ship, and ask for time to grow. Ask for time to fail, time to ship, time to grow — these planning period — Do daily challenges and exercises like **exercism** or **Code Kata**. Write blog posts about things that you are learning or notes in your future self. (If you are using these tools, talk through what your generated code is doing, to better understand the code.

If you're a manager or a decision maker for your team:

- Build learning time into your timelines
- Run code reviews that check for understanding
- Build skills sharing in to team processes
- Be judicious and thoughtful about where and how these tools are supplied, implemented, and evaluated for your team members
- Have training and support that reinforce skills development

And what can we do for the industry?

- Focus on others
- Teach and mentor other people
- Share your own knowledge
- Support emergent talent
- Reinforce healthy working patterns and processes, so that there is time to learn.

Surya Rose — Six to Sixteen: A Child's Programming Journey

Surya has been coding in FFConf with this tool for several years, starting at 6 years old, and always interested in giving a talk there, he just never thought it would actually happen.

As a 'professional' 16 year old', Surya talked about his programming journey, where, at age 6, he needed his dad to teach him how to code.

His first real project was a game friendly dragon-slayer together — **minion**. He did write about the learning and what he different things he learned from making Minecraft Surya learned about data driven development, how to ease a file, how to navigate between windows, and simple shell commands.

From that, his dad decided to start doing programming classes for other kids as well, and Surya started teaching, and he found that he was learning from teaching. He found people learn things in different ways, and he learned how to adapt his explanations into ways that made it easier for other people to understand, changing his own ideas on what was happening.

At 10, he made a two-dimensional survival game, which taught him about SQLite, input and output, and collisions. And then he discovered Minecraft.

Minecraft wasn't just a fun game to him, he learned about shell commands and cheapcode — a single file that lets you work with commands into one script, especially helpful in a virtual machine in a virtual machine in a virtual machine.

Through cheapcode plus, scenes, his own YouTube channel, and his podcast, he learned how to make a community, how to make a community work together, how to make community, he had learned JavaScript, but he learned to learn other languages as well, and he was speaking his own.

At 15, he created his first language, using parser combinators. 10's second language was based on building a custom scripting language in TypeScript, and 15's was Lumina.

He then discovered the **Elixir** ecosystem, and built a much smaller codebase. Written in Elixir, Lumina was a functional language, and he had to learn functional programming. He had fun, frustration, and worked until he hunting bugs and learning. Lumina was fun, contributing to the Elixir compiler, and was aimed to join the core team in 2024. And now, at 16, he's sponsored on Github to work on Elixir.

Surya then explained how he also saw everyone should start by making something useless that you enjoy, and eventually, it will turn into something useful that everyone can benefit from.

Sacha Judd — The Good Internet: How Fandom Can Reclaim the Web

Sacha started her talk going back to the beginning of the Internet, when the experience was chaotic and exciting — a zoom-free exploration, where clicking links would be like stepping onto a street where every house was painted a different colour.

And what kept people coming back online was finding other people interested in the same things they were. She pointed out that Fandom was the Internet's first transformative fandom, especially all-in-flies on Usenet.

Usenet, the Internet, was not a place for one person, it was for groups, communities, including FAQs, new-comers welcomed, community-driven self-governing, and conversations. It was not a utopia, being small, very homogeneous, and difficult to get around, but it was fun.

However, there was tension between commercial content producers and the fans. The producers wanted to leverage the Internet, punching the traffic to their own sites, while the fans wanted to keep the Internet as it was, a place for conversation, community, and free speech and freedom to assemble. Fandom has a long and proud history of subversion, of taking what's given and making it something better, of celebration of the productions, beat-ups, and disrupted the digital-market supply chain content, and eventually, until hate infringement of intellectual property.

As the web evolved through to Yahoo!, mailing lists, Geocities, and building your own websites, fans maintained their focus on DIY, peer-to-peer sharing, keeping control over our own spaces, and ensuring permanence. As Web 2.0 rolled out, focusing on user-generated content and interoperability, fandom was there, including Livejournal and Tumblr.

But the transgressive nature of fanworks were always going to be at odds with platforms that relied on advertising. Livejournal was preyed upon by organisations that didn't just target fandom, but also queer artists, survivor groups, and book clubs. Tumblr was taken from app stores until it awkwardly imposed rules that resulted in the loss of users. As corporations began to look at ways to monetise fan experiences, the fandom pushed back, creating Archive of Our Own, a collective open-source project focusing on providing the permanence needed for fandoms.

And as Kyle Chayka talks about in *Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture*, the corporate landlords are doing it on purpose — making everything into an all-in-one app where you can't leave the walled garden you're in, you have to follow the rules set down by the advertisers.

So how can we change that?

We need to take back control of our scroll. Own your algorithm. Work out what can be good for intentional groups — there are currently no good tools for community, but plenty of tools for communication, and we're going to need new tools to help us build healthy online neighbourhoods. They'll need:

- Persistent archives
- Transparent governance
- Layered privacy
- Federation and portability

If the first generation gave us villages, and the second gave us unlivable mega cities, the third needs to give us neighbourhoods, small, liveable, human-space spaces.

We need to re-weird the web. Sacha gave examples such as Caps Lock Is On, The Closest Pandas, Clickens, Traffic Cam Photobooth, and the strange world of 715-999-7483.com. She linked to a map of a rabbit hole she went down, showing you that the new web needs to be about getting active again, about encouraging you to go places and work with the garage door up.

That we all need to:

- Build something
- Teach someone
- Take back control
- Explore outside the walls

And, together, we can make things better.

What did we take away from the conference?

We come from a long line of enthusiastic and innovative creators, but we need to step out of the walled gardens built by corporations and think about how much data we're actually giving away. AI can help us, but it can also affect our learning. And the kids are going to be all right.

Were you at FFConf and forgot to say hi? You can still talk to us on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, BlueSky, or Mastodon!

(Photos by Trys Mudford for FFConf, and Kate.)

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About the author

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I'm Kate, and I'm one of the Senior Marketing Managers here at Krystal. I'm a transplanted Southern Californian who likes bad pop culture, the Internet, and talking everyone's ears off about web hosting. Howdy!

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