Foreword

by Pia Waugh

Growing up as a female geek in Australia has been quite an experience. My mum was a techie and worked with software and networks, and there was a grand total of two people in my school interested in computers prior to university. So my enjoyment of computers in my early years was pretty organic and natural.

As a young woman, I was unfortunately told—repeatedly—that my enjoyment of gaming, bleeding edge technologies, fixing computers, and software somehow made me strange. An exception that proved some weird and illogical rule about women and technology.

After a while I started to believe that perhaps I might be an exception, or that maybe I did have a “male brain,” or something else peculiar. Then I went overseas and discovered countries where women were 60% of the IT sector and I realised the idea that IT or technology is somehow a male thing was cultural. I, basically, decided then and there to do what I love regardless of what people tell me. I figured the best way to contribute to the IT gender debates that have raged in Australia for decades now was to be the change I wanted to see.

To do IT because I love it. To do awesome projects because they are fun and challenging. To give the men and women around me another example of a female geek to help break down the stereotype.

I am extremely pleased to say that I have seen a genuine change in the last decade. There are more technical women visible in Australia, a more positive attitude towards IT as an awesome industry that young people want to get involved in, and more young girls and boys are starting to identify as change agents with geek super powers throughout school and university.

Many people have contributed to this movement, and the Internet has bred a more socially literate breed of geek that can often transcend the limiting and unfounded biases of generations before. I feel proud now to identify as simply a geek, who happens to be female. After all, with almost everything in modern life depending on technology, the geek will inherit the Earth and all geeks—regardless of gender, age, beliefs, ethnicity, or any other traditional box—have an important role to play as the pioneers of the digital age.

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Pia Waugh is an open government and open data ninja, working within the machine to enable greater transparency, democratic engagement, citizen-centric design, and real innovation in the public sector and beyond. She is passionate about improving the world by getting great technologies to people who need them and creating a well-connected global society where anyone can play and succeed. She has worked extensively in the IT sector, as a political adviser, has run her own business, and for both state/territory and federal government. Pia currently works as the Director of Coordination and Gov 2.0 for the Australian Government CTO. Pia was at various times also the President of Software Freedom International, the President (then VP) of Linux Australia, and on the linux.conf.au 2007 organising team. She speaks at technology, open source, and open culture events in Australia and around the world. Current projects include Gov 2.0 and open government, GovCamp and GovHack, Society5, the Distributed Democracy, and data.gov.au.