

## Linux Fanatic

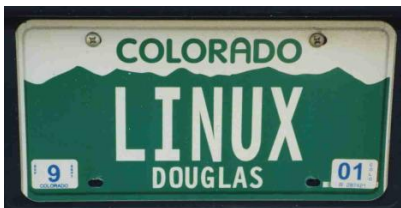
I remember the moment that I switched from being a Linux user to being a Linux fanatic. It was a school day in May, much like any other. Students in my high school classes were finishing their studies for the year. With a few exams to grade in my briefcase and not much else on my mind, I was driving home. I pulled up behind a fancy Cadillac stopped at a red light. Then I saw its license plate: WINDOWS. Now a fancy Cadillac is not the car for me. I imagined it to be expensive, to have features I would not use, to be bigger than I wanted, and to be difficult to maneuver on any challenging terrain. I immediately thought about the Subaru I was driving and that Cadillac. My Subaru was simple, reliable, easy to use, yet powerful and capable of taking me anywhere I wanted to go. I realized that same description applied to Linux.

A quick turn and a different road home took me past the Department of Motor Vehicles for Douglas County. Much to my delight, I found that in Colorado, nobody had reserved LINUX on a customized plate. So it became mine. Then in quick succession, I made many changes to my world. A plushy Tux appeared, dangling from my rear-view mirror. All the machines in the computer lab where I teach got a brand new Tux case badge. Students were told to treat the machines with the respect they deserve, since that was about the time that I converted all the machines to dual boot Linux. From that point on, all of the courses I would teach would be taught on the Linux platform.

I had gone from a quiet user of Linux to a proponent of Linux as an excellent tool for education. Many obstacles were still to come, challenging my fervor. The first was from within the school. “You can’t put Linux on school machines if you expect to get support from the school.” The “if” part saved me. I could support the machines myself – after all it was Linux. So by the end of the summer the machines were all converted and as classes started, it was too late to shorten the statement to just “You can’t put Linux on school machines.” Another obstacle came from the school district. They didn’t want machines that they could not control on their network. My advocacy was severely challenged by that even bigger word: bureaucracy. But we’re all in it for the students, and nobody could argue against the fact that the Linux computer lab was cheaper, faster, and more reliable than what had been there before. It was also clear that since the district network was intermittent at best, having a local Apache server with the resources students needed was a good idea.

The final challenge came from an unexpected source. It was most apparent on Back-To-School night. Parents needed to know why I was teaching their children Linux, and what it was I had against Windows. I did not direct their attention to my “Live Free Or Die” Linux license plate to answer their second question. Instead I focused on all the reasons Linux made sense in education and for their children. Since then, I’ve faced and defended every challenge a parent has posed to my decision to adopt and promote Linux. I’ve armed myself with printouts from many of the best colleges that their children might hope to attend – printouts that show how valuable Linux would be, especially to those going into Computer Science. I’ve made sure I could quote success stories from students who caught the fervor and installed Linux on their home machines, often using a second surplus hard drive I had loaned them so as not to disturb their Windows partition or their parents too much.

The one challenge I haven't had to face is one that I don't miss. Being a computer teacher, I used to get the request often: "You teach computers? Good! I have this problem with my computer." "Are you running Windows?", I would ask. "Yes." "I'm sorry, I really can't help you. I haven't run Windows in almost four years now. I only run Linux and Linux applications." Then sometimes I refer them to our Colorado Linux Users and Enthusiasts (CLUE) web page and suggest they attend one of our Installfests. Sometimes they look at me as if I'm crazy but that's fine – either way I don't have to deal with their Windows problems.



I would hope that any person, especially any teacher, who cares about students and their futures, would look at Linux as an alternative to what they might be using or considering using. Especially if price, reliability, and educational value are considered, I suspect the way I feel about Linux would make perfect sense.

If you are a parent, support Linux in your schools. If you're a teacher, learn Linux. Convince your local school and district computer people of its undeniable benefits. Install it on your machines. Put Tux case badges on each computer. You can do it! The only thing you cannot do, at least if you live in Colorado, is have the LINUX license plate. I already have it.