

## GSoC Interview: Sean Healy.

Contributed by DaaT  
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Today we bring you yet another in the ongoing series of GSoC student interviews. The interview was conducted by Humdinger of Haiku Gazette and we're delighted to host it for your reading pleasure:

Sean Healy is one of the programmers that have applied for Google's Summer of Code 2009. Sadly, his Haiku project wasn't one of the six granted slots for Haiku this year. Nevertheless, as a part of a series of GSoC interviews that is being held by various Haiku news sites, he took the time to answer a few of our questions.

[You can find this interview in German at the Haiku Gazette.]

HG - Hello Sean. Sorry you didn't make it this time. Will you try again next year?

Sean Healy - I don't think I'll be able to. I just got a scholarship which will pay out from September to June, and I don't think I'll be allowed to work during that period. Unfortunately, that overlaps with the GSoC time frame.

HG - Do you know why your project wasn't one of the chosen few?

Sean Healy - Well, if I understand correctly, the main problem was that my project did not meet any immediate needs of Haiku. And I was aware of that from the beginning. I applied with a project I was already working on, rather than as a way to make some money during the summer. What I mean is that the project was my motivation, not the money. The money would simply have meant that I could work on the project full time. Now I'll have to make money some other way and work on the project in my spare time.

HG - Do you already have experience with other open source projects?

Sean Healy - I have contributed to a few Perl modules, and I follow the SWORD project (a Bible study program). My favorite editor for Windows, Programmer's Notepad, is also open source, and I have a copy of the source on my hard drive, but I haven't contributed to it yet. (I'd like to make an extension for it to add Perl scripting to it, but it's low on my list of things to do.) I find the tabbed MDI interface of Programmer's Notepad quite tidy and elegant; lack of window management is the main thing about Pe that drives me crazy.

And of course, I use a lot of open source software. I even have Ubuntu installed on a partition on my hard drive. But I've never looked at Linux source code, and I stay in Windows most of the time, because there's just more software available for it. I suppose I should clarify that I mean more of the kind of software that I typically use; there is lots of software available for Linux, but most of it I have little or no use for. I have Cygwin installed on Windows for the stuff I have trouble living without, like bash.

HG - Why did you pick Haiku from all the other mentor organizations for your GSoC project?

Sean Healy - Back in April of 2000, I got a job (my first full-time job after leaving school), and my team leader was running BeOS. He told me about the Personal Edition, and within a short time I had found out via the web how to install it to a partition (rather than starting it from Windows).

I've had BeOS on every computer I've had since then, although on the last two it's been via emulation.

So I've been following Haiku for a while now. I'd been thinking about a project of my own since BeOS days, and since Haiku is pretty stable now, I decided to start working on it. Shortly afterward, Matt posted the news about GSoC on the mailing list, so I decided to apply.

And even though I didn't get accepted, the application process got me working on Haiku instead of lurking on the list, and got me building Haiku on my own again after downloading images for the last several months. I didn't have room on my BeOS virtual machine to store the Haiku code, so I had to build from Linux. It was such a pain to have to shut down Windows and boot into Linux to update and build Haiku that I eventually gave up and started downloading images.

HG - What would've been your GSoC project?

Sean Healy - Perl is my favorite language to write code in. I've been using a Perl module called Win32::GUI for years now to write GUI programs in Perl. I've also used Prima and wxPerl, which are cross-platform GUI modules for Perl. (I tried Tk as well, but I didn't like it.) So I wanted to expose Haiku's API to Perl. For now, I'm concentrating on the Application and Interface Kits, but my long-term plans are to expose all the kits.

HG - What about that project intrigued you especially?

Sean Healy - I use similar Perl modules all the time on Windows, and since I plan to make Haiku my main OS once R1 is out, I will sorely miss such a tool if it is not available.

(And yes, for Haiku I will abandon Windows, even though for Linux I will not. Sorry, Tux.)

HG - After your application you had to delve a bit deeper into Haiku development. What were your major difficulties in the beginning, how do you think this could be improved and what went actually pretty well?

Sean Healy - Well, I don't have a great deal of experience in C++. I've taken classes and written a couple of things for a previous employer, but it never really grabbed my interest and it's not something I do on my own for fun. So getting back into the swing of C++ slowed me down a bit at first.

But the biggest problem was that the bug I chose was marked "easy" and was, in my opinion, not that easy. Every time I fixed a problem, it exposed another problem which I then had to track down and fix. The only way to really fix that would be to better evaluate the bugs, and I don't think Haiku really has the manpower (in terms of time available to the experienced developers) to do that. There are higher priorities.

HG - What are your future plans, you mentioned a scholarship?

Sean Healy - The scholarship I just got is a pretty cool program. Before World War II, Europe was the place to go for higher education. Because intellectuals fled much of Europe, after World War II, everybody wanted to study in the US.

The European Union is trying to attract students to study in Europe again. To that end, they have extended the Erasmus program (which allows European students to study in another European country) to non-Europeans; this extension is called Erasmus Mundus.

I would recommend that any non-European student who wants to pursue a Masters degree consider it; you can apply for up to three of the qualifying programs in any given year; deadlines are usually in February, and there isn't even a separate application for the scholarship; you just indicate on the program application that you'd like to be considered for the scholarship. More details and a list of qualifying programs can be found here:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/index_en.html)

Presumably the students who go to school on these scholarships will then go back to their home country and spread the word, and more students will want to study in Europe.

To fulfill their goals, the scholarships are not given for a particular university, but for a consortium of universities. Each student will study one year in each of two universities within the consortium that hosts their program of study; that way, the students gets a feel for education in Europe, rather than in a single European country. My two universities are in eastern France and southern Portugal.

Most programs conduct classes in English, but my program actually conducts them in the language of the host country. (It can do this because it's a program aimed at linguists.) The program is called "International Masters in Natural Language Processing and Human Language Technology". (It combines my interests in linguistics and programming quite nicely.)

The consortium has ten member universities in nine countries; unfortunately only four of those universities qualify for the scholarship; if I wanted to go to one of the other six, I would have to find other funding.

Sorry, that was kind of a long-winded answer. But it was a pretty open-ended question.

HG - Now that GSoC 2009 is being held without you, what will you do all summer? Work or play? :)

Sean Healy - I'll definitely have to work. I just went back to school after eight years in the work field, and this year I've been going to school without a scholarship. Even though I now have one, it doesn't start paying out until September. I've had a few contract jobs here and there, but my savings account has definitely had more withdrawals than deposits this school year. It's time to refill it.

On the other hand, my parents live in Alaska and my wife would like to visit; she's only been once for a week. So we may end up living in Alaska for the summer, which is practically like playing, even if we also have to work.

HG - Would you be interested in a possible "Haiku Code Drive", which is similar to the GSoC, though it's for "only" \$2,500 (last year) and financed by donations from the Haiku community?

Sean Healy - Right now I'm looking at various options for making money this summer. Provided that I have not committed to something else full-time if and when a Code Drive developed, I would certainly be interested.

HG - Thanks very much, Sean!

And thank you Humdinger as well for the interview. :) Sean, where in southern Portugal? Faro?