

Ali Smith

I first came to know Ali Smith as a student on September 7th of 2010, her first day of high school. She was in a class I was teaching called Introduction to Computer Science class, where students learned to write simple programs on computers. It took me until the next day, September 8th to determine that Ali would have a long and successful career as a computer scientist. In a matter of weeks Ali was cranking out her own video games and directing her creative energy into the art of software development.

The recipe for a software engineer is as follows: Take one gallon of ironclad analytical ability. Mix in 3 pints of creativity. Add a heaping spoonful of self-confidence. Throw in a few Star Wars light sabers or Harry Potter magic wands. Then stir until someone appears to tell you to step the heck away from your computer keyboard so that they can fix what you just broke. That's the final ingredient: some hacker attitude.

Ali has all of those ingredients. First the ironclad analytical ability. Ali is an extraordinary problems solver, in math class, in science class and when using her math and science knowledge to make a computer do what she wants it to do.

Second: Ali is phenomenally creative. She is known by her classmates as one of our strongest graphic artists in school. If you have a visual idea, you want to bring to life, and you're able to communicate it to Ali, she will take your idea and convert it to bits and bytes and colored pixels as well as anyone.

Third: the heaping spoonful of self-confidence. Now those who don't know Ali well know her as quiet, polite and reserved. And she usually is, but if you incorrectly question her mathematics or software design approach, please take two steps back for your own safety. Don't challenge Ali on math or computer science question. You will lose. Ali does not suffer fools gladly. She will go into Tazmanian Devil mode and then proceed to use math and the rules of the universe to destroy you. As late legendary songwriter Jim Croce once sang: You don't tug on Superman's Cape, you don't Spit into the Wind, you don't pull the mask off the Old Lone Ranger and you don't mess around with Ali Smith.

Fourth: the lightsabers and Harry Potter wands...I should have mentioned that in this recipe you may substitute Hello Kitty Gear...that was part of the Ali Smith recipe.

And finally: the attitude. Although Ali may not appear to be one of our more competitive students, she possesses a healthy competitive streak. Earlier this year, our AP Computer Science class started using an online homework for solving computer programming problems. It was developed by the University of Washington, one of world's top computer science programs, where Honor Society member Ned Denton will enroll this fall. One of the cute features of the homework site is that there were class *standings*. You could see a ranking of the students who had solved the most homework problems since we started to use the site. One of the gentlemen in class, who shall remain nameless decided that he would work ahead on the homework and rise to the top of the standings. Each day when we came into class, the class would check the standings to see who moved up and who moved down. When Ali saw that this gentleman had temporarily taken her spot atop the standings, I think you could have boiled an egg on her forehead.....the next day, her classmate/opponent came in to the surprised that Ali had dislodged him from the top spot.....back and forth this went for weeks...other students jumped into the fray. Now I shouldn't have brought this up because I know what Ali is going to do when she goes home tonight....she's going to check the standings again.

I should note that Ali also has a great sense of humor, and when it comes to nerdy math teacher humor, I consider a connoisseur. When Ali laughs in class because she laughs so furiously that she actually somehow flies out of her chair vertically, lands on her chair and bounce up again...it's not at all safe...she's going to land on another student and squash them eventually. I'm going to look into getting her a seatbelt for class next year.

Ali, be proud of your outstanding accomplishments here at Verona High School. You have distinguished yourself in a very special way.

It is my pleasure to induct Alexandra Smith into the National Honor Society.