

Interview: Jayson E. Street of Stratagem 1, Dissecting the Hack

To say that Jayson E. Street has done a lot in his lifetime is an understatement to say the least. Jayson has overcome more in his short life than most people could even fathom. Jayson manages to cope with all of these lowlights including homelessness and cancer with a dark and genuinely funny sense of humor. He doesn't come off as someone with such a hard life, and, unless you specifically ask, you would have no idea how far he has come. Join me as I take you on a journey through an eye opening interview with one of the up and coming voices of the information security community. Before we get started, here's Jayson's official bio:

Jayson is an author of the book "Dissecting the Hack: The F0rb1dd3n Network" from Syngress Publishing (Read Rich's Book Review). His consultation with the FBI and Secret Service on attempted network breaches resulted in the capture and successful prosecution of the criminals involved. In 2007 he consulted with the Secret Service on the Wi-Fi security posture at the White House. He has also spoken at DEFCON, BRUCON, UCON and at several other 'CONs and colleges on a variety of Information Security subjects. He also was the co-founder of and a speaker at ExcaliburCon held in Wuxi China. He was an expert witness in two cases against the RIAA. He is a lead trainer for the Incident Handler Certification for the EC Council. He is also a current member on the Board of Directors for the Oklahoma InfraGard Chapter and Vice President for ISSA OKC. Jayson is also a longtime member of the Netragard "SNOsoft" research team. He is a highly carbonated speaker who has partaken of pizza from Beijing to Brazil. He does not expect anybody to still be reading this far, but, if they are, please note that he was chosen as one of Time's Persons of the Year for 2006. ;-) (If you want to know more, just use the Googles).

But it is what's not in his bio that interested me the most. I'm sure you will agree and be inspired.

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"Here is a shot that better captures 'me' ;-)" - Jayson

Part 1: Bio

RichM: How did you get started in IT?

Jayson E. Street (JS): I started as call center tech support for a major OEM. This is where I learned that my skills as a manager were nonexistent. It was at that point that I realized I should always be a techie and not a boss.

RichM: Worst IT job...

JS: Working as an INFOSEC consultant. There was hardly any business, and it got so bad one day I changed all the folders' icons on my laptop to sci-fi/fantasy themes. This was clearly a cry for help. Fortunately, the company went bankrupt after about 7 months (apparently not having any business was bad for all parties).

RichM: Most fun experience in IT...

JS: Working at the first Internet only bank (obviously before the dot com bust). This also happened to be my first foray into Information Security. I had the coolest boss, office and co-workers ever. My office was also the lab where we installed multiple copies of Unreal Tournament! After work, my boss and I would play against each other for hours! I hope my wife doesn't read this, I always told her it was lab work which was sort of true ;-)

RichM: Advice for a person graduating high school that wants to go into information security...

JS: STUDY,STUDY,PLAY,STUDY and STUDY some more! Whether you are fortunate enough to learn in a formal class setting or like me who is still taking courses at GOOGLE U, never stop trying to learn something new. The other thing to keep in mind is that you must thoroughly enjoy this line of work. This field is too demanding to try and just collect a pay check. You have to have a passion and enjoyment of it. InfoSec WILL take up a lot of your free time.

RichM: What advice would you offer to people that are out of work, looking to re-invent themselves and want to get into InfoSec?

JS: Get involved! INFRAGARD, ISSA, DC Groups, CitySec or the 2600 is your friend. Most importantly join the InfoSec mentors program at <http://site.infosecmentors.com/>. You don't have to go to conferences to network, look for local INFOSEC/Hacking groups. It is there you will find support, new friends and probably most important information on who is hiring and help learning if Information Security is your true calling.

RichM: Can you share your cancer experience with the readers?

Author's Note: I was blown away by the following question's response. For most individuals cancer is the single most traumatic event in a person's life, not Jayson! Please also keep in mind, this is not something that happened years ago, Jayson just got over his cancer ordeal in April.

JS: I would have to say that it was hardly a blip on this year's radar screen, much less looking back over my whole life, thus far. It wasn't a total loss, it did provide me with some new jokes. I tend to recycle jokes and those closest to me were thankful to hear new material (or too polite to stop me from myself). The part of the experience I get the most mileage out of, is a cool scar on my neck. I tell people I got in a bar fight in Guatemala (Not sure if it's just me but chicks still aren't digging the new post scar Jayson, so I think that myth has been busted). Taking stock of the top 10 life changing events in my life, Cancer ranks about 7. Overall, in the top 10 horrible things I have experienced, it is a 5. The book ordeal [Question 1 of Part II] is 4.

RichM: Can you give us some insight into overcoming the obstacles of homelessness, and how it changed who you are?

JS: I spent less than 3 months out on the streets, and, let me make this clear, though it was one of the worst things I have ever lived through (it ranked 3 in worse all time and 4 as far as life changing), it was a cakewalk compared to what most of the teens that were out there back then went through. Most people are unaware of how many teens wander our streets now forgotten or written off by society!

I had a somewhat safe place to sleep for most of my time out there (even if it was behind a dumpster, behind a Safeway). I still tried going to school and was fortunate to have friends that would let me crash on their floor, use a shower once in a while, and would loan me clean clothes when available. Another factor that helped tremendously was a man by the name of Haki, who ran the pizza place, at my local mall.

Haki looked past my horrible anti-social attitude, scary grungy look and made sure I had food and Pepsi (back then I didn't need diet Pepsi). When I wasn't trying to find a place to eat or sleep, I spent a lot of time at the bookstore. I was fortunate to find workers that would let me stay in their store and read instead of buying books or magazines.

I finally hit my rock bottom when I spent about a week or two in downtown Houston. It was at this point that I realized no matter what I had thought my life at home was like, there are places on this planet that are far more terrifying. Also, I realized it was my pride and not thinking about consequences that led me to my homelessness. I realized the value of being humble and analyzing the gravity of a decision, before I leap right into it (I still struggle mostly with the latter to this day).

Part 2: Book

RichM: Please give me and our readers a brief overview/explanation of the plagiarism controversy.

JS: I have to say that having cancer was much more pleasant and easier to deal with. It was devastating to find out last year that someone I trusted plagiarized their entire section of the book that I had been working on and striving to get published for over 4 years. Nothing has been more devastating except for the passing of my father. If it was not for the help of Marcus J. Carey that first night I'm not sure what I would have done. He was also the one who introduced me to Brian Baskin, the man who not only wrote the new all original STAR section but also made it ten thousand times better than the 1st one was no matter whose content it was.

RichM: I hear rumblings. Will there be a movie?

JS: We are in the preliminary stages. A producer is attached and a screenplay is written, but I still have to get a studio to buy it and then of course make the film.

RichM: Can you specifically mention your three caveats for making the movie, especially the bands that you want to be in the soundtrack?

JS: For this movie to work it has to be:

1. Factually correct attack techniques. There will be no fake or imaginary attacks or techno babble that sounds good in Hollywood but means nothing to techies. Yes I'm looking at you "Swordfish" (Sorry Halle & John), but that was not a good representation of our community.
2. I want to have cameos from people who are either someone I know from the INFOSEC/Hacking community or just someone I consider a friend. These would not be talking parts just background extras you see walking across the street and you say to yourself "wait a minute is that..."
3. The soundtrack needs to be from the community as well. I want DJ Mumpi, Dual Core, MC Frontalot, etc. This entire project is a way to show our culture to the world in a very real way.

RichM: Is there anything you want to reveal regarding the final 36 hours of revisions, right before the book went to print?

JS: When you read the book you will find some rather funny sayings or even perhaps a reference to Scooby Doo and Battlestar Galactica. I spent over 36 hours straight reviewing and putting final edits on the fictional story. After about the 27th hour, things got a little hazy and well you know how it goes when you're staring at your screen for that long...

RichM: What are your thoughts on the movie "Hackers" and its impact on the hacking community?

Author's Note: As Jayson and I both admitted, Hackers is a guilty pleasure. Jayson even confessed that he has it on his Ipad.

JS: You know with the 15th anniversary of Hackers this year, I think it is time for another movie which helps to re-define our culture, in a positive way. This time though, the people who were influenced by Hackers, now know better than to fall for the now obvious inaccuracies and poetic license that was taken. It has to be done right, so no you won't see inside the glowing towers of the Gibson or an accurate reflection of the screen on the face of the person looking at it. Because that is not real, and this will not be a glitzy Hollywood smoke and mirrors extravaganza. That being said I don't think there will be another movie quite like it. The reason is it just hit the right notes, corny one-liners, flying through computer systems and all.

RichM: Which character in Dissecting the Hack do you most identify with and why?

Author's Note: It was at this point in the interview where Jayson and I had our only disagreement regarding the book. I ultimately sided with him because he is the author, but to me Bob is the lead character, not Leon. I would like to hear from any of our reader's if they felt this way as well or if I completely misread the roles of each respective character.

JS: It has to be Bob, anybody who knows me, will see a lot of him in me or vice versa. I have always considered myself as the funny sidekick, not the lead role. Bob's elaborate lab, general paranoia and love of gadgets is all me. Though I have to admit each character is a partial reflection of me and my various personality traits.

RichM: Will there be additional books? Series?

JS: I will let everyone reading this know right now, YES there will be more books. Also, this is the first time I am making this publicly known... I have the storyline for the next 3 books. The epilogue in the 1st book of the Dissecting the Hack series, is the prologue for the 3rd one. The 4th book will be a reboot of the series with new lead characters (that were introduced in the 1st book). This book will serve as an introduction to the INFOSEC/Hacking scene, but with the latest techniques illustrating what has changed in the 7 years or so, since the 1st book was conceived. It will also have a STAR section (like all of the books in the series) and all techniques will be accurate.

RichM: What's next for Jayson E. Street?

JS: Lord if I only knew. ;) I have been playing this whole thing out by luck, hard work and the faith that, if I do what's right, I will be rewarded for it. So far so good, more or less. Regardless of what's in store for me, I hope I will keep learning and sharing what I learn. I am not ever going to be a big name INFOSEC guy or an expert at anything, but I hope that I will be known as someone who stays true to their word. I am always willing to help anyone who asks for help in the community

or IRL. Mainly, I hope to be seen as a guy who left this earth a little bit better than when I found it; and hopefully a few people along the way appreciate my efforts. I do know that after my father died in 2005, I have found myself driven to make something that lives past me. I started using my middle initial, because it was his first name. It reminds me that when I go, I want to leave something for others to see. Not just memories that fade but something that will show a little bit of what I was to others. Mainly I just want my son and daughter to know that I did my best, and that no matter how many mistakes I made in my past (and believe me I admit there are a lot of them), I always did my best to do what was right, even when it was not the easiest to do.

RichM: Thank you so much for your time and your openness.