



Precog's Blog

Category: Students

I have been Precog-ed (for life): Part 4

Holà! It's the first day of 2017. All of us just got done with looking back at the past year, trying to fathom how time flies and life metamorphosizes. My life has taken a leap too and this is my last blog as a part of the 'I have been Precog-ed' series.

Earlier, I have written about my first stint at research ([Part 1](#)), a wonderful summer at the [Information Sciences Institute](#) at Marina Delray, Los Angeles ([Part 2](#)), my first paper presentation at ICWSM 2016 in Germany ([Part 3](#)), and my time at Precog. This post is about the last 6 months of my journey and an attempt to express what being a Precog-er is all about (for more on this, please read the first three parts too). Being a Precog-er for more than 3 years, I have more thoughts than I can ever pen down; from being an undergrad who joined Precog as a noob to a grad student at Carnegie Mellon University, my path has always been illuminated by the light of learning and hope.

April 2016 – I was struggling with end-sem preparations, document processing and Visa applications for my trip to ICWSM and my masters in the States, and the humdrum undergrad life when an unexpected email got an unexpected reaction from me –

“Dear Megha,

We are pleased to inform you that **you have been selected** as an one of the 40 [CERN Openlab Summer Students 2016](#) (out of 1461 applicants)! For nine weeks, CERN will be your host for what we hope is going to be an interesting, fun and active summer...”

I have been an amateur astronomer for 9 years, and getting to work at the ‘Mecca of Particle Physics’ would have been a dream come true. I knew I wouldn’t be able to

make it. I was applying for my Schengen Visa for Germany (which would take another 2 weeks), and then I had to start my application for the US visa. I needed another Schengen Visa for Switzerland in a span of one week. On top of that, the only dates I could select for the internship were overlapping with my initial orientation schedule at CMU. I almost disrupted a meeting in PK's office to break the news to him. I was sad. Pillars (Ph.D. students at Precog) and PK were convinced that I should try and if it doesn't work out, so be it. That's a Precog trait – not giving up until you have given your best shot! After cutting short the duration of my summer at CERN, pushing CMU to allow me to skip the orientations (convincing them that I'll manage when I wasn't sure myself I'll), and getting my Schengen for Switzerland in a day (thanks to CERN's administrative staff who made a special request for me to the embassy), I was ready for a summer at CERN.

I worked for 2 months at CERN's data center on a storage system of ~125PB (one of the largest in the world). CERN openlab program includes a lecture series to help CS students understand the Physics needed for some of the projects, trips to ETH Zürich and EPFL Lausanne, hackathons, and several means to help the students gain insights about the revolutionary projects spanning across 100 hectares in Switzerland and more than 450 hectares in France! It was a humbling experience, which entailed learning something new every day. Europeans have nailed the work-life balance too. Along with finishing my project on time, I managed to check Geneva, Lausanne, Lyon, Zürich, Paris, Montreux, Bern, Engelberg, Chamonix and many more off my list!

Delhi for 2 days, and Pittsburgh was my next destination, my home for the next 16 months. I am an MSCS student at CMU now. Last to arrive and one of the youngest of the lot, thanks to PK I had ample of background knowledge about life as a student here and the city of Pittsburgh. The experience I have gained at Precog comes in handy when I have to identify research gaps and solve hard problems. I feel more equipped and confident to take up the challenges that come along with grad life at a school like CMU.

Throughout these 6 months (Jul – Dec 2016), I have been working with a few Precog-ers on what we now call the Killfie project. It has turned out to be one of the most exciting projects I have worked on as a part of the group. It is the inclination to work on interesting problems with some brilliant people, which gives me the motivation to find time for this amongst courses and projects at CMU.

I cannot finish this blog without revisiting these lines from my first blog – "...PK, the heart and brain of Precog. He is the coolest adviser I have ever met and his skills and dexterity at work are almost mind-boggling. I came to know him as my Probability and Statistics professor, the role changed to being my adviser working at Precog and now I see him as a mentor for life..". A lot of what I have been able to achieve in the

last 3 years, I owe it to PK's unconditional support. Thank you PK for illuminating my path always and for proving what good mentorship can accomplish! My time at Precog has taught me how to help people, make friends, eliminate distractions and focus, improve daily, think big, fail often and give nothing short of your very best effort! I have had last minute unscheduled video calls in the middle of the night from the other end of the world with Precog-ers when I needed help. Pillars, interns, RAs – thank you each one of you for this experience. Even though I live in a different time-zone now and my attendance at the 4th floor Ph.D. lab has been at an all-time low, I know my association with the group will last forever. As has been rightly put – 'Once a Precog-er, always a Precog-er!'.

PS – Some pictures...



Just another day at Precog...



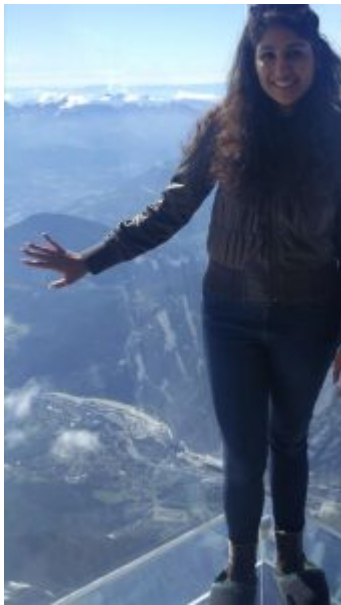
"It's all about the people!"



The room where Tim
Berners-Lee developed the
World Wide Web at CERN!



This one doesn't need a
caption... 😊



The Aiguille du Midi Skywalk,
"Step into the Void" at
Chamonix (altitude – 3842m)



CERN Openlab Summer Students 2016

📅 January 5, 2017 👤 megha_arora 📁 Experiences, Students, Uncategorized 💬 Leave a comment

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