How People Become Experts

I have a friend who is a computer science expert of sorts. But he wasn't always that way.

When he was young, the people around him threw up their hands when they encountered computer problems. They looked for someone to fix them.

At 11 years old, my friend was not a computer expert. He was just curious enough to want to try to fiddle around with computers. Over time, he became the go-to guy for anyone with computer problems at his school (including, I would assume, administrators).

He filled this de facto role enough and for long enough that he came into a career in computer science, in which he does this kind of work full time.

What I love about his story is that it illustrates how experts are often made.

They may not even start out with a goal of becoming experts. But they do repeatedly choose curiosity over passivity. Instead of throwing up their hands in the face of problems, they see those problems as invitations to exploration. When some people take course A, they take course B.

If they're going to be experts, they'll keep taking course B at every fork in the road. They gain experience, discipline, and reputation. Eventually they look up and they're experts.

Depending on how many times you choose curiosity in any given track – computers, hardware, building, gardening, painting, etc – you can either become an expert or become someone who relies on experts. There's no shame in either, but think about how you're reacting to problems. Your curiosity or passivity now will shape your future.