

The life of Lee Holloway: A genius coder robbed of his true self by a terrible disease.

A terrible disease transformed Lee Holloway from a brilliant, cheerful, and friendly coder into an emotionless, cold person, even towards his loved ones.

Lee Holloway is a genius coder. He single-handedly built Cloudflare's core technology, capable of handling 10% of the world's internet traffic and blocking billions of cyber threats daily. But he suffers from a terrible illness that causes him to lose his sense of self, becoming cold and incomprehensible even to those closest to him.

Wired recently published a fairly detailed article about Lee's life, and we have summarized the most important parts for your convenience.

One man built Cloudflare.

Lee grew up in Cupertino, and his father worked for Apple. He was exposed to computers from a young age and soon showed a higher aptitude than his peers. Lee possessed exceptional judgment and the ability to quickly read complex situations, but he wasn't necessarily a bookish or unapproachable person. He was very sociable with his friends and later colleagues.

During his time in college, Lee met Matthew Prince, a young investor. At the time, Prince wanted to create anti-spam software, and coincidentally, Lee and his classmates were working on a similar project with Professor Keller.

Later, in 2007, Prince suggested that Lee develop their system from one that could only track spammers into a system that could monitor and retaliate against spammers. Lee listened silently to Prince's presentation for an hour and simply replied, *"That sounds good, let's do it."*

In late 2009, Lee successfully wrote a demo version of the Cloudflare server system for Prince to use in his crowdfunding efforts. Lee's promising system secured Cloudflare a \$2 million grant, enough for them to rent a new office instead of working in Prince's basement.



Remarkably, that same year Cloudflare participated in the TechCrunch Disrupt startup competition. Before the presentation, Cloudflare's system was still riddled with bugs, and Lee was on extended leave due to persistent migraines. By the day of the competition, Lee had returned and immediately set to work on eliminating the bugs. While Prince took the stage to present, Lee was still working with his ten fingers on his ThinkPad laptop, nicknamed The Beast. Right on time for the software demonstration, Lee had cleaned up all the bugs, and the system was running smoothly.

Lee's efforts helped Cloudflare win second place overall in that year's TechCrunch Disrupt competition and gain 1,000 new customers. However, with success came strange behavior from Lee.

The terrible disease began to spread, but no one paid attention.

Starting in 2011, Alexandra—Lee's wife, whom he married in 2007—began to notice unusual behavior from Lee. Instead of playing with their son after work or eating meals with the family, Lee would order pizza to eat alone and fall asleep on the floor as soon as he got home. Lee refused to go out with friends and slept in a hotel room for three days during a family trip to France.

In 2012, Alexandra told Lee that she had an internship opportunity at NASA in Southern California and wanted to bring her child along. Lee gave a response that hurt Alexandra: "Get the divorce over with and then leave." They proceeded with their separation shortly afterward.

A few months after his divorce, Lee started seeing his colleague Kristin. They got along very well, and Kristin seemed to have succeeded in reviving Lee. He became more active, more athletic, and more sociable with friends and colleagues. They got engaged in Rome during a fun trip to Europe.



In late 2014, Cloudflare announced free encryption for websites participating in their system. At that time, encryption was still something of a novelty. Lee promised to complete everything necessary for encryption before October. Everyone was impatient while Lee did nothing; anyone who mentioned the security system was dismissed by Lee.

The day before the security system launched, Lee sat down at his desk and started coding. He was wearing a hooded hoodie, headphones, and his favorite loud rock music.

Lee's ten fingers glided across the keyboard continuously, his eyes glued to the screen. Late at night, Lee stood up and uttered a single word: *"Done ."* He leisurely drove home, much to the astonishment of his colleagues. The engineering team immediately checked Lee's code for bugs. By the next morning, the entire code was debugged, completely error-free, and the system was running smoothly.

Having finished their work, Lee and Kristin planned their wedding, and Lee also decided to address his health issues. Lee was diagnosed with aortic valve regurgitation and needed heart surgery. The surgery was successful, but it turned out to be a turning point that plunged Lee's life into despair and darkness.

A leaky heart valve is not a problem.

Lee and Kristin got married in Hawaii in June 2015, a few months after he underwent heart surgery. At that time, Lee's strange behaviors, which had appeared in 2012, returned.

After the wedding, the couple traveled to Europe once more. But this time, Lee didn't go with Kristin, leaving her to wander around exploring the neighborhoods on her own. Using the excuse of having recently undergone surgery and still suffering from migraines and heart problems, Lee stayed in his room and slept excessively.

Upon returning from his trip, Lee became uncooperative with everyone in the office. He frequently yelled at people during meetings and even openly played games on his phone during meetings. When Prince and co-founder Zatlun offered feedback, Lee simply promised to *"do better."*

But Prince and Zatlyn's efforts to keep Lee at the company failed because Lee remained unchanged. In 2016, they were forced to make the decision that Lee had to leave. Upon hearing the news, Lee simply said, "*Yeah, that sounds right.*"

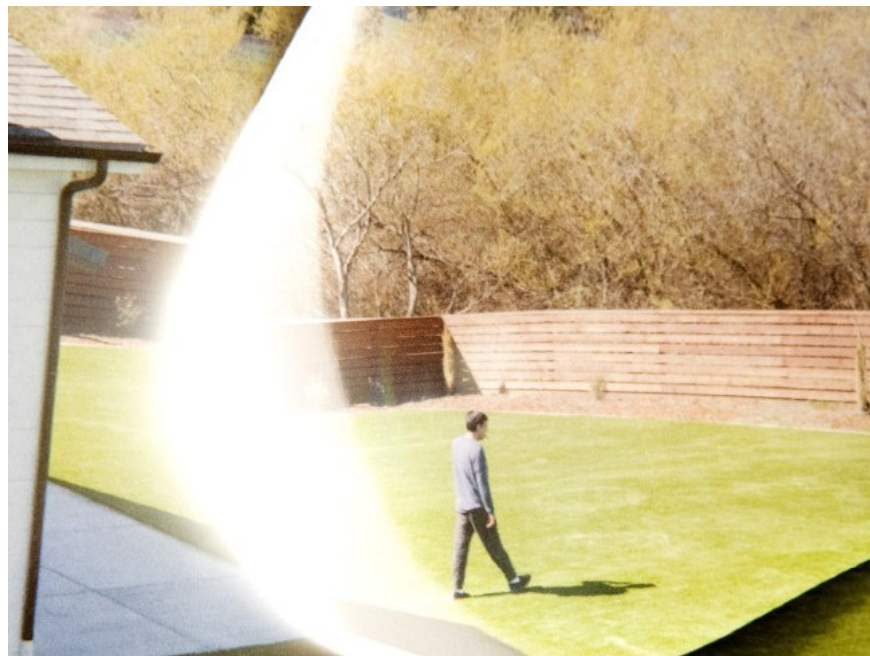
While unemployed, Lee slept frequently. He even slept for two days while Kristin was in the hospital giving birth. Sleeping at home wasn't enough; he slept excessively at the hospital and even argued with the doctors when he woke up. After the birth, Kristin questioned Lee about his behavior, to which he simply promised to "*do better.*"

Their family life wasn't good either, as Lee continued to sleep excessively and sometimes refused to eat. He also showed no interest in playing with their second son. Things continued to worsen, leading Kristin to consider taking Lee to see a psychiatrist.

A rare disease robbed the genius coder of his true self.

The MRI results showed that Lee had premature brain atrophy. For more specific results, the doctor advised Kristin and Lee to go to the Memory and Aging Center (UCSF) at UC San Francisco.

A few weeks later, at UCSF, the entire Lee family was present to hear the results. The UCSF neurology team concluded that Lee had vestibular-temporal dementia, or FTD for short. FTD attacks a range of brain regions and sometimes disrupts a person's self-awareness. As the disease progresses, it creates a completely different personality from what originally defined Lee; it reduces a person's ability to speak or alters their behavior, but does not affect their memory.



Lee was too young to have FTD, and worse, there was no cure for the condition. Doctors said that eventually Lee would lose the ability to speak and move, and he was advised to eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly. Lee received the information from the doctors calmly; he even complimented the wedding ring of a doctor sitting opposite him, showing no particular emotion.

It turns out that all of Lee's cold and incomprehensible behavior stemmed from the illness he was suffering from. FTD was like a monster, destroying Lee's personality and self, transforming him into a completely different person—heartless, indifferent, and cold even to those he loved most.

In 2019, Cloudflare successfully went public, and Lee became even wealthier. Kristin bought a spacious villa on the California coast for Lee and his family to live in. Kristin hoped her father-in-law, Rendon, could take Lee for walks on the beach. She also hired talented architects to transform the villa into a safe place for Lee to stroll around. The villa was planted with non-toxic, non-fruiting trees because doctors said there would come a time when Lee would have difficulty swallowing food.

Lee Holloway still lives in that mansion. However, he can no longer speak. Occasionally, he surprises his parents with gentle pats. He can still make phone calls, but he can't say anything.

Just a few months ago, Lee sent Kristin a series of text messages containing photos of their family at the park for Halloween not long ago. At the very bottom, Lee only wrote the words "*the love*"!

1. Genius hacker Jonathan James: Talented but lost.

You finished reading the article "**The life of Lee Holloway: A genius coder robbed of his true self by a terrible disease.**" edited by the [TipsMake](#) team. We hope this article has provided you with many useful tech tips and tricks. You can search for similar articles on tips and guides. Thank you for reading and for following us regularly.