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I hacked into a nuclear facility in the '80s. You're welcome.

By **Timothy Winslow**

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

As a teen, Timothy Winslow fell in love with exploring computer systems around the nation

When the FBI showed up, that exploration caused some trouble

Editor's Note: Timothy Winslow is a former member of a teen computer hacking group that operated out of Milwaukee in the 1980s. His story is detailed in "The 414s," a short film you can watch at CNN.com/shortfilms. Explore the '80s tech boom on "The Eighties" Thursday, May 5, 2016, on CNN.

(CNN) — I can't remember exactly when my teenage fascination with computers collided with the federal government, but I will never forget the morning in 1983 when two FBI agents showed up on my parents' doorstep.

I had gone to bed around 4 or 5 a.m. after spending hours on my computer, which was pretty common for me back then, at age 18.

A few hours later, my mom woke me up telling me there were a couple of men here to see me and that they said something about it being official or federal business. I had a slight fear this day would come, because only a couple of days earlier, I had a strange call from a friend asking me what I would do if we were visited by the police or some type of investigation team.

Two men sitting at my kitchen table pulled out badges and stated they were with the FBI. They said they needed to talk to me.

Let me start with a little history: I got my first taste of computers in the mid-1970s in junior high school. We had a teletype terminal that had been brought to our school with an acoustic modem attached. We were shown how it worked and some of us had a chance to do some math testing.

I did not get to use it the first time, but I stayed after school that evening to see if I could get a chance to try it out. The teacher dialed into the central office computer, logged in and started the math program.

I felt like a new world opened for me. For the first time in my life, I saw something that made me imagine what I wanted to do when I grew up.

That junior high school computer math program lead me to computer classes Explorer Scout group sponsored by IBM.

For the next couple of years I built a friendship with a group of people who ha closer than others. We would play with computers at school, in Explorer Scou home.

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PHOTOS: How the Sony hack unfolded

Finally in 1982, I bought r already had computers a got my own. I purchased friend's basement. At the 309 baud Smartmodem.

I used my computer and modem to log onto electronic bulletin board systems, or BBS, and create more friendships and acquaintances. We were a curious group and we were eager to learn more and more about the different computers made and how they worked.

We ended up getting into about a dozen computer systems -- from the Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York to a major international bank system in Los Angeles to the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, one of only two U.S. laboratories dedicated to nuclear weapons research.

We were really just looking around and playing games on these systems; we didn't want to harm anything. This was pretty easy because computers back then were built with a basic set of login information, all of it written in the manuals. We didn't see any harm in it.

We would share information with each other about any particularly interesting system we connected to and, when we got together for Explorers, we'd talk about exploring, not harming systems.

At some point, we started calling our group the "4-1-4s," a name we came up with after hanging out at a local park. We noticed etchings on the tables with numbers like 1-9 and 2-7, gang signatures that came from the streets where they operated. Since we all lived in the Milwaukee area, we more or less jokingly gave ourselves the gang name of 414s for the Milwaukee area code.

As the months went on, we started to notice issues staying connected with our modems for any length of time.

Then, the FBI showed up at my home.

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Remember, back then home computers were very new, so there were no computer hacking laws. After about a year of back and forth with the FBI, three of us were eventually charged under a federal provision against harassing phone calls, which carried a maximum of six months in prison and a $500 fine each.

As I sat before the judge with my lawyer, he asked why he should not give me prison time. I had recently met the love of my life and we were expecting our first child. So I explained that I would like to be around to see the birth of my baby and live a happy and normal family life.

The judge agreed to a plea deal with a stipulation that I could not own a modem during the time I remained on probation. Under the deal, we were charged with misdemeanors that carried two years' probation and a $500 fine. Our records would be expunged und

Today, more than 30 years later, I'm still fascinated by computers: I'm employe home, I tinker around on about half a dozen computers. Oh, and I'm still marri

The things that we did set the stage for more than just our personal career pa laws that are still on the books for computer crime and password safety. It ma working partially in security knowing that, in a way, what we did as a group m are still lots of issues with people using simple passwords, companies leaving massive amounts of computing power available to work on decoding and bre

We could have caused some damage to these companies and many were su and played games. Today, hacking is a whole different world.

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