CSE 333
Lecture 21 -- fork, pthread_create

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HW4 is due Thursday night

<panic> if you haven’t started yet </panic>

Usual late days apply if you have any left

Final exam Wednesday, June 10, 8:30 am here

Overview/review in sections this week

Last minute Q&A Tuesday, June 9, 4:30 pm, EEB 045
Some common HW4 bugs

Your server works, but is really really slow

  check the 2nd argument to the QueryProcessor constructor

Funny things happen after the first request

  make sure you’re not destroying the HTTPConnection object too early (e.g., falling out of scope in a while loop)

Server crashes on blank request

  make sure you handle the case that read( ) [or WrappedRead] returns 0
Previously

We implemented hw3 searchserver, but it was sequential

it processed requests one at a time, in spite of client interactions blocking for arbitrarily long periods of time

this led to terrible performance

Servers should be concurrent

process multiple requests simultaneously

issue multiple I/O requests simultaneously

overlap the I/O of one request with computation of another

utilize multiple CPUs / cores
Today

We’ll go over three versions of searchserver

sequential

concurrent

processes [ fork( ) ]

threads [ pthread_create( ) ]

Alternative (which we won’t get to): non-blocking, event driven version

non-blocking I/O [ select( ) ]

Reference: Computer Systems: A Programmer’s Perspective

351 textbook, good source for process/thread/OS ideas
Sequential

look at `searchserver_sequential/`

```plaintext
listen_fd = Listen(port);

while(1) {
    client_fd = accept(listen_fd);
    buf = read(client_fd);
    resp = ProcessQuery(buf);
    write(client_fd, resp);
    close(client_fd);
}
```
Whither sequential?

Benefits

- super simple to build

Disadvantages

- incredibly poorly performing
- one slow client causes all others to block
- poor utilization of network, CPU
fork()

`pid_t fork(void);`

Fork is used to create a new process (the “child”) that is an exact clone of the current process (the “parent”)

everything is cloned (except threads)

all variables, file descriptors, open sockets, etc.

the heap, the stack, etc.

primarily used in two patterns

servers: fork a child to handle a connection

shells: fork a child, which then exec’s a new program
fork() and address spaces

Remember this picture...?

a process executes within an **address space**

the address space includes:

- a stack (for stack frames)
- heap (for dynamically allocated data)
- text segment (containing code)
- etc.

```
0xFFFFFFFF
  OS kernel [protected]
    stack
    shared libraries
    heap (malloc/free)
      read/write segment
        .data, .bss
    read-only segment
      .text, .rodata
```

SP
PC
0x00000000
Fork causes the OS to clone the address space, creating a brand new process. The new process starts life as a copy the old process in (nearly) every way. The copies of the heap, stack, text segment, etc. are (nearly) identical. The new process has copies of the parent’s data structures, stack-allocated variables, open file descriptors, and so on.
fork() has peculiar semantics

the parent invokes fork()
the operating system clones the parent

both the parent and the child return from fork

parent receives child’s pid
child receives a “0” as pid
fork( )

fork( ) has peculiar semantics

the parent invokes fork( )

the operating system clones the parent

**both** the parent and the child return from fork

parent receives child’s pid

child receives a “0” as pid
fork( )

fork( ) has peculiar semantics

the parent invokes fork( )
the operating system clones the parent

both the parent and the child return from fork

parent receives child’s pid
child receives a “0” as pid
fork()
Concurrency with processes

The **parent** process blocks on **accept**(), waiting for a new client to connect

when a new connection arrives, the parent calls **fork**() to create a **child** process

the child process handles that new connection, and **exit**()’s when the connection terminates

Remember that children become “zombies” after death

option a) parent calls **wait**() to “reap” children

option b) use the double-fork trick
Graphically

server
Graphically

client

server
Graphically

client

server

connect
Graphically

client

server

fork() child

server
Graphically

client

server

server

server

fork() grandchild
Graphically

client ➔ server ➔ child exit()’s  /  parent wait()’s

server ➔ server
Graphically

parent closes its client connection
Graphically

client → server

server

server
Graphically

client → server
server
server
server
client
fork() child
fork() grandchild
exit()
Graphically

```
client  →  server

server  →  server

client  →  server
```
Graphically
Concurrent with processes

look at `searchserver_processes`
Whither concurrent processes?

Benefits

- almost as simple as sequential
  - in fact, most of the code is identical!
- parallel execution; good CPU, network utilization

Disadvantages

- processes are heavyweight
  - relatively slow to fork
  - context switching latency is high
- communication between processes is complicated
How slow is fork?

run forklatency.cc
Implications?

**0.25 ms** per fork

maximum of \((1000 / 0.25) = 4,000\) connections per second per core

~0.5 billion connections per day per core

fine for most servers

too slow for a few super-high-traffic front-line web services

Facebook serves \(O(750\) billion) page views per day

would need 3,000 -- 6,000 cores just to handle fork(), i.e., without doing any work for each connection!
Threads are like lightweight processes

like processes, they execute concurrently

multiple threads can run simultaneously on multiple cores/CPUs

unlike processes, threads cohabit the same address space

the threads within a process see the same heap and globals

threads can communicate with each other through variables

but, threads can interfere with each other: need synchronization

each thread has its own stack
threads and the address space

Pre-thread create

one thread of execution running in the address space

the “main” thread

therefore, one stack, SP, PC

that main thread invokes a function to create a new thread

typically “pthread_create( )”
threads and the address space

Post-thread create

two threads of execution running in the address space

the “main” thread (parent)

the child thread

thus, two stacks, SPs, PCs

both threads share the heap and text segment (globals)

they can cooperatively modify shared data
threads

see thread_example.cc
Concurrent server with threads

A single **process** handles all of the connections

but, a parent **thread** forks (or dispatches) a new thread to handle each connection

the child thread:

- handles the new connection
- exits when the connection terminates
Graphically

accept()
Graphically
Graphically
Graphically

client

server

pthread_create()
Graphically
Graphically
Graphically
Concurrent with threads

look at searchserver_threads/
Whither concurrent threads?

Benefits

straight-line code

still the case that much of the code is identical to sequential!

parallel execution; good CPU, network utilization

lower overhead than processes

shared-memory communication is possible

Disadvantages

synchronization is complicated

shared fate within a process; one rogue thread can hurt you badly
How fast is pthread_create?

run threadlatency.cc
Implications?

0.036 ms per thread create; ~10x faster than process forking

- maximum of \((1000 / 0.018) = \approx 60,000\) connections per second
- ~10 billion connections per day per core
  
  much better

But, writing safe multithreaded code can be serious voodoo
Thread Pools

In real servers we’d like to avoid overhead needed to create a new thread or process for every request

Idea: thread pools

Create a set of worker threads or processes on server startup, put them in a queue

When a request arrives, remove the first worker thread from the queue and assign it to handle the request

When a worker is done it places itself back on the queue and then sleeps until dequeued and handed a new request
Threads and races

What happens if two threads try to mutate the same data structure?

they might interfere in painful, non-obvious ways, depending on the specifics of the data structure

imagine if two threads try to push an item onto the head of the linked list at the same time

depending on how the threads interleave, you might end up with a correct answer, or you might break the data structure altogether
Simple “race” example

If no milk, buy some more

- liveness: if out, somebody buys
- safety: at most one person buys

What happens with multiple threads?

```c
if (!milk) {
    buy milk
}
```
Simple “race” example

Does this fix the problem?

```java
if (!note) {
    if (!milk) {
        leave note
        buy milk
        remove note
    }
}
```
Synchronization

Synchronization is the act of preventing two (or more) concurrently running threads from interfering with each other when operating on shared data.

Need some mechanism to coordinate the threads

“let me go first, then you go”

Many different coordination mechanisms have been invented

Take CSE451 for details
Locks

lock acquire
wait until the lock is free, then take it

lock release
release the lock
if other threads are waiting for it
wake up exactly one of them
give it the lock

simplifies concurrent code
prevents more than one thread from entering a critical section
Simple “race” solution

What is the critical section?
- checking for milk
- buying more milk if out

These two steps must be uninterrupted, i.e., atomic

solution: protect the critical section with a lock

```c
milk_lock.lock()
if (!milk) {
    buy milk
}
milk_lock.unlock()
```
pthreads and locks

pthread_mutex_init( )
  creates a mutex (a.k.a. a lock)

pthread_mutex_lock( )
  grabs the lock

pthread_mutex_unlock( )
  releases the lock

see lock_example.cc
C++ 11 Threads

C++ 11 added threads and concurrency to the libraries

- `<thread>` - thread objects
- `<mutex>` - locks to handle critical sections
- `<condition_variable>` - used to block objects until notified to resume
- `<atomic>` - indivisible, atomic operations
- `<future>` - asynchronous access to data

Might be built on top of `<pthread.h>`, maybe not

Definitely use in C++ 11 code, but pthread will still be around for a long, long time
Exercise 1

Write a simple “proxy” server

- forks a process for each connection
- reads an HTTP request from the client
  - relays that request to www.cs.washington.edu
- reads the response from www.cs.washington.edu
  - relays the response to the client, closes the connection

Try visiting your proxy using a web browser :)
Exercise 2

Write a client program that:

- loops, doing “requests” in a loop. Each request must:
  - connect to one of the echo servers from the lecture
  - do a network exchange with the server
  - close the connection
- keeps track of the latency (time to do a request) distribution
- keeps track of the throughput (requests / s)
- prints these out
See you on Friday!