My high school did our senior project a bit differently. Each student got to pick the career that they wanted to go into and the school supported their interest in finding a company to shadow for that position. The field that I had chosen, due to my family’s background in physics and engineering, was Civil Engineering. What I didn’t know, though, is if I really wanted to do it for myself, or just to make the people around me happy with my success.

My parents are not the kind to hold me to my siblings or expect me to follow any path besides the one I want. They always encouraged me so long as I was putting my best foot forward and putting effort in anything that I chose to do. However, I felt an amount of pressure from myself. I could not allow myself to pick something just because it was easy or so that I could say I did. I needed something that would challenge me so that I could challenge it. I held myself to this standard in trying to find what I wanted to do. Marine biology was on the forefront of my mind for a long time, as well as computer science and design. I concluded that biology and computers were two interests that I should keep as fun in my life. Engineering, however, was a perfect alternative to look into.

I had first become interested in the field thanks to my brother, Kris. He was working on his Master’s in Civil at OSU after receiving a Bachelor’s at BSU and would frequently play online games with me to stay in touch. As we did so, he would tell me about the lectures he had attended or the work he had done that day, and it had caught my eye. I don’t remember many specifics from our conversations, but I do remember my brother regaling tales about pre-stressed concrete, and how it was stronger for bridge design in certain areas and weaker in others. I also remember learning about his program itself, and how he had specialized in Wood Chemistry in order to learn more about the old wooden bridges of the 20th century and how best to maintain or replace them.

By the time I had to think about what I wanted to start doing for a career, two years after my brother had graduated from OSU, this memory had stayed at the forefront of my mind. I committed myself to discovering if Civil Engineering would truly be my passion. What better to challenge myself than something that I knew challenged my siblings? If it made me happy, it would make those around me happy too. I emailed over ten companies local to Boise, and by the next day, I had received a reply from Jason Mumford, a local EIT at TD&H Engineering. We set up a schedule to shadow him for 2 hours a day for 20 days.  
On the 6th day of this shadowing with the engineer, Jason, I remember a perfect and vivid scene that would determine the path I would set for myself in life. I was sitting in a cool office, breathing in fresh air and feeling the sunlight beam through the windows and warm my skin. I held my heavy metal bottle between my hands, fidgeting with the handle on the lid. The office was in Meridian, Idaho. The experience was surreal–one that I knew would be once in a lifetime–yet it felt so normal to me. Was this calm setting the adult life I would find myself in?

Jason casually buzzed away on his computer, answering messages on his office’s phone via email and making his own emails to request more information from a town that he was working on a water tank facility for. I sat to his right, taking notes and intently watching this alien program that I’d never once seen in my life. He spoke to me casually, as if I had been a lifelong friend along with him for the journey. Whether it was reciting stories about games we play, talking about the characters we would write for Dungeons & Dragons, talking about our education and our daily lives, or even just the weather outside, I felt at peace for the first time. It felt natural to be thinking about this work, to be happy, to feel like this was where I would belong.

Then, about halfway through the day, it came time for my interview with his boss, who was also the owner of that branch of TD&H Engineering. His boss, Mike, was an older man who had been a professional engineer for decades and seen the world change time and again. I sat down in their conference room for an hour and a half long interview with him about his thoughts on this career and the life it comes with. The conference room itself was a silent and large room at the center of the small building. The table had room for 12, but being the only 2, we sat next to each other. I used my kindle tablet to set up and record the interview to include in my senior project at a later date. He made no glorifications and cast no aspersions on the career, but rather he told the truth. More than anything it seemed real, like an honest truth, and it made me confident and happy with who I was and what I was going for.

Coming back from that interview and sitting back down with Jason, I saw everything in a different light. I understood now why talking with him felt natural and why being there felt right. I understood that I wasn’t just looking at Civil Engineering for my family, or for my friends to be happy with me, but rather I was looking at it because even though it is hard, Civil Engineering is a path in life that makes me happy. It allows me to be who I am and allows me to be real just like Mike in the interview.

I left that day refreshed, with renewed zeal to reach my goals and to become an engineer for myself, not just for the people around me. From this day and from the experience of being able to learn through a job shadow senior project, I learned an important lesson that sometimes going with the flow and watching where it takes myself is ok. It reminded me of one of my favorite quotes in life from *Destiny 2*, “There will always be paths to tread and methods to try. Roll with it.” Essentially, don’t always get caught up on where you are going to be, just look at where you are and go with where the river of life is going to take you.