I found my passion/zeal for computer science in a rather unconventional way. In elementary school I remember our teacher giving us challenge puzzles to solve on Friday afternoons when the day’s work was done. One day our teacher presented us with a puzzle so hard that it hurt my little brain just thinking about it. This puzzle was the Towers of Hanoi, and it was my favorite because I couldn’t find an obvious answer. To explain it briefly, a pyramid shaped stack of disks each one smaller than the other as it ascends needs to be moved according to a specific set of rules.

Confident in my abilities, we revisited the puzzle the next week but sadly my dreams were crushed. I quickly realized that I actually had little idea of what I was doing to unravel/decipher the seemingly simple game and struggled mightily in many attempts to solve it.

Years later, I found myself faced with the exact same conundrum in college as a challenge problem my friends and I were tackling for fun. The problem seemed vaguely familiar to me, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. However, when working through the problem in Java, insight eventually flooded through and once I got the program to work I realized it was the same Towers of Hanoi that fascinated me as a child. Only now I was able to wrap my head around it and understand it at its most fundamental level.

That “thinkering” is what I found I live for. That “thinkering” is what set the gears of my mind in motion and put me into a problem-solving mindset. That “thinkering” is what shifted my brain into overdrive to understand the complexity of the puzzle.

I found the brainstorming, drafting, writing, debugging, and analyzing process that went into creating this program was extremely rewarding and eye opening. Taking the rules and game mechanics of the Towers and reconstructing them in code from the ground up is what solidified computer science for me. It was like building the puzzle the same time I was solving it and invited me into a way of thinking that forced/persuaded me to consider the minute details and overall picture simultaneously.

Computer science is about the imaginative yet logical mindset that it compels me to adopt. From being able to analyze a question to find the best possible solution or approach, breaking down a problem to its most basic elements, or to even how to better efficiently handle my work and day to day life, the mindset has helped me in a myriad of ways.

I would not have attained this mentality if it wasn’t for the ethos of computer science and the main reason why I will pursue it.

In addition to the mindset, another major reason why I gravitate towards computer science is the “creation” aspect of it. There is something about turning an idea into reality that galvanizes me to learn as much as I can and practice every day.

I consistently ponder about how I can combine all the tools at my disposal to create something that could potentially change the world. It may sound cliché, but it really is the truth in a lot of ways. Much like a painter with his paintbrush, all a computer scientist needs are time and/ is a computer to make their masterpiece. For me that could be my fashion app that I am currently developing that would help people categorize their wardrobe, build outfits, and plan out their fashion goals. For me that could be analyzing traffic data about Chicago and gaining new insights on the average commute of CTA riders each day.

Going hand in hand with this, the impact and reach of the field is what also attracts me to it. I absolutely love the fact that the applications and products one can build with computer science has the power to touch/reach millions instantaneously and have a direct effect in people's lives. From cybersecurity to game engines, computer science I believe can be used to have a real and lasting impact on the world.

Lastly the versatility of computer science pulls me toward it. I view it as being “flexible” but in the sense that later down the line I can explore and innovate in other fields. I can go into the medical field and make a program that helps regulate a patient's breathing or conversely go into personal finance and help people budget and determine trends in their spending. In essence, it gives me the autonomy of choice.

I have met with computer scientists and people who work in tech to gain insight on the industry and the work that they do. This along with my own research/readings has led me to find many of the characteristics that are universal among computer scientists are also present in me. Patience, determination, deep critical thinking, and problem solving are some of the attributes I embody and take to heart on a daily basis. From their accounts, the responsibilities that they have are matters that I am genuinely interested in and see myself doing. I see myself building a website in which people can publish their artistic work, developing a government platform in which families can sign up for social benefits, or even founding the next big social media network. Projects like these excite me and are spaces where I can utilize my skills to bring about positive/forge positive/give life to positive/envision positive innovations.

In a field like computer science, I have learned from those in the field that teamwork in the workplace is essential. Even though I get satisfaction from working independently, I really enjoy working with others and collaborating to find the best ideas.

My passion and ambition for computer science makes me confident in the fact that not only am I right for computer science, but computer science is right for me.