Dear Diary,

I’m writing this entry while underneath the cover of the the computer science building on campus. It’s pouring rain next to me. There’s a distant alarm going off from one of the CSL labs (as per usual). There are people walking back and forth around me, to and from their classes. Most are covered by rain jacket hoods or umbrellas. Others are covered with their phone screens or headphones. I was about to do homework, but instead I thought it would be a good time for some self-reflection because I’ve had a lot of thoughts lately, and it might help me work through them by writing them down and trying to make sense of them.

I think recently I’ve been struggling a lot with motivation. Less so the motivation to actually get out of bed and go to class and do homework (I’ve actually been doing really well with that). But more so a sense of purpose. I feel like I’m going through so many motions in life and taking so many classes and learning so many things, but what is my purpose? One of the things we’ve been talking about in my computer ethics class is this idea of software engineering as a “Calling”. I definitely didn’t start my career as a software engineer because I thought it was my calling. There’s no way I was even close to that thought. I did it because my parents and brother pushed me to go into this career. I did it because of the financial prospects. I did it because I didn’t know what I wanted to do anyway, so why not try something that will allow me to be financially secure and employable for my life?

Recently I think my views have shifted. After learning about technologies like CRISPR and discussing AI and SuperAI, I think I’m starting to feel this moral obligation towards society to help create these technologies in an ethical way. I’m starting to think of my studies as my moral imperative rather than just a means to an end (financially). But it’s a stressful thought. What if I don’t make the right choices and get into the right fields so that I can make the changes I want to see? What if it’s too late for me to actually make a difference by the time I enter the workforce (when I’m done actually graduating and travelling like I want to do)? I feel like I should feel more of a sense of purpose now that I have this underlying moral responsibility driving me towards a calling. But if anything it is just making me question my purposes. Why am I taking Chemistry? Why am I spending so much money on classes in college? Why am I so concerned about a sport? Why does any of that matter in the context of the inevitable AI revolution? How can I choose to focus on one thing or find purpose in the things that might have actually been more of my “Calling” when I have such a moral obligation to make software engineering my calling? I see the people around me so excited and so driven towards an end goal. So many people know what they want to do in the workforce or where they want to end up or at least what field they want to end up in. They are working towards that goal. Even on a smaller scale, the team winning against Santa Barbara and going to Nationals. That was amazing for our team. That was an amazing accomplishment for me as a leader to have helped make that happen. But I didn’t feel like it was as big of a deal as I normally would have in the past. Why do so many people worship and idolize the outcomes of sports and games? What is the bigger purpose for this? These thoughts may seem like they come from “high Jessie” or that I am just questioning too many things, but why don’t people question these things more often?

I used to feel an intense drive to graduate, that seems to be faltering. I used to feel an intense drive to win every water polo game, though I do still feel this I think I am starting to enjoy the journey much more than the results. I used to feel an intense drive to be a good musician, but I just don’t have time to pursue that goal in the way that I would have liked to anymore. What drives me? Why am I doing what I do every day?

I say that I want to travel the world and meet people, but why do I want to do this? Is it so when I’m in my 30’s I can say that I experienced those things and make sure I have no regrets at that point in my life? Or is it because I actually want to experience those things for myself and to grow from them? I hope that it’s the latter and not the former.

I guess recently I’ve just started to wonder if I’m only doing the things that I do to try and please others or to have the ability to say that I did something. I’m trying to figure out what actually drives me as an individual in what I do.

What if the purpose to life though is just to do what you enjoy and what you as a person are inherently best at? If that’s the case then I feel like I shouldn’t be a software engineer. I’m not saying that I’m bad, I’ve actually gotten quite good. But I’m so worried that becoming a software engineer for me will just allow me to become the next cog on the wheel of the computer science industry. It’s the choices that I make now that will determine whether I become a cog or do something meaningful with my work.

It’s weird to say these things. I’m almost cringing while writing them because it doesn’t feel like me. I’ve always been so extra motivated and determined and goal driven. I know that I still am. But it’s different when I put my goals into a broader perspective. It doesn’t make sense to me to have small-scale goals anymore. I need to set larger goals for myself so that I have a drive an and end goal to strive for every day.

What is the point of being in a relationship? What is the point of being single? What is the point of furthering certain friend relationships that may end soon? What is the point of not furthering friend relationships that could last forever?

Am I actually a good person? Or have I just been a regular person who attempts to do good deeds for my own selfish reasons? (The selfish reason being that I want to be identified as a good person and that I want good karma for myself so that good things happen to me).

How can I become a truly good person?

I think I am feeling a little bit lost in this world. I know that it’s normal and perfectly okay to feel that way. As I take more classes and feel myself becoming more intelligent, I feel more cognitive dissonance in my brain over these things every day.

**Who do I want to be? But more importantly, why do I want to be that person?**

I think those are the two main questions I need to keep asking myself throughout my life. I obviously also will need to ask “how do I become that person”. But as my fellow ethicist Langdon Winner would argue, *it’s more important to ask why than to ask how.*

I think I have quite a bit of reflection to do.

Until next time,

Jessie J. Smith

Age 20