Oh boy. This sort of thing. I’ll try to make it coherent.

I’ve always been sort of a troublemaker, I feel. Doesn’t really seem like it, I know, but it’s true. As a kid, I’d get into a ton of mishaps. Sometimes intentional, sometimes on accident. How it happened varied, of course. Sometimes I’d be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Other times it would be because I talked when I should’ve kept my mouth shut. But most of the time, it would be because of my curiosity. A curiosity that made me wonder how things worked, how they functioned. How they would come to be, and all that. And in my curious endeavors, I would attempt to take things apart. And of course, clumsy as I was, they would break. I feel that’s how it is for the way I approached the course this semester as well: I would end up breaking things, or things would backfire.

I’ve taken CS taken 101, the easy beginner class. There wasn’t any issue there. When I took Intro to Programming two semesters ago, I had to drop it because I absolutely could not use Java. My code would break, and I couldn’t learn at the same pace the other students were learning because I was too focused on my missteps instead of my potential. Going into this class, I expected the worst. I expected to stumble, I expected my mind to wander, I *expected* to fail.

My head is a cacophony of ideas, both good and bad. I’m an active thinker, but *doing* things is another thing entirely. No, I wouldn’t say I’m lazy. I can try to do things for any class, not just CS or ISAT. If I get stuck and struggle, I’ll get frustrated. I’d say this is natural for a lot of students, sure. For me, however, it’s a little different. It’s been drilled into my head for 20 years now that I’m some kind of whizz kid, some kind of boy genius because I seemed above average in high school. My parents said so, my teachers said so, even my boss expected me to go to some kind of Ivy league school (Stanford to be specific). There’s just been so much pressure I’ve developed a bit of anxiety and depression, because I’ll never be able to live up to those standards. My personal philosophy is to live the best life for myself, helping people along the way. But at the same time, I can’t do that if I’m not trying my best.

But what is my best?

The least I could do was attempt to not fail as hard, of course. That was a start. Of course I wanted to pass, everyone wants to pass, but I didn’t think it was in my ability to do so. That was my first goal. My second goal, once I realized it was open ended, I would learn and get proficient in *one* language, to start. I didn’t want it to be Java, because that didn’t seem written in the stars. I had the most experience with Python at the time (which wasn’t that much, give or take), so I would start there. In addition, I had planned to code a little every week, no matter what. My mentality going into IT would be that if I put more time into it, and took it slow, I would have a better experience with it. I *wanted* to go into IT, because it was a field my parents knew nothing about, so they couldn’t chastise me for not understanding, because in truth, they didn’t understand, either. Looking back onto it, it seemed like I wasn’t coding for myself, nor coding 4 my life (get it? Like the website, heh). It was coding because I was tired of being yelled at my parents. We weren’t the richest off, and I was the third child out of the four of us in total. My dad worked to the bone and *promised* us that we had the right to four years of college, all expenses paid from he and my mother. I felt like it was my responsibility to do well, in that case. I would have to put childish things away, grit my teeth, put my friends on hold and do my best in every class I could. And in a way, because I wasn’t doing it out of love, I had stripped myself of a part of me.

And so I would code. I struggled at first, but I would follow along with class, making the various assigned programs (like Fizzbuzz and Hello, World). I’d spend an hour and 30 minutes every other day, just scrolling through the website and engrossing myself with code and whatnot. And I’ll be honest, sometimes I had no idea about what I was looking at. And still, I couldn’t bring myself to ask. Personally, I have a terrible time with asking for help, because I’ve always felt it made me inferior, stupid, not good enough. Struggling with that concept already, I would much rather force myself to figure it out, no matter how hard it seemed. Because of this, I’ve ended up going over my time limit I set for myself, struggling with what now seem like simple concepts.

Once the semester shifted to virtual sessions, at first, I had no idea what to do. I remembered my original goal of getting proficient in a language, so I would follow the same method as I had done before and jumped into Codeacademy sessions for Python, following tutorials and coding for the sake of coding. Because of the way things were, it didn’t feel right.

At first, coding wasn’t that big of a priority. The pressure wasn’t as high as it was when I was on campus, definitely. I took a more laid-back approach as I re-learned how to do if, else statements and loops, assigning variables and printing text. Very chill, very relaxed.

At least it was, until I learned of a grave development. One of my friends had a death in the family because of COVID-19, his aunt. That in turn lead to the death of their aunt’s son, as well as the husband. It was as if that part of the family had never existed in the first place; erased from the history of the earth. For the next few days, I wouldn’t code. I wouldn’t do much of anything, really, as my brain wrestled with a ton of terrifying ideas. It was unfair. He didn’t do anything to deserve it, and I’m sure his family didn’t, either. Why did it happen? Why was life so cruel?

And perhaps worst of all, *what if it had been my family, instead?*

It was enough to bring me to tears, and I’m not afraid to admit I had broken down that night, crying for people I didn’t even know that well and the consequences it would have on my friend. At the same time, I had gotten an idea, something that would fill me with conviction. I knew what I would do, and I would, well, code 4 my life.

My new goal was clear. I would make something topical, of my own invention. I browsed reddit for some tips, browsed the CDC’s website, and I used Stack Overflow as well for a more refined way to position my code in the latest version of Python. The result was a COVID-19 risk level questionnaire/calculator, a program I finished all on my own. I wouldn’t say it’s anything special, but I put a lot of effort into it, working on it day after day, rewriting it, remembering *why* I was writing it, starting it from scratch, you get the picture. In a way, my view on code changed. I might’ve been writing it because of my friend’s sake, but I was also writing it for myself. My original reason to take the class had been changed altogether. It wasn’t to spite my parents, it was writing to cope with loss, writing because I needed a way to vent my sorrows. Writing because if I didn’t, no one else would.

And… I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it a lot, more than anything I had done in a while. I was lost in my own little world, writing because I needed someone to listen to me. That someone was of course, myself, and I make a pretty good audience, as it turns out.

In that sense I was successful. I managed to crack out a piece of code of my own design, and it related to current events. I also managed to achieve the goal of being proficient enough to write a competent program in a language, so I suppose that makes me proficient in Python somewhat. That’s good, I’d wager.

On the opposite, I managed to misstep as well. Did I code every week? To be honest, I failed in that department. I failed hard. There would be multiple days in a row where I thought to myself, “I really need to be coding right now,” but my body refused to muster up the energy to do so. Like I said, coding was low priority. And in a way, my attitude at the beginning of the semester was also a bit of a failure. Why would I take a course if I didn’t believe I would do well to begin with? Why even spend the money and put the burden on my parents, just so I can be a dumb kid and not give it my all, 100% of my willpower into a course? At the beginning, I didn’t really believe I would achieve much of anything. And some of that still lingers, it hasn’t completely gone. I’ll admit, every now and then it creeps up in my mind and the depression hits hard, multiple days at a time.

And yet, from these failures I don’t feel anger. I don’t feel as frustrated anymore. I’ve learned that it’s alright to feel this way. Everyone gets this way from time to time, and I learned that I’ve got a passion that burns bright. I just can’t let the bad vibes win. I’ve got people who have my back, and it’s okay to ask for help, even at a professional level. No man’s an island, after all. I learned from my missteps that my parents aren’t the bad guys, either. Although we butt heads from time to time, I can’t write them off because I feel like they’re antagonistic. They want me to succeed, and I’m old enough to tell them how I feel. I haven’t told my parents about my depression, and I plan on doing that sometime in the future.

I feel more educated, I suppose. Enlightened? Nah, I don’t feel enlightened. That’s something I’ll have to find on my own, without anyone’s support. It’s all individual. However, I do feel like even with this strange situation we’ve found ourselves in, I managed to get to know myself a little better. I know my limits, but if I keep pushing, they’ll break. That’s a good thing, because once you break your limits, you can do anything. And, like I said before, I’m good at breaking things.

Do I enjoy coding? Over the semester, my love for it has grown exponentially. When I put on my headphones and start making variables, it’s like I’m digging into that imagination of mine that I had mentioned earlier, jumping into that cacophony of ideas, both good and bad. The odd semester actually furthered my path on what I want to do in the future. It’s a bit clearer, I feel. First and foremost, I’m going to learn more languages, challenging myself. I can do whatever I put my mind to, continuing to push my limits until I break through. Information Technology was my main field, but now I would like to study some biotech, as well. I only want the best for people, so if I manage to excel in both fields… maybe instead of breaking things, I’ll mend something together for once.

As for grades… I would like an A. An A-, an A+, I don’t really mind. This semester can be analogized as a caterpillar breaking from its cocoon and turning into a butterfly, and I feel like that was me. My love for coding is steadfast, now that I’ve spent more time in it . I’m not going to ever give it up, not for anyone or anything. It’s my second life, my home away from home, something more than just a hobby.

My first name is Nigerian, derived from the Igbo tribe. It means “God has done well.” I’m not God, and I’ll never be. I think my best is still to come, but for now? Yeah, I think I’ve done well.