

Matters of the Heart

There are several events in life when we need to make decisions that are truly important. From my own experiences throughout my twenty something years of living, I can say that the one lesson in life that I have always been keeping true with is that which I first heard from my mom. Follow your heart.

It all started one afternoon when a very huge American guy asked me about my dreams for the future. The husband of my grandmother's sister was stunned when I said, "I will be a scientist." At that time, I was just taking my first science lessons on metamorphosis of butterflies and growth of seeds to plants. Yet, when he asked me what kind of scientist I wanted to be, I said that I wanted to be involved with electronics. Those words of mine were my tools in threading the path to being an Electronics Engineer since then. Despite early discouragements that this field favors the men more than women, I continued to follow my heart. For in the face of challenges and failures, the only force that can push you through is your determination. This determination is strong if you truly love what you are doing.

I was lucky; I always knew what I wanted to become. Getting there is one thing, but being there is another. In the Philippines, engineers need to take licensure exams in order to be recognized as such. This is also true for Electronics and Communications Engineers. I took the test and with all the prayers and hard work, thankfully, I passed. It was fantastic and it felt like all the efforts that I did finally paid off. It was just as soon that I realized... it was only the beginning. At first I was confused as to what kind of work to get involved with. Should I join the corporate world, get enough training, and be part of the workforce behind microprocessors or communication systems or biomedical technologies? My college course was too broad that I could be anywhere. Once again, I consulted my heart and as always, I was still hungry for more... to learn more, to specialize more.

So, I made another important decision: to teach in college. For me, learning always happens two-way, in a healthy dialogue. And what else could give me more opportunities to learn but to teach? The best days of my life began. Truth be told, I was more stressed than ever, having to teach almost 30 units in a semester one time. However, the joy of seeing students realizing things even outside the class, of giving consultations even beyond our current lessons, of reading interesting answers to my test questions... these all made me want to do more for them. Moreover, as a young instructor, I also got to have some great mentors in the university, who not only taught me academic and practical knowledge but also inspired me to dream once more. They allowed me to explore the field further by joining several research groups at the same time. They also trusted me by letting me handle five undergraduate thesis groups, which indeed pushed me to my limits and provided me the opportunity to grow both as an instructor and as a person. I did all these while working on my masters degree. I wouldn't have been able to survive all of those if not for my passion for learning and sharing my knowledge with others. With love for your work, you never get tired. It just gets better and better with more things to accomplish.

Right now, I am currently living another dream. My childhood heart, the one that said she'd become a scientist someday, always wanted to go to Japan as well. I jumped at the opportunity and applied for the Japanese Government Scholarship to pursue my doctorate on Computer Design and Test in Nara Institute of Science and Technology. It is here that I am truly able to be a scientist—a research scientist. My professors allowed me and helped me to create a novel design-for-testability method for digital ICs. I joined IEEE to be able to access thousands of research papers to study and share during our meetings. I am also able to go to several IEEE-sponsored conferences to present papers and to hear the latest findings in my research field and from others too. It is fascinating, where your heart can bring you. I share stories of my experiences through social networking and blogs, and I am very happy that more and more of my previous students are now taking their graduate studies abroad and making a difference in the world one research topic at a time.

Follow your heart: the best single lesson in life that you'll probably need. It makes you search for your passion without settling just because it's comfortable. It makes you jump at that which seemed impossible for the moment, having faith that it will all turn out well. It makes you achieve. For as with all the matters of the heart, when you find what you are looking for, everything else can be possible.

Name: Marie Engelene J. Obien

Affiliation: Nara Institute of Science and Technology

Email Address and Mobile No.: obien-j@is.naist.jp / +81 80 3119 9585

IEEE Membership No.: 90643951

Essay Title: Matters of the Heart