

John Henry was a steel-drivin man...

John Henry worked on the railroad, he drove steel. This consisted of driving a metal spike into the rock with a hammer. John Henry was the greatest of hammerers, as well as the best of gamblers, the biggest of drinkers, nastiest of fighters, and the best of lovers.

He was born to the railroad. When he was a baby, he told his momma that he would die with a hammer in his hand. More importantly, its how he fed him family. He worked on a legendary connector in West Virginia, which is a long tunnel in a mountain connecting two sections of track. It took years and hundreds of men to build.

One day, a man brought a steam engine to the tunnel and said it could drive steel better than any man. So, a contest was made between John Henry and the steam engine..

For twelve long hours, John Henry hammered and the steam engine drilled. At the end, the tape was brought in to measure...

Wait...What does this story have to do with any of us? None of us are big strong men who make their living pounding steel into stone. For me, this story is about someone who did what he did with passion, pride, integrity and a undaunted optimism. I see these qualities in so many of you. You have faced your connector, which has been graduating in computer science at Berkeley. Whether you were born to it, as John Henry was, or were drawn to it, or are doing it to earn your living, you've faced your challenges. Your steam engines were many, from crashing programs, to unfeeling autograders, to difficult problem sets, to mystifying exams. You rose to these challenges with the integrity that comes from working hard and earnestly on what is put before you. To be honest, you young women and men mystify me. The harder the course, the more you to like it. The more you build, the more you want to build. You run, don't walk to get into courses that overwhelm me. Honestly, many people would consider you guys to be a little bit sick, ..but I am totally impressed.

I hope you know what you accomplish. You passed those tests, satisfied the autograders, and you maybe even solved a couple of those theory problems. Very cool. Again, the earnestness of your efforts, your thirst for doing things well, and your integrity generated these accomplishments. This is the sense in which your story is reflected in John Henry's.

To me, the story of John Henry also gives a guide for the future. Again, a gambling, hard drinking, steel driving man, and computer science majors at Berkeley? I can't be telling you to go out and drink whiskey and gamble, well, at least not in front of your parents. Still, even that part of the legend

does suggest that you are, you must be, defined by more than just what you do for work. You will, of course, pursue many other things, including of course, you will pursue the opposite sex (or maybe the same sex)...some of you will your travel, some of you will do public service, and some of you will have children (Which for me, is the hardest and most rewarding thing I have done.) All in all, it is a wonderful, and beautiful world. But what makes it more wonderful, is the energy that you bring to it. And knowing many of you, I am excited for what you bring to our world.

Still, the legend of John Henry is about steel drivin. Or for me, about injecting passion into his purpose. You know...I get excited sometimes. I see something that hasn't been done before and needs to be done, or something that can be done better, or something that can make things easier for people. You will see this things too. People with your talents will see the steam engines coming from miles away. You will see an opportunity to make something happen. It may be a program that makes your group better, or makes your company better, or makes the world better. It might be making a sale that brings value to your company and your customers and even to your the community. It might be building an organization that really nice for the people in it and serves its purpose well. If you see such things, if you see such steam engines, challenge them. Pursue the challenge with a passion, stay up all night, don't shower (...well..ok, you can shower, in fact, please do).. but do what it takes to meet the challenge.

And sometimes, sometimes, you will make it real...and that will be cool. People will say look, look at what she did! That's so neat. It will be a glorious thing.

Finally, sometimes talented people such as you need a reminder that you aren't all that. John Henry hammered the spike better than all takers. But Little Bull or Polly Ann held the spike. With every strike, they would lift the spike, shake it, turn it, and replace it, all before John Henry's hammer came down again. For you too, there will always be people around you. They may not appear to be as important or as talented as you, but pay attention. Take the time to understand what they do, what they want, even their hopes and dreams. The more you consider people around you the more you will respect their integrity, and their passion. That will make you feel good. And if you are lucky, you may even be able to help them acheive their hopes and dreams. And that will make you feel great.

Oh, yes, what happened to John Henry?

He raced the steam engine. When time was called, they brought out the tape measure, 12 feet for John Henry, 9 feet for the steam engine. He didn't

just beat the steam engine, he crushed the steam engine. A glorious result. Of course, right after the race, John Henry died. He died with his hammer in his hand. Even I can't see the lesson there. But you know..it is not a sad tale. It is an inspiration. A model to live up to.

Finally, you aren't going to be the women and men with the hammer in their hand. You are the chosen ones. You will be building the steam engines. Hey, you guys even won the BIG game against those ..those who would not be named..

The world has become a place that you, with your talents and skills, can change. No one can stop you, if that is what you want. And do it, by all means, do it with the passion that you are filled with. Still, just pause for a moment, and maybe even grieve for the old world, while you create the new world.

Congratulations, and good luck.