

# verdadera

## PURPOSE IN LIFE JANUARY 2012

The Verdadera staff encourages you to discuss and explore the issues and stories, as the publication aims not only to offer an outlet for expression, but to improve our lives. Keep in mind that the emotions that flow through the text and the feelings behind the words could be those of your child, your classmate, or your best friend.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- What motivates you? What are you passionate about?
- Why do students feel pressured to determine what they're going to do in life?
- What is the purpose of life?

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## STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

You ask me why I am unique You ask me what makes me special, and what makes me different from everybody else. I answer. For years I have watched my peers grow up, harboring noble dreams of finding a cure for cancer, or for being the CEO of a company, or for becoming a modern day hero. I don't dream like that.

I dream of buying a coffee, every morning before work, at the nearest Starbucks.

I dream of burning the first Thanksgiving dinner I make in an attempt to make to impress my friends and family.

I dream of sitting in a chair, placed perfectly in patch of sunlight, and reading a book, having time just stop around me.

I dream of being a High School teacher- though, I don't tell anyone. Every time I have a get a scoff in return or "well yeah- you could be a professor" because professors have the money, professors have the prestige and if I aim for anything lower then my dreams are meaningless.

I asked a girl if she knew what I meant when I said, "I

am tired of existing, I want to live". She didn't. I told her one day she would.

Now I know it didn't matter. I knew what I meant by that, I know what I mean by that, and that's all that I can hope for. Some call me an idealist, a hopeless romantic. I call myself a believer, that there is still something out there worth finding, worth living for. Something other then this world of cars, large houses, and paychecks. Somewhere where purpose is not defined by success- and where neither purpose nor success is quantified. I believe that our purpose is not measured in success, or even happiness. I believe that life is measured worthwhile based on the amount of magic you find in it; the amount of things that you find worth living for, worth waking up for every morning. Everyone here says life is a race, but- what if it isn't. What if life is a stroll along a sidewalk, or a dirt road, or a grassy field, in which all you must learn to do is to discover the magic? This doesn't mean that I don't hope to achieve great things; write a book, educate the future of our country, stop world hunger. It just means that it all comes second to smelling the roses."

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? ”

— Marianne Williamson

Sometimes I wonder: Is there even a purpose in life? I mean, what’s the point of this whole system we’ve created if in the end we die and money and material gains mean nothing anymore. What is the point of struggling for success, wallowing in failures, and premeditating every act we perform in the context of the alleged greater scheme of our lives. We constantly live in this cause and effect world. My mom never lets me forget, get good grades then you’ll get into a good college, then you’ll have a good job, then you’ll have a great life. All these monetary gains, even the knowledge, what is all of it for if in the end it all disappears. I wish that we could realize that we’re all too planned and practiced. We all are hoping to receive some reward in the end for all we’ve done, but we’re going to be faced with disappointment when our lives equate to wasted time. I want to live in the moment, I want to actually know what *carpe diem* means every day. I want to act without caring about its societal consequences. I don’t want to pretend that life has a purpose. I just want to live. Day by day. No thinking ahead, no overanalyzing. Just me, living.

“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

— Abraham Lincoln

My name is Keaton Chiu, MV Class of 2009. The initial question I received before deciding to write out this submission was “does anything/any experience come to mind when you hear the topic ‘Purpose in Life?’” I’m here to tell you that “purpose in life” strikes all kinds of chords within me, and there’s an interesting story behind that. For the better part of middle school and high school, I never had a clear idea of what purpose I

held in my life. ‘Purpose’ might have come up in a couple conversations throughout the teen years, but it always became an afterthought for me. I think there was a time when I decided that it was far too early in my life for me to decide on a purpose for myself that I may or may not have. It sometimes baffled me that many of my peers already knew what they were in the world for, while I was left to wonder what was coming next for me. High school ended, and college started. I figured that the college years would be the perfect time for me to find a purpose in life, and that it was only a matter of time before I had a clear vision of what I was meant to do. It eventually came, much, much sooner than I had ever expected. Last year, during my sophomore year, I became Christian. That decision alone has become the ultimate determinant for how the rest of my life will pan out. By becoming a follower of Jesus, I had given my life to have a personal relationship with God. Why is this relevant? Because I now know that my purpose in life is to follow God and He has in store for me, and many of the choices I make today are dependent on what He is calling me to do. Obviously I’m not perfect at this, and I’m very prone to making mistakes and messing up in a countless number of ways that do not reflect my life in Jesus. But the cool thing about finding my purpose in God is that He shows forgiveness, and He is willing to give me another shot.

For many people, the mere thought of having faith in God is enough to turn them away. The thing is, I understand those sentiments, because I’ve been there before. That’s why I put my name at the beginning of this spiel; if you want to know more about where I’m coming from with my (VERY) condensed story of the past few years of my life, go ahead and find me on Facebook or something. You don’t even have to know me personally to reach out to me, my simple hope is that you’re at least curious to find out more about how in the world I found my purpose in life. Thanks for reading.

"We all possess the thunder of pure fury and the calm breeze of tranquility. If it wasn't for tomorrow, how much would we get done today? Whatever your purpose... embrace it completely. Get lost in the clouds every now and then so you never lose sight of God's wonder."

— Paul Vitale

**M**y parents have always told me that my only purpose in life is to graduate from a good college. Of course to graduate from a good college means you also have to get good grades in elementary, middle, and high school, score high on the SAT's, and be involved in a good amount of extracurricular. As I grew up the purpose of my life stayed the same but more and more conditions were added. Hanging out with friends came second to studying because studying would help me achieve my purpose whereas hanging out would not. Also girlfriends were not allowed because they would create a distraction and ultimately lead away from my purpose. I have never been a rebellious child and I'm actually quite submissive. I listened to everything my parents said because I owed it to them. My mom went through painful labor to birth me, my dad works hard at work every day to pay for the house and set food on the table. If anyone they should be the ones to set the purpose of my life because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here. But then sometimes I play the devil's advocate. If I were to wholeheartedly believe in what I said then children are nothing more than clay for parents. Parents have the right to do whatever they want with their children including choosing their purpose in life. As far as I'm concerned, my purpose in life is to graduate from a good college. Even if it is the purpose that my parents imposed on me, I also happen to agree with it. But in my mind, the answer to the question: What is the purpose of life? The answer is: Whatever your parents say it is.

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

— Harvey Fierstein

**S**ometimes I really question why I exist, especially when things aren't going great. Other times, I question the existence of other people, when they start to piss me off or do things that I can't understand at all. Especially since I'm Christian, I have to really just remember that God has a purpose for everything and everyone, but sometimes it's just really hard to remember that. When it comes down to a purpose, the purpose for why I was born, I'm sometimes really stuck. Obviously since I'm Christian, the right answer would be because God loves me and knows what he's doing. However, it becomes really difficult for me when things get tough. Last year, for example, I was having a miserable period of life as my grades were in the dump, I was getting in fights with my parents, my friends all just seemed to not care at all for me, and as I began losing touch with who I was, who I am, as well as my faith in God. Looking back, I can quite honestly say it sucked. Majorly. But that's the beauty of it. I can look back and analyze it. I can look back and say that I got through it. I pulled my grades up, I had a heart-to-heart talk with my parents, I realized my friendships weren't really being lost, but rather we were all becoming stressed over a new year that was much more academically difficult than the last, and as for my faith, the fact that I got through just made me believe more in God's power. So my purpose in life? I honestly don't know. I probably won't ever know. But as a Christian, I know that all I have to do is believe. Things get better. There's a purpose to everything.

"My great hope is to laugh as much as I cry; to get my work done and try to love somebody and have the courage to accept the love in return."

—Maya Angelou

What is my purpose in life? Whoa, now that's a pretty heavy question. What am I other than just another human being out of 7 billion who in turn are just another species out of an array of millions of species that inhabit the planet of Earth, which happens to be just another miniscule planet in the company of a couple others in a galaxy known as the Milky Way galaxy which turns out to be just one of BILLIONS OF GALAXIES. I don't seem that important anymore do I? Does the purpose of my life even matter? Why would it? The purpose of my life isn't likely to impact the 7 billion humans or the other species or the planets in the Milky Way or any of the other galaxies. That's why I don't think life has a set purpose. You can make the purpose of your life whatever you want it to be, set whatever goals you want to. Or you can also live a purposeless life just doing whatever you want. My purpose in life is to get rich, I don't care how but the end result is going to be wealth.

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them."

— Henry David Thoreau

Originally my purpose in life was to become rich cause my parents wanted me too. I thought, ok, it would be nice to live in a mansion with butlers. maybe I could have a few of those fancy bushes that are shaped like elephants that all rich people have in front of their mansions. this is the reason we live in cupertino right? to get an education and become rich? but then in middle school, there was one video that changed. my. life. it was in 8th grade science HG&D. the class was shown a video and it showed pictures of people walking on the boardwalk and in the back there was a voice that said: humans were biologically created with one main purpose in life: to reproduce. it then hit me. my purpose in life wasn't to become rich. my purpose in life was to reproduce. I was

wrong all this time. the reason why I wanted to be rich in the first place was to reproduce. I then created a new game plan. I will first become rich and then lure women into my lair/mansion/condo with my money, wealth, and power. this is my true purpose in life.

"The main facts in human life are five: birth, food, sleep, love and death."

— E. M. Forester

When it comes down to what I feel my purpose in life is, I am torn between living a life for myself and living my life for a higher power. In my case, I practice the Christian religion which dictates that our purpose in life is to glorify our God. While I believe that, there is a part of me that wants to simply satisfy myself. Is my purpose to glorify, follow, and worship a god, or is my purpose to live a happy and successful life? That is the dilemma that I face everyday. I guess the healthiest medium is to find a way to live my life in a way that I satisfy my religious calling while still satisfying myself and indulging in my own selfish desires.

"When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"

— Erma Bombeck

Why am I here?" I ask myself that a lot. I wonder if my only job is forever going to be outsmarting and winning over people in the game of life. And then there's the issue of my parents, acting as though they know every single little detail of my life, where in reality, they have no clue. They really treat me like a puppet. It's brought me to brink of suicide so many times. So my purpose in life? I want to do what I want to do, but it's always deemed impossible. I have for the longest time wanted to be a singer. Of course my parents think I can't do that, and they

want me to grow up to make a lot of money by inventing some super sci-fi type of medical instrument, or being a vet (because performing surgery on animals is TOTALLY what I want to be doing in my later years....) My point is, my life has gotten to the point of where my purpose in life is being controlled by my parents. I'm sure there's a lot of people, especially MV students, who also have this going on at home. My story is a routine. I drag myself out of bed, not wanting to go to this prison my parents call a school. I get ready, grab my breakfast and eat in the car on the way. I do my homework before school until my friends come. When they come, I put on the "face". The "face" is a happy, confident, laughing face that seems to fool all my friends into thinking I'm ok. So I get on through the day, using my "face", and continue until the school day is done. I go to my mom's car and head over to swim practice, so that I can make varsity when MV swimming starts up again. I am still using the "face". By the time I get home, somehow something about my grades or otherwise has ticked off my parents, and they proceed to lecture me. So I go upstairs after dinner, take off my "face", and do my homework. And I go to bed, hoping that somehow I won't be forced to go to such a high-demanding school, with such impossible expectations. It makes me feel like a robot, being programmed for learning, learning, and more learning.

"I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul."

— William Earnest Henley

# A WORD FROM THE PROFESSIONAL



Maureen Johnston has been providing psychotherapy and counseling to children, teens, and adults for many years in her private practice in north San Jose. She is the mother of a Monta Vista student and wife of one of the teachers at the school. Last year, she served on the School Site Council. She believes strongly in the value of life long learning and striving for balance in life. She can be reached at 408-871-9180 or [mj\\_therapist@yahoo.com](mailto:mj_therapist@yahoo.com). Her website is [www.maureenjohnston.com](http://www.maureenjohnston.com).

I was not surprised to hear two major themes echoed over and over at the Verdadera read-through of the students' submissions on "Purpose in Life": one - the students who had no clue at all about what their "purpose" is, yet believed that somehow they should know, and two - those who were struggling with the idea that working really hard to get the best grades in order to get into the best universities in order to get a job that makes you rich is what it's all about.

In my mind, it is unrealistic to expect that anyone in their teens should have any idea about what they really want to do with their life. They are just at the edge of adulthood, with many, many years worth of experience in front of them. While it is very helpful for all of us to take some time to examine our beliefs and values, set goals, and have some basic expectations of our future, no one knows what is going to happen as we journey through life or how we will respond to events.

Given the academic pressures so many of the MV teens experience from their parents, their peers, and themselves, I had expected that a fair number of the students would be questioning the point of it all. It is all too easy for us parents, as well as the teens, to lose sight of the real reasons why they're working so hard. We tend to get stuck in the trap of viewing the grades as an end in themselves, rather than a means to a much larger goal. This can lead to burnout and

disillusionment, along with unhealthy levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Since I am a psychotherapist who frequently approaches my work from a developmental and attachment perspective, I find that when I think about "purpose in life", I keep coming back to what on it's

most simplistic, basic level sounds like, but is really much more than, a very biological stance, and this is that our primary "purpose in life" is to live long enough to procreate and reproduce healthy offspring.

Of course, I don't mean to imply that we're no different than rabbits. We are obviously much more complicated and sophisticated than our base biological drives. But, it is important to occasionally ponder the intersection of our biology, psychology, spirituality, and intellect, and how this manifests into who we are and how we see ourselves in relationship with others in our life.

As a species we are driven to survive through reproduction, and connection to and interdependence upon others is a key to our survival as humans. Therefore, I propose that our purpose in life is to establish and build relationship with other

people; in our immediate family, our extended families and clans, and in larger groups and communities.

I am fascinated by the field of interpersonal neurobiology which is showing, through brain scans and other neurological studies, what many of us in the therapy world have long suspected - we are socially and relationally interdependent creatures. For example,

## theLOWDOWN

resources for parents and teens

Videos:

- Early Childhood Brain Development with Allan Shore and Daniel Siegel: [youtube.com/watch?v=QE8hhdym8Yc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=QE8hhdym8Yc)
- Early Learning Brain Development and Lifelong Outcomes: [youtube.com/watch?v=7Qb3DXY\\_7fU&feature=related](https://youtube.com/watch?v=7Qb3DXY_7fU&feature=related)
- Adolescent Brain Development: [youtube.com/watch?v=GPMP68QP698](https://youtube.com/watch?v=GPMP68QP698)

Sites:

- Dr. Daniel Siegel: [drdanielSiegel.com](http://drdanielSiegel.com)
- The Committed Parent: Translating social neuroscience to help parents raise kids we can live with and we're crazy about: [committedparent.wordpress.com/first-200-titles/](http://committedparent.wordpress.com/first-200-titles/)

infant brain is biologically primed to form neural pathways that set the foundation for deep connections or attachments with our primary caretakers, whom in most instances are our parents. Human infants are clearly completely dependent upon others for their very survival. However, we need much more than just adequate food and shelter to grow and thrive. During infancy, our “purpose” is to connect with our parents. The neurons in the infant brain are specifically designed to grow in ways that allow us to observe, learn from, and imitate our parents. We are not just physically dependent upon them, but also emotionally and psychologically linked to them.

Research is also just beginning to show many of the physiological changes that occur in new parents, in fathers as well as mothers. While we’re all familiar with the obvious physical changes a pregnant woman goes through, once the baby arrives, the neurochemical alterations that both mother and father experience are much less visible, but still important.

As toddlers and small children, we grow more mobile and become physically independent. Yet, our emotional dependence upon, and psychological connection to our parents does not fade away. In fact, our attachment to our parents continues to deepen and affect us on profound levels throughout our lives. The manner in which we learn to relate by observing and interacting with our parents sets the stage for how we will relate with others for the rest of our life.

Adolescence is another stage when the biological “purpose in life” becomes much more apparent. As our body goes through the physical transformation from

child to adult, we experience tremendous emotional, psychological, sexual, and relational changes. We perceive our parents in a different way and often struggle with intensely conflicting feelings toward them. At this point in our life, we begin to shift our relationship with our parents in a way that allows us to form a clearer definition of self so that we can form deeper attachments with others.

This process becomes apparent when you hear parents complain that their teens don’t want to spend time with them anymore. They can feel their child’s need for connection shifting from them to their peers. It is important for us parents to keep in mind that while it may hurt when our kids prefer their friends’ company to our own, it is both normal, and developmentally appropriate when they do. It does not mean they are no longer attached to us, nor that we have become obsolete. The relationship between adolescent and parent is still very important for the current and future emotional and psychological health of both.

For many years now, scientific studies have shown how important a strong connection with others is for both our physical health and our emotional well-being. Deep committed relationships are known to be one of the best antidotes to emotional and psychological distress. We are biologically driven as a species to form relational communities of different sizes and constellations.

Therefore, I see our purpose in life as really quite simple: form deep attachments, live in meaningful relationships, connect.