The last time my family was replaced by technology

My great-great-grandfather thought he'd be replaced by technology too.

He was a farrier in Mandres-en-Barrois, the small village in rural France where I grew up. Shoeing horses, repairing farmers' carts. Then he saw a car drive through the next town over, or read an article about it in the paper. I can't tell what exactly happened in his mind at that moment, but soon after, he became a mechanic, like every man in the family after him.

In the end, and maybe after a long stretch of grief at trading his horses for engine grease, he kept his purpose: helping people get around. He just changed the technology, going from horses to engines.

I think about this a lot these days, surrounded as I am by so many developers who wake up every day wondering what's going to become of them. I must say there is some comfort in knowing that someone in my family had the same doubts before me.

Because, yes, we love to say AI is the biggest revolution since the Industrial Revolution, and that we're going through a transformation unlike anything we've seen before. But that overlooks the farmers who watched the tractor roll in, or the farrier who watched the car arrive. Back then, the revolution was often right next door, hitting your neighbour. They didn't have X to doomscroll first thing in the morning (lucky them), but they too wondered what on earth they were going to do, imagining the worst.

A century later, the torments felt by my great-great-grandfather are forgotten. The garage feels like it has always been in the family. My father loved his job like few people I know, as if it had run in the family forever. We just kept doing what we had always done: helping people get around. Just as some families in the village still farm the same fields today, mine kept the same purpose.

Not every farrier became a mechanic, and I'd never have heard of the ones who didn't. So I won't pretend his story proves anything. But it makes me wonder: what if what we loved about this job was never only the code?

Many of us, deep down, are driven more by the joy of making things, solving problems, and seeing people use what we built than by the act of coding itself. After all, many of us

decided we wanted to be developers before learning to code, just to create video games or websites. The desire came before the code.

Be willing to let go of the how to hold on to the why.

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