

Growing up

Business



“ What do you want to do with your life?” It’s a question I’m hearing more and more, eating away at me. Messing with my mind. I want to punch the people who ask it—did they know what they were going to do at age sixteen? Instead, I smile, shake my head, and embrace the reality that I have absolutely no idea. My grades are slipping—into the abyss of mediocrity I have feared for so long. Yet I work harder than ever.

Those who float—those who don’t have to try—those are the people who have the free tickets to perfect test scores I can never, ever achieve—the ones who ask me how I did on the last AP US History test while I just glare and say “ horrible” because that’s the truth. I spend hours a week devoted to key terms and studying, but it’s never good enough. Every day I despair at my inability to pick one right answer among three wrong ones, or my inability to see my careless mistakes on my Precalculus tests. I used to truly believe that I was above average—smart, worldly—but the world is telling me no, that I’m not smart. That I’m not good enough. That I can’t get into college because my grades aren’t good enough, that my test scores aren’t good enough.

And if I can’t get into college, do I really have a future? My college mail lies unopened on my shelf. I can’t bring myself to look through it—not because I don’t want to, but because I’m scared. Scared of the questions that will start manifesting themselves in my mind, tricking me into believing that I have a chance. I don’t feel ready for all of this. My eighteenth birthday looms around the corner, time marching on faster than I want it to. I can’t freeze time.

I'm going to turn eighteen, and I'm going to have to face my future. I am so lucky to have the life that I do—my friends, my education, and my opportunities almost guarantee a bright future. I am so lucky to live in the North Seattle sector of privilege where it's all too easy to forget that inequality still stands everywhere I turn. I am lucky. Yet when I think of my future, my better judgement falls away and I find myself alone in a dark cloud of unknown. So many of my classmates know what they want to do, where they want to go, who they want to be—and I have narrowed it all down only to “ not math or science” and “ not the South”.

Even my sister has more ideas than that, and she's in eighth grade. When I think about what I want to do, who I want to be, where I want to go—the only thing that jumps to my mind is writing. But then the self-bashing starts. Writing's not a stable career, it doesn't bring in any money, my books aren't marketable—I'm not good enough. But just because I say I'm not doesn't mean I shouldn't try.

I'm going to try to write. I'm going to try, alongside whatever I decide is my career. And my grades? I've accepted that I'm not going to finish high school with a 4.0 GPA. I've accepted it, and once I did I just felt relieved. Maybe I don't have the test scores.

Maybe I don't have the grades. But I have something that makes me truly special—something that for someone, will be good enough. I don't know what I'm going to do with my life. I don't know, but I think I'm getting closer. As I wrote in my journal after my school's South African visitors said their

tearful goodbyes, there is so much more I'm passionate about than just writing.

There's social justice, the library, education, children's programs, music—all of which I discovered by simply putting myself out there. Doing that—being willing to do that—is all part of growing up, something that doesn't carry much of a threat over me anymore. Once I get there—once I work through all this stress—I can finally do what I want to do. I don't know what that is yet, but I will know, so stop asking.