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Finding the Meaning in My College Experience

I am officially graduated, unemployed and have no plans for the foreseeable future. The only thing I know for sure is that I will be living in a tiny apartment for three more weeks with my best friend and her sister in central Boston. And after that, God only knows. I've gone through the ups and downs already. I've woken up paralyzed by fear regarding the future and I've felt overwhelmed with a sense of great fortune knowing my current circumstance. I know with hard work and a little faith something will work out, but in the meantime it's a rollercoaster ride of panic and anxiety wrapped up in that sweet sarcasm only a few seem to really appreciate.

I want to make the best out of a weird situation, but the volatile nature of my mood, mixed with my codependency on my roommate, makes the low days where we can't get out of bed or eat anything other than dry cereal and cheese that's starting to mold, all that more low. All of us recent grads live in a time where unemployment is steadily decreasing and thousands of jobs are being added to the market each quarter, but smart, capable graduates, like myself, are finding themselves overqualified and underemployed. I mean really – I have a friend who didn't get a job at a nonprofit she interned at, where the job description included "organize the calendar and answer the phone." Hearing story after story of my fellow peers – the ones who challenged me and educated me, as much, if not more, than my liberal arts education did – being turned down time and time again is all at once comforting and incredibly frightening.

A college degree is the new norm and regardless of our self-proclaimed intellect, we seem to find ourselves in a melting pot, struggling to distinguish ourselves from each other. What makes me stand out from the other fifty applicants? I was the Associate Editor of my college's newspaper – she was the Editor-in-Chief. I was a senior interviewer for the admission's office – he assisted in reading

applications. I worked as a part-time nanny to help support myself – they had a fulltime internship in their desired field of work. Maybe this is just cynicism from the millennial age of shameless self-promotion, but it feels all too real.

In my last year of college I decided to tack on a second major, in hopes that having both English and economics on my diploma I would appear to be more well rounded to future employers. When I told my economics minor advisor that I would be taking both intermediate micro and macroeconomics (arguably the two hardest classes in the major) during my senior year, he asked me if I thought it was worth it. He warned me that it would be a strenuous uphill battle and he knew there would be moments, if not long stretches of time, that I would regret this choice. I assured him that this was a decision I had thought out and definitely wanted to pursue. So he signed the declaration of my second major and wished me well.

As I sit here, four weeks out of college, and reflect back on that decision, I have to ask myself the same question my advisor asked me: do I think it was worth it? Juggling a full course load, two part-time jobs and my position on the newspaper created a monster driven by one thing only – the fear of failure. I watched as my relationship with my girlfriend dissolved, found myself dependent on prescription drugs to wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night, and, consequently, was driven into a deep depression. I knew it was going to be a challenge, but I never pictured myself becoming self-destructive and mentally unstable.

But through all of it, every bit of pain, panic and delirium, I think it was worth it. Sure, I'm sitting here on a Tuesday at 3 p.m., still dressed in the t-shirt I went to bed wearing, with no job or relationship prospects in range of sight, but I have something that means so much more than that to me. I have an overwhelming sense of satisfaction simply knowing that I am alive and well.

After struggling through months of pain and self-loathing, I am happy to have a break from the intensity of it all. I, of course, want a job that will lead to a career and a relationship that will lead to a family, but right now, at age 22, I am okay with not knowing and just believing that I will get there someday. My triumph over my constant self-loathing, more than my completion of the double major, gives me the faith to believe in the universe, and more importantly, the faith to believe in myself. So, as my recently graduated cohorts and I look towards the bleak and terrifying future, I hope we see the four years of exams, Friday nights in the library and mental breakdowns as strength to move forward. We may face many more weeks of unemployment and self-doubt, but this is yet another obstacle to face and defeat. So when we do finally land that interview and they pose the question: "Can you tell me about a challenge you have overcome," we will have the perfect answer.