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Dr. Narcisi
The Idea of a University

Being Alone, But Far From Being Lonely

I always thought that crises were only for old people. Well, maybe not *old*, but at least older than me. I never thought that I would experience my first real crisis at the spry young age of eighteen.

Right before this semester started, I sat down with my mom to talk with her, *really* talk with her, about how nervous I was, and she gave me some really interesting advice. “You’ll be fine, Quinn,” she said. “College will be a new start, with new adventures and new friends.”

I didn’t want to tell her how wrong I thought she was. My high school years, especially the last one, were the best years I’ve had, and all of that happiness, comfort, and security were ripped away from me the day that I graduated. I didn’t want to leave that and have a new start, go on a new adventure, or get any new friends.

Allow me to put this into perspective. My final year of high school was filled with all sorts of chaotic happiness. I was in both of the highest-level choirs and the musical, I was the editor-in-chief of an award-winning yearbook, I was on the swim team, and I was a thespian. It seemed like almost all of the three thousand people in my high school knew who I was. When I stepped onto the Regis campus for orientation, all of that changed.

Suddenly, I didn’t recognize anyone. Suddenly, no one recognized me. Everything I was in high school suddenly didn’t matter anymore, and suddenly, I had to go from being a somebody to being a nobody.

All of those emotions of feeling scared and alone came to a head at a most inconvenient time during orientation: during the honors trip on the way to Lowell Pond. I have a tendency to obsess about things, so all I could notice while walking to the pond was that everyone had already latched onto someone else. All around me, people were giggling and asking about what dorm building everyone else lived in, and then there was me, all alone in a sea (or perhaps a pond) of people. I didn't want to intrude on anyone's conversation, so I stayed quiet, but inside, I was screaming at myself as loud as I could. *"Talk to them!" "I can't! They didn't want to talk to me earlier!"* Back and forth, back and forth. I started to overwhelm myself, and it made the scared and angry emotions worse. I thought I would actually have an anxiety attack, right then and there.

Before I could start hyperventilating, I thought to myself, "Quinn, if you did that well in high school, just think about what you can do here." That seemed to help a bit, but not for long. It was kind of like hearing something go bump in the night—thinking logically only got me so far before the emotions started to win me over.

For some reason, it seems as though my emotions, both good and bad, are hard-wired to my tear ducts. As we were walking, I felt a small tear creep down my face and slowly crawl around the contour of my nose. Thankfully, I was wearing sunglasses, and that tear was my little secret.

We finally broke out of our group to go and find our own little brick at the pond. I walked off, alone, and found myself sitting at the place where the water fell straight down into the stream. I couldn't see anyone from where I was sitting. Just as suddenly as the feeling of loneliness crept in when I was surrounded by all of those people, it went away when I was alone. Watching the water spread into a thin layer before it came crashing down into the stream, I

realized that being alone and being lonely were two very different things. Suddenly, when I really was alone, I was far from being lonely.

And then, when I had gained that peace within myself, a monkey wrench got thrown into the equation—we had to find someone and talk about our bricks and what we had written. I mentally said quite a few expletives before I got up to search for someone to talk to, and luckily enough, I did find someone.

We sauntered back up to the place where just moments ago, I was feeling content with being alone. He told me that his name was Jack Shoemaker, but that I could call him Shoey if I wanted. I thought, “That’s unusual, but promising. I could be friends with someone named Shoey. Sounds like my kind of person.” We sat down and started talking about our bricks, but I don’t really remember that conversation very much. The thing I remembered most was talking about how we both ended up at Regis, what we did in high school, and even him showing me pictures of him sleeping in the back of a car on the way to Denver, looking just about as comfortable as anyone could get in a car that was filled to the brim. We were talking so long that we didn’t realize that lunch had arrived, and we got to the food so late that we got the sandwich dregs. I’m not even sure if I could call my caprese sandwich a “sandwich” (I mean honestly, what kind of a sandwich doesn’t have any meat in it?), but I ate it anyway. I decided that if I had to choose between meeting someone and eating a caprese sandwich or not meeting someone and eating a meaty sandwich, I would pick the former. I was perfectly happy.

After orientation was over, I called my sister for some advice. I thought she might be able to give me some better college advice than my mom did since my sister just got her degree and my mom never went to college. After explaining my predicament to her, she said, “Don’t stress about having friends with you all of the time. Sometimes, it just doesn’t happen. I didn’t

really have any real friends until I got to my third year of college.” When she told me at first, I wasn’t very comforted, but the more I think about it, the more silver linings I can find, such as how nice it will feel to find what she called “real friends”. It’s nice to have someone to talk to all the time, but in the meantime, I figured, being alone can be great, too, just like I discovered at Lowell Pond.

While I do have a few friends that I see often on campus, ironically enough, I now revel in the time I can spend alone now because it allows me to get better acquainted with myself. I can develop some of my own thoughts, from simple things like what I can write in an upcoming essay to the more bizarre, like how conceptually, pregnancy seems a lot like alien invasion to me. Being alone gives me space to think and, in a way, develop my own personality, and it allows me to be comfortable with myself. Being alone allows me to think thoughts that are distinctly my own because I’m not bombarded with other opinions or the thoughts of other people. Alone, I’m able to just simply be content with myself.

Looking back at those moments during orientation where I felt like I was choking on loneliness, I wish I could tell myself to just be a little more patient. After all, I was unreasonably expecting to find a new best friend within the first 72 hours of being on campus. It took me two years to find my best friend when I was in high school, so it shouldn’t have been all that surprising that I didn’t have a best friend within just a few hours of being on campus.

Being thrown into a situation where I had to start all over was a blessing in disguise. Where at first I started out as what Edmundson would describe as the “sweet and sad” (43) student, that sadness that I so strongly felt gave me motivation to get past it somehow, and slowly, I am getting back to that same level of happiness that I had in my final year of high school.