

Embracing Change: A Personal Narrative

Teenagers are universally known to be...eccentric. From TV shows to comic books, our youth is often showcased through weird and somewhat cliched characters: the social media obsessed girls, the ones experiencing near impossible mood swings, or the one hoodie guy, scared to show his face to the world.

I'm unaware of where most of these stereotypes originate from, yet there is some truth to the matter. Behind the exaggeration of it all lies a vulnerable truth: regardless of intellect or confidence, nothing spares a student from experiencing the turbulent changes of the short-lived successes and heart wrenching setbacks that plague all academic, emotional, and social aspects of their high school career. As a high schooler myself, I recognize the unique challenges of our adolescent years. From naive freshmen to lethargic seniors, whatever side of the spectrum we are close to, no two of us are the same; each school becomes a melting pot of diverse cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and qualities that students learn from and apply throughout their high school career.

However, to some extent, we all struggle with a universal issue that perhaps succeeds to unite us all: embracing change. This year, change crashed the party without a reservation.

I moved back from Canada halfway through my freshman year of high school and was instantly drowning in school work and extracurriculars. As a latecomer, I spent every minute not just catching up on missed assignments and exams, but also asserting my presence; whether this be through school clubs or classroom conversations, I sacrificed my social life to assure myself that I was a deserving addition to my school's academic community.

Freshman year was a blur, literally. Before I realized it, I had given my final exams and transitioned into summer. I spent that summer deeply lost in thought. I found myself reflecting on the decisions I made the previous academic year, understanding the social aspects of my lifestyle I compromised to get ahead. With sophomore year inching closer by the day, I promised to make this the year that I'd find balance - by considering both schoolwork and connection as equals, I vowed to make this the best year yet.

Before I knew it, the Californian summer passed through like a heatwave and I was getting my backpack ready the night before the first day of school. I couldn't really sleep that night-the adrenaline and excitement of the day that awaited me was much too strong. All I could picture was the smiles on my friends' faces and the warm welcomes I was so eager to experience again after all these years.

The reality of the situation couldn't have been farther than what I imagined. I caught up with a couple of them during brunch, expecting our once effortless bonds to be regenerated instantly. Instead, as the conversation unfolded, I was able to sense the discomfort in their eyes. It was like the air sank to the floor: I grappled with my words, desperately trying to avoid the awkward barrier forming between us. It was all in vain- no matter what I said, my longing for connection wasn't reciprocated. Eventually, one of them created an excuse to leave, and that was it. Instead of strengthening our friendship, the people I had grown up with instantly became strangers as I felt them growing distant.

For most individuals in such situations, a surge of emotions hits them like a brick wall-anger, sadness, and regret instantly floods the brain as the heart begins to drown in agony. As

many of us take this betrayal to heart, the eyes are often the first to break.

I was silent. Numb. I might have seemed possessed to the people around me, but I laughed- not because I felt amused, but because I was so emotionally invested in these people that my pain seemed borderline ironic. I learnt something valuable that day: **people can change.**

I spent the next couple weeks replaying the fragmented memories I cherished- every laugh, every conversation, every moment we shared lived rent free in my head for at least a month. Initially, I struggled to make sense of it all. I came up with excuse after excuse, anything that could help justify the way they treated me. Anything that could help me continue living in the comfort of denial.

“Maybe they were having a bad day.” “Maybe I did something to offend them.” “Maybe they just didn’t recognize me: after all, it has been a couple of years.”

Slowly, the fog cleared and the delusion started to settle as I realized that the reality of the situation was painfully simple: Time can change an individual in abrupt and unpredictable ways. These people had chosen to move on from our friendship, and I was required to accept that decision, however hard it was to digest.

When met with such grounding realizations, it is only natural to experience regret and resentment. Hateful and distressing emotions are unfortunately a part of being human, and according to common portrayals of today’s youth, I should have let these feelings engulf me. I chose to let them empower me instead. I chose not to hold grudges. I chose to shift my attention to more meaningful matters.

I spent the rest of the year listening to my curiosities and exploring my passions. Alongside keeping up a good academic record, I dove deeper into the aspects of life I was truly fascinated about. I explored our changing climate and learned more about environmental concerns that plague my community. At the same time, I found myself wanting to learn about how the brain develops under changing conditions and external pressures. I became hungry for knowledge, and as I delved deeper into those interests, I began to find my true purpose. My calling in life. The ambition I’d happily dedicate the rest of my life’s work towards.

As I reflect upon the past year, I recognize how persistent the theme of change has been. Whether it be my academics, my social heartbreaks, or my passions, change was interwoven into each of my cornerstone experiences. Upon closer speculation, I slowly realized how that single dissolved interaction between my friends and I was a catalyst in disguise. Had I chosen to let that incident overpower me, I might have lost sight of what’s most important. I might have never pursued my interests. I might have let my aspirations slip away. I might have never acquired the mental clarity I needed to build the image of a future I wish to have.

I chose to let that change guide me instead. Instead of resisting, I held tight at every swerve and curb. I chose to let bitterness go as I leaned into discomfort. I chose to make space for the possibility of growth by letting go of the memories I once clung onto. I chose to live in the uncertainty of it all. In the end, this uncertainty pushed me to discover my purpose. A purpose rooted in resilience. In persistence. A purpose that was developed not in spite of change- but by embracing it.

As I reflect on my personal experiences, I choose to let them further fuel my curiosity about how humans are able to adapt to our ever changing environments. Whether it be friendship

breakups or climate issues, I now understand that change requires grit and resilience. In the process of writing this, I recall the lingering awkwardness of our final minutes together. They remain etched in my memory, but instead of giving into those feelings, I choose to let them remind me of how far I have come. I view these moments not as painful memories, but as transitions into deeper curiosities, intriguing questions, and into how our brains and the world are evolving in harmony.