

Take Nothing for Granted

Walking into my first day of freshman year, I truly had no idea what to expect. My eyes were filled with brand-new sights, brand-new people, and a brand-new perspective on life. I thought I had signed up for exciting, spontaneous adventures that mixed with rigorous class work, keeping me up some nights. I knew I would experience plenty of emotion, bad and good. Walking in on my first day of freshman year, I had no idea how my school career would end. It turns out nobody did.

I grew up in a little town called Lake Chelan. It's a small, homey place that transforms into a vacation epicenter during the summer. However, when the slow winters come, it returns to its small-town feel. As the students head back to school, they find their lifelong friends they met in kindergarten. I was one of these students. High school brought a whirlwind of change; I moved over the mountains to a brand-new area with over a thousand brand-new students. This change was exciting, but it welcomed a few misplaced nerves. I couldn't wait to get out of my small hometown and experience big-city life. I envisioned myself exploring unfamiliar territory, finding friends who embraced different culture. It felt like a great opportunity to try a new life out. Don't get me wrong, I loved Chelan, but it was time for a change.

June of 2016 was my first chance at this new experience. Driving up to my new school was thrilling, yet overwhelming. I felt consumed by the tall buildings; I'd never had a three-story school before. I watched students mill around like they were used to the campus, finding their way around easily. The fact that there were multiple sets of front doors was enough to blow me away. My eyes filled with hues of purple as I was surrounded by students going out for lunch. My family managed to push our way through the human barriers and find the counseling office for our new student orientation session. I honestly don't remember too much from the actual session; I remember watching cliques chattering and teachers talking. There was so much action going on all at once. I had to take it in. That day, I walked out of the building with a bit of newfound confidence. I was ready to take on this large, slightly overwhelming school and all it had to offer.

My first task at this new place was to try and, maybe, conquer gymnastics. I began the sport not at the tender age of 3, but the tough age of 14. I had always been fascinated with the sport, and I ended up making a few friends who encouraged me to join the high school team. Filled with fear, I signed up and hesitantly arrived on the first day, not sure what to expect. The

long story short is that I was terrible. I couldn't do a single skill, nor did I have any flexibility. It felt hopeless, and I cried a lot. But I continued to go to practice, even though it wasn't fun at first. I watched myself make progress; the coaches watched me make progress; even my teammates complimented me on my improvement.

By the end of the season, I was learning how to do flips, something I never thought I was capable of. I was so incredibly proud of myself. Jump forward to present day: my gymnastics team won the 2020 high school state championship, which was a huge success. We also earned the top score in our division's history. It was an incredible feeling to be a champion. And not only that: I was a two-time captain of this winning team. I felt trusted and loved by my teammates; they had confidence in me to lead them. I felt truly grateful that I had gone to the school I did. I felt proud that I had stepped out of my comfort zone and found a new passion.

Something I was slightly more comfortable with was the actual point of school: academics. I've always found that connecting personally with my teachers helps me learn best. It provides context to how they teach and why they teach, which is just as important as the actual teaching. My junior year English teacher has taught me more about life than anyone else has. I was nervous heading into his class, knowing that I was about to encounter my first AP English course. My preconceived notion was that the class would be full of rigorous content instructed by an awful, cruel, emotionless teacher. Thankfully, my expectations were instantly proven wrong.

After finishing the first literary unit, our teacher briefly mentioned that he'd be sharing something special. We were told that this event was a personal narrative related to the curriculum. There was little preparation and no context. They were dubbed "Terich Talks," employing alliteration with the teacher's last name. We had our first one on the Friday prior to winter break. Going into it, I didn't know what to expect. Would I giggle? Would I sob?

As Mr. Terich began to speak, the room fell silent. I could feel the weight of his words. They were soaking into my brain. By the end of the class, tears were trickling down my face. His emotional story had worked its way into my brain. More importantly, it had worked its way into my heart. As I continued my day, I couldn't get Mr. Terich's powerful words out of my mind. They were indelible. He had struck a chord in me.

Through the power of prose, specifically the stories of my teachers, I've learned that education is more than the academic content one is taught. The personal stories of the educators are what make schooling valuable. They teach the social lessons students have yet to learn in

their lives. In this context, “words of wisdom” comes to mind as an applicable phrase. The wisdom of educators, just like Mr. Terich, are transformed and communicated directly through diction and specific language. The knowledge gained in his class will forever solidify my memories of high school.

These experiences have all shaped me throughout high school; I don’t regret a second of any of them. The worst part is that I no longer get to experience any more. The dreaded virus, though dominating everyone’s lives around the world, has taken away something special for seniors. It has taken away our ceremonial events like sports senior night, prom, and even graduation. While these are obviously sad, the worst is that it’s taken away the act of being at school. The final two months of senior year, from what I’ve heard, are meant to be celebrated through a cosmos of social interactions. I couldn’t wait to give my college pennant to my favorite teacher and thank him for his hard work on my letter of recommendation. I couldn’t wait to bother my AP Government teacher everyday with endless questions, just because I could. I couldn’t wait to walk out on my last day and hug my inspirers, my motivators, my educators; tears stream down my eyes thinking of that moment right now.

My advice? Live every year like it’s your senior year. Don’t wait to cram all your celebrations in at the end of high school; celebrate those mini accomplishments as they happen. Foster connections with those around you. Find your interests and investigate them to their deepest ends. Explore the area around you; we live in an amazingly beautiful town and area. A virus does not take away the resilience of the Class of 2020, but it does take away some memories. Make the memories while you can, and leave high school knowing you did everything you could to celebrate yourself.