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Running My Own Race

KEONI HOLOMAN

I HAD CONTINUOUSLY BEEN applying for colleges, keeping up good grades, asking for recommendation letters, completing hours of community service and balancing time for extracurricular activities. Senior year in high school was a hectic time in my life. I missed out on spending time with friends, family meals and even sleep trying to juggle all of these tasks, but at the time it was worth it. Right?

Imagine little me, from a suburb in Texas, attending a major university in a big city like New York University, or being accepted into the best journalism program in the country at the University of Missouri, or even better, attending the Harvard of the South - Southern Methodist University. It was the dream that always ran through my head and fueled my spirit when I felt I was about to break down.

Being in an environment like Plano Senior High School, filled with very intelligent students with a history of successful at the highest academic universities in the country made this seem like only a great grade point average away. Students there had high expectations of themselves, as well as their parents, and going off to a university was their plan A with no other option; thus it was mine as well. Trying to keep up with my successful peers was so important to me and drove me to the brink of obsession, so much so that my Spanish teacher could tell. One day after class he approached me asking if I was OK because I seemed completely worn out. I explained to him how stressed out I was because of the tasks ahead of me in applying for colleges and trying to keep a competitive grade point average with my top classmates. In a simple response, he gave me the most genuine smile and told me, "Run your own race."

What was that supposed to mean? I am running my own race. He made no sense! In utter confusion I walked off with no understanding of his words or what to make of them.

WHAT WAS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
I AM RUNNING MY OWN RACE.



Later my senior year, I got to experience the total devastation of not getting into any of the universities I applied to which meant I would have to start off my college life at Collin College. New York University, University of Missouri, Southern Methodist University, and even various last choice colleges that I applied to in hopes of going to any university turned me down one by one because of my low SAT scores. I was completely paralyzed with the turn of events. I had spent my entire high school life doing exactly what all of the adults from counselors, parents and teachers had told me to do to ensure my collegiate success and this was the result. All because of low SAT scores.

Coupled with that, a majority of my life I carried on the weight of becoming the first in my immediate family to go to a major university and graduate. My mother never got to finish her college experience due to the major obstacle of having me and it was supposed to be my turn to finish that dream for me and her. It was my self-imposed responsibility to break the pathology of our family and set an example for my little brother. I wanted to prove to my family and my peers that I was successful and would go on to accomplish great things in life.

I watched all of my peers go off to the schools of their choice. The fact that my life was going in the opposite direction than I preferred overwhelmed me with depression. There were endless nights that summer of my freshman college year that I'd cry and ask myself a million questions until I fell asleep. What am I going to do now? I have disappointed my entire family. How am I going to get out of my parents' house? What if I never do? Am I a failure now? The shame of my own self was unbearable.

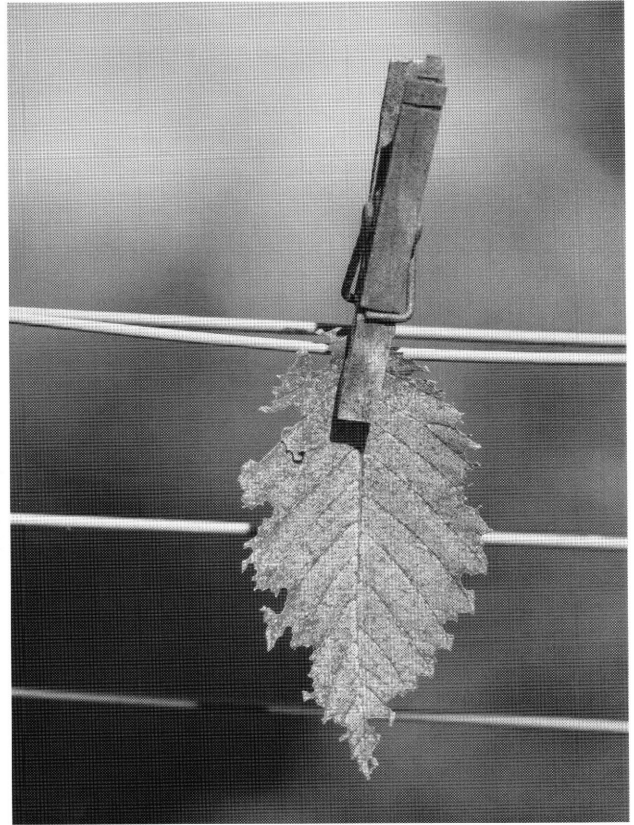
Summer ended and it was time for my freshman fall semester at Collin College to begin. Each day I attended my classes praying for the time to pass by faster so that I could hurry home and crawl in bed to cry the rest of the day - and that was my routine for the rest of the fall semester.

With the tons of idle time I had on my hands, I finally spent it doing something I never gave myself time to do before - think. Though this would seem like a process that might help me figure out what to do with my life, it often ended in more self-doubting questions that would lead me back into depression. I was the true definition of misery. I kept trying to think about my life and figure out how to move on and succeed past my current circumstances.

Throughout the semester, my efforts to move forward eventually began to flourish. Spring semester rolled around and my life turned around. I met new friends and surprisingly saw a lot of old school mates. I found a really cool job at the college and I grew accustomed to Collin. I took the time that I usually used for a pity party and used it to immerse myself in the Collin student body. As I gradually met more people at Collin, my perspective began to change. The students here were intelligent, successful, interesting and very goal oriented. After reflecting on the people I met and new things I had learned, my perspective of my life path took on a whole new direction. All of the stereotypes of Collin and the people there were a far cry from the truth and being at Collin didn't make their goals and their lives any less valuable, achievable, or successful. I obtained so much valuable insight on overcoming obstacles in my life.

Those words and sentiment from my Spanish teacher became overwhelmingly clear to me. I finally realized what he meant by run your own race. Going off to a university right after high school was not the route I was supposed to take, which is why it was altered. My journey needed to start off at Collin College because it was an experience I needed to prepare me for my bright future ahead. I had to realize that everybody has their own path, but competing with my peers' path would ultimately deviate me from my own path. I also realized that this was nowhere near the end of my life like I felt it was at that moment, it was only the beginning!

Could it be possible that my course was starting my college experience at Collin all along but I was too blinded by the paths of others to see it? Could it be possible I will never know the true answer to that question but I will always make sure to remember that my race is unique and to love every second of it because in the end my success will not be shared with my peers but it will be my own to enjoy. Forever I will draw from that experience in my life as an experience of a lifetime.



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