



8-12-2013

Out of the Night

Riley Gryc
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge>

 Part of the [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Medicine and Health Commons](#), [Mental and Social Health Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Gryc, Riley, "Out of the Night" (2013). *SURGE*. 95.
<http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/95>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/95>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Out of the Night

Abstract

I did not graduate.

After four years of college, waiting for the day I could shake President Riggs' hand, receive my diploma, and depart our campus with pride and honor, that day never came. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was watch from the back row of the audience as everyone I had attended school with for the last four years, my classmates, my friends, all received their diplomas and moved on without me. The stares from teachers I knew, the surprised looks from underclassmen, the careful tact with which everyone avoided the subject of not graduating in my presence, like I had died and they just didn't want to tell me. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, college, graduation, mental health, depression

Disciplines

Educational Sociology | Inequality and Stratification | Medicine and Health | Mental and Social Health | Social Psychology and Interaction

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

OUT OF THE NIGHT

August 12, 2013

I did not graduate.

After four years of college, waiting for the day I could shake President Riggs' hand, receive my diploma, and depart our campus with pride and honor, that day never came. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was watch from the back row of the audience as everyone I had attended school with for the last four years, my classmates, my friends, all received

their diplomas and moved on without me. The stares from teachers I knew, the surprised looks from underclassmen, the careful tact with which everyone avoided the subject of not graduating in my presence, like I had died and they just didn't want to tell me.

My counselor told me that I had nothing to be sad about, that I should make it a day of joy, of equal celebration.

I tried.

I failed.

The phone call to my parents about how I wouldn't be graduating, being told I could not even wear my cap and gown, walking away early so that the few friends I was seated with did not see me completely lose it; these are images that will never fade.

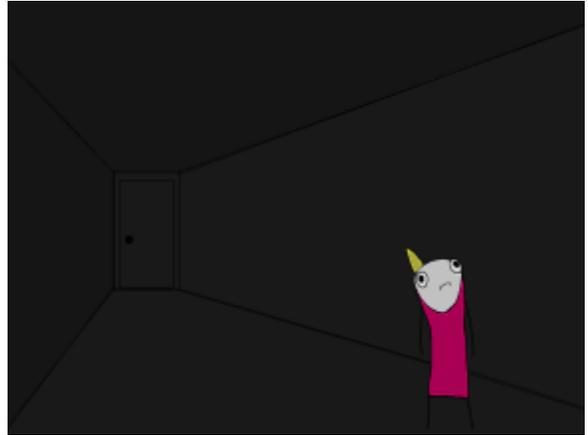
It doesn't make you any less of a person, not graduating on time. That's what they say at least, but that's never the way it feels. I feel forgotten, a wounded thing on the battlefield of life, watching those I had traveled with through the years storm on to greater things while I just lie there.

You repeat mantras:

I am a failure.

I am trash.

I was never good enough.



Rinse. Repeat.

To say senior year was rough is an understatement. Home troubles combined with a breakup just before school with my girlfriend of four years did nothing to set the stage for what one could call a successful and happy disposition. I struggled. I fell into a deep depression. I told no one. I sought a few instances of counseling, and attempted to soldier on. I didn't need anyone's help. Depression isn't normal. I was. And so I could do this.

Things got worse. Over the course of the months of winter, I would cycle between just two emotions: anger and sadness, with crippling apathy serving as the transition in between. It's all I felt.

When you're falling, you don't want to admit it. The brain pretends it's anything else: I'm just tired today, I'm just sad this one time, I just broke down emotionally one more night. It'll only be one homework assignment so how big of a deal could it be to miss it? I slipped into a practiced loathing and loneliness, convinced myself that I could repair this still. You don't need help. Help is weakness, help is admitting you have a problem, and in today's society, they cart people off who have problems. I didn't want to bad enough to need fixing. I pretended.

None of it worked. I became suicidal. I was put on suicide watch, on medications. This was pain. This was hatred of the self. I denied that I was failing two classes. I could correct it.

The mind is a marvelous demon.

So, I failed.

By the day after graduation, I was convinced of three things: I must earn money, I must attend the 150th anniversary of the battle, and I must graduate. It only took me four years and failing college to finally get me into an astronomy class. I got above 90's in all of my assignments and quizzes. I rocked the online discussion board.

I lived in Gettysburg this summer. Two weeks of sleeping on other's floors and apartment and job hunting finally landed me in a shitty third floor apartment atop Mama V's, and a job at Luke's. I've listened late at night to the back alley battles by the bar, to the sound of my neighbors fighting loudly, making up loudly, and then getting arrested loudly. I saw the fields fill with people on the 4th of July, as I myself nursed one of the worst cases of the flu I've ever had. I went to Yeungs and Wings at the Blue and Gray every Wednesday night over the summer. I never missed one.

I lived. I loved. I learned.

I was doing it. And so, in a moment of arrogance and self-pressure, I decided to take myself off medication.

Depression doesn't just leave, especially when you take yourself off medication. It wasn't a wise choice to do so, but it was the right choice. I didn't feel normal. I wasn't me. I felt like cardboard. The world was without edge. Ergonomic. Safe. Dulled.

The storm slipped in quietly, and then I pitched and rolled. I began recycling. Missing assignments, crying at all hours, there wasn't any reason. I was happy. I was where I wanted to be. Things were going amazingly well for me. So why did I want to die still? I had panic attacks, small things set me off easily. My grades continued to plummet in the class which was my second, and last, chance.

By the last week of summer school, it was clear I wasn't going to pass. Again. I'd need to do every assignment I missed, at half credit earned, and still I might not pass. But I went for it. For two days straight without sleeping, I

plowed through it. Every assignment I was missing, as well as I could do them, sent in before the final grading day. It took a lot of focus, dedication, and support from my best friend from home.

But last Friday, I did it.

I earned my final grade in college.

I graduated.

And all I have is tears. It doesn't feel like victory, or even something to celebrate. It feels like the end of a very long road I've been marching without stop.

I'm left in the back row, still. But at least I can stand up now.

Today, for the first time in a very long time in my life, I'm where I should be. I stand with the class of 2013, a graduate alongside the others in spirit. Yet, the only victory I have is in doing what I was supposed to have done in the first place.

But you know what?

That's enough for now.

Not graduating didn't make me any less of a person. It's these thoughts that did, the ones that say I never was good enough. But I was, and I am.

We all have struggles and times we aren't our best. It takes work, and help, and effort, but in the end it's always worth it. Because we are worth something, even if we think we aren't.

Riley Gryc '13
Contributing Writer

Image by Allie Brosh from <http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/>

<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/out-of-the-night/>