Hi all,

In high school I was voted “Eternal Freshmen”, and I’m somewhat proud to say that I’ve maintained that title throughout college. I’ve worked as an R.A. in Campion Hall for about two years now, and I’ve helped lead the Honors Loyola 360 retreat for the last three. And naturally (or perhaps due to Stockholm syndrome) that when trying to reflect on the Honors program, the first year is what most clearly resonates in my mind. Who would have guessed a year focused on the foundations of Western society would impart…foundations.

While the Honors curriculum taught me The Importance of Being Sleep Deprived, Alciabiadon’ts, and gave fodder for many other terrible puns, the Honors community is what has stuck with me. That first year is a unique experience where comradery is forged in fire, operas, and collective illness. And after seeing this cycle up close several times, it strikes me as one of those books that has something new every time you read it.

And it's interesting in retrospect, because frankly, my freshmen year did not go that well that well for me. When I came to Loyola in the prehistoric era of 2014, I was a scrawny, starry-eyed man-child. My world up until that point was the size of an acorn, and I felt very confident in my position as top squirrel. So as you can imagine, my transition to college was like sliding face first across wet gravel. It turns out the acorn’s revenge was long and calculated as it turned into a Womping Willow and punched me straight in the teeth.

When August began, I realized that I was deathly afraid. Not because of the academics, or being away from home, or even the mysterious organisms that seemed to be growing in the Campion basement. I was afraid of the people. The first day, I was socially intimidated, fearful of being judged for having a cleft lip. The first week I was intellectually intimidated by those in my discussion group, who all seemed to be reincarnations of Plato. And in the first month, I was intimidated by this call to action that seemed to give everyone around me a sense of purpose and direction that I sorely lacked.

And while that does sound like doom and gloom, that year taught me a lot about acceptance, firstly of myself. Being that odd-looking kid who obnoxiously played the piano and only knew how to communicate through pop culture references, I thought I would be doomed to be the Hunchback of Campion Hall, ringing the bells from the 3rd floor to call the Jesuits to prayer. And while they won’t return my calls anymore, I forgot that, as a Jesuit school, acceptance is kind of our thing. The more I interacted with people, it became clear that it was not about what you looked like or what you’ve done, but what you could bring to the table. In my case that was usually snacks, but still.

The second thing I learned to accept was help. My first essay grade was humbling to say the least, and it motivated me to listen more intently to the aforementioned Plato clones, to take more critique and give less. But beyond the peer editing, it also taught me to lean on others. As I alluded to before, I felt a lot of social anxiety that year, and planned to keep that a state secret. But when that anxiety became crippling, someone noticed and did everything in their power to get me to talk to someone. And despite my growling, hissing and occasional clawing, they got me to the Wellness Center, and I am eternally grateful that they did.

I was going to phrase this last section as “staying hungry”, but as a social science major that may be too close to reality. But I learned to let my ambition be driven by who and what I love. Like many others, my end goal was to be the best that no one ever was at...something. I struggled, and still struggle to think of a clear career direction for myself. Meanwhile, it seemed that everyone had a fair idea of which cancer they were going to cure. But I think that the Beatles put it most succinctly: “All You Need is Love”. Because, at its core, that's what drives the ambitions of this community. From pursuing medical school to committing to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the people in this program are guided by a care for others, a care for friends and family, and a desire to create positive change. And in discerning my next steps, I take a lot of inspiration from that collective drive.

Four years later, I am still afraid of the future. I’m afraid of missing friends, of finding work, of paying rent for the first time. But I accept that fully, and I face it now filled with greater sense of hope and a lot of gratitude towards this community for building that within me. Because to paraphrase the Odyssey, life is a highway. Sometimes there are detours, sometimes there are roadblocks, sometimes you land up slaying a roomful of suitors. And while the seas may change and the gods may smite you, you can always get by with a little help from your friends.