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University Honors

Year-in-Review

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Halfway Done?

The fact that the end of this year marks my halfway point with my undergraduate career is incredulous to me. Two years seems like a long time, but I could swear it was only a couple days ago I was stepping onto the University of Cincinnati’s campus for the first time, a couple days before the start of classes. Still, I feel like I have matured a great deal from the beginning of my journey, accomplished many of the things I set out to do in 2014’s Year-In-Review, and outlined a path for the rest of my time at UC.

During the 2013-2014 school year, I struggled with mourning for my father and building meaningful relationships with my classmates. I think I will mourn for my father for the rest of my life; I once heard a phrase regarding loss that follows something like this: “The pain will always be there, but you learn to manage it better with every day that goes by.” I agree with this, and I would consider myself open to talk about my dad’s death. Not only have I developed strength over the months, but I have also found strength in the people around me. Sometimes, I will post a status on Facebook reflecting on my dad’s life, and how his death has impacted my life. I do this for a number of reasons: it’s cathartic for me, I feel like I honor my dad, and I remind my friends and family that this topic is still potent for me and, though I don’t like to admit it, I appreciate their words of encouragement and support. I also like to think that my talking about my dad’s death makes it less awkward for other people to talk about his death and my family, because more and more often, I have people asking me, “How is your mother doing?”, which I almost always reply, “She’s doing ok, (and then explain how I think next year will be challenging for my mom since my sister is attending her first year of college at Wash U in St. Louis; my mom will be alone for the first time in her greater adult life). Because when people ask me how my mother is doing, they do not casually ask how she has been. They imply through a unique tone of voice, “How is she doing alone, or how is she doing since her husband passed away unexpectedly?” And as I think about this more and more, I start to wish people would ask exactly what they meant, especially because, I am strong and I can talk about my dad’s death.

I found as I returned for my second year at UC that the friendships that had once felt so distant last year suddenly seemed much closer and much more solidified. My relationships with each and every one of my musical theatre classmates became easy. I felt at ease with my class, which was what I was looking for last year, but could not find. However, this year was overwhelmingly better than last year because my girlfriend, Skye Cone, transferred to UC for Stage Management. We have been together for a little longer than two and a half years and she has been my rock throughout that entire time. In August, we decided to radically change our lifestyles: we decided to become vegan. Skye was raised vegetarian, and I had started the process of giving up fish and other meats during my freshmen year, but last summer we talked about trying veganism. I am so happy with this change in my lifestyle; I feel so much healthier than I did before. Veganism helped shape many of my current values, and Skye and I supported each other throughout the transition. Now we have been vegan for almost an entire year, and I see no end in sight. Being able to share all my experiences with her made this year so much more meaningful than last year. I am looking forward to the rest of our time together at UC; I can only imagine the experiences we will share by each other’s sides.

In 2014’s Year-in-Review, I discussed Thaddaeus Voss, someone I looked up to and had the pleasure of meeting in Gateway to Honors when he presented as an Honors Ambassador. As it turned out, Thaddaeus and I became friends when we embarked on Leadershape together in the beginning of January. Looking back at my first Year-in-Review, I chuckle to myself because I had the great fortune of getting to know Thaddaeus better than I ever imagined I would. He imparted great wisdom and advice to me, and I attribute my joining the ROAR Tour Guides as a combination of Thaddaeus Voss and Erin Alanson’s influence, and my own ambition to become more involved with the UC Community.

I am incredibly proud of myself for branching out as much as I did this year. As I just mentioned, I joined the ROAR Tour Guides, an incredible organization with amazing people dedicated to attracting prospective students to UC. I joined this organization not only because I wanted to become more deeply involved in the Bearcat community, but because I also wanted to leave a legacy outside of CCM and the Honors Program. And through participating in the Accelerated Leadership Development Program, I cultivated a better sense of my values and my direction in this world. I feel like this last semester was just the tip of the iceberg with ROAR.

My involvement with CCM Tribunal deepened incredibly this year. I was appointed as the Chair for the Advertising/Community Service Committee, and I used the experience I gained from working with a marketing agency last summer to my advantage. My efforts this year included expanding our social media presence and trying to connect the Cincinnati community and our members for community service events. The majority of people must have liked the work I did, because I was elected as the Vice President near the end of the year! I am excited for this opportunity to lead next year, but I am more excited by the prospect of helping the CCM student body through Tribunal’s capacities.

Though I was not cast as the lead in any of the musicals this year, I still garnered valuable experience by working in the ensemble for three shows this year. I am grateful for the opportunities I have in the conservatory, and I know that my hard work, dedication, and discipline will pay off in the years to come, no matter what roles I earn. This is something very difficult for me to say, as sometimes it can be very easy to be petty toward the people whose roles I covet, but I know that working professionally means leaving such triviality behind and simply being thankful for what I have.

I look back at this year much more fondly than last year, feeling fuller and more content with my experience. If the next two years are anything like the previous two, by the time I graduate I will be proud of what I accomplished, appreciative for the opportunities I had, touched by the people I befriended, and hungry for more, of course. Next year, I believe I will really come into my own as an adult – having left the teenage years behind. I look forward to doubling down in the organizations I am already involved in. My goal is to not necessarily join new organizations, but to reinvest my time and commitment into those I am already a part of. With this goal, I feel I can make the most of my time without having to stress about new obligations.