

All I Am Leaving Behind

The end of childhood. The start of a new beginning. More freedom, more responsibility. More time unless you count the nine to five.

People describe turning 18 differently and living through it I'm not sure how I would describe it either. I think the first time it hit me was when I watched this show in which all the characters you had gotten to know over the past five seasons were all leaving each other and the hometown that kept them together. That's when I realized that what was happening in the show was going to be me and my friends in a year.

Six months passed, and I was actually looking forward to leaving. I was looking at the benefits. I would finally have my own car, finally get a job, do fun things without my family, and not have to depend on my parents.

I stayed up late one night making a bucket list. If I was going to leave, I was going to do all the amazing things I could first. That summer I was going to have all the fun I could. One final hurrah before senior year started.

Then things changed. Not so much my surroundings but how I thought about them. The change happened one night when I snuggled up with my six-year-old sister Millie to watch a movie. The movie was about four sisters and their relationship and how when one falls ill, and eventually dies, they ultimately come closer. Needless to say, we were both crying by the end. As we were sitting there in the dark, she hugged me close and said, "I never want you to leave."

Now she had said this countless times before but with the emotions running high from the moment this time I realized I did not want to leave either.

I started to think: the kind of deep thinking that entirely changes your perspective. In this deep-thinking moment, I reflected on how I wasn't a good big sister. I would come home from school and doom scroll on my phone for hours and when one of my siblings asked if I wanted to do something with them, I would say I had homework because I did, but I was not working on it right then. Having schoolwork became a crutch excuse to not have to hang out with them. In short, I did not have a relationship with any of my family like those sisters and their mom had in the movie. If I did not change that fast there was a real possibility that I would not have been on after we left. Would anyone be able to say we were more than blood relatives? Would someone be able to tell we were more than sisters, we were friends?

I was determined to stop this. I wasn't going to be an older sister that didn't talk to the adoring younger sister when distance came into play. I refused to do to my younger sisters what my older sisters did to me.

Do you remember that bucket list? Well, I did. I decided if I was going to complete it I would do it with friends and family I cared about. Anytime I planned to do something on that list I would take someone I cherished with me. I know it seems all optimistic and is like something out of a coming-of-age movie but at least I know my childhood will have a grand full symphony finale.

My thinking changed. I was only looking ahead at what was going to happen. I was too focused on what the future held and what wonderful things were there. I did not realize all the remarkable things I had in front of me right now and if I was too concerned with the future, I would miss the amazing things I already had. Now I was thinking about how my present actions affected what I was leaving behind.

Will I leave high school without doing all the “cool” things? Probably but this way I can control the things I never want to leave behind. I know I am leaving behind a healthy stable connection not a broken regretful one. I know I’m leaving behind my hometown, but I know they will root for me no matter where I go. I am leaving on my own terms. Even if being a teenager was bumpy, I know I can smile at the sunrise of adulthood because I am ready; so, bring it on.

Goodbye fear, hello courage.