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TeenWrites

By Analie Fernandes



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as if I'm failing to truly experience adolescence unless I do something amazing this summer - as if a mundane summer reflects a mundane personality.

After all, our society has idealized the sunny season, making it into a hallmark of teen culture. Our parents tell us stories of old roadtrips and beach vacations with friends. We watch movies and read books about teenagers and their amazing, life-altering summertime adventures. Think about it: "Dazed and Confused," "Grease," "Dirty Dancing," "I Know What You Did Last Summer." All are cult classics, all are centered around summer adventures,

I had fallen into a trap.

My summer was being crushed under the weight of a lifetime of expectations - and if I wasn't careful, my entire senior year would be crushed too. I was suffocating all the fun out of summer, fixating on perception rather than feeling. It took some time for me to realize that the reason that all these stories resonated with me wasn't because I wanted to do what these characters and people did. Rather, I wanted to experience what they did. I wanted a summer that was spontaneous, relaxing, fun-and those things are entirely within my control. I can make my summer whatever I want it to be. I needed to realize that what I'll cherish the most won't be manufactured moments, modeled after old stories, but the happy memories I make when I let my life play out naturally.

So I will make a pilgrimage to the beach with my friends; I will watch the waves wash up and do cartwheels on the sand - but it won't be because I'm trying to live up to an idealized story. It'll be because I love the beach, because my friends want to collect seashells, because it's sunny and we're in California, and "What else would we do?" because we're young, because it's fun, because we can do what we want. It'll be because we're only young once and summer is what we make it.

"Drrriinnngg." It's the last school bell of the year, the only time that any of us are happy to hear the obnoxiously loud call to order. Everyone in my class cheers, then rushes out the door, calling goodbyes over their shoulders and waving to friends. The parking lot is a mess. Yearbooks are being passed around with colorful pens. Groups of teenagers are packing into cars like sardines. Car doors are open, leaking loud music. On my way to my friends' car I hear "Despacito" and "That's What I Like" at deafening volume. Traffic is awful. Everybody's heading the same direction - downtown, to get food. It's a mass exodus into freedom - the start of glorious, beautiful summer.

What I love about summer is that the minute that last bell rings, all my responsibilities wash away, like sand castles, smoothed by the waves. There are no more AP classes, no more sports, no more clubs. I'm left with a blank slate, with pristine, untouched sand, ready to be shaped however I want. Summertime is freedom in its purest form - a fresh start.

Usually, my summers are carefree, a collection of long days spent relaxing in the sun in various locations. This year is different. I've been ambushed by nostalgia, what used to be known as YOLO in cringier days past. I can feel the pressure to have a memorable summer more keenly this year than ever, my penultimate summer as a high schooler. My sentimentality is easily translated into melodramatic introspections. I don't have much time left as a teenager, and I'll never be this young again. My window to make memories that will be worth remembering decades later is closing. It seems almost

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