

# A Letter to High School Graduates

By Liesl Hall

Photo by Liesl Hall

Congratulations! You've almost made it! Graduation is getting closer and closer and so I want to share a bit of wisdom that I received when I graduated high school. When I graduated, my Grandpa Joe told me, "Everything you think you know will change once you get into college." At that time, I had no idea what this statement even meant and, if I am going to be completely honest, deep down...it TERRIFIED me. What had I just learned in my exhaustively long 18 years of life if all of it was going to change anyway?! I brushed away this statement as well as the nagging feeling in the back of my mind that maybe I wasn't as smart as I had thought I was. After all, I learned everything that I was going to need for the rest of my life in high school, right? I thought I knew who I was and what I was capable of. I thought I knew what was in store for me. I thought that, since I had worked so hard in high school, the rest of my life would just sort of fall into place and I wouldn't have to work so hard anymore (which turned out to be completely false, by the way). Here was my master plan:

***Get a scholarship and go to college.***

Yeah, that's literally all I had...It was not very specific or enlightening. But, then again, no one knows what they're doing after high school anyway so my plan was probably as good as any one's.

I did get a scholarship and I did go to college. When I was in college, I was ecstatic to be out of high school and able to start afresh. But after a while, the excitement of being on my own wore off and it was back to the daily grind of studying and going to volleyball practice, only with the added responsibilities of grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and doing my own laundry ON TOP of studying and practice. After a few weeks of having to actually be responsible for myself, I found myself longing for my high school days when I could study and go to volleyball practice and come home to a home-cooked dinner (which is definitely NOT the case in when you're out on your own). It was exciting to be my own boss but, at the same time, I remember wishing that I had enjoyed my time at home more.

What I am trying to say is this: Everything that you have right now will someday be years in the past. It doesn't seem sad now but, once the excitement for the future and plans for a new adventure wear off and you're living your everyday life, you'll think about these years and the fact that you won't ever get them back and you'll wish that you had appreciated more and stressed about the future less. Remember the times when you and your friends hung out with your parents? They're still growing up just like you and want to remember this time too. You will DEFINITELY remember this time as a Golden Age because you didn't have bills or a mortgage. (It's inevitable as an adult, unfortunately. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news.)

I'm not saying to worry about the future and the fact that life is going to get harder for you because it inevitably gets harder for everyone. Even though it gets harder, at the same time, it

gets SO MUCH BETTER. When you're your own boss, you can do whatever you want. You can go to bed whenever. You can take random trips to Taco Bell in the middle of the night just because you can. But, with these awesome perks come awesome responsibilities. There is a poem that describes this perfectly: "I am the Captain of my soul, I rule it with stern joy; and yet I think I had more fun when I was a cabin boy." (From "O Captain, My Captain" by Walt Whitman.) All I'm saying is that each part of your life has helped shape who you are and you shouldn't forget to appreciate how much fun you are having right now and live life to its fullest today. I am saying that, someday, you want to be able to look back on these days and remember them with a feeling of satisfaction...the satisfaction that you lived with no regrets and that you enjoyed every day and told people that you loved them and truly appreciated each moment.

So here is my advice to you from someone who didn't appreciate what she had when she was your age: Don't try to grow up too fast. Yes, your future is bright. So, so bright. You are going to have so many opportunities to excel and grow and learn and love. But don't forget all of the people who are with you today: your mom, your dad, your grandparents, your teachers, your classmates. Everyone has had a hand in your life and in where you are today. Don't take them for granted. Tell them you love them, because odds are that someone who is there today might not be there tomorrow. I wish I had told my Grandpa Joe that I loved him more and that he had a huge impact on my life. I wish I had told my classmates whom I would never see again how much I appreciated seeing their faces in the halls every day...even the kids I didn't know well. I wish I had told them how much they meant to this world. I wish that I hadn't wasted those last few days in high school wishing that I was already gone. Someday you'll look back and realize that these years were some of the best years of your life so, take advantage of these last few moments. Appreciate what you have and find the joy in the little things.

Live in the present, not in the future and your future self will thank you. Now go out and make some memories that you'll smile about later!