

Reflections on Graduation

By: Renee Summers

A transition commonly experienced by people in their early to mid-twenties is the life-changing event of college graduation. Unless one transfers more than once throughout their undergraduate career or unless one decides to continue working toward a higher degree at the same institution, most people graduating from college must say goodbye to a place that they've dedicated at least four years of their life to. It goes without saying that most college students, in anticipation of graduating, are mostly experiencing feelings of relief and perhaps even blissful abandon in response to the realization that they're finally going to be free from academic imprisonment! On a more serious note, one's departure from college also leads to an almost automatic questioning of which direction one's life is going to take.

I vaguely remember the notion that high school was meant to prepare you for college and in turn, college was meant to prepare you for life, hopefully a life that includes having a stable job. I clearly remember believing this statement to be sincerely true when I first started college. That belief has accompanied me through these last fading semesters before graduation.

As my graduation date grows closer, however, I must admit that the notion of college preparing you for life can fall short in its most immediate application: the days, weeks and months both before and directly following commencement. Regardless of one's major, college usually provides a person with the skills to function at least at the ground level of most existing jobs, considering that one learns how to develop organization and presentation skills, think independently, work in teams, and so on.

Still, if one does not have a set game plan for what they will be doing the fall following graduation (which for a good number of people usually signifies the first fall they'll have ever spent outside of school), the so-called "real world" can elicit some degree of panic.

This urges me to question the nature of transition and its role in shaping our lives. Why do so many of us struggle with transitions? Is it because we are essentially saying goodbye to something familiar and trying to prepare for the next (unknown) step ahead? It is likely that the type of transition and its level of difficulty may very well be dependent upon the individual and the type of environment one has created for oneself and the new type of environment one is stepping into.

In the midst of finding no clear answers in my never-ending search for personal meaning, the presence of a change as important as leaving college, has all but pushed me to the brink of declaring that the world can only offer desperation or hard-won luck. I seem to have gotten caught up in pondering about what I am supposed to be doing or should be doing and have lost track of what I would really like, or even love to do. This makes sense when I look at what I've been doing since high school: I prepared, applied, endured and am now finishing a course of action that has taken four years to complete. Moreover, this has been the only real decision I've made for myself since I was declared 'free' by societal standards. Now I'm being "set free" again, however this time I'm being released from something -- college -- that I have chosen for myself. Although, in some ways, the decision to go to college almost didn't feel like a decision at all. It felt more like something one automatically does after finishing high school, just as high school was what one did after finishing middle school.

What follows from this reasoning, fortunately or unfortunately, are more questions than anything else. Though, honestly, now that I can more clearly think for myself, I've grown much more comfortable in the presence of questions as opposed to answers- now that answers look more like better-shaped questions anyway. The end of my time here at Roosevelt, without trying to sound corny, has forced me to open my eyes and acknowledge the person that I've become and the person I would like to be once I leave this place. Although this ostensibly common transition of college graduation does not offer up the solace of solid answers or pristinely paved pathways to wherever it is I'm going, it has afforded me a place from which I can go further, see more, learn more and perhaps even understand more.