Photo of the Day | Have a great Thanksgiving break :D



A student relaxes on one of UConn's many outdoor benches on Nov. 19th, 2026. Students will soon leave for break to enjoy Thanksgiving with friends and family.
PHOTO BY ALEXANDER RENZULLI, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

WHEN DID BIRTHDAYS BECOME SOMBER?

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The November breeze always feels heavy, weighted down by something somber and uncertain.

Maybe it's heavy with the fleeting memories of summer, slipping out of our hands and minds. Perhaps it's the soft hand bringing us toward the inevitable end of the calendar. Another year is coming to a slow close, the long hazy nights of July are a distant memory and we're another year old.

This past Monday, 20 years of age took me by surprise. Well, surprise in the sense that it all just felt so fake. Turning 20 — that's not supposed to happen for another few years. I was just getting acquainted with the nuances of teenagehood, miscellaneous adventure and all.

So it's funny, then, that as the leaves crush under our boots in harsh reminder and the daylight grows tired and weary of itself, the question I was most asked about entering the second decade of life was, "How do you feel?" It's been a long time since the birthday was a unanimously joyous event.

My thoughts could just be from my aforementioned November spirit, engulfed in a season less so known for life and more so as the year's denouement, but I think we've developed a strange fear of age as a collective. Ironic, as we bask in a time where lifespans are at an indisputable height. Nonetheless, it's almost poetic to fear the birthday. Sylivia Plath famously put it in a 1950 diary entry, "I know, I've always dreaded birthdays." She was 13. The young mind, it almost seems, fears death more than the older, perhaps more prepared mind. The poetic mind, further, overthinks, and honestly over-fears a reality that is in theory far away. I sit with this quote because the words are of those who cannot grapple with the future. Dreading the birthday is to ignore the 364 days sandwiched between. We dread the birthday because we forget all the rest. Plath died at 30.

Birthdays at some point become a celebration of a joyous existence marred with the slow march of time. In time, I had come to realize that life was non-refundable, and without noticing, days of schoolyard songs, proms and naivety came to a close. Nostalgia for things now inaccessible and a yearning for things not done, life unlived, engulf the brain; wilting the flowers that once came with your singular day of the year.

Gen Z has it the worst today; I do not doubt that. To see the lives of strangers in all nooks and crannies of social media and to garner envy for lives of people that are not yours breeds an insatiable hunger of jealousy for people not you. As we grapple with the notion that young adulthood is merely the precursor for the harrowing adulthood, the Gen Z birthday has become one of worry. One that feels insignificant. Dylan Thomas eloquently wrote, "This sandgrain day in the bent bay's grave/He celebrates and spurns/His driftwood thirty-fifth wind turned age." He was 35. Is it really fair to encapsulate one day into a "sand grain" however? To counter Thomas with John Green, "Now, of course none of this matters in the grand scheme of things... But we don't live in the grand scheme of things." Everyday is less a sand grain if we make it a star.

Mary Oliver wrote, "I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers flow in the right direction, will the earth turn/as it was taught, and if not how shall/I correct it?"

So worry is one of internal fears: ones concerning a life not yet fulfilled. But worry also is rooted in an external world not promised.

Generation Z is a lost generation, one living in an era of divisive politics, technological fear and a mental health crisis. We face a country of seven dollar gas, dirty water, shootings at the local church and no clear way out. Billionaires control the people from top-down, and my flight and my email got shut down in 48 hours; both a lack of hope. 365 days equates to one year closer to a seemingly inevitable end, an end that they're promising to be sooner than later.

But alas, we must remember how Oliver ended the poem mentioned earlier: "Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing. / And gave it up. And took my old body / and went out into the morning, / and sang".

Birthdays may be melancholic, whether now or in due time, but only if you make them out to be. I reject the notion to live like there's no tomorrow because I believe you should live like tomorrow will make for a great and boisterous adventure. And the day after that will make for late night drives and good music. Campfires and stars; stories and guitars. Tomorrow brings photos yet taken and hikes yet trekked. Food not tried and movies not watched. Flowers not yet smelled, trees not yet climbed. If I look forward to tomorrow, I cannot be afraid of the years ahead. This does not mean I ignore the future, death and all, but she can take a backseat for life — just for a little while. Stevie Nicks said "Time makes you bolder / Even children get older / And I'm gettin' older, too." Maybe I am getting older, but I got a whole life to live, and they call it a "happy" birthday for a reason.

Now I'm going to go live up 20 and hope that 21 continues to seem so very far away.



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