

WEEKEND *HISTORIES*

PERSONAL ESSAY

My Seat at the Table

Sterling Library’s Egyptology Reading Room is where I go to ruminate.

// BY ANDREW DEMAR

I didn’t mean to find the Egyptology room. Like most Yale discoveries, I stumbled upon it wandering into some place I wasn’t really planning on going. The room features a single table, a single lamp that emits soft light and walls lined with books. It’s a space with an immense feeling of history. In all honesty, most Yale study spots look similar to this one, but somehow the Egyptology Reading Room has a different feel from those other Yale spaces. For me, it’s the place where I’m in the habit of reflecting on time at Yale.

That’s sort of the point. The room is a space that forces you to be alone with yourself, sometimes for longer than you’d like. It’s a singular table for a singular experience, a reflection of what Yale sometimes feels like: full of other people’s history, but deeply personal all the same.

I think about this whenever I manage to sneak in and sit there — about how much time I’ve spent trying to find my “seat at the table,” figuratively and literally. We inhabit a school where it can feel like everyone seems to have their place already: in student organizations, friend groups and heated seminar discussions. At times, I’ve felt like I was still standing in the doorway, holding my laptop and wondering if I was supposed to knock first.

The Egyptology Room doesn’t answer that question, but it does make me think about it. It’s a place where you can feel the weight of all the history around you — not just Yale’s, but your own. The friendships that once

felt like forever but quietly faded. The moments you thought would define your college experience but didn’t. The small, unglamorous ways you’ve actually grown.

There’s an irony in the fact that a room so meticulously preserved and curated isn’t very practical. You can’t really study there without bumping elbows with the lamp or feeling like you’re breathing too loudly. But that’s Yale, too — charming from a distance, a little messy up close.

When I sit in that room, I don’t feel like I’m making history. I feel like I’m observing it. I’m one student in a long line of people who have passed through, each convinced that their own worries, their own deadlines, their own heartbreaks were monumental. And maybe they were, for a moment. Having spent hours in the Egyptology Room and contemplated the magnitude of my own troubles, I’m inclined to believe they were.

Maybe that’s the quiet charm of this place: It reminds you that being here, even briefly, is its own form of permanence. That the table will remain long after you’ve graduated, waiting for another student to find it and think those thoughts, or maybe entirely different ones.

For now, the Egyptology Room is my secret. And maybe it should stay that way. Part of its appeal lies in how it finds you when you’re ready to be alone with yourself.

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ILLUSTRATION BY SUDARSHAN KRISHNAN

PERSONAL ESSAY

I Would’ve Dyed My Hair Pink, Too

Reflections on the bitter millenials at my summer ice cream scooping job.

// BY ESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ

Millennials did one thing right: indie sleaze. I wanted to be them, with their Tumblr accounts, their peak Coachella trips, and overwhelming sense of authenticity. They were cool. There was a wide gap between a Karen and a millennial. At least I thought.

It was the Fourth of July in a SoCal beach town, so I was playing the most overzealous music I know: indie-sleaze. The soundscape of the ice cream joint where I worked was a blend of incessant customer chatter and vocalist Michael Angelakos’ falsetto.

Only “Sleepyhead” could make me forget that I had been running on canned cold brew and stolen samples of gelato the entire summer. Standing behind the gelato case, I noticed how customers leaned forward, pressing on the glass — as though I were an artist they’d been dying to see. Instinctively, they craved closeness to what they wanted. Join the club.

“Can I get a strawberry swirl sundae?” A 30-year-old man was asking me this question. He was millennial. Very millennial. I instantly recoiled. His dated style reminded me of my elder sister’s equally millennial white mug. On the side of the mug, in black Amatic SC font, it says “mug.” It still has pride of place in her

kitchen cabinet.

I would like to personally thank designer Rae Dunn for making sure I know I’m drinking out of a mug instead of a cup every time my sister pours me a mug — not a cup — of coffee. Is pottery what made millennials uncool?

Maybe the transformation took place when they left behind their dyed-pink hair and decided to have apartments filled with beige furniture instead. I get it: the job and housing market has soured the twee-slash-Tumblr energy they once had. But still. Have some self respect.

I handed off the sundae to the 30-year-old cardigan-wearing man who at least seemed to have a twinkle of joy in his eyes. Was it due to the presence of Passion Pit in our collective sound mix, a band from his youth. His approval of my song choice confirmed my theory that at some point in his life, he was a cool kid.

I wondered if the indie sleaze drought in the Spotify playlists of today’s teens might be to blame for their higher levels of depression. I mean: If the first thing you hear in the morning is Mitski’s “I Bet on Losing Dogs” or Lana Del Rey’s “Dealer,” are you even trying to have a good day?

My coworker, who was likely annoyed to see me on my phone, stepped on my shoes as he slid past me. I continued to hand out samples to eager customers, but I noticed my coworker was

talking to the millennial. He seemed particularly upset. Something about a hair in his gelato.

The twinkle in his eyes — that reminded me of the glittery indie sleaze era — had turned to something more malevolent. In his unintelligible rant, I heard him shout that we were out to get him.

Whatever. It’s just gelato. I couldn’t imagine the daily stress and distaste for life I would need to possess in order to throw an emotional fit over something so miniscule. My employee-of-the-year coworker offered to replace the hair-tainted cup, but had to refuse a refund. Store policy. I held myself back from intervening.

With my back turned to face the milkshake machine, I focused on the consistency of the chocolate shake in my hand, cup shaking from the pressure. A splash of cold hit the back of my neck. I felt it just under my scrunchie-tied bun and left shoulder. It reminded me of being a kid and placing my cold hands underneath my sister’s shirt. Splattered colorful specks clung to the left side of my shirt. It almost mimicked the fireworks bursting outside. I turned slowly, afraid that he would want to fight me face-to-face.

Once I turned around, all I saw was a man in a cardigan, running out of the store, crossing the street without even a glance.

Phrases like “Oh

my God are you okay?” filled the customer-packed room. The fearful and shocked stares helped me register that I had been hit with a gelato cannon.

My rule-following coworker came running towards me. He’d forgot-

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all people can
become bitter.*

ten my favorite rule: If the customer seems like a raging lunatic, the customer is always right. You’d think with the dated millennial fit he’d have an equally mature way of handling conflict. Growing up I never imagined that a millennial would turn into a Karen so easily. I mean, yes, I would be repulsed by a hair in my gelato cup, but not enough to turn into a baseball pitcher. Maybe the millennial cardigan and the indie-sleaze don’t matter. With time, all people can become bitter. God, I don’t want to end up like that.

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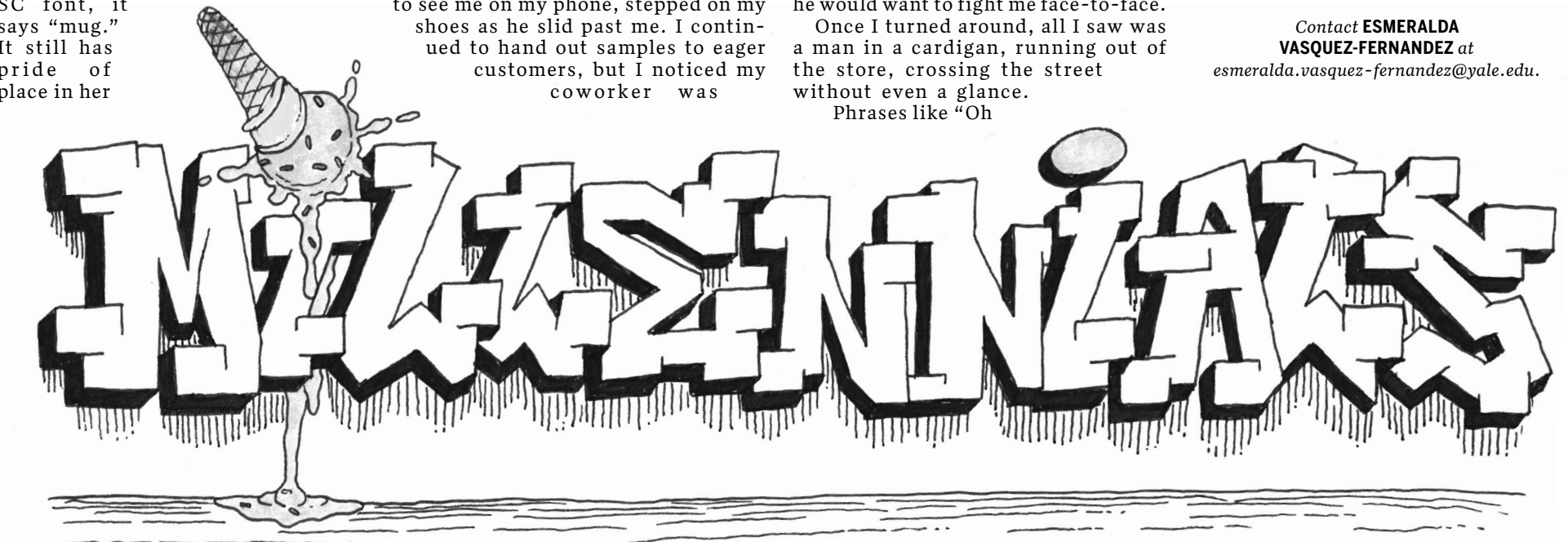


ILLUSTRATION BY SEBASTIAN WOODS

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
YOUR NATURAL HAIR COLOR