WEEKEND *BELOVED*

PERSONAL ESSAY

I am a mosaic of everyone I have ever loved.

// BY HANNAH ROLLER

I am a mosaic of everyone I have ever loved.

I always sign a birthday card with my name in cursive because that is what my grandmother taught me to do. I still say "potato tomato," an expression coined by my first boyfriend, when something seems different but is actually the same.

I put salt and pepper on my salad because my dad swears by it.

I keep a drawing in the drawer of my bedside table that a 5-year-old made for me when I was volunteering at an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. I am fully convinced that the only way to get over a hangover is to have a huge bagel with lox because that is what my high school friend group did the morning after every single party.

I play Bob Dylan and The Cure because one of the best people I know would always blare it on his truck speakers. I never annotate books in pen because my first-year history teacher — who is an atheist — told me it was a sin. I make tea for my friends when their days are long because that is what my mother does. The parts of us cultivated in the image of others are easy to miss. But pause for a second, take a look, we are inarguably shaped by the current of people that flow around and through us.

Like any other mosaic, I am composed of parts. Fragments of love and fragments of loss. The former unavoidably fades into the latter because people are transient and imperfect beings. There is no way to avoid it. To love is to live, but to live is also to lose.

I barely remember the first funeral I went to, but I remember that my older cousin was crying and I couldn't understand why. I lost my aunt last November. At the service, I sat on a couch in the back room attempting to explain to my cousin's 8-year-old daughter why it was okay that people were crying. Her black dress didn't match the hot pink pompom on the pen she was using to doodle in a unicorn decorated notebook.

Despite loss being an inescapable and undeniable truth of life, we deny it again and again and again. The first break up, the slow torture of growing apart, seeing a face that you once had memorized months later, looking at a picture of your parents when they met, the first falling out, your grandfather painting over 14 years of height measured in pencil on the door frame, a song from October 2024, the first funeral, a shirt you don't wear anymore, a phone number that you have memorized but won't call.

I am 18, so I don't truly know what I'm talking about. But here is what I think. I think that we have no choice but to carry loss through our lives. That to grieve deeply is to have loved fully. That it's okay to regret, it's okay to love somebody so much that the loss haunts you, okay to wish that things were different. But I also think that people stick with us despite distance and break ups and fall outs and silence and death. I think that getting over the pain of the first break up makes us learn what we want to be in love. I think that growing apart from someone you were convinced would be your maid of honor helps define you outside of who you were. I think that sitting in a church pew at a funeral staring at the candle flickering on the pulpit makes us more compassionate and more empathetic beings. I think that loss is as integral to us as love is. That learning to lose is a necessary trial of life.

This is an ache of emerging from youth, of learning what cannot be taught but must be lived. There is a realization that accompanies the shift from the childish abstraction of grief to the lived daily ritual of mourning that which will not return. As mosaics, our love and loss are inextricable, so inseparable, so intertwined that they blur together all too often. Perhaps loss is just as important as love to the project of deeply knowing ourselves.

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ILLUSTRATION BY NELLIE KENNEY

PERSONAL ESSAY

On Friendships at Yale

// BY ESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ

Bustling from meetings, to clubs, to work, to every other thing that propels our careers and passions can feel like you are merely gliding by people and gliding through life. When someone manages to stop you and ask, "Can you grab a meal?" you shuffle through your Google Calendar to find any empty white space.

Maybe you can spare 30 minutes tomorrow or 40 minutes next weekend, but this exchange can feel transactional as they scour their own calendar to find any compatible time.

When I first got to Yale about three months ago, I found myself making lunch plans weeks in advance. I wanted to connect with people in my residential college, clubs, classes but with such a demanding schedule the only time I had was when I finally got to take a breath and eat. Hey, everyone needs to eat.

The "let's grab a meal" culture on campus is convenient, but it can lack depth. If I wanted to say anything personal about your life during your resco dinner, I need to comically use the classic "Yale 360 head sweep" to make sure the environment is safe. Still I'd whisper in fear of being heard, maybe in fear of being known.

Yale makes capitalizing on all networking opportunities seem most important. Any peer could be the next president or CEO of some billion dollar company. The thrill of recognition and social clout makes it feel worth it to slide through the door. But while approaching random strangers at parties just to give introductions and walk away probably is the way to gain social recognition, it's a terrible way to make friends.

There is a difference between knowing someone's name and maybe what projects they are involved in and knowing they like an iced matcha latte with almond milk and one pump of vanilla. Just as there is a difference between a friend and a true friend.

Real friendship requires time to foster a close connection, but if all I did was grab a meal with various people throughout the year, I would likely find myself emotionally afloat. Chronicling the past few months of minor life updates starts to feel stale. By week three, I found myself needing someone to help rearrange my room and wanting to go thrifting, but I couldn't comfortably text someone out of the blue and ask for their company.

People at Yale might have a group of friends who they party with, a group they study with and another group they run with. These sub-groups of friends are realistic because not everyone who wants to go out every weekend will be in your same major or enjoy stomping on concrete. Most friendships get started as "a friendship of convenience." These groups of friends can be real friends, but there are also the friends we keep around despite slews of inconveniences.

Friendship is about carving time out of a busy schedule because this person matters just as much as — and no shade to these people — consulting group meetings. It is not a chore to find compatible time, nor is it a stressor. Being around my friends lightens the load of the day and, hopefully, illuminates theirs to the same extent. It is about letting someone see my authentic self without being armed with first-impression armor. They become people I value the presence of in my day-to-day life, whether they are physically present or not. An internal indicator that I care deeply about my friend is if I find out about a cool opportunity and immediately reach for my phone to invite them. I overhear someone talking about their favorite band and I get reminded of them. I receive random texts about G-Heav running out of chips and hummus literally daily. I have an ongoing text message chain that continues and stops and picks back up again. Friends, at least in my mind, should be people who are constant.

Now, I am not saying my friends need to be there 24/7 attached at the hip. I actually believe that real friendships get tested when both parties naturally take a pause but are able to pick up right where they left off.

This kind of friendship is easier to foster with people who've known each other for years, but it is just as possible with the friends who see each other once a week for Sunday morning hikes or Wednesday morning coffee dates. It is the people who lay on the floor with each other on Friday nights after a night out just to talk about a bunch of nothing.

According to Rhaina Cohen at the Atlantic, "Wasting time together makes the best memories." I happen to agree.

These types of friendships are built by establishing a layer of trust. These friends demonstrate a care for one another's well-being and celebrate their authenticity. I trust in their warmth for me because I feel it, like a constant hug that bears comfort. It takes vulnerability, and that can feel scary in such a small school. Nobody wants to see their deepest secrets on Fizz or hear them pass swiftly through the lips of someone waiting for their order at the Elm. But that trust is an element of what makes true friendship so valuable.

My advice: It is not easy to maintain a friendship, so learn from the ones you've lost. But also recognize that sometimes people are meant to stay or can only be in only a chapter of your life.

Thankfully, I have found people, both before Yale and since I've arrived here, who I can text about tripping on a step or whenever I need reassurance. I don't want to glide through life to realize all I have is a list of followers on Instagram and LinkedIn. I want to be surrounded by people who believe in me and root for me in ways that are deeply personal and meaningful. I hope I return the favor.

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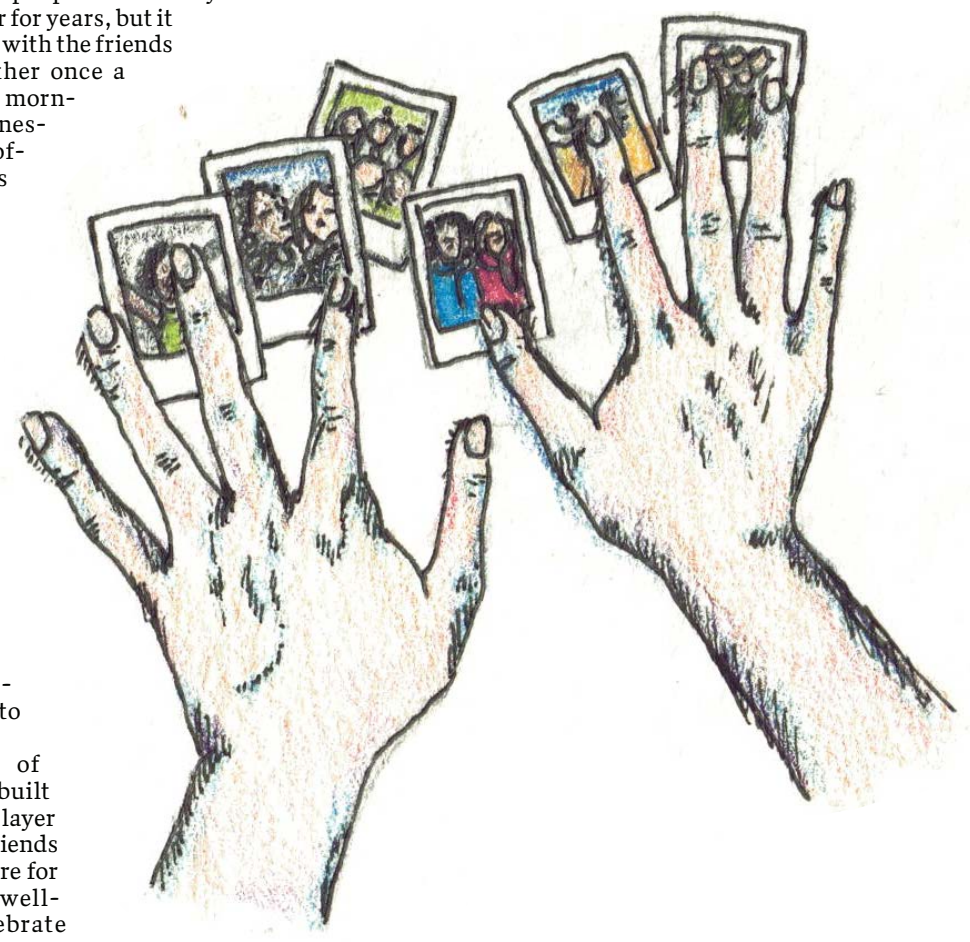


ILLUSTRATION BY JANE CALLANAN

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

MAKING FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS