

Maize and Blues

In her short story titled “The Opposite of Loneliness,” Marina Keegan discusses the unique nature of the togetherness that college provides. She makes the claim that being in a university setting, surrounded by like-minded peers, is the opposite of loneliness. If that is the case, and I do believe it is, then I think I know what this sharp ache right below my stomach is. I first felt it as I drove out of Ann Arbor this afternoon, and it has been growing ever since. The feeling dwindled slightly as I sat down with my family for a meal that my sister made to celebrate my return, but now, as I sit by myself in our spacious and tidy kitchen (a direct contrast to the small, grimy cook-space I was using yesterday), it’s back. It’s two in the morning and the house is quiet; my parents and sister don’t operate on the same schedule as I do.

Sure, sitting here alone does seem pretty similar to the countless nights I spent at school, sitting alone at our dining room table doing homework after everyone else had gone to bed. But this is different. I’m not in a house with five of my best friends, and I’m not in a town with all of my best friends. Here, my loneliness reverberates against the walls and is amplified by the empty space. Back there, my loneliness was muffled by clutter and extinguished by snores, coughs, creaks, and other night sounds. I feel like an amputee. In the back of my head, I keep expecting someone I know to stumble through the door with stories. I keep expecting my phone to buzz to discuss where and when we will eat brunch tomorrow. But I know that won’t happen.

I’ve been sitting here, trying to comfort myself by thinking of the future. I like to imagine the first visit, the first reunion, the first wedding. Where will everyone be? What will they be doing? I try to explain to myself how I will manage seeing my closest friends as many times in a year as I usually do in a day, and I’ve been able to come up with a few methods so far. I’ll call and text and Skype. I’ll watch the snap stories and see the picture on Facebook and Instagram. But obviously that won’t be enough, so tonight I’ve made a promise to myself. *Make the visits count.* If I can’t see my people as often as I’d like, then I will just have to make the time I can spend with them that much more meaningful.

For a moment I was scared about the visits. What if it’s not the same? How can we make more inside jokes and memories when we aren’t all together? But then I when I

think about it really hard, I know it will be fine. I know that it will be easy to fall into the old routine as soon we see each other. It has to be that way.

Because when I think back to why these past four years have been fantastic, it's not really the big loud memories that stand out. Gamedays and tailgates and giant parties were definitely fun, don't get me wrong, they just aren't the first to come to mind. It's the smaller ones that jump to my head. It's the time my night was far from over even though I was asleep in bed at one in the morning. It's the times we spent hours throwing golf balls into a bucket and only broke one lamp in the process. It's the weekly ritual of recounting the previous nights adventures to each other in our living room, hungover and groggy but happy to be together. It's the runs we went on, the brunches and dinners we had, the strange pregames that invariably led to more male nudity than most would expect. It's the times we studied until we were far too tired to be productive, but then kept studying because we had to.

And that is for whom this essay (that kind of turned into a letter) was written. It's for my friends. My friends I run with and the ones I walk with. My friends I study with and the ones I party with and also the ones I study and party with. This is for my friends I talk about coding with, and for the ones I talk about literature with, and also for the ones I talk about music with or movie or TV shows or life or everything or nothing. My friends that have seen me at my best and at my worst. You made this place great. You are the answer to the question of why nobody's had it better than us. Michigan was good to me, but only because it was the vehicle through which I found you. And please notice that I said *run* and *party* and *talk*, not *ran* and *partied* and *talked*. This is a change, a big change, but it is not the end. Not even close.

To the times we've had and the many visits to come.

Much love,

Noah