

I have spent my whole life waiting. I waited to be born so I could see the world. I waited to be thirteen so I wouldn't be twelve anymore. I waited for my driver's license so I could stop asking for rides from my parents. I've waited for buses, for confirmation emails, for the seasons to change. But what was I doing while I was doing all that waiting? I'm not sure. Waiting is an unusual activity because it has nothing to do with what you are actually doing; it focuses only on what you are going to do. It is a rare breed of action that is not active. You can't wait a book or your mom or a carrot. You can wait a table, but what does that entail? Waiting for someone to make a decision. We, as students, spend our days waiting: for the end of class, for the end of term, for the big performance or party. We spend so much time in this in-between, this dream state where we must occupy our time while we look forward to the next step. And I know that I have spent the last few weeks, maybe months, waiting for this day, when I would stand before you here, and talk about how I was waiting for this day. That is a whole lot of waiting.

True to form, as a high school graduate four years ago, I waited impatiently for Bennington, a magical and mystical place where I would finally be cool. Bennington. A word that's meaning has become synonymous with its name. Bennington. A small college on a hill in Vermont. A place for weird artistic kids. A home for scholars. Bennington. My first visit to Bennington only added to my excited frustration and intrigue. My family and I had driven from Chicago for my little brother's baseball tournament in Cooperstown, and my mom and I planned to visit schools around the area. Everything about that trip seemed surreal: an entire side of the country I had never really seen with quaint little towns untouched by froyo or Chipotle. There was New York City, where I had the privilege to see Allison Janney in Dolly Parton's original Broadway musical adaptation of *Nine to Five*. There were hilly country drives where your phone

service petered in and out with each rise and fall of the road. And then there was Bennington: the most surreal of them all. We visited on an impossibly beautiful day in July. When we arrived, our tour guide greeted us in the admissions office. He was a poetry student at Bennington, a rising junior, who moonlighted as a heavyweight judo fighter. And I was surprised to see him because I sort of knew him. He had gone to my high school, a Catholic school near downtown Chicago. He was one of four students total in the history of Bennington to come from my high school. And more surprising and unsettling than that, he had gone to my grade school too, also Catholic, in the Western suburbs of Chicago where I had grown up. This person who I sort of knew who had worn the same uniforms as me for 12 years and had the same teachers, and here he was again, waiting to welcome me to Bennington, a tiny school in Vermont, for the very first time. Was this fate? Was this eerie coincidence? Not really. He knew I was coming and asked to lead my tour. But to me, it seemed that Bennington knew something that I didn't. And I needed to know what that was.

And so, fate or not, I found myself here a year later, with longer hair, and a mix of fear and awe at the beauty of this place. This was my new home. And it was to be the new home for 150 other students as well: students from Germany, Spain, Senegal, and Pakistan. From performing arts high schools in New York City and Los Angeles, from public high schools in Rhode Island and Ohio, from farm towns in Minnesota. We had all come from our respective lives because we believed that we had something new and exciting to offer the world, and we were *waiting* for the opportunity to find out what that was. I remember vividly how everything on campus buzzed with possibility: the path to Jennings, the end of the world, the barn. New rooms in strangely shaped houses, a vibrant dining hall with multiple personalities, an entirely new cast of interesting and

intimidating individuals. But as I settled into my room, as I felt what it was to be alone in a new place, some of the shine wore off. Maybe some of you felt the same. That sinking feeling that accompanied questions of “did I make the right decision? shouldn’t I feel better right now, I mean, I’m finally in college, these are supposed to be the best years of my life?” What nobody told us was about the paralyzing doubt and fear that came with being alone in a new room with a stranger and the expectation that we, as 18 year olds, would somehow craft a fulfilling four years of academics that would act as a springboard for the rest of our lives. But if you’re sitting here right now, you did it! You got out of your bed, you ate breakfast, you went to class, and you worked. And you worked. And you worked.

This fall term of my senior year, I sat at a square table in the middle of a blackbox theater, affectionately known as d207, every Friday, for four hours with 10 other drama students. This was our directing class. We would meet at this table and discuss our ideas about our final projects, scenes that we wanted to direct from plays of our choosing. We sat together as students learning the craft of directing, but also as thinkers, as visionaries, as artists. At that table, we dreamed of tall balconies in 17th century France, of brutally honest first dates, of men in love with goats, etc. We chose plays that ignited something within us, that made us talk with our hands and get all hot and sweaty and choked up. The passion at that table was tangible. We were terrified, full of doubt and uncertainty of how on earth we would make it happen, but we knew we had to do it because it was what kept us up at night and woke us up the next morning. It was in this room, at this table that I witnessed the support and shared growth that is so inherent in a group of Bennington students. Because of our small student body and small class sizes, we have the rare privilege of seeing the people we care about blossom into thinkers and artists.

We all met our freshman year, at a time when we didn't know what we were doing and who we were, and we not only got to figure some of that out, we got to witness our friends and colleagues figure that out too. We have this shared understanding that we all have something to say and we're going to help each other say it. That is what I love most about Bennington.

Our school has been full of tables like that one: in biology labs studying the aggressive behavior of colorful fish, in crit rooms listening to artist presentations, in barn classrooms quoting Yeats or Tolstoy, in the dining hall sharing meals and our hopes for the day. We, as students, have constantly formulated questions, ideas, hypotheses, and have brought them to our fellow students and our faculty for inspiration and re-evaluation. This act of collaborative thought and inspired revision has united our students under the common understanding that we must think, create, then think again and create again. And though most of our work took place on a small campus in a small town in the 2nd least populous state in the U. S., we learned something wherever we went.

We had been waiting for Bennington, for a place where we could create our own education, explore our own passions, just as it seemed that Bennington had been waiting for *us*, students who would give ourselves fully to our work and support those who were doing the same. But now, on the eve of our graduation, I ask you, class of 2014, what are you waiting for? If you're like me, then you may be wondering, "Where do I begin? How do I move forward? How do I start living the life that I have been waiting to live? It's scary. It's terrifying. In her book, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*, award-winning American theater director Anne Bogart addresses the uncertainty and resistance that comes with plunging into something new. She says, "Do not wait. Do not wait for enough time or money to accomplish what you think you have in mind.

Work with what you have right now. Work with the people around you right now. Do not wait for what you assume is the appropriate, stress-free environment in which to generate expression. Do not wait for maturity or insight or wisdom. Do not wait till you are sure that you know what you are doing. Do not wait until you have enough technique. What you do *now*, what you make of your present circumstances will determine the quality and scope of your future endeavors. And, at the same time, be patient.”

My fellow graduates, do not wait. Whether we realize it or not, we have been preparing for this moment since we first found ourselves at Bennington, a mysteriously beautiful school, the stuff of fiction. The people we have met here, the experiences we have shared, and the work we have done have brought us to these tables here for us to celebrate the past four years and anticipate the exciting experiences to come. And let us too be patient, with our families, with our friends, and most importantly, with ourselves that the mistakes we will undoubtedly make are just the bi-products of our courage to face our doubts and fears, get out of bed, and work. We are stepping away from our Bennington home to start doing what we have been waiting to do. But know that we have been doing that all along. What we create moving forward will just be a continuation of the ideas and work and relationships we have formed at Bennington. Our home. Bennington. Our inspiring and supportive family. Bennington. The place where we realized what we were waiting for.