

Running
by Madeleine Hill

I skipped a grade in elementary school. It didn't seem like a big deal to me. I was going to be able to push myself to do harder work, and I would get to go to high school a *whole* year early. I was getting a head start on life. It was naive of me to think that it would allow me to feel ahead of everyone my age, rather than constantly feeling stuck behind those older than me. I never expected that the hardest part would be the questions. Or, more specifically, *the* question:

“Do you regret it?”

I regret that I had to watch my best friend deliver her valedictorian speech to a graduating class I wasn't part of. This was a speech we had talked about for years, one we had always assumed we would experience together. She delivered the speech to a class I had spent nine of the most formative years of my life with, yet I didn't walk across the stage with them. I sat in the audience, applauding as I watched them all move on without me. It's funny that way, discovering just how little people truly need you in their life.

I regret that I never kept in touch with all the people I left behind. Maybe it is my fault for not trying hard enough, maybe it's theirs for not trying at all. I don't like to dwell on it. I try to tell myself that it doesn't hurt, that we all would have lost touch anyway as we went to different secondary schools, but I know deep down that isn't true. I know that thinking about it won't help, but I wonder if they feel I abandoned them. I regret that I never apologized.

I regret the weight that came with starting high school at a younger age than everyone else. The constant fear that I would not be good enough for them, that I would always feel inferior to everyone around me. I always felt like I had to prove to them, and to myself, that I belonged there. I often wonder if things would have been different if I had chosen to stay put in elementary school for another year. I don't know that I would have carried that same burden.

However, the thing that I regret the most is the time lost. Although I know I did not *truly* lose any time, it feels like everyone else has the luxury of walking at their own pace through their lives while I am always running. I am running to catch up to people I can never catch, people I was never meant to try to catch. I am running to try to figure myself out in the same way that people with an extra year on me already have. I cried on my 15th birthday because I realized that I don't see my birthdays as a breath of fresh air anymore. Rather than being thankful for a new beginning, I only felt glad I had finally taken another step forward. And yet I will always be a year behind.

I will run myself into the ground trying to catch up to people running a different race than me.

I hope that someday I can reflect on my choices and understand that I made the right decision. I want to be able to tell myself that I didn't make a mistake, but I don't think it is fair to truly believe that could happen. I don't know what the rest of my life will look like, and I don't know what it would have been like if I had decided to walk through it instead of running. All I know is that what's done is done, and I've never been a fan of walking anyway.

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