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## Final Celebration

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*Butler University*

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## Final Celebration

*Grace Crane*

I get out of my bright blue car with my mom and stare at the beautiful Hinkle Fieldhouse. She's talking to me like I won't see her for a year. My dad pulls up in his metallic black pick-up truck that's carrying all of my dorm necessities. I cannot believe I am a college student. I am feeling so anxious that I am tuning out all of my mom's words. I stand up tall in the parking lot and stretch my lengthy arms to the sky while taking a deep breath. I am so nervous to take this Covid test; all I want to do is get up to my dorm room and set up for the beginning of my freshman year of college. I think to myself all of the thoughts that could go wrong: What if I test positive? What if I get sent home and have to wait to come back? What if I don't get to meet anyone for two more weeks? What if I get behind on my classes? Man, was I nervous. My amazing dad gets out of his truck and rests his hands on my shoulders. "Take a deep breath Grace, it will all work itself out," he says reassuringly. "Yeah, easy for you to say dad," I reply restlessly.

I head out to the socially distanced line out of the fieldhouse doors and wait my turn anxiously by myself. I cannot believe this is my reality right now. I am taking a test to see if I have a virus that has changed the whole entire world, to be able to go to college. This should not be how I am getting dropped off for college. Everyone in front of me must be thinking the same thing as me and realize how crazy all of this really is. I wonder if some of these people are going to end up being my friends. I wait patiently and before I know it, it is my turn. The doctor is in one of the outfits that look like she is conducting a chemical experiment; it was honestly kind of terrifying. She has me sit down and tries to have a friendly conversation with me. I am trying to be calm, but in reality I am sweating so bad from the stress of it all. She shoves the long q-tip up my nose and my eyes water instantly, this is not fun. Even though it took five seconds, it felt like five minutes.

"All finished. Next!" she shouts quickly.

"Thank you!" I exit the room and head back to my parents in the parking lot.

I walk back quickly and see them sitting in the truck patiently waiting. I open the back door swiftly and hop in. It is hot out today. After they asked me how it went, we waited patiently for an hour and a half. I am anxiously waiting for a phone call to tell me my results, I hope it comes back negative. An hour and a half later, there's a loud ring. My parents both look at me, just as anxious as I am. I answer, and put the call on speakerphone.

"Hi, is this Grace?" a lady asks in a tone I cannot detect is good or bad.

"Yes, this is her," I say.

“Well, I am happy to tell you that you’re negative. Welcome to Butler, Grace!” the lady states excitedly.

My parents both look at me with excitement. I am officially attending Butler University. This is it. No more worrying about my test results. I feel so much relief throughout my body. Now, I need to set up my room and spend one last day with my parents before I am taking on the world on my own. I get a sense of sadness now, wishing this day would slow down. After the call, we get the keys to my dorm room and set up my yellow-themed room. I had an orientation meeting in a couple hours, so I knew I did not have too much longer with my parents. I am sitting on my new bed watching my dad build the shelf that will hold my snacks while my mom is helping sort my clothes. It is all starting to hit me now. I won’t ever fully live with my parents again. Of course I will be home for breaks, but I am not a little kid any more. My parents’ youngest child is now in college. I could tell it was hard for them today too.

The time finally comes where I have to head down for my orientation meeting. My parents walk down with me to the lobby and I am trying to hide my tears. Once we get down there, I am struggling to look them in the eyes. I wish my siblings could be here too. I hug both of them and once I let go, I look at them and they are crying too. We part ways and they head off to the car. As I head to my meeting I look back at them, they are already looking back at me too. I sign language to them that I love them and turn around. I am officially a college student in the middle of a global pandemic.

The day before my first day of classes is nerve wracking. Butler seems so big, even though I know it is a smaller college. It is also weird adjusting to all of the freedom I have gotten this past week. No one is telling me I need to clean or run errands. My amazing roommate Lauren and I are both sitting outside, eating Atherton Union’s very interesting food. We are planning to walk to each of our classes so we know where to go. She is laughing with me as we talk about how out of shape we are going to be when swimming starts. Not even two minutes before we are getting ready to head out to walk to our classes, we get an email saying all classes will be moved online for the next two weeks to control the virus. I can’t believe what I just read. This is what it is going to be like to go to school during a national crisis.

I wake up two days later in the morning bright and early and get dressed up in my light blue jeans and a Butler t-shirt to sit in my bed for my first ever college class. My Monday classes all are cancelled because I think the professors were a little thrown off guard about classes being changed to online. My First-Year Seminar class is already all online and so it is my first ever college class. I am feeling pretty nervous even though it isn’t in person. I pull up Zoom on my computer and start to get butterflies in my stomach. I click join meeting and suddenly see a ton of unfamiliar faces. I am so excited about this class because it is all about exploring the self. I find this topic really

interesting because throughout the whole summer I felt like I had a lot of time to reflect, but I was not really sure what to make of my thoughts. One of the goals I wrote down in my journal for the class was that I wanted to touch on my creative side and wanted to dig deeper into myself. This class seems like it will help me discover what my thoughts really mean. My professor, Dr. Lynch pops up on the screen and I already know I am going to love it at this school. I can tell she really cares and is passionate about what she teaches, something I have never really experienced with previous teachers. I am excited to see what this semester has to offer.

Two weeks have passed, meaning I will finally have in-person classes and start swimming. I am so ready to not be cooped in my dorm room. Lauren and I have made friends with the girls across the hall and a few other people in the same unit as us. We have done really well with what we can. Lauren and I have surprisingly gotten really close in the past couple weeks that we have been here. We are sitting on my bed eating Graeter's ice cream from Plum Market talking about our families and friends from home. It seems as though we have been friends for a long time. Before I get ready for bed, I read some of the book we are reading for FYS class, *The Boys of My Youth*, by Jo Ann Beard. One quote that immediately sticks out to me when I flip through the beginning pages is: "Everything is perfect; all those things that I always think are so bad really aren't bad at all," (xiii). Even though I might be attending college in a non-normal way, I am still at Butler going to class tomorrow, I'm healthy, meeting new friends, and here shortly will start swimming. How more fortunate could I be?

A couple weeks later, I am walking into the recreation center through the pool doors with my suitemates who are all also on the swim team with me. It is so weird for me that I am on a new team now after being on my old team for the past ten years of my life. These girls will end up being a significant part of my life over the next four years. I am feeling anxious again. Everyone is in masks and I feel separate from everyone as we are all in our own lanes and on opposite sides of each other. I am getting ready to hop in the cold pool as my coach walks over to ask how I am doing.

"How have your first couple weeks at Butler been so far? We are so glad to have you here," Mo says caringly.

"I have really enjoyed it so far! Thanks for asking," I speak shyly.

"Well, I hope we can make your experience the best we can despite the circumstances. I know it has to be pretty hard on you guys," his tone is very empathetic.

"Thank you. I think it is good that at least all of the freshmen do not know any differently. We have made the most of what we can," I say more confidently.

"I am glad to hear it. Please know that everyone is here if you guys need anything at all. Let's get to swimming!" he says excitedly.

I dive into the pool and it felt really good to be swimming again. I stare at the black line and before I know it, my first collegiate practice is over. The time is flying by here, I need it to slow down.

My FYS professor assigns us to journal once a week with a tree we like in the beautiful Holcomb Gardens. She wants us to write down how we are feeling as everyone's emotions are all over the place with the current state of the world. I am sitting on the soft grass next to a beautiful tall tree with light green leaves. The fall colors are slowly starting to poke out. It is the last warm day before it will start being cold all the time. The thought of it becoming cooler makes me sad, yet happy because hopefully this means a good change to this year, which we all know is needed. Sitting here, I am just so grateful to be here at school. It seriously is one of the best decisions I have ever made and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I feel so at home and have met people who I know could make friends for a lifetime. I already feel like I have grown tremendously and am so excited to see what is to come. Despite the circumstances, I know it can only go up from here and the next four years are going to be the best. I am glad I talked to a tree today.

Today, my class got to meet Jo Ann Beard on Zoom which is so awesome as we are finishing up her book. Hearing her be raw and vulnerable was so inspiring and I learned most of all that it is good to write and be honest with how you feel, no matter how descriptive. My story is mine and that is powerful. My memories are what make me who I am and I should embrace that. After reading her book, my idea of writing has opened up my mind so much more. I am grateful for that.

Another couple weeks later, Lauren and I are sitting in my bed when we get an email saying that practice is cancelled for the rest of the week. I am very frustrated considering that I finally felt like I was getting back into shape again. This year is anything but normal but it is starting to take a toll on me. I get up from my bed and tell her I am going to visit my tree again.

I sit down with a thump by my tree again and start to write. This past week has been very eventful, but every week seems to feel that way. I met Blue for the first time earlier on Monday, which was exciting to say the least. He is a lot softer than my bulldog, Walter, who has all sorts of skin conditions. I also made a new friend, Hannah, in my Earth Science class who is a marketing major just like me. At our labs on Wednesday nights, we are always the last people in there because we have no idea what we are doing. We laugh so hard every time and from there we hit it off. Beard taught me that relationships are part of what makes us who we are, which I never really thought of before. It made me appreciate meeting Hannah so much more because she has impacted my journey here at Butler.

Another week has passed and it has been significantly colder out, which I don't like. Swimming started up again which is exciting but stressful at the same time because school is ramping up as well. The girls on the swim

team have asked my suitemates and I to hang out a few times which has made us all closer. We mostly hang out outside that way it is safe for everyone. I can't wait until we can hang out and do fun activities such as going out to concerts together. I miss doing stuff like that. For now, we just talk and get to know each other. I think times like this though will make us closer ultimately because we all are seeing things from a different perspective than we normally would. I finally feel like I am starting to get the hang of things though, which is nice.

We started a new book called *Black Boy* by Richard Wright today in FYS. His writing is different from Beard's in that he had a separate experience from her, which is what makes everyone's writing so powerful. My words are strictly my own along with my experiences and no one can ever take that from me. This experience at college is something that is mine and I am finding my own way through it.

A week later, I finish the book while sitting at my desk doing my homework before classes tomorrow. One particular quote Wright says stuck out to me after he is sharing his hunger for books and reading: "It was not a matter of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something new, of being affected by something that made the look of the world different," (249). The books that my FYS class have been reading have allowed me to reach my goal of diving deeper and seeing life in a different view. Wright taught me through his experiences of racism growing up, that it is okay to figure life out along the way and I won't have the answers to everything. Life is a journey and it isn't always going to be easy, but it's my journey and I will continue to grow no matter what life or a pandemic might throw at me.

I look at Lauren who is sitting on her bed and we talk about our feelings through college so far. We have about three weeks left before Thanksgiving break. We think it over for a second and say overall we are lucky to even be here with things getting worse again. Cases are ramping up on campus which is really scary. People we are friends with are in quarantine and have been exposed to Covid. The reality is hitting closer and closer to the people I care about.

I share with my roommate that I am at a place where I feel content, but not content at the same time. I wish the world wasn't going through a global pandemic, but again I am happy to be able to get somewhat of a college experience. My emotions since March have been sort of hard to deal with. I am not really sure how to feel sometimes. For my in person classes, I am feeling so lucky to be in my room, but then I start to feel disappointed as I look up and see everyone distanced from me in masks. Lauren agrees with me and we just hug each other for a minute and start laughing about how crazy this year has been. At least we have each other.

I am headed out on a cold early morning to my last tree meeting. I basically have completed my first semester of college. I can't believe how fast it went and how much I have learned despite being in a pandemic. I have had a lot of challenges thrown at me and I learned to roll with the punches. I am so proud of myself for staying strong.

Going from high school to college, I have been so much happier. I am thankful to have met amazing professors and people who I know will continue to support me throughout my time here at Butler and throughout my life. I think if my tree could talk to me, it would say how proud of me it is and I have been doing what I can to make the most of this terrible situation. My tree would also say to let go of things I can't control because it doesn't do me any good. Overall, I have had a great time and met new people that have made this experience amazing so far.

At swim practice the following day, I am feeling a bit rough in the water. I feel like the past couple of weeks, the energy of my teammates has been negative all around and I have been letting it get to me. My form feels off and every time I come back to the wall from swimming laps, my coach corrects me. I keep trying to fix my form, but I can't get it right. To make my form better, he tells me I am only allowed to breathe to my right side, when I only ever usually breathe to my left. I am not excited about this as I am not used to breathing this way, but I do it for the rest of the practice. After practice is over, my coach says how impressed he is with me because he thought I would end up breathing to the other side.

I say hesitantly, "I was afraid you were going to yell at me again if I didn't."

He is a little taken back by that statement and says politely, "Grace, I don't want you to think like that. I want you to want to do it for yourself."

I think about what he said for a second and realize he is right. I absolutely love what I do and need to remember why I am here in the first place. Even though everything is complicated in life right now, I need to make the most of the situation and stay focused on my goals. My coaches and professors are here to help and they are also going through a lot of stress right now. My attitude seems to shift right in that moment and I start to pick myself back up again.

Not even a day later, I received another email while talking with Lauren that all student activities will be cancelled for the remainder of the semester in order to try and finish out in-person classes. Yet again, the pandemic caused another problem. Even though there is only two weeks left, I will be taking another break from swimming again. Trying to look at things on the positive side, I tell Lauren we still get to finish out in person and there are other ways we can stay in shape for swimming.

Today is the day. I am packing up my things and heading back home. I finished where I started and just got out of my last FYS class. It is sad saying

goodbye, but I smile and realize it is only a see you later. I help Lauren take her items to the car as I end my online class. Before she leaves she gives me a big hug. I am sad to be leaving a little bit because we have gotten so close in such a short amount of time, but I am sure we will see each other over break.

She gets in her white jeep and I watch her drive away.

I head back up to my room and sit on my bed for a second. It looks a bit more empty, but it is nice because everyone is allowed to leave our stuff here for next semester, so I mostly just packed clothes to go home with. Thinking about all that I have learned this semester, I smile. The person I walked in as is not the same person I am leaving as, and it has only been one semester. I will be spending the next few years at Butler, so I am eager to see how much more I am going to grow. Despite being in a constant battle with Covid-19, I am the one who is going to win overall. No matter how many problems it might cause, I will not let it consume my energy. The books I have read in my FYS have taught me so much about self-reflection, and I have seen me work through something that no other person can say they have in the exact same way. I have met amazing people by simply living on the same floor as them, who have opened my eyes to the kind of people I want to surround myself with. I have studied and found some of my favorite spots on campus such as the Lacy School of Business and Hinkle Fieldhouse, growing a bigger passion for my major and sport. The relationships I have with my family have gotten closer than they were before as they have helped me so much through this first phase of being on my own. I have learned that we all will always be very close, but I am also learning that I am becoming more independent.

I hop into my car and drive south back home. Looking out at Butler University in my rearview mirror, I reflect again on my time at college so far. Going to school during a global pandemic is something that I don't think anyone can prepare for. Though people say this situation isn't normal, I believe that there is something to learn from it. The readings from both Beard and Wright enlightened me to embrace my journey. The situations from this pandemic have not been ideal, but the memories I have created during it are powerful. I have something that I can share for years to come. What I am going through is something that can be seen in history books. The books along with my FYS class in general have allowed me to self-reflect and not be afraid to express my emotions out loud. Memories are influential and they are meant to be heard. Without them, the world is dull. I am thankful that Covid-19 has brought out the strength in me.