

Fall 11-9-2015

Confessions of a Young Workaholic: A Letter to My Future Self

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Confessions of a Young Workaholic: A Letter to My Future Self

Dear Haley Senior,

As I write to you, it is the fall of 2015. Can you picture me? Currently, I'm a naïve, 18 year old girl, full of drive and intellect but lacking in common sense. Do you remember yet? Can you see my bloodshot eyes, exhausted from hours of studying and very little sleep? Can you picture my short hair, the result of a spontaneous haircut you immediately regretted? Do you remember the stress of trying to maintain good grades, participate in eight thousand clubs, and keep an active social life, while finding time to call your grandmother every once in a while? Does your heart still ache when you recall being four hours away from the boy you believed to be your soulmate? As you reminisce, it may all seem trivial now, but I hope that you can picture everything clearly, as if you were still me.

As I'm sure you remember, it was not an easy journey to get here. Your childhood was complicated, and you suffered a lot. Unlike most six year olds, your first few years were not filled with crayons, Barbie dolls, and sidewalk chalk; instead, they were occupied by hunger and fear. Your parents, sick with addiction to methamphetamine, often neglected to care for you. As a result, rather than be a child, you had to learn at an early age how to be a mother, caring for your siblings as if they were your own children. You protected them from the monsters your parents embodied as they came down from a high, screaming profanities as they attacked each other. Do you remember the time your mother, in a fit of rage, chased your father around the block with a frying pan, yelling about how she was going to murder him? How about all of the times you watched your mother crumple to the floor as she took a beating from your father? You witnessed all of this, but you did not cry; you held your siblings and dried their tears, holding back your own to appear strong for them. Following a complete crash, while your

parents slept for days on end, you became Mom. If your sister needed her diaper changed, you did it. If your siblings were hungry, you fed them first, only allowing yourself to eat once they had eaten. In fact, I recall a time where your brother came to you, complaining of hunger pains, because he hadn't been fed the entire day. The cabinets were scarce, but you managed to scrape together three sandwiches, one for each of your siblings. Although you were hungry yourself, you put their needs above your own and took only a single bite from each one. You went to bed on an empty stomach that night, but to you, it was better than watching your brother and sisters suffer. Despite being practically an infant yourself, you undertook a task that should not have been expected of you. Nonetheless, you made it out, and you grew so much from the experience. Many would have let this background inhibit them from accomplishing their dreams, but you never once let it stop you. You developed a strong will and a determination that allowed you to push through all of the tough times, in both school and daily life.

As you know, our family was not well off. Often, Grandma struggled to pay the bills and keep us all clothed and happy. However, we were always told that we were going to be different. We were not going to be shackled by the burdens of living paycheck-to-paycheck, working overtime to purchase basic necessities.

“You are destined for great things, Haley,” our family would say. “You’re going to make something of yourself.”

College was pushed at an early age. They knew they couldn’t afford to send you, but they expected you to go, nonetheless. There was no college fund to help pay for tuition, and you were given the responsibility of getting yourself there. As a result, you pushed yourself to the extreme; high school was full of dual credit courses, hours of studying, and getting involved in activities to strengthen your college applications. In order to feel successful, an A was never enough; you

had to have an A+. Despite the stress and numerous sleepless nights, you accomplished your goal. You graduated from high school as valedictorian of your class and got accepted into an outstanding college — with enough scholarships and grant aid that you did not have to pay anything out of pocket, I would like to add. You were no longer that fear driven little girl; you were ready to take on the world.

I do not tell you this to brag about our accomplishments; rather, I want to leave you with a few recommendations related to our situation. For all I know, maybe you don't need to read any of this, because you're already practicing my advice. I truly hope so, but just in case, I urge you to continue. To begin with, be better for your children. When I say this, I am not suggesting that you avoid drugs and care for your kids. As a 47 year old adult with our life experiences, this should be an obvious life decision. However, other choices may not be so clear. For example, make sure to always choose family over work. As I reflect on my personality, it is clear that whenever I have work to be done, I shut everyone out until "perfection" is achieved. Work becomes my addiction, and I cannot rest until I have reached my high. I cannot know whether or not this is still a problem; however, if it is, I beg you to stop. Due to having very little as a child, you probably feel as though your children should have everything they need and they should want for very little. However, the material comforts — a big house, nice cars, and shiny gadgets — are not worth the havoc this disorder will wreak on your family. Although your children should be sufficiently provided for, it is more important that you invest in them emotionally, as your grandmother invested in you. Find the time to attend their events, know what their favorite colors are, and remind them daily that you are proud of them. Your love will carry them further in life than any object ever could.

In addition to always choosing family, never forget where you came from. Similar to the struggle I mentioned before, I am prone to getting so caught up in the world, I forget to touch base with the people and places I consider home. Despite my excuse that I am always busy, the truth is that I lay more importance on my pursuits than on the individuals who helped me achieve my dreams. However, I do not wish this for us. Despite what you may think, you did not get to where you are today without the help of others. Your grandmother destroyed her body working as a CNA to provide for you and make sure you had everything you needed. Likewise, your siblings suffered through countless hours of listening to you complain about homework and stress, and they were always there to talk you through it. My hope is that right now, as you're reading this, you're remembering all of the individuals who have had a major impact in your life. Whether it be a handful or a hundred, make sure to cherish them, and refuse to let anything inhibit your relationships. Nothing in life is guaranteed, and I wouldn't want us to make the mistake of forgetting our past as we forge our future.

Finally, I would like to end by informing you that I am proud of you. You started with very little, and you have achieved a great deal. Although I do not know where you currently reside or the occupation you hold, I'm sure that it is amazing. If I know you like I think I do, you wouldn't settle for anything less. Whether you went into research or opened up that cupcake bakery you secretly desire, you have come a long way, my friend, and you have worked very hard to get to where you are. Just remember, sometimes work can take the back burner. Family should always hold precedence, and you should never forget the people and places that molded you into who you are today. Nothing, not even work, is more important.

With Love,

Haley Junior