

“Watching the Clock”

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Every night in elementary school, the last thing I would see before I fell asleep was the time. My very cool, big girl alarm clock—the kind that actual adults used—projected the time onto the ceiling, so I would lay in bed each night staring at those red digits glowing in the darkness. And the more I stared, anticipating when the time would change to the next minute, the more I thought about how much time had passed since various points in my day. Six hours and forty-two minutes since I came home from school. Nine hours and seventeen minutes since I had two and a half graham crackers for morning snack. Soon, these calculations consumed my brain throughout the day—I could not avoid clocks, and all I could think of when I saw them was how fast the minutes were slipping by. There was the tiny square clock on the dashboard of our Suburban—4 hours and twenty-two minutes since I was swinging at recess. There were the green digits that returned after “Enjoy Your Meal” on our microwave, as if I could enjoy my meal knowing that ten hours and thirty-four minutes had passed since I made my bed. “Watching the clock,” as I thought of it, was kind of like a game—one that was not very fun and made me zero friends but did greatly improve my mental math. What scared me, though, was that even at the height of my math powers, I could not keep up. As soon as I had counted the minutes, I had to add another one, because time is relentless and didn’t stop and soon I would be old. I just wanted to have a time

remote, so that I could hit the pause button for, like, two seconds, take a deep breath, and maybe catch up.

Eventually, I grew out of this habit, but my relationship with time has remained fraught. I've always been anxious about time, and over the years, I've spent a ton of mental energy on dreams of escaping it. As a kid, I'd imagine this escape through time travel—a trip to see the Gettysburg Address, or to visit Elizabethan England, or to return to my closet so I could rethink my outfit choice from the previous morning. Birthdays were especially tough. I refused to acknowledge my 17th birthday, for example, because I didn't want to admit that I was “so freaking old.” Three years of old age later, I spent the first minute of my 20th birthday huddled in a ball under the covers, as if hiding could somehow stop the end of my teenage years from happening.

Perhaps some of you in this room feel similarly about time, and know this fear. Or, maybe you haven't stressed out about time at all, and had way better 20th birthdays. But no matter your relationship with the clock, we all have developed ways to handle the time we're given. Some people stretch their hours to the limit, with not a minute unused. I admire this. Personally, I go for a strategy of denial—hours are not passing if I don't acknowledge them, and instead bury myself in a book, or a Youtube black hole, or two seasons of Mad Men in two days. Yes, for someone so preoccupied by the passage of time, I'm spectacularly good at wasting it. I've often wished that I could be more like many of the people I admire here,

people who see time as something to take advantage of, not something to hide from.

I'm in my senior spring now and, to many of us, time seems more urgent than ever. So it's surprising that I'm not really freaking out. At least, not yet. Maybe that's because, in the four years since I arrived at Harvard, I've found that actually there is some joy in the passage of time. It's allowed me to get to know many of you, some over the course of years. I'm amazed by so many of the people I've met here—people who use their time to learn a new language, volunteer at the homeless shelter, organize a conference, ace a sport, people who put in the hours on any number of passions and pursuits. People who have also taken the time to attempt a sprint workout with me, or to talk me through a stressful deadline, or to have a midnight dance party to NSYNC.

So, in a few hours, when I say goodbye to 23 years, 4 months, and 7 days forever, it's the people in my life who keep me looking forward, instead of counting the minutes past. I still struggle with time passing, and I probably always will. But when I think of the ninety-one days until graduation, I don't see a big timer looming over me, counting down. Instead, I see a lot of laughter, singing along to throwback playlists, impulsive roadtrips, and hastily arranged group photos. I see big plans and fun nights out, but also brunch in the d-hall, lazy walks by the river, hanging out. I see little ordinary moments like these, moments that turn little ordinary minutes into great memories—ones that don't fade with time. Thank you.