

Time Lies

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I'm running. I'm running but my legs aren't moving fast enough. The harder I try, the slower I move, until finally I wake up and realize I was only dreaming. Growing up, this was my nightmare, and it played on one of my greatest fears: time. The way it limits our experiences, the threat of running out of it. Usually, I could shake it off when I opened my eyes, but one day I woke up, and it was no longer a dream. It was my reality.

More than once last spring, I sat in my common room for hours, but when I looked at the clock, only ten minutes had passed. I wished I could will my legs to move, to bend and step and carry me to my Spanish section that had begun half an hour earlier, but my legs wouldn't listen. I would hear my mom on the other end of the line, trying to help me move: "Sweetheart, don't think about the whole day. Think about one step at a time." I wanted to, but it felt impossible. I was stuck, immovable, powerless.

It was in the way that the disease warped my perception of time that depression had its most profound impact on me. I found that sleep was my escape. It was only when I laid down and closed my eyes that time didn't matter. I could sink into a timeless chasm miles below the thoughts that tortured me during the day. Sleeping was the only way I could make time pass at a regular pace. I tried to fight the creeping numbness, but when I could no longer make myself do anything, I knew my mom was right and I had to start moving again. I took that first step. But instead of toward Sever, it was toward UHS.

Thousands of steps and several weeks later, it was time to board a flight to Trento, Italy. Prozac and counseling had helped reduce my symptoms, but there remained a part of me desperate for change and desperate to feel alive again, so I decided to do what I have always wanted – to travel to Italy, leaving behind my depression and my deadlines. I found this opportunity in the form of a summer neuroscience program. So, I, who had never been abroad and was only beginning to climb out of the depths of depression, was about to spend eight weeks in a foreign country with thirty perfect strangers. Little did I know that my perception of time was changing in more ways than one as my plane crossed through each time zone.

I can't pinpoint the exact moment in which time synced with the hands of the clock, but I remember one day when the clock didn't matter anymore. One morning on a weekend trip to Verona, I rushed out of my hotel room without time for makeup and my still wet hair piled under a hat. A friend was stepping out of his room at the same time, and greeted me with "Ciao, bella" – "hello, beautiful." His greeting, so casual and so kind, struck me. It shifted my attention from my shortcomings to the goodness around me, making me feel little lighter and time a little less scary. That afternoon, I stood on Monte Baldo, squinting into the sun, seven thousand feet above a sparkling blue lake. In that moment, time was neither dragging nor overwhelming me – I was just *there*. I watched the sun sink lower into the sky that evening. As the last bits of light touched my face, my heart felt content. It felt full, and time was far away, far enough away that my mind could rest. Finally.

This day was only a snapshot in what turned out to be my most transformative summer yet, but it revealed to me the true nature of time. **Time lies.** Usually we think of it as a fixed construct – seconds turn into minutes, minutes into hours, hours into days. The past year, though, has been a disjointed series of moments, days, weeks that passed at different paces and paused at irregular intervals. Time is our perception of it, and, as I realized, we have the ability to change that perception by shifting the pieces of the world to which we attend. A moment suspended in time doesn't have to mean idle hours in the common room – it can be friend's compliment, a breathtaking view of an Italian mountainside, or a sinking sun.

I now see time differently: minutes are chances, days are storybooks, and a lifetime is the ultimate opportunity to make time more than a measurement. Instead of fearing the passing minutes, I'm becoming more aware of the story I'm creating. I have finally reached the place in time that I described to my mom in an email at the end of June. I wrote, "I'm doing great, today was an amazing day! I love this place, these people, this life. I love life."