

Why I'm Not Hunting for Horcruxes

Ninjas. Spies. Knights. Wizards. Dragons. I pretend to be a mature 20 year old college senior--occasionally at least--but there is still a large part of me desperately waiting for my Hogwarts letter or a wardrobe that will lead me to Narnia. Hell, I would even take a sparkling vampire. More accurately, I am waiting for that perfect adventure that shoves aside normal life, that epic fight for good and glory, that Horcrux quest.

I'm trying to gauge from your expressions how many of you agree on some level and how many just think that I'm silly, but there you have it: my confession.

It is not even like there are simply no opportunities to fight evil in the real world--even without Avada Kedavra, we have violence; even without Death Eaters, we have prejudice; even without Voldemort, we have cruelty; and even without the Ministry of Magic, we have corruption.

So why have I not taken up the mantle of a hero? Why do I still do stupid things sometimes, lazy things, selfish things? I procrastinate endlessly, get bad grades, leave my friends hanging, take advantage of my little sister, worry excessively about how I look. Heaven forbid if the world was relying on me to hunt down Horcruxes.

The truth is, I'm not a hero. I'm not Harry Potter. And it's okay.

Okay, now pause. We are going to leave that thought for a bit, let it smolder, burn, and come back to it later. Right now, let me tell you about Richard Bortnick.

You know how people often reference that teacher that changed their lives? Mr. Bortnick is one of those for me. He taught AP Economics, and is smart, patient, funny, encouraging, and genuinely cares. Mr. Bortnick took it upon himself to teach us not just economics, but also some truths about life. He finagled a class trip to the Oregon State Penitentiary where each of us sat for an hour with someone serving a life sentence, had a candid chat, heard their stories, and perhaps learned a thing or two about making the right choices. He just happened to own a jiu-jitsu dojo, and--I kid you not--offered us extra credit if we visited and learned some basic self-defense. He inspired me to study economics and pursue martial arts and think about social issues like the justice system. He was just that kind of teacher.

So why do I tell you this story?

3 years wiser today than when I last saw him, I realized Mr. Bortnick inspired me to one more realization. I may not be a hero, sure, but I still have my Dumbledores and my McGonagalls. Beyond Mr. Bortnick, countless other teachers at Harvard and earlier have supported me, pushed me, taken me seriously even when I haven't. I've even had my Snape's...but I won't name those.

I have my Hermione's and Ron's--the best friends anyone can ask for in the form of my siblings, my roommates, and many of you sitting here today. Some like Meena, with the passion of Hermione and SPEW, have opened my eyes to issues like gender inequality. Others, in a more Fred-George sort of way, have dumped ice cold buckets of water on me at 3 in the morning. I've never been jealous of Harry for his friends, and all of you are to thank for that.

And finally, Harvard has been my Hogwarts. It's funny--if you read the *Crimson* or listen in on every day conversations, sometimes it seems that life here must kinda suck. Harvard students work too hard, care too much about grades. Harvard doesn't talk enough about mental health or vulnerability or race. The Gen Ed system sucks. And so on. These are real issues, but I want each of you to take a moment now, and think back to when you got your Hogwarts--sorry Harvard--letter. Faculty and others here, come on, you must have been thrilled to hear you were coming here too. That excitement? That feeling in your stomach, that shock of disbelief, that euphoria? What about your time here? Think about the last time someone made you smile. When this place helped you get somewhere you're proud of. My friends tease me that I'm too much of an optimist, but yeah, I love this place.

So I may not be a hero, I may not be hunting for horcruxes, but damn, am I glad I'm not Harry. Because I have my Bortnicks to his Dumbledores, all of the people in my life to his Hermiones and Rons, and this place to Hogwarts. And who knows? I'm only 20. I may still go on my quest, in education or data science, the fields I'm currently obsessed with, or something else. For now, here's to all of you, for putting some magic in my life and teaching me it's okay that I'm not hunting for horcruxes.