

# On the Future

By Briana Garrett

Here's a short skit about the kinds of conversations that I have as a college student:

Me: "Hey, how's it going?"

Friend 1: "So this woman parked too close to my car this morning, and so now I'm thinking about dropping out because the parking situation on campus is ridiculous. How are you doing?"

Me: "My life is falling apart."

Friend 1: "Same!"

(END OF SCENE)

I didn't always used to have these kinds of conversations with my friends. I don't believe that we used to talk this way, and part of that may be because my friends and I like to exaggerate a lot more now.

Actually, that's an oversimplification of the problem. In reality we like to pretend that the apocalypse is impending whenever something mildly inconvenient happens to us.

It's entertaining for other people to witness someone devolve into a disaster, and so it's appealing to share our most over the top, exaggerated problems as if they are the worst thing to ever happen to us. This type of hyperbolic language makes us feel closer to one another because beneath the exaggeration there is a layer of truth that we all understand: we're all struggling and just trying to stay afloat.

I'm not sure why, but when something is going wrong in our lives it is somehow more comforting to say and believe that the world is ending than it is to confront the root of our problems head on.

It might be representative of the larger implication that we, "the millennials," are always living our lives on the brink of some major precipice. We have a lot to deal with: Student loans, after

school jobs, grad school applications, sorting out our futures. None of it should be taken lightly, and so the stress of even one more thing could send us careening over the edge. The song by Grandmaster Flash never had so much truth: “Don’t push me, ‘cause I’m close to the edge.” If I could get that emblazoned on a T-shirt, I’m sure it would be popular among most 18-22 year olds.

The stress of college can make people into their own personal victims. They develop a martyr complex, in which they view higher education as a form of willful suffering, if only to obtain a college degree and begin a successful career.

However, the reasoning behind this willful suffering fails to make sense if you do not receive a return on investment by pursuing what most would consider a *financially* successful career. Degrees in subjects such as English or Sociology for example don’t easily lend themselves to high paying jobs in anything other than academia. For this reason, fields that aren’t immediately viewed as profitable are frowned upon, and students interested in those fields are encouraged to study something else or pursue them as a hobby.

Twenty One Pilots weren’t born with this idea, society gave it to them. “*Wake up you need to make money,*” indeed.

But it’s hard to know what you want to do with your life when you’re a college student with your whole future ahead of you. You could think your life will be one thing, and then years later it could be something else.

It’s horrifying to think about, and so my friends and I joke about how our lives are falling apart on a daily basis.

We do this because somehow it’s more hopeful to believe that literally nobody knows what they’re doing in life than it is to think that everyone else has their future sorted out but you.

The poem “The Anxiety Inherent in Air” by Iain S. Thomas expresses a similar sentiment:

If you must know, this is what I’m

Scared of. I'm scared that everyone else  
Is more who they are than I am who I  
Am. I think everyone else just looks at  
The things they feel or think and says,  
"Of course this is what I feel or think,  
This is who I am."

But I am never sure of what I feel or  
Think. (lines 1-9, p. 54)

The insecurities that Thomas mentions are not uncommon. There is a strange truth in realizing that everyone is afraid that everyone around them has their life together. It is a common misconception that people automatically know what they like, or what they think about things, or how they feel—leaving the rest of us to panic, thinking that we've fallen behind. It is easy to feel that we're somehow broken for not knowing those things.

As far as I understand, this feeling never goes away completely. The insecurity that comes with living makes us wonder if everyone else is as messy or lazy or awful as we are. And because we have no way of knowing how other people live their lives, we assume that we must be the exception.

We assume we must be the only ones not knowing what we want to do with our lives, or the only ones wondering if college is even worth it, or if we'll even get a job in whatever field we get our degree in. We must be the only ones insecure about eventually moving house, making new friends, and living a whole new life where suddenly if something goes wrong, you're the adult that others turn to for help.

We don't know what to do, and so we joke about dropping out of school and getting hit by cars in an effort to make our crumbling individual lives feel less chaotic. Dark humor has become our coping mechanism in dealing with the impending future.

Without it, life is much harder to manage.

Take me for example:

In the fall semester of my sophomore year I would've been considered what intellectuals refer to as "a hot mess." Somehow, my grades were excellent and my body was healthy, and yet I was riddled with an anxiety that made it impossible for me to fall asleep at night and difficult for me to get out of bed in the morning. For some reason, I was spiraling into myself at the prospect of having to deal with the future, in which I had no idea what I wanted out of my life, or who I wanted to be.

It was like a lightbulb went off in my brain but then exploded into shards of glass, leaving me with an existential crisis that I wasn't sure how to sweep up.

I remember that I didn't have many friends, and so I spent a lot of time in my own head. That left me with an abundance of free time to consider where my future was headed. It was during this time, faced with my entire future ahead of me, that I figured out that I didn't want to be a person anymore.

To put it simply, I didn't want to be an adult who had to make decisions and live her life without someone telling her what to do. I wasn't ready; nobody had taught me. Your parents and your school are supposed to teach you what you want out of life, but mine had only ever taught me how not to kill my little brother, and how to write a passable essay. To decide for myself what I wanted and how I was going to make it happen seemed like a leap of faith into a bottomless pit. There was no safety net if I screwed up my own life, and so I just wanted to world to stop spinning.

I wanted to press pause. To ask for more time. To will myself to be more confident and less insecure about the things that I wanted to do, and to believe that my life would work itself out. To fade into blissful obscurity would have been preferable to thinking about what came after college, and what I wanted to do with my life.

Things did get better, though. My life began to level out once I started to make friends in college who understood what I was going through. Suddenly, I wasn't alone in my confusion about

what the future held for me, and I could talk to others who shared similar anxieties and fears about what to do with their lives. Honest conversations about our insecurities saved me from feeling like the world was spinning without me, leaving me isolated and static. Together, we were able to keep pace with the world, carrying each other on our backs so no one fell too far behind.

As a result, these are the kinds of things that we say to sympathize with one another:

Me: “I hate it when people ask me what I want to do after I graduate, because I don’t even know what I’m doing right now. I’m just trying to make it through this semester, and I’m honestly dying.”

Friend 2: “I feel it. I think about dropping out all the time because I hate myself for double majoring.”

Friend 1: “I’m so sorry. Meanwhile, this man almost ran me over on the way to school today and all I could think was, ‘Yes please!’ At least then I won’t have to pay for nursing school.”

Me: (laughing) “Dude, we’re all screwed.”

Friend 1: “True, but I like to think that we’re relatable.”

(END OF SCENE)

## Works Cited

Thomas, Iain S. "The Anxiety Inherent In Air" *I Wrote This for You: 2007-2017*. Central Avenue Publishing, 2017. Print. 54.