Jonathan Kenney 07/12/19

4th Year-in-Review

Sitting around the living room table the other day, my housemates and I could not help but fall prey to an episode of nostalgia and future dreaming. At one point in the conversation—the like that goes in circles around general truths and wisdom—I expressed that each year feels like a lifetime in itself. I look back at each year and marvel at the different Jonathans I see; each unique in his own struggles, triumphs, and perspectives. Yet I can also now see how each of those individuals makes a whole, like organs supplying distinct functions to my life’s narrative while each bound together by the same bloodstream.

Perhaps a bit dramatic I admit, but at this time that I am approaching my final year at UC, everything seems to be surreal and at least *a bit* dramatic. Reading back over my first three year-in-reviews, I see a man struggling with finding who he is and what he’d like to see his life become. I now feel like those very questions are changing. I wake up and ask what impact I have on the world and those around me. I am trying now to live more in the moment and strive to actually achieve things instead of just theorizing about it.

In the aftermath of my research with Dr. DeMazumder last summer, there was still a lingering feeling that I had not found what I was looking for yet. This quest to somehow discern my certain fate only led me in circles, however, and I decided I needed to reframe what exactly I was judging my success and happiness on. Frankly, this did not work at first. The bustle of classes and work put me back in the cycle, and for the fall I would be resigned to the normal and depressed slog of daily life. I should clarify, it was not the program itself that caused this. It was that I stood on the precipice of my final co-op term feeling as though all of college life had passed me by. It was a feeling of truly being lost.

By chance one evening as I was working at the pizzeria, my sister-in-law’s brother and his wife came in for dinner. I walked them to their table and just was chatting. I expressed to him that I was entering my final co-op period and was hoping for something different, perhaps a co-op. I name dropped one of the largest in Cincy just as an example, and to my surprise he said he knows one of the co-founders! A conversation led to coffee and coffee to a job. I thought this must be my chance to answer so many of these questions that have gone unanswered.

Spoiler alert: seven months in the questions remain unanswered. I still do not feel I have a strong grasp on who I am and want to be, nor my relationship with the world around me. But I am learning how to be completely comfortable with the process and trusting the wise people around me. Just today I was talking with my mother about my passions (education, tech, injustice), and she suggested I reconsider a Ph.D as a path. I have always doubted my abilities on the above, but after these months of just giving it my all and worrying less about perfecting my future path, I feel I am ready to seriously consider. This brings me to the real takeaway from this past year: **the key is to act.** This is always easier said than done, but I have never felt more convinced and encouraged to simply start acting without having every step figured out, or even more importantly, a guaranteed outcome.

So, this brings me to where I am now: focusing on next action steps instead of a full itinerary to some contrived destination in life. Instead of, “there are so many things I need to do to get to a Ph.D”, I am instead asking, “what do I need to do next to move this process along?” Maybe I will find success with this method, maybe I will crash and burn. Regardless, there is no doubt that there will be no slowing down anytime soon, and I think I am finally learning to accept this process and my own growth without pretense.