

Dear You,

So, here's a thing I decided I was going to do heading into my freshman year of college: I was going to completely, one hundred percent, top-to-bottom reinvent myself.

(I didn't necessarily hate the version of myself I was in high school, but I *did* think that version could be *improved* upon, and I knew it couldn't be done in high school, because all of those people knew me already. It had to happen in college, with a clean slate.)

High School Me was awkward and anxious, so College Me would be Suave and Confident. High School Me never seemed to know the right thing to say, but College Me was going to be Charming and maybe Taller, Somehow. High School Me had baggage and embarrassing mistakes that were a matter of public record, but College Me was going to be Aloof and Mysterious and Effortlessly Cool. I decided to punctuate this bold change with a bunch of new shirts and a haircut that was drastically different from the haircut I'd worn the majority of high school. Look out world: Here comes a Cool Guy.

Turns out it was terrifying being College Me. No one knew me, and neither did I. I answered every question as I imagined an impossible, bizarro version of me would have answered, and it came off as weird and unnatural as you'd expect.

About three hours into my first day on campus— three hours into the brave new experiment of being College Me— I was so relieved to run into someone I went to high school with. He was, too. We weren't even that close in high school, but as soon as we saw each other in the cafeteria or whatever, we ran to each other, held onto to each other and stuck together.

“It's you! *Someone who knows me!*”

Sometimes you don't realize you're holding your breath until you remember to exhale. That's what finding someone familiar after being lost in paralyzing newness felt like. I can breathe again, I remember what breathing is like, I remember what being Real Me is like.

The advice, I guess, is this: Certainly try to grow, certainly try to learn, but don't try to reinvent yourself. Ultimately, what you want is to be a more confident version of yourself. And you **will** achieve that, but only after you put in a lot (a **lot**) of hours being yourself. Confidence only comes from being comfortable in your own skin, and you won't get that if you're pretending to be someone else. I was still awkward and anxious and weird and goofy all throughout college, but I eventually owned it and grew to be... comfortable in my own discomfort.

(If that makes any sense.)

(It might not.)

(It probably doesn't.)

(But also maybe it does?)

(Either way I don't care.)

(And you shouldn't either.)