

This I Believe

Ever since I heard the first “This I Believe” this semester, I had put the idea of writing one in the back of my mind with many coinciding excuses, such as the typical I’m too busy or I don’t like talking in front of people. However, while both of these are very true, the more I thought about it, the more I felt like I’ve learned a few important lessons that changed the course of my life.

I look back at myself years ago in high school, just as involved as I am now, but much more introvert, to myself, and cautious. I had my firm beliefs, but I didn’t take many chances because from my viewpoint, the risks were stronger than the potential gains. And confidence was never my forte to push me anywhere. Those lost opportunities and “what if”s always seemed to stick in my mind. However, college is primarily where I learned to develop and turn around this idea.

Many can remember that September 10th is Suicide Awareness Day, and I never had a strong motive to recognize this day until almost 3 years ago while attending Iowa Wesleyan College. My roommate, Kellie, and I had completely differing schedules (mine as a music education major and hers as a nursing degree), but we still had great interactions. One in particular that sticks in my mind to this day was me sitting at my desk attempting to finish homework but failing to keep focused because Kellie was fixing up a girl’s hair. Bree, a sophomore soccer player, was always seen around campus surrounded by other teammates or members of her class. She loved having her hair done by anyone willing, even if it was just some random evening when she had no place to go. We were also aware of her difficulties from the past year, but that didn’t seem to phase her then. I remember that she couldn’t keep a smile off her face and, better yet, she enjoyed making us laugh with conversations of Twilight and singing Taylor Swift and other girly things. And I remember thinking that we must invite her to hang out again sometime because it was just way too entertaining, but I decided to hold back and wait before I put that notion forward.

Less than a month later, Homecoming was about to begin that week, and we were all excited, especially the soccer players on our floor. Suddenly, Kellie and I heard an officer knocking on our neighbors’ doors, asking if they had seen a particular resident or knew how to contact them. The real nightmare began the next morning when we discovered that Bree Culp walked over to the nearby train tracks and committed suicide that evening. Bree was not just that girl that visited my room, but she was also my next door neighbor. Never had I had imagined such a person to reach that point and feel so alone. Even though she wasn’t a close friend of mine, I felt partially at fault because I didn’t reach out sooner after so many walk-by encounters. What if I had stepped up sooner? What if I had offered to speak up and give her advice that may have prevented her from making a permanent decision?

Those “what if”s are why I cannot forget. I learned that day that you must not let fears or insecurities misguide you from your intentions, your hopes, and your path. Some lives are cut shorter than we plan, and I didn’t want to look back and see where I fell short simply by choosing the “easy” way. One quote I found stated: “The greatest rewards come from doing the things that scare you the most.” I can’t describe how nerve-wracking my decision was to transfer here my senior year, dive in as RA, and only know one person on the entire campus. And it’s intimidating going abroad when you hope your finances can be stretched for three months with exchange rate included. And auditioning for a cappella choir my

last semester and still being unsure of myself? All of these were terrifying to me, but I finally saw how many benefits could come from pushing myself and having huge aspirations. And for moments like these, I was right, and I gained so much more than I ever expected. "You only live once" has been WAY overstated lately, and I'm certainly not telling you to jump out of a plane without a parachute if you feel so inclined. However, take the occasional yet safer leaps of faith, and more importantly, live your dream as if there is nothing to stop you.