

Amanda Brown

I have always known exactly what I wanted. Even back when I used to wear mock turtlenecks to elementary school and I used to run late because my mother could never tight roll my jeans to my liking I knew what I wanted. I wanted to be a writer, but sometime between pigtails and adolescence I lost sight of that dream-- it was as if on an idle Tuesday the dream got tired in its efforts and decided to run away. As I began to lose sight of what I wanted, what I didn't want began to push its way into my life; in fact, to this day I still classify my desire to become a doctor as my least insightful epiphany.

I believe it was the looks of disapproval that I received from my family when I spoke of my future career choice that prompted me to reevaluate the path I had planned on traveling. Something that one of my cousins said remains with me like a bad dream; she said, "you'll never be a writer so you might as well choose a career that will get you somewhere. Stop living in a fairy tale world and wake up." She made me think and as I contemplated it I decided that my entire dream had been in vain. At that moment I decided that I would give up what I loved to appear successful in the eyes of everyone else; I decided to become a doctor and decided to attend UK with those intentions after I graduated high school.

The first semester of my college experience was spent concentrating so heavily on my GPA for med school that I quit writing altogether-- I even quit writing in the journal that I had kept since I was ten years old. More and more I lost sight of my life long dream and as a result lost sight of myself. Then, my second semester of my freshman year I joined the Emerging Leader's Institute at UK; my motive to join the institute was to have a leadership program would look good on my resume for medical school. At first glance I

thought that the institute would just teach me how to develop and redefine my relations and leadership with others. However, now I know that the institute redefined my life.

Emerging Leaders prompted me to once again regain leadership over my own existence-- over my own life. I realized that being a leader is not just appearing successful and respected, but being successful and respected because leaders should stand up for what they believe is right. I realized that since my medical school epiphany I had not taken leadership over my life; I had let my cousin and others defeat my dreams-- I had become a follower.

Due to the influence of the Emerging Leaders' Institute I have taken the initiative to do what I feel I should pursue in my life. During the course of the past couple weeks I have changed my major and made additional plans to include myself in my life. I also made the decision that I will take next spring off to study in France in order to satisfy my strong love for the French language. It is time that I began to live for me while simultaneously forgetting the insults and disapproval of outsiders. We only get one life to live, and I no longer intend to live it to appease others.

Additionally, I now appreciate and respect the decisions of others to live their lives in a way that suits them. I even surprise myself sometime due to my more open state of mind. I have begun to notice the prejudice and ignorance of those around me concerning certain issues and cultures, and always stand up for what I feel is right. Note that I am in no way claiming to always view the world without being clouded by my own prejudices; however, I now notice when I make ignorant assumptions and I then make an effort to cease those in the future. Overall I believe that the Institute has taught me to fight my vices: prejudices and stubbornness, ignorant assumptions, and my strong will to

appease others as opposed to myself. When I applied for the Institute I had no idea what I was getting myself into, and to this day I truly value that decision to take a chance. It was in the midst of a chance that I gained self-awareness and an experience unlike any other.