

Choosing Love Over a Desk

In the summer of 2013, I decorated my flimsy brown camp counselor clipboard with all sorts of things. Triangles, anchors, and sailboats are pretty much all I've ever been good at doodling, so those images were visible to everyone on the backside of the clipboard. On the front, beneath all my attendance rosters, camper evaluations, attempts at new signatures, and lists of what to buy at Meijer, I had written a quote to keep myself focused on life post-camp. "*A life lived for art is never a life wasted*" -Macklemore. I'd catch myself staring down at it a few times a day, reminding myself that performing is what I loved, and if I worked hard enough, I might have a shot at making it my profession after college and my summers spent teaching sailing.

One day, I asked a friend (who would later become much more) to call attendance while I figured some boat stuff out. He and his buddy felt the need to flip through my papers afterwards, and found my quote. They thought it was lame, and spent a big chunk of time on the sailing porch that day making me feel bad about being inspired by a Macklemore song. Those boys really succeeded in making me feel small that afternoon. For the rest of that summer, I avoided looking at the lyric that had once given me hope and focus. I felt like a pathetic loser every time my eyes fell on those black letters.

I could be who I wanted if I could see my potential.

Fast-forward a few years to winter 2015. I was grinding HARD at UCF. I was directing a pageant, leading a publication, blogging every day, working part-time, and taking "more than the recommended number of credits". With a few business internships under my belt and a standing job offer in an office for after graduation, I had a lot going for me as "Business Maddie". The big problem? It wasn't where my heart was.

I had been aggressively getting involved in college activities outside the classroom in an attempt to move out of the business space. Because I was so close to finishing my marketing degree, I was determined to get it done. But even then, I knew that post-graduation, I would not be working in an office. Traditional works for a lot of people. A lot of people wanted traditional to work for me. But traditional has NEVER worked for me. By this time, I'd worked a few little performing jobs, and I was hooked. I didn't know how I would make an entertainment career work, but I knew there was no other path for me. Every time I saw a live performance, I would cry thinking about life chained to a desk.

Dramatic? Probably. But performing has always been my one great love. Entertaining has always been my everything. I had some critical adults (and peers) try to trick me out of chasing my love, and could finally recognize and process that. The only way I'd ever ACTUALLY be a pathetic loser is if I gave up on that dream. I started to pour all my energy into auditioning for everything I could, and in January 2016, I finally got noticed. It was the beginning of a new life.

The greats weren't great because at birth they could paint // the greats were great because they'd paint a lot.

Now, nearing the end of 2018, I feel incredibly grateful. I have made a living almost exclusively as an entertainer this year. I've had a few side jobs here and there, but mostly to keep myself entertained between gigs or have a change of scenery. It isn't always easy waking up and dragging myself to every audition I can find, but it sure as hell beats the alternative. I've had some wonderful, weird, and wonderfully weird work experiences this year. I've tested my limits and discovered some weaknesses. Occasionally I think about how doing something else would be easier in a lot of ways, how some stability would be nice. Maybe I could do some more "normal" 26-year-old stuff for a bit. But for me, true joy is making other people smile, giving them (and myself) an escape. With some new projects on the horizon, I couldn't be happier to live an "alternative" life. I'm out here choosing love over a desk every single day.

Macklemore's *Ten Thousand Hours* came up on a Spotify daily mix yesterday, and I nearly cried hearing the first note. To me, that song is everything. From the first time I heard it years ago to this morning on the way to the coffee shop to write, every listen has filled me with hope, inspiration, and the motivation to put in my ten thousand hours. I'm reminded of everyone who has ever made me feel small, and am given a renewed strength to rise above.

A life lived for art is never a life wasted.

Originally published at <https://bit.ly/2MO0085>

Why Leaving My Sorority Was the Best Choice I've Ever Made

"I know we just met yesterday, but I already know you're going to be one of my bridesmaids!"

Four years ago, my doe-eyed pledge sister said this to me as we walked out of our new sorority house. It was a Saturday morning and we were wearing all white to participate in a new member ceremony. It was one of the most genuinely sweet things that anyone had ever said to me, but even in my excitement to become fast friends, I knew the statement was shrouded by naivete. How could one be so sure of a strong lifetime bond based on the Greek letters embroidered on our matching tee shirts?

I went through spring recruitment at the University of Florida because I saw it as a great way to assimilate into my new life as a Gator. Starting college in a spring semester was unconventional, and I was already locked into living off-campus with random upperclassmen that I had found online, as UF was not able to offer me housing on-campus with the other students my age. Generations of women in my family had raved about their sorority experiences in college, so I had high hopes that my bubbly personality and new Lilly Pulitzer dress would help me find a home and a close knit group of women to experience college with.

Within the first few days of accepting my bid, I knew I didn't fit in with the other girls in the house. I was a lanky science geek in a sorority that seemed to place a lot of value on tiny girls with big curls and Southern accents. But I told myself to stick with it. After all, they were a top house and they picked me! Nobody was squealing when I walked into a room, hugging me close and calling me a "little nugget", but I'd made it! I was a ZBZ!*

All through my new member education period, it seemed to become apparent to those around me that my values did not align with the majority of the other girls. It seemed as if every time I had the courage to speak, my words were met with an eye roll or a negative comment. As a result, I suppressed my naturally enthusiastic personality. In just a few weeks, I had lost my sparkle. I felt cripplingly insecure and hated the person I had become. Initiation day came, and my feelings of isolation pushed me to hide in dark corner of the house and cry. Nobody noticed. I finished off the semester, making sure to go to every Greek event and attend most of the meals served in the house in an attempt to make friends and find my place amongst my sisters.

I left Gainesville for a few months to work at summer camp, and had one of the best summers of my life. A thousand miles away from school, I proudly wore my ZBZ letters whenever I could. Because of the length of my work contract I was not able to participate in formal recruitment, but I returned to school feeling refreshed and confident in my ability to turn my sorority experience around.

Things didn't get better that fall, they got worse. The social pressures that came with attending a SEC school during football season took a toll on me, so I started distancing myself from Greek life. The "Gators for Obama" pin I wore proudly on my Longchamp prompted my sisters to shun me, and I would sit alone at dinner while listening to them whisper about how being politically liberal was wrong. I found solace in an acting class, and thought about dropping ZBZ to discover other parts of college life that would help me be happy and confident again. On a whim, I applied and got accepted to an internship program that would allow me to move away for a semester. The excitement and relief that I felt when picturing life outside the sorority's rules and expectations lifted a huge weight off my shoulders.

After talking to my parents and hearing their support for me leaving ZBZ, I scheduled a meeting with a member of the executive board to formally leave the sorority. She didn't attempt to sway me or listen to why I was leaving, just handed me a contract to sign and return. The next day, I dropped it off and left the house for the final time. There were no goodbyes, just a clean break. My pledge sisters, even the one who swore I'd be part of her wedding, didn't attempt to contact me. I spent my last month in Gainesville flying under the radar as a GDI**, and started to feel like myself again. One calendar year after joining ZBZ, I moved to Orlando and never looked back.

My miserable year as a ZBZ taught me a lot about who I am, what I stand for, and the importance of finding your own path. The extreme sadness I felt drove me to find my wings, and I have had so many amazing opportunities come my way in the past three years. What made me a freak in the sorority house has helped me find so much success in the new life I have created for myself. Giving up my letters led me to become a safari driver, improv actor, pageant director, stilt walker, stylist, show host, professional zombie, and writer. Today, I am a successful student leader at UCF with a great job and an amazing group of true friends. I wake up every morning happy and excited to live my life.

Leaving my sorority was the best decision I've ever made. My experience is just that- my experience. I think Greek life is really great in a lot of places and for a lot

of people, but it isn't for everyone. Anyone who says that is being unrealistic. I have a lot of friends who love their sororities and fraternities, and I am so happy for them. But for me, happiness came outside the Greek system.

So what can you learn from me? Don't let anyone or any organization dictate your life. Be yourself and don't be sorry.

*Obviously, I was not a Zeta Beta Zeta. A bid from ABC Family's hit show Greek's famed fictional sorority house would've been awesome! I changed the name of a very real sorority for writing's sake, I'm not here to point fingers and I want you as a reader to remain objective.

**Derogatory term used to describe one who is not part of a Greek organization.

Originally published at <https://bit.ly/2WzU6Xz>

Cyberbullies on Campus: The Real UCF Problem

Let me start off by telling you a little about myself. Hi friends, I'm Maddie. I'm a marketing student with a GPA that warrants lots of scholarships, a hard worker with a rather impressive employment record for a 22-year-old, and a human being with a passion for treating people with respect. I also help to run a handful of high-profile social media accounts on the UCF campus, you all probably know me best as Her Campus UCF's Social Media Director (follow @hercampusucf). I really love using social media, it is a way to both personally and professionally connect with others and contribute positively to society when used correctly.

Here's the problem though- it seems like not everyone sees the positive power of social media. Cyber bullies are everywhere, from the halls of your middle school alma mater to our college campuses. Sadly, even our "adult" status does not protect us from the harsh words of bullies hiding behind computer screens.

Recently, our baseball-playing Knights kicked some serious Gator butt, and I went on social to congratulate the boys. I innocently tweeted, "But seriously, we

all know that UCF > UF. Congrats on the big win, @UCF_Baseball! #ChargeOn". In my eyes, and probably the eyes of most, this is not very offensive at all. I'm a really proud Knight, and I love when fellow Knights do great things, because it gets our school's name out in a positive way. Unfortunately, my little reference to a fairly nonexistent rivalry almost immediately got a pretty nasty response from a Gator fan. I blocked the user after repeated harassment, but it was something along the lines of, "Sry ur too stupid to get into UF!! #gogata". Um... ok. Well, I didn't know this rude girl personally, so I'll give her a little benefit of the doubt, but not only did I "get into UF", I attended that university for a year and maintained a 3.8 GPA, then transferred to UCF because I felt more accepted in the warm culture of Orlando. She also proceeded to call me a "fatty", not a nice thing to say, but also I highly doubt that anyone who has ever seen me would call me fat (I've been teased my whole life for my bony ribs and massive thigh gap, but I digress). I have pretty thick skin, so I blocked the girl and moved on with my life.

Last weekend though, an account called @ucf_problems tweeted something wildly insensitive, and as a vocal feminist, I couldn't let their ignorance go unnoticed. Here's a screenshot of our short but eye-opening exchange.



Alright, @ucf_problems. Do you want to know why I'm taking this sh*t so seriously? For starters, when this rude tweet was initially sent to me by a friend, I immediately thought that it was making fun of me. Maybe that's my ego talking, but I've been cyber bullied since we were all carrying around Moto RAZRs, so that isn't a crazy assumption. I'm in each frame, rocking a Lilly Pulitzer maxi and Ray-Bans. Turns out, Mr. UCF Problems, you were actually making fun of the lovely bearded gentleman standing next to me, a man who took time out of his day to raise awareness of rape victim shaming. I'm taking this seriously because you were quick to negatively judge a strong group of women and men before knowing what was going on. I'm taking this seriously because anonymous cyber bullying based on appearance, gender identity, political affiliation, and passion for making the world a safe place is WRONG. And, I'm taking this *really* seriously because with an audience of over eleven thousand followers, your hateful voice is heard by many more than our peaceful protest's compassionate one.

I'm offended because you are making fun of me and my peers, a passionate group of individuals who had the courage to march around campus, raising our voices for our friends who have survived violent and hateful acts. I'm offended because your ignorant tweet attempts to tear down the voices of those who are brave enough to stand in front of a massive student body and peacefully fight for positive change. I'm offended because what you said was offensive- to both those in the photo and to the women, men, and children around the world who just want to live safe lives.

Mr. UCF Problems, your account claims to be a "parody". Parody is a comedic writing style, and there is nothing funny about making fun of student activists. Your anonymous account is not a parody, it is a forum where users can bully other students without any repercussions. There isn't anything funny about ignorance or being cruel to others.

But, Mr. UCF Problems, since you only seem to communicate via tweet, I'll spell it out for you in 140 characters or less.

**“@ucf_problems, your violent and ignorant voice is uncalled for.
Cyberbullying is a bigger problem than anything you’ve ever tweeted about.”**

And to my fellow Knights, stand up against these hateful acts. Stand up to bullies, and make your kind voices heard. It's really easy to be nice to people on the internet, as well as in face-to-face interactions. We attend an amazing university, and it is up to us to keep this community safe for ourselves and our fellow Knights.

Originally published at <https://bit.ly/2MP9bVI>