

The Search for HOPE

What defines the moment when a child becomes an adult? For me, it was the realization of HOPE.

Dear Reader, I am depressed. This I know because I show all of the stereotypical symptoms of depression. Lack of interest in things I love, a constant deficiency in energy, and the comfortable numbness that shrouds over the sharp pain of loss. But the thing about depression is that it dulls all of the sharp pains and blinding colors. So, maybe it could be considered selfish or something, to find solace in a condition that ends lives. But why would I try to escape when it is that very thing that keeps me safe from the daggers of reality?

Like my depression, music was a kind of shield from the bitterness of life. But also like the depression, my music of choice was only digging my metaphorical grave deeper. So I guess that it's inaccurate to blame the music for my downfall. How are you supposed to leave a grave that you are digging yourself?

Hate Myself - NF

It is a golden afternoon in late September. The leaves on the Coloradoan shrub oak are on the precipice between a dusty green and puke yellow. I groaned internally, longing for my black earbuds and the counter-productive comfort that they would bring. But everyone knows it is rude to have your earbuds in while in the company of others. So I would have to make do as I usually did- Humming and whispering the lyrics to my favorite song.

Today I am in the tourist-ridden town of Pagosa Springs for a cross-country meet. We all finished running our races 30 minutes ago, and now we're waiting for the awards ceremony to

begin. Some wait cheerfully; Anticipating the glorious moment where the official would place the overrated piece of metal and cloth around their necks. Others, like me, wait patiently in agony for the moment when we could once again mount the pathetic yellow bus, bound for home.

This particular race was only the latest of a long list of failed efforts.

You ain't nothin' but poor and weak...

I mean, maybe I'm not good at running fast, but at least my sister is.

My older sister is perfect. Or so everyone thinks.

I don't see you like I should...

She is the fastest runner in the region, has perfect grades as a senior in high school, everyone likes her, and perhaps her most shining achievement, she is not depressed. With her long auburn hair, short stature, and sweet disposition, she could pull any guy that went to our school. As if all of that isn't bad enough, she pretends that we're good old pals. Especially at cross-country.

Pray to God with my arms open,

“Wanna go get something at the concession stand?” Lily asked me.

If this is it, then I feel hopeless...

The initial question seemed to be whispered from another planet.

“What?”

Slightly annoyed, she tried again, “The concession stand. Do you want a Gatorade or something?”

But it's hard when I hate myself...

After a substantial pause, I was shaken from my jealous stupor and managed to give a meager response.

“No. I’m good.”

She walked away even more annoyed than she was before. What does she want from me? To spend all of her money?

Finally, we were all loaded back onto the bus, and I could just concentrate on the dark trepidant music radiating from my earbuds. The heavy aggressive voice of Nate Feuerstein singing a song called *Hate Myself*, poured into my ears and I felt safe and understood again. It’s true, I was lonely, but I’m sure at this point you can see that loneliness wasn’t the true cause of my hopelessness.

After the cross-country season ended, it was a cold, dark winter. A winter of weather and of consciousness. Holding me captive well into May of 2022.

*We scream to be free but I stay captured,
Knee-deep in defeat of my own actions,
Feel weak, but the peace that I keep lackin’,
Keeps speakin’ to me but I can’t have it.*

The Search- NF

Dear reader, by this time you’ve probably figured out that the italicized writing represents my inner thoughts. Or well, that isn’t quite correct because I don’t consciously think these haunting lyrics. They’re just... there. If this is confusing to you, please take your complaint and shove it up your...

Just kidding! But the truth is that not everything in life is meant to be clear, certainly not becoming an adult. Either that or I'm just making an excuse for poor writing. But back to the story.

The words and songs of NF will always have a place in my heart and mind.

Last year I had a breakdown, thoughts tellin' me I'm lost gettin' too loud...

See, that first sentence I meant literally. Whether I like it or not the abrasive lyrics have been engraved into the very fiber of my being. I couldn't forget them if I wanted to. As for the desire to forget, I really don't know if they are still valuable to me, or if they continue to eat away my soul. If an infection is left to fester, it then has the ability to corrupt the entire host.

By the beginning of my sophomore year, I hadn't listened to a single song by NF for months. Because at that point, I had finally made the exodus out of my imperial despondency. Finally, I could look back on that time, and recognize what better life looked like. But there was one by-product of the era that took hold of me. I can no longer listen to NF. The subject seems to have become taboo.

The way I see it, my consciousness had taken in a new fundamental belief. You know, like the things that are part of our identity. (Religious beliefs, personality, or whether you use your right or left hand to wipe your butt.) The belief that the music had caused my depression. Therefore, if I started listening to it once again, NF would cause me to relapse into the same melancholy state as before.

Grabbin' my keepsakes, leavin' my burdens,

But that didn't matter anymore. I had left that time behind me.

Well, I brought a few with me, I'm not perfect...

Apart from “forgetting” Nate Fuererstien, the summer and the first half of 10th grade had been nearly amazing. I had been in and out of a childish relationship, I found out that I was actually good at cross-country, and I had friends! No, I had a best friend. Well, I had other friends too, but it was really just her who kept me grounded through the tumultuous summer. In short, my life was going great.

I'm lookin' for the map to hope, you seen it?

That’s what I’ll tell myself every day. That life is great. Because no matter how much I try I will never be the same carefree little girl I was before. I am darker and colder. I guess that makes me selfish again. Because it’s true, I have a great life. I have every reason to be happy.

So why can’t I just fucking be happy?

HOPE- NF

“Hey Marah, you wanna hang out tonight?”

“Nah, I’m okay. I’m... busy.” *“I wasn’t.”*

I could tell he was skeptical. “Oh really? Busy with what?”

“Dang it.”

“Tommy, I’m just busy! I’ll hang out tomorrow.”

I feel bad, but it’s not his fault I want to be alone. I just do.

Tommy Sheeran is a tall, brown-haired, senior. I guess he’s also my friend but I don’t think I deserve that. He’s popular, but that depends on who you ask. He’s also one of my favorite people in the world. He’s the kind of friend who would be there for you through anything. If I were to murder someone today, he would be the one to ask “Where are the shovels at?”

Oh yeah, one more defining factor about him: He is obsessed with NF. In fact, he's the one who got me into that music in the first place. I know at this point the reader may think that I might blame Tommy for getting me mixed up in the wrong music, but I don't.

On February 16, 2023, Nate Furerstien released a new song called HOPE. But of course, I didn't know that; I hadn't so much as thought about the music in months.

This story starts during flex time on a cold February day. Of course I was skipping class in the lobby, like any other sophomore with older friends would do. I was with Laili, Tommy, and Aaron, just sitting and wasting time.

"What did you guys work on in choir today?" I asked Laili.

"We just ran through all of the songs and then did homework," She replied without looking up from her phone.

Usually, we'd be talking about some outrageous hypothetical prank that would get us expelled or joking around, but today there was something different. Some strange energy in the air.

Looking over at Tommy, I realized that he hadn't said much of anything that whole time. But silence was not a word to describe his demeanor. Tommy looked like a pure ball of energy with nowhere to go. It didn't seem like the others noticed.

"You alright there, little Tim?" I said jokingly. "You look like you're about to explode."

"Huh?" was his initial response.

"Dude, you look like you just downed a monster! What's up?"

Point blank he said, "NF released a new song today."

What's my definition of success?

The bell rang and my head imploded. *“What did this mean? Did this mean I could listen to his music again? Maybe something new would be good for me. Maybe hearing his voice again would trigger a relapse. What if I can’t handle it?”*

I wanted to crawl into a hole and forget everything. I couldn’t do this now. Now that I’ve come so far.

“Marah? Are you okay?” Tommy asked with regret in his voice. He was the only one I’d told about my relationship with NF’s music.

As the lobby started to fill up with students on their way out, I was finally able to formulate an answer.

“Oh uh, yeah. I’m great. So uh, how is the new song?”

“It’s amazing! I’ve been wanting to tell you about it but I wasn’t sure if I should.”

“Time to put on some acting skills.”

“What?! Of course, you can tell me! What’s it called?” I kind of surprised myself there. *“Was I actually interested in listening to this song?”*

“It’s called HOPE. And he’s completely changed his look too!” Tommy was enraptured. “You know how for his whole career he’s only worn black, right?”

“Yeah?”

“Well for the new album, he’s all in white! Anyway, I’ve got to get to Basketball practice. We should listen to it later. After play practice.” He picked up his bag and left me in shock.

When I got home from school I was very on edge. Or maybe I just thought I should be on edge. I spent the afternoon pacing around my house looking for answers. (As if I’d find them in

the cupboard or a laundry basket.) I even tried listening to the song on my own once or twice. But I was just too scared.

Thirty years of running, thirty years of searching

Thirty years of hurting, thirty years of pain

Play practice came and went. I even almost forgot about the whole thing. But when Tommy's set on something, there is no persuading him otherwise.

"Wanna listen to it in your car or my car?" He asked eagerly.

"I don't know man..."

"Come on you'll be fine! Worse comes to worse we can just turn it off."

I could tell by the look in his eyes that he wasn't going to let me out of this, so I caved.

"Fine, we'll do it in my car."

"Yes!" He exclaimed.

During the first thirty seconds of the song, I remained skeptical. After that, my jaw dropped.

Dear Reader, I'll spare you all of the gory details about how amazing this song was because this essay is already too long. Plus I doubt you would be interested. All you need to know is that the song HOPE by NF changed my perspective on life. Maybe I didn't know it at the time, but it did. It showed me what I was lacking. What I had been searching for.

See, after my year of depression, I was okay. But I still felt like something was missing. It was the HOPE that there was something more for me. That even when I have bad days, bad weeks, or bad years there is a light at the end of the tunnel. That not everything in this world is doom and gloom.

So how does this all relate to making the transition from childhood to adulthood? Before I started recognizing HOPE in my life, I had to force myself to be comfortable in the dark. Some might call this brave- not being afraid of the dark. But I call it weak and cowardly. Living in darkness is a choice that we make to avoid the light of reality. I became an adult when I was brave enough to see the good (and the bad) of the world. Because without both the good and the bad, we have no **HOPE**.