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The Sculpting of a Human Being

Identity is an abstract concept, as fluid and ever-changing as the tide. When people are born, we are clean slates, an untouched shore; we wait patiently for people and places and hardships to imprint upon us and build us into individuals.

When I was younger, I knew my identity with as much certainty and simplicity as any 7-year old could. If I was ever asked about myself, I would say without hesitation that I was 'nice,' 'smart,' and 'funny.' I never had any doubt in my mind as to who I was, and I was happy. When I was younger, I looked around at my environment and saw a place where I could grow and change and live freely, never pressured to fit into a set role.

As I grew older, though, I found that certainty quickly slipping through my fingers. I moved to a different school, and the pressure to find a new group of friends in the new and unfamiliar environment weighed on me. Everyone seemed to have their roles figured out: you were the funny one, or you were the smart one, or you were the artistic one, or you were no one. After a few months alone, I didn't care who I was anymore, nor did I care who I wanted to be; all that mattered was that I was a person who the people in my school would like. So, I met people, I made friends, and I became completely void of any personality other than 'agreeable.' My personality was practically nonexistent, I was just a mirror for whoever I was talking to. Eventually, though, being 'agreeable' wasn't enough. People grew tired of my dullness and I quickly realized that I had no idea who I was anymore. I only became more lost, fighting to find the person that I used to be behind all of the different masks I had worn to fit into my new environment. When I looked in the mirror, I didn't recognize who I saw. Every day I wondered who I was, who I used to be, and if I was anyone at all. My environment was my enemy, a thief who had stolen away my sense of self and my confidence through its pressure. It had taken my identity, and, instead of shaping it into something beautiful, had completely discarded it, making me anxious and frustrated and miserable and lost.

Last year, I saw my environment, for the first time, as the sculptor who has shaped me into who I am today, not a villain to be resented. Last year, I surrounded myself with people who make me feel like me, even when I feel like no one. My environment, which was once only the school where I felt nothing but pressure to succeed and fit in, became my best friend's house, the restaurant downtown where my friends and I go to eat, and the online group chat where I met people around the world with the same

interests as me. I changed my environment, and I stopped searching for the person I used to be. Instead of clinging desperately to the past me, as I had done for so many years, I let my environment reforge my identity anew. And while I still sometimes struggle to recognize myself, I know that the people around me now will understand and be there to remind me of who I am.

Before, my environment shaped me into an unsure, confused, husk of a person. But now, my environment has changed. Now, I can say, with all of the certainty that the world once stripped away from me, that my environment has taken the blank canvas I once was and painted a wonderful portrait. My school has made me perseverant and intelligent, my home has made me kind and thoughtful, the park my friends walk to after school has made me funny and carefree, my bedroom has made me talented and artistic, and the world around me now has made me happy. Identity is a fluid and ever-changing concept, and mine has been undeniably shaped by the struggles and victories presented to me by my environment.