

Five Thoughts in Five Years

by Hannah Monti

My Dearest 12-Year-Old,

I know that you think about me quite a lot, and believe it or not, I think about you, too. This relationship has a strange dynamic, though, because I know you personally, while you simply fantasize about me from afar, as though I'm the star of one of those boy-bands you love so much.

Well, it's about time I introduced myself. My name is Hannah; I'm a junior in high school I spend more time at debate tournaments than sporting events, I don't much care for neon shades of nail polish, and I still don't know how to properly apply eyeliner (sorry, but some things will never change). I realize that this isn't what you expected, but I hope you'll hear me out anyway. After all, you pick up a few things in five years.

I know that by now you've packed up all your dolls and stuffed animals, painted your room a grown-up shade of off-white, and declared for all the world to hear, "I'm not a child anymore." I also know that it feels like no one listened. So here I am, writing this letter, to help aid you in your transition from 'little girl' to 'young woman.'

Here are the 5 things you're going to need to know:

Number One: You really ought to sleep while you can.

Look, I get it, nothing quite compares to the exhilaration of reading a page-turner under the sheets until the wee hours of the morning, just to find out what happens next. Please, don't do it every night. I also know that the eighth graders seem to wear sleep-deprivation like a badge of

honor, as though pulling an all-nighter is some rite of passage. Exhaustion does not make you cool, it makes you cranky. You can never make up the hours of sleep you miss, and believe me when I say, I lose enough as it is, the last thing I need is you racking up sleep-debt as well.

Number Two: You're growing.

In the next few years you're going to go through a lot of 'phases.' You'll be a painter today, a poet tomorrow, and an amateur zoologist the day after that. You'll try on selves like blue jeans and go through 15 pairs in the span of 16 weeks. You'll find one that's snug in all the right places, only to discover you've grown out of them entirely a few months later. This is all okay. I only have a handle on who I am today because you put so much time and effort into figuring it out.

Number Three: You are not a failure, nor am I.

It's hard to know which is worse at your age; feeling all eyes on you or none at all. You crave recognition yet fear the spotlight.

You've been wondering for as long as you can remember whether or not you'll amount to anything in the years to come, and as the shadow of high school looms ever closer, that wonder has turned to worry and that worry has turned to fear. I'm not going to lie and tell you this feeling will be washed away in a tidal wave of trophies. You wouldn't believe me anyway. However, you have my solemn promise that you will find success. It won't be earth-shattering, but it will be enough. And you will fail. Not at everything, not all the time, just often enough to keep you humble. The great thing is, you will find your way into a group of people who make you feel unique and beautiful and loved, and awards will begin to matter less and less, after all, you will have already won the jackpot.

Number Four: Love is right around the corner.

While your high school experience will not look anything like the angst-filled poetry you like to read, nor will boys line up outside your door like Grandma always said, you will fall in love.

With yourself. Some days it will be more difficult to honor your commitment to this relationship than others. You will be tempted to cheat with your mirror, and your mistakes, and those girls you so desperately want to like you. You will flirt with diets, and forced smiles, and boys who couldn't be bothered. You'll feel broken and lost until one day you'll get tired of the tearstains on your cheeks. That's the day you'll realize that the person you're going to be waking up to for the rest of your life shouldn't be the person making you cry yourself to sleep at night. That's the day you'll stop wishing to slip into someone else's skin and begin to make a home in your own. That's the most important day of my life thus far.

Number Five: I love you.

Please forgive me. I've put an inordinate amount of time and effort into making it appear as though you never existed, from deleting all your pictures off of our Instagram account to hiding your yearbooks deep in the abyss I call my closet. I told myself you were an embarrassment. I told myself that I had changed and that it was best never to look back. I told myself you didn't matter.

Then I realized you'd heard all those things before, but it would hurt the most to hear them from me. So now your picture hangs on my wall (bangs, braces, and all) among my cross country bibs, debate certificates, and evidence of my other accomplishments. Because you are important. You made me the person I am today, and you remind me of the strength it took to place every stone that forms the foundation of my confidence. All I can say is thank you.

Yours with admiration and gratitude,

A 17-year-old you

A Work in Progress