

The Nude Paradox

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Please note, this work contains content related to nudity and substance use.

I think tonight may have been the best night of my life. This is the feeling I want to remember the next time I get down on life, so here it is, written down, for insurance. Just in case my brain fails me and lets the details of tonight slip.

It started with us five seniors in the dorm saying a final goodnight to all the freshman girls. After some liquid courage in my room with Margot, the real fun began with a frantic run to the music wing bathroom. A bunch of other girls had the same idea, so we were all crowded in there covering ourselves in neon handprints and screaming our heads off. We ran down the hallway and collided with some naked boys, out to the Circle for more screaming and music. Then we started the streak. Three (and a half!) laps around the Circle and through the dorm courtyards. Shouting, dancing, and frantically grabbing hands with any nearby friends. Oh, and one of the most fun workouts I've ever had. I didn't think I had that kind of endurance, but here I am, a full-blown track star. I ran and I ran, smiling the entire time. For the final lap, I freed the titties, tossing my pasties somewhere in the middle of the Circle.

After the streak was over, I found myself in the bathroom with Margot, Helene, Neve, Edie, Daniel, and Russell. We drank some more, then joined the rest of the grade at NAKED DANCE. Somehow, being in a thrashing mass of sweaty naked bodies felt like the most natural thing in the world. I hope I can feel that way, just absolutely free, again sometime. I danced and I sang and I laughed and I jumped and screamed some more. Then we left and took some funny pictures and selfies in the forum with a bunch of other people. Not sure how smart that was, but we did it and I'm happy.

I think it was so much fun because our grade actually felt unified. It's silly that we needed to be naked to feel together, but it was a great feeling nonetheless.

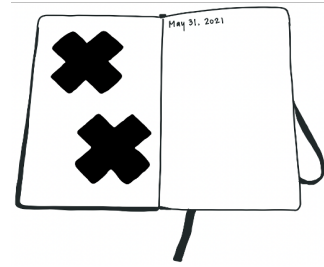
Tomorrow is the last day of high school.

This is the journal entry from "the best night of my life," also known as Senior Streak at my high school. The tradition is exactly what it sounds like: an entire graduating class running nude nighttime laps around our boarding school campus. No, we weren't completely naked (at the start, at least). Most of us had on some kind of skimpy set along with glitter and glow-in-the-dark paint, although some people got creative. One girl fashioned lingerie out of blue surgical masks, a celebrity chef's son wore nothing but an open-backed apron, and a roommate duo somehow got ahold of two pairs of assless chaps. There were people on scooters and rollerblades leading the pack, armed with silly string and an enormous speaker. We shouted beneath dorm windows, blowing drunken kisses to our favorite underclassmen. Meanwhile, the faculty members stayed tucked in their beds with the shades drawn, knowing full well they couldn't approach a mass of naked minors breaking curfew.

Those two full pages of (really shitty) writing in my journal sit next to a pair of black X's, the aforementioned pasties that I shamelessly recovered from the Circle the next morning. (Our school's campus

is arranged around a circle of grass with a very creative name.) The dorms, schoolhouse, dining hall, and chapel are all part of this central terrain, and therefore the streaking route.

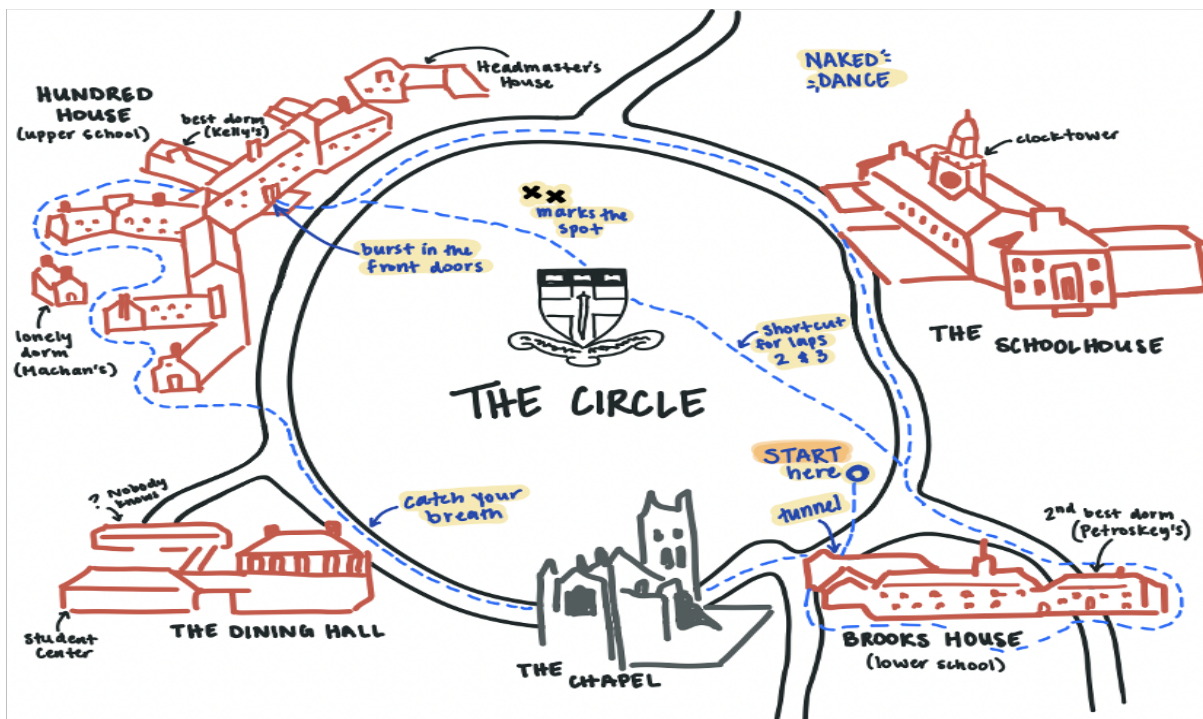
If the chapel is any indication, my school is what you might call... sophisticated. Refined, even. To put it into perspective, I went to the same school as former President Franklin D. Roosevelt. We have milk and cookies at the headmaster's house and call it Parlor. The school has a board of trustees and an unfathomably large endowment. Yet on the night of the streak, I was prancing around in the middle of it all, naked aside from some precariously placed fabric. For four years, I had attended class six (yes, six) days a week adhering to the dress code, but that night I brazenly flung off my nipple stickers without a thought of modesty. We were a group of 95 well-mannered seniors, all of us college-bound, parading our delinquency for a prep school audience. What irony.



What strikes me now though, is a little less obvious.

I'm the type of person who gets stressed when plans involve wearing a bathing suit. The type who only eats "safe" foods the entire day if I'm dressed in a tight shirt. (Safe foods are the ones that don't normally induce bloating.) I have half a drawer full of crop tops I never wear because I'm still waiting for the right day to come around; a day where the skin I live in feels presentable to the world; strong enough to protect me.

But a naked exhibition to celebrate graduation? Followed up by a naked dance? Sign me up. Despite



my feelings towards my body, I'm also the person who rallied a dozen girls to skinny dip in the ocean in March. I'll never decline an invitation for a quick strip and dunk into any nearby body of water. I may even enjoy a solo trip. Whenever possible, I celebrate National Skinny Dipping Day (July 13th, for those

interested). I recognize now that I may be a serial skinny dipper. In that sense, I guess it's unsurprising that senior streak remains one of my favorite memories.

So why the aversion to bathing suits and crop tops? Three years later, the conclusion I've come to is that there's a difference between nudity and bareness. Baring myself to the world, that is—venturing out as nothing but an authentic being. No protective measures or defenses.

Exposing my legs or an inch of my torso can make me uncomfortable, even if there's no greater thrill than running towards the sea in my underwear. Though seemingly contradictory, neither fact invalidates the other. The moments where I'm naked just happen to correlate with the moments where I truly feel like myself. With this revelation in mind, a previously omitted section of my journal entry starts to make more sense.

I also, for the first time in a long time, felt confident in my body. I loved myself and I wasn't ashamed for people to see me. I guess part of that can be attributed to being buzzed, but I'm okay with that. I felt happy.

The nakedness was not why the night of the streak felt so special. Neither was the intoxication. It was the rawness, a rare feeling of comfort and trust surrounded by my closest friends. In my journal I had misinterpreted the confidence I felt, attributing it to how I looked. Instead, I was simply happy to be there as myself. If I'm at the point of near nudity with 94 other people, there's no reason to hide anything else.

As it turns out, it's not too difficult to understand the contradictory nature of an insecure girl thriving while naked or prep school students shedding their classy clothes. Some simpler examples might help illustrate this idea: I'm a germaphobe who plays in the mud during a storm and calls it a rain dance. I can't tell my lefts and rights, but I can navigate the mountains at home without a problem. I'm a picky eater whose favorite topping is pickled red onions. My top Spotify artists are all mellow, crunchy bands, yet my number one genre remains rap. I hate having my picture taken but I'm dating a photographer. I'm a penny pincher unless it's a gift for someone else. I'll refuse a single sip of alcohol, but I love a night out. I don't believe in God but I will always wish on an eyelash.

I am a living, breathing contradiction. Or maybe it just seems that way.