

## Forty-Year-Old Freshman

by Rachel Moore

The day I applied to college was beautiful. It was spring, but I remained trapped indoors. The chirping of birds wafting into the apartment seemed to beckon me outside. Their joyous sounds filled me with nonsensical jealousy. I longed to fly, to be free of this loathsome human body. I sighed heavily. It seemed this day would never end, and I dreaded the days ahead, for I knew they would be the same as the ones before: empty.

“Are you okay?” my boyfriend asked warily.

“Fine,” I lied. I was always fine until my façade cracked. I mustered a reassuring smile and we said goodbye for the day. He left for work as I slipped back into my listless trance. The depression was like a thick blanket, smothering and paralyzing.

I took another gulp of my drink. A vile concoction of cranberry juice and too much vodka, it burned my throat as I swallowed. I had been trying for years to drown out my thoughts, but it had been ages since alcohol could give the desired effects. At first, it provided escape from my emotions, my memories – my very self.

On this particular day, I found myself thinking back on my school days. I remembered them fondly and berated myself for quitting college. Decades had slipped by and I had floundered from one job to the next, never giving much thought to my future. My feeble excuse was indecision: *I don't know what I want to be when I grow up*. The truth was beginning to dawn on me: I may never “grow up.” I knew the road I was on led nowhere worthwhile. Indecision plagued me still, but I finally decided to take a leap of faith.

My fingers trembled as they typed my query into Google. In a daze, I took one step, then the next. Before I knew it, I had applied to Roane State. The concept was dizzying. What would I study? What were my goals? I had no idea. I simply knew I had to do *something*. Doing nothing was getting me nowhere, and I had finally grown tired enough of nothing to actually do something.

As usual, intoxicated me was doing things that would confound rational, sober me. This time was different, though. This time, I was doing something constructive. There were no regrets the following day. I had finally found a way forward. The road ahead was uncertain, but at least there was finally a road. No longer wandering aimlessly, I persevered despite my fear, knowing I was making a sound decision.

The path I began to follow that day led me to where I am today: in college, making a 100 in every class so far, with two solid part-time jobs and goals for the future. It was the catalyst I needed to let go of my old friend and enemy, alcohol. I'd tried to quit many times before, but this time was different. These days, I don't have to lie; I really am fine, and it feels fantastic.