

It is so weird, almost unsettling, to look back and try to remember what my life was like before moving to Albuquerque and having my entire life flip upside down. The precious ignorance of a kid that I used to hold seems sweet in my memory, so sweet that I almost wish I had been oblivious forever. But of course that is just not possible. For better or for worse, the child-like bubble that blinds us all at one point is inevitably going to pop once you have gained awareness of the lightness and darkness that surrounds you. When you are finally exposed to bits and pieces of information that you had neglected to acknowledge before, you may find that you felt more secure in the blissful omission of truths. The day your ignorance is lifted is the day you stop truly being a child. Throughout high school, I was forced to face the harsh reality of myself and my own self-image, resulting in the depression and anxiety I have today, but also in the motivation and drive I have to create and the compassion I have for other people. My experiences have opened me up to the world, taught me to have faith in the things I believe in, and to not give up on myself or what I am passionate about.

Back when I shared my homily in the Coming of Age Ceremony, I had not yet fully developed an understanding of myself or how I felt about the world around me. I had very basic ideas of what I wanted and hadn't allowed myself to view the world realistically. In my freshman year, I was exposed to new situations, opportunities, fears, and heartaches. I didn't see the opportunities even as they stood right in front of me, instead only letting myself see the things that scared me and left me feeling alone. Suddenly, I had lost my motivation to do almost anything. I didn't even feel like myself. The only thing that still made me content was my art. When I was drawing, I was not some pretend face that stood as a protective barrier. I wasn't afraid in my art and I was able to express the thoughts and emotions that filled my head without fearing the judgment of others. I was becoming more aware of reality. As my anxiety got worse sophomore year, I pulled through using my creativity to keep me sane. But even as my incognizance was stripped from me, only denial took its place as I tried to hang on to the beauty of being unaware. I mourned the ending of my innocence and just wished I

could go back. My refusal to come to terms with the present only fed my depression and kept me from growing to my full potential. Months went by, but I was still stuck on the past.

Somehow in the past year, I've managed to stop dwelling on things that have ended and look to things that I have the power to make happen. I've stopped yearning for my past ignorance and accepting life the way it is. My art has reflected this change of heart as it became happier and colorful. The anxiety attacks are not nearly as frequent as they had been before and I've managed to gain self-confidence in my abilities and self-worth. I've even allowed myself to find happiness in trusting people and allowing myself to be vulnerable, although it's still scary sometimes. In losing my ignorance and the denial of this loss, I've become a more open and honest person.

I still look back on the absence of my past self with a tinge of remorse, a little girl who was happy, confident, strong, and creative. But even if I had the option to go back to living obliviously, I would stay where I am today. Anxiety and depression will continue to follow me around, but they don't need to be the end of me. I think back to that little girl I had once existed as and know that she is still inside of me. I am creative. I am strong. I am capable of confidence. And happiness is completely obtainable by me, even though I sometimes forget. Depression has made me more sensitive, but sensitivity is not always a bad thing. Anxiety has made me a bit more reserved, but this trait is not bad either. I feared the truth and wished it didn't exist, but now I see that it is necessary and beautiful. I've found spirituality in my art and in the truth that I welcome into my life. As I said in my Coming of Age, I am an artitarian. Being able to recognize the truth as it is and express my love, doubt, passion, and fear is the key to my happiness, and I'm ready to accept the things that my credulous incognizance used to hide. Ignorance may be bliss, but acceptance is true peace.