I must admit that I haven’t been overly enthusiastic to write this piece. Part of my current apathy to my work is a reflection of my private life—I’m tired and a little moody and in desperate need to confess my personal sins to my pillow; but, some of this is also attributed to the topic of this article. My friends, we are going to talk about nerds. Dweebs. Geeks. You. Me.

You see, I am an extreme proponent of being who you are. I could care less if you know Klingon. It’s your business if you have a 12-sided die charm on your key chain. Good for you if you have a strong position over whether James T. Kirk or Jean-Luc Picard is the better captain. It may have caused a younger me to hunt you like a Pit Bull would hunt a squirrel, but now, I find it all to be a curiosity, like bald men that grow out and sweep over one side of their hair as if it was logic camouflage or large women that wear Spandex shorts that say “Juicy” across the butt and have camel-toes in the front—it’s not for me to understand, but to just accept.

The truth is that I exist in a no-man zone. I played football when I was in high school; I was recruited for athletic scholarships and went all-region. I wrestled varsity. I played basketball. I was also on the yearbook committee. I was in student government. I graduated summa cum laude with both state and federal honors (and the personal recommendations of two serving state senators). I wrote for the student newspaper. I was on the debate team, and I knew what “Babylon 5” was.

If two different people were to call me a jock and a nerd, they both would have been right. I straddled the border: known to both cliques and a member of none. I was fine with this. Really. I didn’t mind being my own person.

But, because I was such an individualist, it was hard to define me, even to myself.

My junior year in high school, I fell in love with a cheerleader. Hard. She literally made me weak in my knees the first time I saw here; I collapsed into the brick wall where the team were hanging out between summer double sessions and ended up with a busted lip. She was glorious, with her brown curly hair and pouting lips and large, luminescent eyes that reflected the Sun in shimmering greens and warm browns. She was muscled and toned and contoured and pressed into a body that was neither petite nor forlorn nor absurd in its extremes, but curvaceous and seductive and beautiful in its exactness. She owned the day; she was regent of all she surveyed and she demanded the glares and wagging tongues of all she passed.

It wasn’t like I paid too much attention to her, you know.

She was like Christmas morning: she was all I dreamed about, she consumed my very thought to the point of insanity until that moment, the moment when she would arrive, came, and the fount of my anticipation would consume me. But, that moment never came.

You see, I saw myself as a nerd, someone below her status. So, I watched her from afar, and I let my heart break a small crack at a time. I dated other girls—some I actually cared for, but it wasn’t the same. It wasn’t her.

During graduation, she sought me out; despite being draped in unflattering maroon and white, she radiated and glowed and consumed my senses. So, it was a shock that—through all of this—she told me that she liked me and was hoping that I would have asked her out on a date. She told me that she chose her college because it was only five minutes’ away from my college, and she was hoping I would visit. She wanted me to take her to the prom, and she was heartbroken that I didn’t ask her. (To be fair, I didn’t go to the prom; I just made my rounds to the various after- parties.)

I was stunned. I reasoned myself out of my own happiness.

I never did visit her in college; somehow, I felt our moment had passed. But, I sometimes dream of what could have happened—in all of my life and in all of my adventures, I never met a woman that excited me as physically and passionately as her, and now she is gone—a different person than the cheerleader in the skin-tight uniform a decade and a half ago. I’m a different person, too: still the geek, but maybe closer to where I need to be.

So, I ask you this: was there a relationship you talked yourself out of having? Was it because you were scared? Intimidated by feelings of not being up to snuff? Afraid of being rejected?

This is life, this is all we have, and it is short. It’s far too short to be afraid. It’s far too short to discount yourself. Be bold. Be fearless. Go after what you want. Lead with your heart. Don’t be afraid.

Life is too short to pine over lost cheerleaders.

*Frederick Reese is wanted for questioning regarding maple syrup smuggling and an “unbecoming act with an elk” with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. No, seriously, he is a comically large man (2 meters tall) that lives in the frozen tundra of Central New York State. He is a political and financial contributor for Yahoo!, a political and societal analyst for B. Coleur, a culinary bloggist, and a novelist with multiple novels in post-production. You can follow him at his FaceBook page—www.facebook.com/fdreese—or e-mail him at content@bounceback.com.*