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IAH 241 Season's End Reflective Essays

What is your (the student--not your character's) Holy Grail? What steps do you take to pursue it?

In my mind a Holy Grail is an ideal, something very hard to achieve and sometimes never actually achievable. In the stories we read and watched, it was achieved by going through great journeys, which only one person could do such as in Moana. In the case of Indiana Jones being a person with good intentions, as well as Galahad in the quest for the Grail, who needed to be one with Christ to see the Holy Grail. This sometimes overwhelming view of how a Grail must be achieved, is not how I would define it for myself. I think the true Grail for myself, and really most people, is very achievable. The Grail is just being happy. I define it this way because what makes me happy is an always changing thing. When I was in high school for me that thing was snowboarding. The result of that was I decided I wanted to be a pro snowboarder. I put all my effort into getting better and learning new things within snowboarding, and at the time it made me very happy. It still does, knowing I put so much effort into something and I can look back on it and be proud. However, at some point snowboarding stopped making me as happy as I wanted and so I stopped doing it as much. It is not a sad thing, that I gave up my childhood dream. Its just the "what I want" changed. This is the difference from the texts and films. The Holy Grail is not some quest with milestones laid out in front of us. Its not until we have reached the Grail and can look back, that we can truly say what the real milestones where. If we are on

a constant quest to be happy, we can be sure that at any moment we can look back and see that we have made the right choices, that we followed our heart. So for me the steps that I take are much like Indiana Jones or even Moana. They are about following your own voice.

How do you measure your own maturity and development? How do you know when you've achieved adulthood? How do you know when you've gained the skills you need to succeed at your life's purpose?

This is one I struggled with a lot. What makes a man? How do you know? What if I am not a man? It was my first summer after college and I decided to spend it in Oregon.

Government Camp, Oregon, specifically. Now I didn't have any family or very close friends living there. I went there with one other friend I knew and we made our lives there for a short time, both getting jobs in Timberline Lodge. The lodge is a historic place, being placed on Mt. Hood, a dormant volcano. Government Camp is the small ski town below it.

During the summer, this place brings out people from all corners of the United States to come ski all summer long. For the most part the travelers come in two categories, rich ski racers and poor ski bums like myself, who pay their way by washing dishes at the lodge. It is here, during this summer, that I first encountered, "Made Men". I think this term has Italian mafia routes, but anyway, "Made Men" have something about them. They are men. They look it. They know it. They just wear it, and you don't have to ask, you just know.

Struggling to find my way in this foreign place, I wanted to know if I had it, and if I didn't,

how do I get it? While I was there me and my friend found a place to live with some other ski bums in a small ski hut. There was a total of 3 bedrooms. 12 people would live there throughout the summer. More would camp outside the hut in their cars on the road and come in for breakfast, showers, and good conversation. My first night in the house, I was getting to know the people I was about to be living with the entire summer. We were talking, eating, and drinking. One man stood out in particular, his name was Meeks. That was not his real name, its just what people called him. Meeks, was a “Made Man”. Meeks came up and started talking to me. We eventually got to talking about what I was doing up at the lodge. “Dishwashing,” I told him. “That”, he said, “will make you into a man. If that doesn’t put hair on your chest, nothing will”. Great I’ve got it, I thought. Once this summer is over, I will have survived as a dishwasher, and I will be a man. Now, a few weeks go by, and one day I am riding the bus up to the lodge, ready for a long day of dishwashing. I thought I had things pretty much figured out at this point. The cooks are your best friends. If you treat them well and do a good job, they will treat you well back. This means they will feed you. Which is the difference between not eating and getting a \$50 steak for dinner. There was this one cook I had come to know that was a “Made Man”. He had traveled the world times over, had an amazing wife, and could always tell a good story. I was riding the bus up to the lodge with him one day and he asked me what I thought of dishwashing. “Well its not the best”, I said, “But after this summer is over, I will have built some character and it will make me into a man”. “A man”, he said, “That’s not what makes a man”. I hesitated at this point. I just laughed and said “ya I know”. This threw me. I thought I knew what made a man, but now? I didn’t want to ask him what made a man, because I didn’t want to look like I didn’t know. So I just let it go. And I thought about this

for a little while. No one can tell you what being a man or being a woman or being whatever you want to be is. It's the confidence in our own gut, that allows us to define ourselves in whatever way we choose. It's not dishwashing or traveling the world. It's just being confident in who you are and what you are doing in this life. As compared to the stories we read and the video of Gigantomachia, this story for me is the of coming of age, which can be somewhat compared to Culwhch. Not in the sense that I am seeking a lady with the help of my crew members, but rather that it is symbolism for turning into or proving one's self as a man. The Gigantomachia for me was the challenge of understanding what made a man. In some ways this can even be compared to the Holy Grail, as in Indiana Jones. To find the Holy Grail, Indiana had to know inside himself what the Grail looked like. In the same way I had to understand in myself, what a man was, to become one.

What was the most interesting, important, strange or troubling aspect of this season?

I think the most interesting part of this season was thinking about the Gigantomachia and what that can really mean. Viewing the giant as not only overcoming something physical, but also overcoming internal struggles is very interesting. I thought about this a lot when creating the giant to send to another group. I tried to come up with a way for the overcoming of the giant, to be a great battle but also show how the hero has grown. I tried to create the same need of a crew such as in Culwhch's story, where he had a "six go through the world" type scenario. I tried to present the story of my Gigantomachia, the Skeleton King, as one where the hero would need to have made relationships with people that were a part of his crew, who could act as these talented helpers to aid in battle.

Ideally, the hero would have done this, as well as shown their courage by being an ambassador for the crew. The Skeleton King, would be the challenge of the hero's to overcome, and if overcome, show the leadership position the hero has taken amongst the group.

One thing that could be improved with this course is the amount of feedback given. I sometimes am not sure if what I am doing or writing is correct, as I have not received a grade on any of my KCEs or SEREs. I worry that I will get to the end of the semester, receiving feedback all at once, and have no way of working toward a better grade. I wrote this earlier, but I did just get the feedback back for summer's SERE, which was great! Thank you!