A Cure for Oblivion

The late Marty Rubin made this statement, “A few names have survived oblivion. In time, oblivion will have them all” (Rubin). Rubin was a gay-rights activist, aphorist, and author of “Boiled Frog Syndrome,” who reflected on happiness, death, and the dizzying speed at which we come to the end of life. What a depressing way to think, and yet, as we consider the billions of people who have inhabited the earth, only a few names come to mind. Thus, we must consider these questions: Is there a purpose to anything we do? Can one individual make a difference or do something that is forever remembered? We certainly have witnessed many who have tried; and, while some may appear to have succeeded, few rarely do. The names they have made for themselves are short-lived, fading away with time. Others take the opposite approach, realizing how insignificant they really are in life’s schematic. These are the people who go about their life, focused only on their little world, with no effort placed into becoming a legacy.

Personally, I would admit to falling into the first category. I am driven; I have big plans, and big goals, and everything I do is with those in mind. Some might say I subconsciously live in the future, with everything I do today having an effect on tomorrow. I do this, not because I am unhappy with the present, but because I can’t stand the thought of being a “nobody.” It is with this attitude that I approach school,
career, relationships, and life in general. I want to be the best; I want to stand out, I want to make a difference, because ultimately, I want to be remembered.

Some might consider this statement as blunt and self-seeking; but, when all is stripped away, that is the truth. It is the truth for me, and much of the population, who, unbeknownst to themselves, are ultimately fighting a battle against oblivion. As I reflect on my life, and specifically the past four years, it is obvious that my actions have been centered around one goal – the goal of finding a cure for the thing I fear most – oblivion.

I think about the person I was when I entered college – young, naïve, opportunistic, full of grandiose ideas. I wanted to do it all. I was going to be an honors student, graduate with the entire Latin alphabet behind my name, join a sorority, play a sport, take on a leadership role, work in medical research, study abroad, all the while graduating with a nursing degree. Obviously that all did not, and could not, have happened. So now, as I reflect on these past four years, I can’t help but compare myself to the student body president, the student awarded a research grant, or the person with a perfect 4.0 GPA. I think about the fact that the entire campus does not know my name, and that I will not hold a spot in the UNC Charlotte Hall of Fame.

At first it may feel like I failed, like my battle against oblivion was in vain. But as I consider the many experiences I have had, a theory begins to form, because my past four years do not feel like a failure. Can oblivion be overcome only by being widely recognized and remembered by many? Or could it, instead, be the small experiences and differences I make in individual lives, that help me overcome the
fate of oblivion? Rather than being concerned about the numbers, maybe I should be focusing on the individuals whose lives I impacted. The question being asked is, did I, in fact, find the cure? Can oblivion be overcome by leaving a legacy among the few lives I did touch, rather than an entire population?

I will answer these questions by exploring my experiences throughout the past four years of college. I have identified ten artifacts that help to define those experiences. My reflective writing about these artifacts will play a role in answering my question regarding overcoming oblivion. The artifacts will help portray my journey through college, and provide evidence for the conclusion at which I arrive. I will use these artifacts and my reflective essay to expand upon this theory of overcoming oblivion in my life. The following are the artifacts I have chosen to use in support of my portfolio’s theme.

There were several pivotal pieces among these artifacts that impacted the course I have taken. The first was the final paper I wrote in my Honors Body Image class (MacLeod, “Overcoming Perfection”). Throughout the semester we had delved deeply into the topic of the self-image in relation to the media’s influence. In this paper I took everything I had learned, and explored my own personal image of myself. It was very eye-opening to realize how my perfectionist attitude was controlling my life. I realized that many of the unrealistic goals I had set for myself were due to my own fear of oblivion.

My nursing school acceptance letter (UNC Charlotte College of Health and Human Services) was another course-defining factor in my experience. Admission to the nursing program was something that I had spent my first two years of college
working towards, and the last two years proving that I did, indeed, deserve it. I could argue that the admission letter quite possibly shaped my entire college experience, as well as my future. Given the role of nursing, it is a field that has placed me in the lives of many different people, even if just for a short time. Nursing has provided me with the opportunity to make a difference, though on a smaller scale, but in a more personal way.

My final core artifact is *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green). I chose this book because of the epiphany I had while reading it. Until this point I had not been able to identify the reasoning behind my struggle for perfection; but, it was the words of Augustus Walters, a character in the book, that changed that. Walters, a young boy with cancer, made the statement that oblivion was his biggest fear in life. I immediately recognized that subconsciously I too had always been afraid of oblivion.

Interactions I had with various people also impacted me and my journey to avoiding oblivion. The first interaction is reflected in the care plan I wrote for my 50 year-old patient who was dying alone (MacLeod, “Care Plan”). His situation really struck me, because I cannot imagine spending an entire lifetime and having nothing show for it - to have no family or friends, or anyone to feel the loss of your presence. The care plan exemplifies the necessity of striving to overcome oblivion. At the same time, however, there is a balance between doing everything and doing nothing.

My interpersonal process recording is another example of an interaction I had in my psychiatric clinical (MacLeod, “Interpersonal Process Recording”). In this assignment I had a thirty-minute conversation with a patient, using therapeutic
techniques, and then wrote down the exact exchange that occurred. I then had to analyze the interaction and the patient’s responses. During this interaction we discussed how comparing ourselves to others may leave us feeling like failures. Through this type of self-examination I discovered how my personal fight against oblivion cannot be won by defining myself on the terms of others.

Another interaction comes from community service I performed with a pediatrics health fair clinic (MacLeod, “Pediatrics Health Fair”). To portray this experience I used a picture that was taken that day. Working with children is my passion, and I think it is also my responsibility to use my skills for the service of others. It can be easy to think that we need to do something big, such as serve as a doctor in the Ebola-ridden parts of Africa, in order to have an impact on the world, when in fact, some of the neediest people are those in our own community, and we can make quite a difference locally.

The next two artifacts portray times in which I pushed myself, because my fear of oblivion was so strong. One is a picture from recruitment during sophomore year, when I rushed, hoping to meet a hundred new best friends and sisters (MacLeod, “Formal Recruitment”). It was a time in which I thought oblivion could be overcome by having the most friends, and knowing the most people, so joining a sorority seemed to be the most obvious answer. It was a great experience, but it did not take long for me to realize that sorority life was not for me. There are still times that I regret not going through with it, but at the same time I realize that I have not overcome oblivion just by having many acquaintances.
My Association of Nursing Students Membership Certificate (Jossam) is a portrayal of my leadership as president of the organization. Through the responsibility of leadership I have learned a great deal about who I am as an individual. In this experience I have had the opportunity to help many other nursing students, as well as the community.

My chemistry grade was another influencing factor in my life, and possibly even a turning point (MacLeod, “Chemistry 1252 Test”). Chemistry was the first class in which I had ever struggled. I was a straight A student, and in my mind, anything less was unacceptable. I began to question my abilities, dreams, and the career I had chosen. It took this grade to show me how obsessed I had become with perfectionism, and how great my fear of oblivion really was. Eventually I had to accept my grade in the class and come to the realization that my grade did not define me, or my abilities.

My final artifact is my Honors English Final Project (MacLeod, “Breast Cancer Awareness”). I have been affected by cancer, as I think most have, through close acquaintances and loved ones. In this class I did a project in which I talked about cancer awareness and how we can make a difference. That project really laid the foundation for my future, as I became extremely passionate about the cause. Though I will likely not find the cure for cancer, I have found other ways to make an impact and share my passion.

All of these artifacts, along with my personal essay, will be placed into an online portfolio. This portfolio will be an exhibit of me, showcasing my past four years of college. It will be composed of areas of my life which I believe have had an
impact on who I am. I have chosen Wix as my platform for the representation of the portfolio. The portfolio will reveal my collection of key artifacts, and my reflection of those and my theme. The artifacts and my portfolio will portray my central theme, and the question I am asking myself regarding oblivion.

I have chosen Dr. Whitaker-Brown as my thesis reader, due to her experience within the nursing department, and because she taught one of my classes in nursing school. Dr. Edwards, I have chosen as my thesis advisor, because of her experience within the nursing program, as well as the honors department.

The following is an outline of steps necessary for the completion of the portfolio. The next several months will consist of a detailed reflection on my theme, and the framework for my essay.

The due dates are as follows:

- February 3rd: First draft of the essay
- February 10th: Second draft of the essay
- February 17th: Third draft of the essay
- March 2nd: Final draft of the essay
- March 17th: Artifacts due to be uploaded into the portfolio, and the portfolio will have its general structure complete.
- March 24th: Bibliography will be completed and uploaded to the portfolio
- March 31st: Design of portfolio will be completed, allowing some time for any minor adjustments.
- April 27th: Presentation of theme and portfolio
• April 28th: Portfolio will be finalized and submitted for review.

Within this time frame I will be meeting with my thesis reader, Dr. Whitaker-Brown, every two weeks, as scheduling allows. I will also be meeting with my advisor, Dr. Edwards, at the beginning of the semester, and every month following. These dates are not definitive, but provide a guideline for completing all required elements of the portfolio in a timely fashion.
Works Cited


"Interpersonal Process Recording." Personal interview. 10 Oct. 2014.

University of North Carolina, Charlotte.


