



YOUTUBE LETTERS: AN ARCHIPELAGO, NOT AN ISLAND

Hello Friends,

The low glow of the iPhone was the solitary source of light the kitchen at 4am. I was attuned to two sounds - my water boiling in the tea kettle and the “whoosh” of the text I just sent off. Like every day, it said the same two words, “Making tea” with a time stamp. I was reaching out to my writing partner to let her know I was awake and preparing to set to work writing while the world was quiet. I write best when the world is quiet... when email, stocks, news, and texts are asleep...and the weight of the day has yet to cloud my thinking.

Behind the two words, “Making tea,” was a friend, another island in an integral part of a social archipelago of support. Some might call it a group, others a tribe, and still some a network. And each morning the “Making tea” meant I showed up. Morning had not defeated me. Some of you are athletes who show up. Others of you are new parents who show up. And some are caregivers who show up. Standing in the kitchen in the dark, I was there and I was reaching out. How do you routinely reach out on a consistent basis for support?

There were four persons in our graduate school archipelago: Megan, Michele, Sarah, and myself. We referred to ourselves as “The Cone” as in “The Cone of Silence.” We made two commitments to one another in graduate school. First, you could say anything in The Cone, and your words ventured no further. It was a safe space where some of the heaviest words were laid and collectively shouldered. Second, we decided that everyone in The Cone would finish. That meant early morning texts, study sessions in “The Fishbowl,” and critiquing first, second, and sometimes third drafts of works. What commitments have you made with others, in a manner that gives and receives, to engender a safe environment of mutual support?

We also celebrated. There were many celebrations. And mini celebrations. I believe that celebrations should occur at various mile markers and not just at the finish line. When someone finished coursework, we celebrated. When someone finished a defense/proposal, we celebrated. And when someone defended their dissertation, we damn sure celebrated. Sometimes, it was nothing more than the end of the semester, and we celebrated. How might you celebrate at the various mile markers of this journey you are on rather than just the finish line?

In the end, we all finished. Four doctors. Our lives looked different at the close than they did at the beginning. We did not set out with the intention of establishing “The Cone.” We discovered we needed each other if we were going to successfully finish graduate school. This principle of collective strength is not new. In fact, it exists in a variety of professional settings, including the theatrical arts which is team-based in its approach to the world. In this vein, I leave you with this clip of an actor who urges you to consider how community, commitment, and consistency will impact your world just as they did for him: <https://youtu.be/EBGb40yh4SY>

Standing with you,

Joshua Travis Brown, Ph.D.