

Everybody hurts

Giving up fight against stress is not the answer



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exactly what you'll do when you get out is anyone's guess. So much time has been spent dealing with actually being in college that you haven't had time to give a thought to what's going to go on once it's over. If it ever is. Graduation might be another of those myths like the Loch Ness monster, Bigfoot and "The Good Life."

It's Friday, and a couple of your friends are going out drinking. They don't ask you, and even if they did, you just don't have the time. There's school work, job work and so much other crap, you're going to go crazy.

There's only a couple of people you're attracted to — you work with both of them, naturally — and you don't know if either of them is interested in you. Even if they were, you really doubt they'd have time to fit you into their busy lives, and even if they did, you aren't sure you could fit them into yours.

You're working two jobs, considering a third, and taking 15 credit hours.

In the job where you're a grunt, you hate the way the bosses treat you. It's getting more stressful, and you're not sure you can take much more. You'd quit if only you could afford to.

In the job where you have some authority, the people who work below you don't like you, the people above you aren't happy with the work you're doing, the people in other departments wonder how you got put in charge, and you're just trying to make ends meet.

Some people don't show up to work. Some people are cranky at work. Some people want to blame you for the problems in their lives. Some people want to take out their problems on you. No one wants you to make them feel better — they're sure you'll only make things worse. So you're stuck picking up the slack, trying to build the Eiffel Tower from a couple of toothpicks and bottle of Elmer's Glue.

You know you have an apartment, because you keep getting bills for it, but you'll be damned if you know what it looks like. You usually stumble into it with the lights off, and it hasn't really been worth your time to turn the lights on anyway. You know the route to your bed by heart, because it's the only path you walk in

the place. Even in the dark, though, you can hear the damn "rose-colored" carpeting taunting you. They didn't tell you it was "rose" until the day you were moving in, and you still resent it at least a little.

It seems like life's just about as problematic as it can get. You've honestly had dreams about climbing to the top of the Capitol with a sniper rifle and just venting some random aggression. The worst part is that you haven't felt much guilt about those dreams. Much more of this and you'll go crazy.

Breathe.

Fix what you can. Stop worrying about what you can't.

If it seriously seems like you're going to snap (and believe me, I know that feeling all too well), take a deep step back, and put it all into perspective.

Consider this my open-ended plea to the people who, like me, are on the verge of collapse:

My friends and my colleagues, my columnists and my bosses, my folks and my cat.

Topher, Lupus and Willis; Lovely Lady Erin, Mad Man Matthew, the Fork and the J-Dogg; Gibs and Joe X; Mom, Dad and even temperamental little Marx.

And more than that, you, the student who made it all the way down here in this column.

Each and every one of us is stressed out, and there are only three things we can do.

The first is to breathe.

A little relaxation will put it all into perspective.

The second is to ask for help.

The world can't be beaten single-handedly. Our ancestors came down from the trees and banded together for survival.

Modern life is pushing us apart.

Cling to those important to you. Refuse to let them give up, and they'll do the same for you, should you need it. Friendship is more important than anything else in this world.

And most importantly, never finish the game before it's time.

Giving up, quitting — it ain't the answer, folks. Don't let The Man get you down.

We will survive.

Stress isn't incurable.

Your homework's building up around you. You haven't read the 12 books for the English class, the reading material for the poli sci classes is so dull you use it to put yourself to sleep at night, and you think, maybe, you missed a test or two somewhere along the line in, say, half of your classes.

The bills just keep coming. The folks who deliver your mail have adjusted their schedules so they can leave mail without you seeing, so that they don't have to face your wrath.

Everyone wants your money. The cable company wants your money, the credit card companies want your money, the power company wants your money, the telephone company wants your money, your landlord wants your money and, come to think of it, so do you.

Because you haven't got any.

You've been eating ramen noodles and ice water for three weeks, trying to string yourself along until the end of the month when payday comes, which, you hope, will be enough to pay at least one of the bill collectors off and buy you the next month's supply of ramen noodles. It's either that or another month of buying food on your gas station credit card.

Your roommate is in even more debt than you. He's had trouble paying rent over the past few months, so you've been picking up the majority of the bills, just so you don't get evicted or arrested. But you're still a few months behind. Your roommate must owe you almost a thousand dollars right now.

Your cat turned temperamental and scratched you up pretty good last night with his back claws. He hasn't been that nice to you lately, and you should have taken him to the vet two weeks ago for a shot, but there's that money thing again.

Most of your friends have meandered out of your life, and it's not their fault really that they're becoming successful, starting relationships, marrying, getting laid every night, traveling across the country and generally enjoying being alive.

The only friends who aren't loving every minute of their life are just about as miserable as you are. They don't have time to call, they don't have time to hang out, and they can't really spare a minute to drop you an e-mail. They won't let you help them, and they don't have time to help you.

Your parents wonder why you don't return their calls. They haven't seen you in months, and they're starting to worry that something might have happened. At least, that's what Mom tells your answering machine. She worries about you, she tells you. Your mom knows the words to the machine's message by heart.

Sooner or later, you're hoping to graduate, but



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