

# Thank you note

When you go, what will you leave behind?

If it's sudden, if it's today, I'll leave behind a messy car. Filled with pens and crusted pita crumbs from that road trip to Virginia. Stocked with an outdated GPS I no longer use, beads from an old friend from abroad, a blue rain jacket, a stack of CDs I still like to flip through on long drives. That sweet nostalgia of mix tapes friends made for me, Josh Groban's warble, symphonic soundtracks that transform the way I feel.

I'll leave behind a messy car, wrinkled with dust and littered with kombucha bottle top wrappers, gummy from spilled hand sanitizer. I always feel dirty after touching the gas pump.

When I go, the world won't change because of it. Fall will still come, the sun will still rise and it will still set. People will still wake up in the dark groping for their morning coffee cups, praying it's what wakes them up and moves them to their purpose. Some people might be sad.

Not every person feels a purpose. An article on concealed depression says that people who hide their depression look for that purpose -- they want to know why they exist. They're more susceptible to feeling inadequate and anxious, they're more likely to be searching for some achievement they can't fulfill in their minds.

My reason for existing keeps changing. At least in the depths of my own mind. Some days it's just to make people feel better, voice smooth, hands strong in a yoga class. Some days it's to emit positive energy, to be a source of light, to share words, to join the world of expression and understanding and the quest for greater truths. Some days it's to be happy and do whatever I need to do to get there.

Some days it's nothing.

When I go, if it's sudden, if it's today, I'll leave behind my salt-streaked yoga mat, marbled by yesterday's sweat. Warped and worn by my toe-tip whorls, my fingerprints and the press of my chin, grains of sand from my beach practice and the faint scent of the ocean where I washed it and me in the waves. I'll leave behind my mat, invisibly smoothed by everything I've shed as I've moved: Doubts, hatred, that lack of purpose.

When I go, it will be too late to fulfill it -- if I had a purpose, or thought I might. It will stop mattering.

So will everything I and we did or keep doing to prevent our departure. Running, walking, yoga-ing, taking deep breaths, taking our vitamins, meditating, praying,

eating kale, drinking red wine, going to the doctor, being kinder, puffing our inhalers, inviting in good karma, saying we're sorry – we do so much to ward off death.

But there are still so many ways to die. Millions of people [die each year](#), hundreds of thousands of people die each day, thousands of people die each hour. People die. *People are dying.* This is the world we live in. And there are so many ways to die.

Heart attack, stroke, brain aneurism. Brain cancer, breast cancer, lung cancer, esophageal cancer, cancer. Getting hit by a car in a car, getting hit by a car on a bike, getting hit by a car on foot. Choking. Gunshot. Plane crash. Amoebas. Old age. Quickly, slowly, suddenly, prolonged. Painfully, at peace. Something that happens to us or something we do to ourselves. If *that* doesn't take us, *this* will.

"Deaths of despair" are rising, [they say](#). Suicide, drugs, alcohol. "We knew the proximate causes," they say. "We know what they were dying from," they say.

General malaise. Not enough jobs. Reduced marriage rates, poor health and poor mental health.

Suicide, drugs, alcohol.

There are so many ways to die.

The scary thing about getting older is seeing more of this happen. A friend goes to the funeral of a former classmate who got shot. You just know the name, and the face on the obit looks familiar. You can't stop reading about it.

An old friend's best friend kills herself. Another friend's dad dies of cancer. Two yoga friends lose their younger brothers to complications from addiction. You never know quite what to say.

You read the book of a girl who died after college graduation and you think, "how talented." You read about a college classmate dying after graduation in a freak hot air balloon accident and you think, "what the fuck."

You still don't know quite what to say.

Your friend's baby dies in her body and you show up on her doorstep with stupid flowers and a stupid bottle of wine and all of your tears and your crumpled face and a huge hug and none of it will bring that baby back.

You cry because you can't feel what it feels to be her, or any of them, because you don't know how to help. Not really. You cry because death confuses you. How do you confront it? Really?

You're terrified because no one you've loved has died. Not yet.

I can't stop thinking about this on long road trips by myself. With my car, my messy car, hugging the curves of the interstate like we're on some long flowing loop, gliding with the stream and the sheer fluidity of the world and the drivers and the particles that surround us. Flow with us.

My parents could die on their drive back home from the beach.

I could die on my drive back home from the beach. With my pens and crusted pita crumbs from that road trip to Virginia. With that podcast on my phone that I never listened to. With my half-drunk bottle of seltzer, with that missed call I didn't return, with that random tire I never took out of my trunk, with every thought I never said out loud.

When I go, if it's sudden, if it's today, nothing I've worried about will matter. Losing my family. Losing my job. Never writing a book, never having a "perfect" moment with my mother, never feeling like I knew my brother. That confusion about choosing to have children, or not. Accidentally getting pregnant or accidentally killing someone. Panic attacks. Not waking up skinny. That fear of dying but also that dark desire for it. That mole in my armpit.

All those worries, they won't matter. So why let them matter now? Stop that.

When I go, what will I leave behind? If it's sudden, if it's today, I'll leave behind a messy car. With its peeling steering wheel, with its scraped up, patched up tires that have traveled so far.

When I go, I'll leave behind a messy life. Filled with journals I've written and no one needs to read, jotted post-its and full-fledged first drafts and second drafts and third drafts and final drafts. Unfolded laundry.

A messy life filled with every hour I ever spent with my family, at the kitchen table at home, on snowy ski slopes in Vail, at poolside bars in Mexico, on airplanes to North Dakota, on hot clay tennis courts in North Carolina, on the couch with the glow of a show, at drunk Christmas dinners and candlelight services, in a cluster of sandy beach chairs at Hilton Head.

I'll leave behind a messy life filled with kisses I can no longer quantify, "I love you"s and hugs that felt like coming home, countless dinners and parties and road trips to Virginia and wine bottles and phone calls and deep conversations and dumb conversations and cups of coffee and moments, *so many moments*, with friends, sweet friends. Filled with everything I did wrong and everything I did right, with every feeling that comes from falling in love that one time and meaning it, this time.

When I go, if it's sudden, if it's today, I'll leave behind my messes, my purpose. My car and my yoga mat, my unfolded laundry, my life. I'll leave behind the people I've loved. The people I've touched, if any.

I'll leave it behind with one last breath. Let it be my clean, crisp thank you note, the one I never wrote. Written in air and sealed with a soft breeze.

"Dear Universe," it will read, "thank you for filling me. Thank you for letting me be filled."