

Feeling Like a Fraud – Tristan Bailey

What am I doing here? How did those judges think I'm worthy of speaking in front of all you today? I feel like I sold them one of those miracle knives that they used to sell door to door; like a fraud. Actually that is exactly what I want to talk about today: I mean not the knives, but something called Imposter Syndrome. It's an anxiety I've been dealing with for a very long time and it's something I'm sure many of my fellow graduates, professors, and even the guests in the audience experience as well. It's an anxiety that makes me feel like I'm not deserving of giving this speech, no matter how hard I worked on crafting those carefully contrived opening lines. All jokes aside it really is a stress that can hold someone back. It can be as small as not feeling comfortable answering questions in class because you think there's no way someone like you can be right. Or as big as not pushing for a raise or promotion at work even if you're good at your job because you feel you're not even qualified for the role you have now. It can be crippling, but it's something that I know all of us can overcome.

Now let's go back to me first getting accepted to Marietta College. As a first-generation college student I was stressed to the max when I found out I got in, convinced that I was already way behind everyone else. That first week I wasn't going to let anyone know how lost I was. I put on my social butterfly mask, and it was working. I was making friends, watching Netflix, and the classes didn't seem that hard. Then a couple weeks of bliss later I get back my first Geology Exam and there's a big fat 67 on the top of it. The jig was up. THEY knew. I'm not really sure who THEY are, but whoever they are they knew I was a fraud: a first-generation college student that didn't belong here. As if somehow my parents going to college would've helped me understand the rocks better. It was illogical, but the stress was real. It took a while for me to get over it, but with some new study habits I realized the problem was me, and considering the 10 point curve on that exam, everyone else was just as lost as I was. That was until I started hanging around some of my fellow Petroleum Engineering majors.

To this day I'm still not sure if there were some secret night classes that people were taking while I was asleep. I mean I was doing well in my classes and getting great grades, but it felt as though some of my peers were so much farther ahead. They were using words I didn't understand and seemed so confident in their knowledge of the industry. It got to a point where I had gotten into the habit of just nodding my head and saying yeah when I talked with someone about it. Couldn't let them know I was a fraud. Someone would walk up to me and say, "So I was working with this toolpusher that messed up the dogleg and missed the payzone. We had to trip out and the company man blah blah blah...." While I'd just be there with eyes glazed over, "Oh Yeah?" I mean it's gotten better since I've had some experience, but I'm going to be honest with you all. I'm still lost about 50% of the time. Though eventually I realized that I wasn't the only head nodder. In fact, I'd say I was in the majority. Most people didn't have a crazy amount of experience and we couldn't all be frauds right? I guess it doesn't really matter though since I got a job in a completely unrelated field.

With my petroleum engineering major, I'll be working in the medical software field. Yeah... pretty similar. I think you can all see why I'm worried. What am I supposed to do when they find out I somehow tricked them into hiring me? Now they've assured me multiple times that I'll be given the proper training, but how can I know that I'll be okay? I won't be able to just hide in my dorm anymore if I fail. I'll be alone in Wisconsin, luckily I'm not lactose intolerant. Taking risks can be terrifying, but we're all here because we've decided it's worth it.

Now it may seem like I've just been complaining about my struggles throughout college and my future for the last few minutes, but I'm talking about it because I know I'm not the only one. All of us are going into uncharted territory. It's normal to feel lost or like you're somewhere you don't belong. Know that you're not alone and that no matter how much we tear ourselves down we are prepared to thrive. We wouldn't be in these gowns if we weren't. Even if it feels like we've been faking our way through these past four years, Marietta College has

given us all an opportunity to grow into well rounded individuals that are more than just our majors.

Speaking from personal experience, I really had the chance to branch out in my time here and I appreciate it. I had three short stories published in Pulse magazine. I wrote a play in one night and got to see it performed on stage the next day. Sitting in a crowd of people that would be judging a play I wrote while sleep deprived was one of the most nerve-wracking experiences of my life and really forced me to stop caring about what other people think. I was the captain of the intramural ultimate frisbee team, and I hadn't even played the sport until a few months before. Now if you want to feel like an imposter try organizing scrimmages for a sport that you barely know the rules to. I've gone to Peru and experienced another culture with the leadership program, of course I then also experienced food poisoning while on a four day hike up a mountain and through a jungle to Machu Picchu on that same trip. The hardships make us stronger right? I've made great friends that I know would support me through thick and thin. We've all grown so

much over these past 4 years and I'm confident that we'll all go out into the world, or in my case Madison, Wisconsin, knowing that even if we feel like imposters or frauds; when we try our best we have what it takes to succeed. Thank you!