

Dear John Green ,

What is life? This is a question that many spend their entire career slaving over, never truly finding the answer. Scientists know what we're made of, they know the chemicals and components in our bodies and in our brains, and they think they can give us the answer in a mathematical equation. But no, they're all wrong. Life is so simple that it can be explained with one simple sentence, the sentence that you introduced to me in your book Looking for Alaska. By the end of this letter, I will have told you how your book gave me a refreshed outlook on my world with a simple phrase: "Everything that comes together must fall apart."

On October 16th, 2016, my friend Darren died due to an accidental shooting. At first I didn't understand what this meant. I'd never had experience death before; it felt so unreal. I had the same mindset that Pudge did when Alaska died, that Darren was playing a sick joke on all of us, like he was going to walk into school on Monday and laugh at all of us. I could almost hear his chuckling voice saying "That was a pretty good one, huh?" But he didn't walk into school. It wasn't a joke. He wasn't coming back. That seat in homeroom would be empty, as would the seats in the other classes we used to share. Until I read your book, I still hadn't accepted the fact that he was gone, but you told me that just like everything else, Darren was a thing of the earth that had come together, therefore he had to fall apart. Nothing had ever seemed so simple. We all have to fall apart eventually, and the pain would always be the same. Everything falls apart eventually. It just has to happen, and your book helped me accept that and cope with him being gone.

The understanding of Darren's death isn't the only thing that Looking for Alaska has given me a different outlook on. Recently some of my friendships have curdled into sour milk, leaving me almost alone. I cried myself to sleep multiple nights, thinking about how I could've saved the relationships which had meant so much to my sanity. I told myself that if I had done everything differently, I would still be laughing and joking with the people whom my actions had cast aside. I'd never been truly happy with them though. I'd always felt like a "third-wheel", a last resort. I'd been calling them my friends for years despite their constant emotional abuse and neglect.

Why did I have to mess it up?

Now I'm alone, and it's my fault.

What's my problem?

These are all thoughts that went through my head as I watched my sanity crumble to pieces like a stale piece of bread. But once again, the phrase "Everything that comes together, must fall apart," helped me understand that this wasn't my fault. I soon came to realize that my friendships were like old wooden bridges. They were never built with a strong structure in the first place, and now, with age, they were falling apart. The cause of the bridge's destruction wasn't at the fault of the support beams but at the fault of the people who had built them. Your book helped me come to peace with the fact that it was going to happen eventually; that my friendships were going to have to disappear for a while. I'm alone now. I have one friend who I don't get to see much. My bridge has fallen, but that doesn't mean that another one can't be built.

I never realized that my mental stability could fall apart too. In sixth grade I fell into a deep rut of depression, which I have never fully clawed my way out of. I've had suicidal thoughts... and suicidal attempts. I didn't think that anything was going to get better; that I'd always be alone. "Everything that comes together falls apart". I always thought that my depression was me falling apart, and that after you fall apart, you're broken. Everything, all of the little problems and big, distressing events in my life, weighed me down, pressing on my shoulders until they broke. There were nights when I felt like I had no purpose, that things would be better for everyone if I was gone, and then the nights spent hating myself for being so ridden with mental illness. I told myself that I was a burden on my family and those who chose to stand by my side no matter what happened. But, contrary to what I thought, **I was not and I am not broken.**

As things became a little steadier in my life - I got a new friend and I began to understand myself and my thoughts a little more - it soon became apparent that my depression wasn't something falling apart, it was a stage of my being coming together. My depression will eventually fall apart, just like everything has to. You have given me a new hope. With one simple phrase you helped me cope with the death of a friend, understand that some bridges have to be torn down for stronger ones to be built, and that sometimes when we think that everything is falling apart... it's really all coming together.

So what *is* life? Life is simply something that comes together, then falls apart multiple times in multiple ways. Thank you John Green, for writing Looking for Alaska, which helped me get through my roughest patches, and possibly saved my life.

Forever in debt,
Annabelle Melton, 14 years old