



LEANNE HO

When love has an expiration date, is it better to love deeply and painfully or safely and shallowly?

If we've had a personal conversation in the last few months, you know I've been grappling with this dilemma for a while now.

Going into my final semester, I knew that I'd be moving overseas when I graduated. I knew that my days were numbered, my time precious. There's a "Wait But Why" essay about how most of us are in the tail end of our relationships with the people we love. For the last four years, I've seen most of my college friends two or three times a week. In the coming decades, I'll be lucky to see them two or three times a year. Our friendships are in their final chapters. Even before our year was cut short by a catastrophic global pandemic, we were already in the tail end.

Last August, I was diagnosed with cancer. While I was hospitalized, I missed the first two weeks of senior year, and I worried that things would fall apart without me. Who was going to fill this leadership role? Who was going to finish that project?

And then other people stepped up. The work got done. Even after I recovered and returned to OU, I found comfort in the knowledge that anyone else could present "Step In, Speak Out" or chair the LGBTQ+ Program Advisory Board. If I hadn't done it, I'm sure that someone else would've precipitated the first gender-neutral campus awards and homecoming court. Even when I think about my future as a Rhodes Scholar, doctor and advocate for marginalized communities, I understand that

anyone can do the work I do. If that's true, why am I here?

I think it's because no one else can love my people the way I do. No one else knows how. Who else knows exactly what to say when my sister cries? Who else plans dinner to accommodate my best friend's allergy to sesame seeds but not sesame oil? Who else can cherish the memories of that sunrise breakfast on the roof of the Union, that spring break road trip through the red-orange desert of the American Southwest, that conversation so captivating that we pulled an all-nighter and still went hiking the next morning? No one but me. Nothing matters but this. When I look back on my time at OU, no test I took and no paper I wrote was as worthwhile as the moments I spent with the people I loved.

In the memoir "When Breath Becomes Air," doctor and terminal cancer patient Paul Kalanithi is asked by his wife, "Don't you think saying goodbye to your child will make your death more painful?" to which he responds, "Wouldn't it be great if it did?"

Knowing that it would make my life more painful, I chose to love deeply anyway, treating each day as if it could be my last. I had no idea that one day in March, it would be.

Class of 2020 (and the folks we'll be leaving behind): it was so great to love you. Here's to the rock-climbing blisters and impulsive undercuts and crepe restaurants that close early and Saturday morning pancake breakfasts and student activists coming together in solidarity. Here's to the love. So much love. Deep and painful and worth it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leanne Ho". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Leanne" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Ho".