

EPISODE 11

Dear Young Rocker,

College is a big transition for everyone and freshman and sophomore year are the hardest. Even though most of us couldn't wait to get away from our parents and hometowns and have daydreamed about how free we would be without them - that first taste of real freedom can become paralyzing when we actually jump out of the nest and realize that even though we don't have anyone telling us to do or forcing their own values on us now, well, that means we have to build up our own and find our own security. It's really hard. Honestly at 31, I still don't even feel like I'm done with that transition. No matter how many seemingly grown up things I do, I still feel scared and like I'm just casting out in the dark everytime I go for a new opportunity or take on a new responsibility and I'm sure I'm still making plenty of mistakes. The only thing you can trust to guide you is your instinct, and I promise you have a good one, believe it or not some of those actually came from your parents, but anxiety is just still drowning that instinct out. I promise you'll get better at hearing it and then you'll be able to trust yourself to do more and more things you've never done before. It's ok if for now you have to fly in one direction and then try the complete opposite one before you calculate exactly where you're headed. You have so much opportunity in front of you, as scared as you are, I'm kinda jealous.

I poke my pipette into this solution to suck up what looks like spit and as the smell wafts to my nose I decide that if being a scientist is anything like this terrible lab class as in sitting here on a horribly uncomfortable stool with a hunched back for hours under these buzzing fluorescent lights that give me a headache, smelling gross chemicals and alcohol, and memorizing thousands of boring compounds - that it's for sure a job I am not into. I wanted to be an ecologist and save the environment, but this is torture. Right as I'm poking my pipette into this solution that looks like spit some goofy tall guy with braces starts talking about how he's going to buy a ferrari when he becomes a doctor and then says something about Pokemon -- and I think *there is no way I can spend my life working with people like this*. Even the smartest ones here seem to have no artistic hobbies or interesting thoughts. I want to do something creative and, like be near a window maybe?

When I step out of the lab I feel like I can finally breathe and think again . I walk across the street and down the stairs to the North Campus cafeteria to meet James. It's the only caf I like because they have sandwiches that are actually edible. James asks me if I like being a bio major. I tell him that it's *kind* of interesting especially learning about genetics and evolution. I tell him how we learned about recessive traits and did this square thing in class and filled in my parents genetic traits and I found out that I shouldn't have brown hair and brown eyes since my parents both have light hair and light eyes and I got really freaked out over it for a minute. When I asked the professor he just shrugged and said genetics are more complicated than that. James reminds me he's switching to music business and that I was originally supposed to be a

sound recording technology major and that if I switched to the music department we could be in classes together. I put down my sandwich and tell James, you know what, I think i'm gonna do it. Bass or cello he asks? Bass. I say. I don't really know how to play jazz but I can figure it out. We high five . He smiles. I decide to walk back to East Campus. As I look down at the rocks in the river that runs under the bridge I think about the kid they said jumped off of here and died last year.... Man I hope I don't screw up the music department audition.

When I get back to my room my new roommate is there. I never had a fight or anything with my first roommate but it wasn't a surprise to me when she decided to move into another room with more normal type girls. My current roommate starts talking about biology - about proteins or something but I don't care about it enough to know what she's talking about, although it's clear she *does* care, maybe too much actually. There's definitely something sort of socially weird about this girl which makes me feel less self-conscious about me being me plus she's not interested in partying or stupid Chris Brown, so it's fine. She tells me about some "weird guy" in one of her classes who she thinks is creeping on her and I think he probably just likes her because she is an adorable petite redhead and I wonder why that isn't obvious to her, but it feels like it would be weird to say that. Like - It wouldn't even compute for her probably, so I don't. Then she starts on her recap of her most recent one hour phone call with her parents, which I had been sitting in the room for. I start tuning her out just like my Chemistry textbook. So, I guess I technically now have a whopping two whole friends, but I still just feel like I'm missing something or maybe someone. Once again I wonder - am I just surrounded by people I have nothing in common with and who make it really hard to connect with them like in high school or... is it... me? Am I just a girl who can't figure out how to be friends with other girls and can't be friends with boys without letting them make out with me? Who the hell am I without a band? Is there even a point to existing without one? Otherwise I'm just some girl and I feel like I still don't know how to be one.

When my roommate's done talking she leaves to go see her boyfriend - the Pokemon kid with braces from my bio lab. I open my laptop and type in Craigslist.org and click on the personal ads to read them for fun. I've never thought of replying to any of these, but it's entertaining. As usual it's stuff like "fit lawyer looking for cuddles" and "single dad who likes the beach" and "you won't believe how big it is". I scroll down and see one that just says "Anti-Social Loner." Sounds like we have a lot in common, huh. I click on it and as soon as I'm done reading I start typing my email.

(August 2008)

I know I'm overdressed. Or maybe I just feel that way because I'm wearing a *dress*, a thing that rarely happens plus I'm the only girl I see here. I'm keeping my eyes mostly on the carpet to avoid confirming what I know to be true - I am being looked at, even if they're trying not to make that obvious. I'm waiting in this hallway in the music building to go into my bass audition. A bunch of dudes are sitting and standing against the walls. They all have electric or acoustic guitars or basses. They're playing scales and noodling on blues licks. Finally, a lady

calls my name (“Chelsea Urrrsin?”) I go into the audition room, and I notice how cold my hands are even though it’s the summer. I put my music and keys and stuff on my music stand and it all clicks really loudly in the empty auditorium. I feel awkward as I bend over to plug in my bass into the practice amp and I’m glad I wore leggings under my dress. “I’ll start with Bb blues,” I say and one of three white middle aged white men in front of me picks up a guitar to comp the chords. He counts me off: “ah1-ah2-ah1-2-3-4” I look at the music book on the stand and start going down the page, following the pre-written walking line. I always crumble in auditions but as I play, I watch my body from somewhere else and see my hands hitting every note. When I finish I look up at the men and they look at each other with raised eyebrows, but don’t say anything. I can tell I must have been either extremely good or extremely bad but I honestly have no idea which one because this is my first time ever playing a jazz bass audition. I spent hours a day all summer sitting on my itchy carpet in shorts getting really good at reading sheet music on bass and learning how to play walking lines but I never took lessons or played with anyone else so I still don’t know if i’m good enough. I’m crumbling inside. I can’t let myself take a breath until they tell me how I did. They look down and write little notes on the papers in front of them and show each other and I think about how I’m finally here giving music another shot since I gave it up at the end of highschool. I knew I couldn’t go back to cello after what my dumb highschool teacher said but I decided to just give it everything with bass. I can’t stay away but I can’t have my heart broken again. I still haven’t taken a breath. My stress level is so high that tears are almost pushing themselves out. *Hurry up.* One man asks me “who taught you?” I say “myself and the internet,” they look confused. I *need* to know how I did, but but before they get a word of feedback in, a black woman with thick glasses comes in from the side door.

“You’re a cellist right, what are you doing here?” She asks. Her tone makes it sound like I’ve done something bad. As if i’m stupid for standing here with a bass, like some kind of a poseur.

“Uh, hi yes, but I play bas too”

“I want you to play cello in my orchestra” she says. She must have seen my initial application when I was still in highschool and how I had signed up for the cello audition but didn’t show up because of what Jim had said to me about not being good enough.

“Play cello and bass?” “Sorry, I don’t think I can handle doing two instruments.”

“No just cello.”

My stomach knots. I’ve worked so hard to be here on bass and to forget I had ever even played cello and how painful it was to give up. I haven’t touched a cello in over a year and don’t know if I ever want to again because of how it makes me feel about myself. This bass audition was supposed to be my chance to start over, this is everything I have left in me and this woman has come to tell me it means nothing, that i’m being stupid somehow.

The guitar and bass teachers look at her, they seem afraid to say anything and clearly expect ME to respond to her but I am waiting for them to save me because I literally can’t talk anymore.

I can’t hold in the tears any longer either. It all becomes a blur. Eventually she leaves. I barely register what they say about my bass playing besides the word “good” and I run into the hallway bawling my eyes out and see twenty or so guys staring at me. I’m so embarrassed to be crying, as the only girl in the room it’s so shameful, this is my worst nightmare. I can’t deal with it. The

shame makes me cry harder . They probably think I bombed the audition why the hell else would I be crying. Or that I'm just a dumb girl so I must suck. What a horrible first impression.

I sit down on some stairs and put my head on my knees. A boy drags his upright bass over to ask me what's the matter and his guitar friend follows but I can't explain. I try to say they shouldn't worry about their own auditions, that the teachers aren't mean or anything. I try to explain what happened with the cello lady but my bawling is so intense I can't make sentences. They don't seem to get it at all. Then the bass teacher comes out of the room to hand me my car keys which I had left on the music stand. I feel even more embarrassed to be seen by him. He says sorry and that he doesn't really know what happened in there. I say it's ok and try to act like I'm crying about something else "it's just some family thing" I say. Why did I think I could be a real bass player. Why did I think I could be good enough?

(September 2008)

Well, I definitely never thought I'd be playing Bach again after ending my life as a cellist. And for sure never imagined playing Bach chorales with a rock band setup. But here I am in a classroom plunking away at some John Sebastian on electric bass along with two guitarists and a drummer. I smile to myself thinking how lucky I am to actually be getting legit college credit for this very relaxing task instead of banging my head against a chemistry book. I guess it's almost like being in a band again although i'm not sure I'd choose these guys. One of the guitar players is standing up really straight looking at the music seriously. He's got a Megadeath shirt on and is playing some super metal looking black guitar. The other guitarist forgot his strap again so he's hunching over his telecaster in a chair. (*Thud* "Aw man") His practice amp keeps sliding off of the desk...

We decide to switch from practicing Bach to the boring Jazz standard we have to learn. As I put the chart on my stand and the guitarists start playing the head I think about how it sounds like nursing home music. I kind of prefer the Bach even though everyone else grunts when we have to practice it. I'm fast at reading music, especially baroque music in the bass clef from all those cello lessons. Sometimes I don't even have to look at the page because I know old man Bach well enough to predict the next few notes. But for the Jazz pieces I have to at least sort of pay attention because the music is just chord names. I have to come up with what notes I want to play and the rhythm myself and not miss the changes, which I have some practice doing from rock bands but it's different. Jazz is about showing how smart you are at music and I want to get better at it. If I want to get better at this I have to push myself to find interesting notes. There's almost infinite options, which kind of overwhelms my brain. As we get to the (Ab dim 7) my fingers panic trying to think of the notes in the chord besides Ab that will transition to the next chord well but I can't think fast enough and I end up playing totally bonk notes for the whole measure. I'm still trying to recover as two more changes go right by me so I give up and decide to just go back to playing quarter note roots with a fifth so I don't throw off the others (self-explanatory here?). This at least I can do basically with my eyes closed. I go into

auto pilot bass mode as the guitarists work on their solos. I start to space out and think about last summer playing music with Dan and his friends. It was the closest thing i'd had to a band since the Psykicks ended. We did a pretty fun cover of come on Eileen.

I still kind of miss Dan. I had gotten back together with him after my indiscretions last winter because he was the one person who really knew me unlike the people around me at school. And it was so hard to let that go. I never really told him about all of the bad stuff I did and that guilt made me cut it off for good eventually. I wanted to be a good girlfriend but I wasn't. I'm never sure if I am just a cheater like maybe I got my dad's genes or if it just wasn't the right relationship. Even when I dumped him for the second time I immediately wasn't sure if it was the right decision even though he agreed it was for the best. Anyway, the past couple months after enough times hanging out with my new guy friend from Cragglist, Dan eventually said "I'm sick of hearing about this Aaron guy" and I knew it was time to be done for real. I might end up cheating again and I can't let myself be that knowingly sadistic. I wonder if I'm broken. After spacing out a while I realize I've been a measure behind throwing everyone off yet again even just trying to play the root notes . I feel like Jazz bass is always either too hard or so easy I can't pay attention and flub. "Sorry" I say and I turn my amp down to let the guitars drown me out in case I keep screwing up. When we've played for a while we give up and all start messing around on random songs. The two guitar players start playing some goofy 90's grunge song that's like "I gone hungry" and when the second guitar player starts singing the high harmony - I lose it. He's weird but sometimes really hilarious. Finally our two hours end and it's time to go to my bass lesson.

I sit down and crack open the Appleman bass exercise book on my music stand. "Sorry but we have to do it" Chuck says. "Oh yeah I like this one. Did you like it?"

"Yeah sort of I say. At least it's got a more interesting feel," I say. He puts on a metronome, snaps his fingers to give me the count-in and I play through the exercise. When i'm done he says "Nailed it!" I feel proud. I did practice this one a lot. I look at Chucks yellow socks. He sees me looking at them. They're kind of weird with his gray pants. "Cool socks" I say. He says he couldn't decide between purple and yellow. Then he looks up at me and says "Hey", do you think astrology is real. Like are you into it?"

I think about the Book of Birthdays my mom had and how the description of people born on my birthday November 18 seemed like a creepily accurate description of me and how I liked learning that I share a birthday with a bunch of kind of crazy but creative people. So I say, "Yeah kind of why?"

"Well I started seeing someone and I really like her and I looked up our compatibility and she's a Pisces so that means it's supposed to be good. I kept dating Geminis and that never seemed to work out."

"Oh yeah I guess I've dated a lot of Gemini's too." I say.

"So you must be drawn to them?"

"Eh, maybe."

I think about how Aaron is a gemini just like Nick, just like Ricky. Here we go again.

Dear Young Rocker,

That cello lady is a total jerk for acting like you are somehow permanently conscripted to be a cellist for all time. I promise that I really doubt any of the kids in that audition group thought you sucked at your audition. They were probably just confused and uncomfortable by a girl crying - like most dudes. Crying in public isn't as unforgivable as you make it out to me. It just shows you have feelings and that's better than not having feelings. Anyone who judges you for it is also a total jerk. You personally are a stress cryer and you were under incredible stress. This audition felt like the most important moment of your life. You wanted to finally undo the damage of your highschool cello teacher and get some validation as a musician on your other chosen instrument and may I say your real true instrument and in that breathless space of waiting for that after working your butt off for it this lady swooped in like the wicked witch and re-cast the spell of musical insecurity over you. Just about anyone who's not a sociopath would have cried.

And look, you really don't need to find someone on Craigslist to connect with you just need to be patient and give the people around you a chance. Slowly develop your friendships with the people in your classes, people you meet in your dorm and learn to trust them and you can find what you're looking for in human connection. There is no 0-60mph deep friendship button and honestly you should be weary when it gets too deep too fast, but I get it - you never had much of a secure base of family and friends when you were younger and you're still trying desperately to make up for that. The process of making friends wasn't modeled for you and it feels impossible. You want to just grab a blanket and wrap yourself in it - to find the easy quick way to feeling secure and the internet and all the creepy people on it want you to believe that's where you can find the shortcut to human connection. I'm sorry but you can't, you can only move forward slowly if you want real, lasting, and healthy connections with people but you just don't know how to do that yet. It's OK. You'll be OK anyway, I promise. And you will certainly learn your lesson but we'll get to that later.

You are a music major despite thinking you'd never be able to get to this point, and you are actually doing pretty darn well. Be proud. I know you won't you'll just put more things in front of yourself that you think you need to do perfectly at in order to allow yourself to feel proud but I wish you could just enjoy this success. You worked hard for it. It's a new beginning for you and I'm so glad you feel at home again, mostly, I just wish you could forget all these dumb dudes and be more in the experience with the other people in your major. I know you're already feeling a little bit intimidated and frustrated and we'll talk more about that next time but once again you are so good at bass. You are good enough for this program. And you are just good enough period. If you really-really knew that I can't imagine what you'd be doing. Maybe the world wouldn't have even been ready.

Next time on Dear Young Rocker...

The music major starts getting kind of hard. And Chelsea starts getting closer to her internet friend.