

Valedictorian: Jackson Scarbrough '22

If you know anything about McCallie, you know that we love our mantras and sayings. All across campus, Honor Truth Duty is brazenly embedded in our buildings, posters, and lecterns. On our Youtube page, you can find another one of our charges: Be Uncommon. And just a few years ago, Mr. Thomas introduced a new saying, a call and response: Rise! We Up.

Even though for some of you, that last one just reminds you of your alarm clock, all three of these mottos reinforce the fact that at McCallie, we've come to embody a culture of doing. Over the course of four years, a student at McCallie can involve themselves in a multitude of things like leadership in clubs, competitive sports, community service in East Ridge, and if you're William Odle, blessing the McCallie community with daily but highly informative weather updates. No matter the topic, we are dedicated to motivating ourselves and others to perform at a high standard.

Coming to McCallie as a freshman, this culture of doing excited me, and I immediately wanted to take part in it. When I asked some of the seniors in my dorm what they thought was the best skill to develop here, one answer always seemed to come back: managing my time. Naturally, I did what any overplanner would do: I downloaded an app on my phone that let me meticulously schedule

every single little thing I did. Homework? Meetings? Doing my laundry? They were all on it.

What made this planner so helpful was that everything was there when I needed it. I didn't have to worry about forgetting something or its due date, I didn't have multiple jobs bouncing around in my head at one time; when a new task came up, I just added it to my planner, and it rested there safely. The best part about that planner for me was that every task came with a checkbox, so when I finished something, I felt the comfort and relief of checking that box and knowing the task was behind me. It even had some confetti pop up, sort of congratulating me for my work.

The positive effects of this habit are fairly obvious: I had found a way to work more efficiently by organizing my day at a glance. It wasn't until several months ago, however, that I understood its negative effects. As I got used to this process of adding a task and working toward the eventual reward of checking the box, I actually started to rely on that action, that check, as my sign of success. Completion of work became my stress reliever. And as you can imagine, as classes became more strenuous and more work was added to my plate, it became harder to check those boxes as quickly. Rather than comfort and relief, I started to feel overwhelmed. It wasn't until that day several months ago that I realized my fault, when I had to add a task I had never added before, one simple word: Rest.

Over the years, when I've found myself in a cycle of constant doing, of running from morning meeting to class to Backwork to practice, I've gotten tunnel vision in my effort to keep myself performing at the same quick pace. Sometimes, I would use my planner so heavily that I would live from task to task, using the satisfying click of the checkbox to keep me going until it was time to go to bed and do it again. However, throughout my neat and orderly schedule, I never included chunks of time dedicated to stepping back and resting.

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This semester, I had the privilege of taking the senior elective Literature of the Heart, and like many other students in the class, I can confidently say that it has been one of the most beneficial experiences of my time at McCallie, because in this course, we didn't learn how to *do* things--how to properly use syntax, how to interpret text, how to write argumentatively. Instead, we learned how to better understand ourselves and the world around us. Part of the course included multiple forms of meditation, in which several times a month we sat together in silence and stillness. We grounded ourselves with our breath, sounds, the feeling of the breeze, and even the taste of M&Ms. Time and time again, the same guiding question was asked: "What does it feel like to just sit?"

When we first began our meditations, I couldn't stop shifting in my seat. My brain was running at a million miles per hour, worrying about how much time I was wasting by sitting. But as I settled into our routine, I understood that having time to sit, and be aware that I was just sitting, made me feel comfortable. It was weird at first because I wasn't really doing anything but focusing on my breath. However, my awareness that I *was* doing nothing let me take a step back from the normal rush of the day to check in on myself. Rather than being pulled by the need to do something, I felt in control. I was feeling what it was like to be.

A final, end of the year reading from a meditation teacher and professor named John Kabat Zinn summed up my thoughts well: "... it is okay to just be... we don't have to run around all the time doing or striving or competing in order to feel that we have an identity."

I don't want to make you think that the work that I've done is in any way discouraged or insignificant. McCallie is built for thinkers and doers like us who find enjoyment and pride in pursuing our interests. Without the enduring motivation we're given every day to continue our pursuit from faculty and peers among us, many of the issues and projects on campus would go unsolved.

However, my work here on the Ridge has taught me how beneficial it is to step away from the urgency of doing and take time to just be still. To naturally but

intentionally let myself be. Because sometimes, being can be much more important than doing.

Oddly enough, I again have to thank my planner. On its calendar, I can see all the time slots where I have things to *do*. In the same regard though, I can also see the space in between where I'm allowed to *be*. Instead of filling my calendar with tasks that tell me to rest, I think there's much more benefit in putting nothing at all. Because when you really consider it, there's something pure about that empty space. It's the time when you can sit outside and watch the sun gently set. It's the time when you can quietly idle in meditation, or reach out to your favorite mentor. It's the time when you can finally ask yourself after a long day, "How am I doing?"

When you find time to live in the empty space in your calendar, you begin to truly understand yourself. And that's one of the best things I think we can do in life: know who we truly are. That, I believe, is how we make something out of nothing.