

Don't swim too fast, pace yourself. Never appear vulnerable, predators are always lurking. Speak to others only in passing, for they may not be as accepting as you would envision. Most importantly, follow the current that has been placed before you, for it is the ONLY way to achieve your goals.

For a naïve 17-year old whose life had been shaped by endless Sunday morning church services, countless family reunions, and a circle of friends whose perfectly-bronzed pigments never strayed too far from my own, these were the tenets by which my transition to college would be governed. Growing up in the confines of the Mississippi Delta had instilled within me an unswerving sense of commitment to my family, friends, and faith. The simple life that I had experienced up until my high school graduation had allowed me to find solace in stagnation and comfort in like-minded company. However, I would soon realize that the self-assured life of simplicity in which I thrived as a growing boy was nothing more than an enormous bubble of ignorance waiting to be popped by the needle of liberation.

For me, coming to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was the needle that burst my bubble of ignorance. My journey of self-actualization and liberation began as soon as I stepped foot on campus in 2008. Not only was the campus vast, but it was also filled with people of different races, cultures, and beliefs from all over the world. There were a million majors to choose from, even more clubs to join, and an opportunity to get involved presented itself at every corner I turned. I was overwhelmed to say the least. I am sure that this must have been how Nemo felt after leaving the anemone.

My narrow view of life was quickly expanded and in some ways completely rehabilitated. UNC prides itself on fostering an inclusive environment where diversity stands at the forefront of our interpersonal success. I must admit that it was difficult for me to grasp this concept initially because of the lack of multiculturalism that I experienced growing up in the Mississippi Delta. Until I stepped foot onto Carolina, everyone I had ever interacted with on a personal and many times professional level looked like me, spoke with the same Southern drawl as me, and could see life through the same microscopic lens as me. Over the past four years, I have been fortunate enough to develop profound relationships with individuals that look nothing like me and do not necessarily share my beliefs. These relationships have enabled me to grow beyond

my cultural limitations and gain a true appreciation for the characteristics that make each and every one of us unique.

In addition to expanding the boundaries of my once narrowed vision of cultural acceptance, my undergraduate experiences at UNC have also fortified my faith. I entered college with a strong sense of faith in my religion. I can proudly say that I will leave college with that conviction still intact. As I have stated before, UNC is a place where differences are appreciated instead of derided. I found reassurance in knowing that an individual can believe in whatever he or she desires and not be crucified for it. UNC has taught me that the world is not all black and white; sometimes there is a splash of canary yellow in the mix.

The opportunities that a liberal arts education can afford an individual who genuinely desires to grow and make a difference are limitless. I have learned that there is no yellow brick road to success; no gleaming neon sign that reads "Darius This Is The Way". Instead, I have learned that life is filled with people who have stories to share, and from those stories I can acquire the tools that will help me to pen my own narrative. In life, there is no handbook to achieving success and ignorance is not an excuse. In order to move forward we must be willing to burst our bubble of comfort, expand upon the areas in which we lack knowledge, and maintain our personal beliefs ardently, yet humbly.

My four years at UNC have taught me to swim as fast as my little fins will propel me. I have learned that vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, but an indication of maturity. And most importantly, I have learned that my current towards success is not known, but it is indeed ordained. For this little fish, UNC has been the pond of preparation for the sea that lies ahead.

*Darius Trevor Love, from Greenwood, Mississippi, is the youngest of three children born to Maxine Hill. A political science major and African-American studies minor, Love was heavily involved in community service and extracurricular activities during his four years in Chapel Hill, serving as a pre-orientation counselor and resident advisor and holding various leadership positions with the UNC Pan-Hellenic Council and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. After graduating as a Carolina Covenant scholar, Love plans to work in the entertainment, sports or media industries before going to law school.*