

TRANSITIONS

Sustaining Social Change

Goodbye Letter

Literally saying goodbye to the past is an important step in letting it go. Committing to paper what is changing, who or what you are losing, and how you are feeling about these changes can reveal emotional obstacles to moving forward. Write a letter to yourself, someone that you are losing with this change, a symbol or person that represents the past, and, if applicable, the place that you are leaving. You don't have to send the letters. Writing them is the cathartic exercise.

It may be helpful to look over the [Personal Loss Analysis](#) sheet and review the losses that you will be facing with this change.

Here is a sample "Goodbye Letter" written by a youth in foster care who transferred schools. She writes to her old school, where, after the loss of her mother, she had begun to skip classes, ignore homework and ultimately dropped out. "I decided to write to Murrow," she explains, "telling the school why I'm making this transition, and saying good-bye. I decided to keep my letter short and sweet because I didn't want to cry or shout or go completely crazy."

In her letter, Natasha begins to articulate the loss of her identity as "the overachiever" and the loss of connection that she hoped to get from Murrow. Writing the letter left her upset and disappointed with Murrow and herself. "I guess it was time to begin feeling some of the emotions I wouldn't let myself feel while I was still at Murrow," she says. Releasing such emotions is critical to letting go of the past.

Dear Murrow,

I came to Murrow to get what I had always wanted: a place where I was welcomed and academically challenged. I also had always wanted to feel connected to school and the people there (maybe because I felt so disconnected in my foster home).

School had never been a problem for me in the past. I would never have been voted Ms. Popular, but I knew who I was through my academics. I was an overachiever. People called me weird and unique and smart.

That has been part of my persona since elementary school. My home life was always crazy, so school was the place that anchored me to a reality that I wanted. All of this was possible as long as I stayed the smart, dependable student. No matter what else I may have been, I was always that.

When I started failing in Murrow, I could no longer identify myself as the achiever and the smart one. Smart ones didn't fail classes. Overachievers achieved with ease. I was still the weird one, but even that took on a kind of melancholy tilt.

Now I'm going to try to find a new me in a new school.

Wish me luck,

Natasha

Excerpt from ["School Daze"](#) by Natasha Santos, *Represent Magazine* (Youth Communications, March/April 2007)