Stating my Case: You Don’t Have to Date in High School

By Ciera Couto

 My mother was engaged when she was eighteen years old during her last year of high school. When I turned eighteen, I hadn’t even dated anyone (to be honest with you I hadn’t even gotten close to a relationship). At the time, I thought of this fact as either a reflection of my own flaws or a reflection of how the universe was ultimately against me and all my wishes for a high school sweetheart. Looking back at it from my early twenties, I’ve come to the conclusion that it was completely normal to feel that way, but, I had always wished that someone had told me that it was ***okay*** not to date in high school.

 Our teenage years are hard enough as it is, although they should be years of self-discovery and learning, they are often turned into years of unbelievable pressure and self-doubt. Add onto all of that the prospects of a relationship, and you get a bubble of heightened emotions and confusion. I’ve talked to several peers about this subject because every individual has their own experiences and perspectives, but admittedly, a recurring theme came up – being too young.

 I remember being sixteen and being so eager to be in a relationship, but truthfully, I was far from ready for that kind of step in my life. I think when you’re that age and that impressionable, you can want things just for the sake of wanting them. I didn’t want a relationship because I was ready to take on all of the emotions and commitment that naturally comes with one. I wanted a relationship because everywhere I looked, I was being told that I should probably be in one. Every television show about teenage drama showed us couples in love or in fights, every song on my favourite albums were about young love, every young adult novel I read was about the perfect high school sweethearts. It seemed like every bit of media I consumed that was targeted at my age group and demographic was telling me that high school was for flirting, first kisses and “love”. If that wasn’t overwhelming enough, several of my friends were beginning to get into their first relationships. I wanted so badly to be happy for them, and part of me genuinely was, but part of me was also angry that it hadn’t been me. To see your friends get something you have been yearning for can be an isolating feeling at that age. Listening to their experiences and seeing all of their photos with their significant others while you quietly question every little detail about yourself. All of these factors stunted my own journey of self-love and acceptance. Instead of taking that time to figure myself out and learn to love myself, I was doubting every piece of clothing I wore and every photo I posted on social media.

 Before I go any further, please understand that this is not a PSA denouncing dating in high school. Being in a relationship is a wonderful thing when it is genuine and healthy! Relationships in high school can be that wonderful thing, and they can also be complicated and insincere when rushed into. It’s very easy to get caught up in your own feelings, especially when you’re young. When you’re caught up in your own feelings (or someone else’s), it’s far too easy to jeopardize your own happiness and push aside your own needs for the sake of a relationship that may not be fulfilling. Every relationship is an opportunity to learn how to love and there is opportunity for growth that comes out of any relationship in life. Dating (or not dating) in high school can be stress inducing or it could be the most fun you’ll have in between tests and university prep. Either way, it is important to know who you are both within and outside of a relationship.

 It wasn’t until I was twenty years old and getting into my first relationship that I realized maybe not having dated in high school was a good thing for me. I was now an adult who had taken time to mature and learn what I really was looking for in a relationship and a significant other – rather than just looking for *any* relationship with *any* significant other. All those nights I had cried to my best friend about not being good enough for anyone or all of those young adult novels that mocked my single status feigned importance as I got older. I learned to focus on myself and figure out what I truly wanted in love. Again, this is not a PSA to say you shouldn’t date when you are fifteen or sixteen or whatever. This is simply a reminder: Date Responsibly.