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Honors Thesis Reflection

“Writing a senior thesis will be the most fulfilling thing you do during your time at Notre Dame.” I first heard this phrase at Welcome Weekend in 2016, spoken by my first-year advisor to a crowd of students who hadn’t even declared majors yet. From the moment we arrive, we’re told stories of magical documents, created through students’ blood, sweat, and tears, which go on to win prestigious awards, earn competitive graduate school placements, and, in general, awe anyone who reads them. Maybe I’m wrong, but I think that a lot of Notre Dame students feel the way that I felt: as if there’s no reason that you shouldn’t be prepared by the end of your junior year to take on such a task, yet at the same time, do you really have it in you to create one of the magical documents we’ve been hearing about for years?

Going into my Honors Colloquium, these worries plagued me. I had already committed to writing a thesis, but I was still wondering if I could really follow through. But during that Honors Colloquium, I discovered a potential in myself I never knew was there. And just a few weeks ago, I turned in a magical document of my own.

I had spent the past few years thinking that there was some secret formula that would reveal itself, giving me the perfect magical document recipe. Instead, I found the magic in bits and pieces along the way. It comes from the moments you make an unexpected breakthrough chatting with your adviser. It comes from the first time someone asks you what you’re writing your thesis on, and you actually know what you’re talking about. It comes from your Honors Colloquium who (spoiler!) is filled with students who are just as nervous as you are about this whole thing. It comes from the inside jokes you form, the group messages created to send a lit

meme you found about someone's primary source author, and even the musty article you read at two in the morning, realizing that you'll never actually use it in your thesis.

In the end, I found that the magical document was not what changed me. It was everything that led up to it that made me who I am today. Writing this thesis, it felt as if Murphy's Law was in full swing (I'm looking at you, #Corona). But reflecting on the entire process, I realized that the whole point of writing a thesis is being able to make a piece of art that is formed from your struggles and strengthened by your successes. No, my document didn't turn out to be what it could have been had this school year progressed normally, but I wouldn't have it any other way. As Fr. Jenkins said in Notre Dame's first ever virtual commencement ceremony: "You cannot be the Fighting Irish if you never had to fight." I'm proud to say that I ended this year fighting, and my thesis is all the better for it.