

&

We

*College,
September 2020 - May 2023*

Words, pictures & layout

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Part 1

LOST

"Fuck it!" I said, "I'm going to
do an art degree."



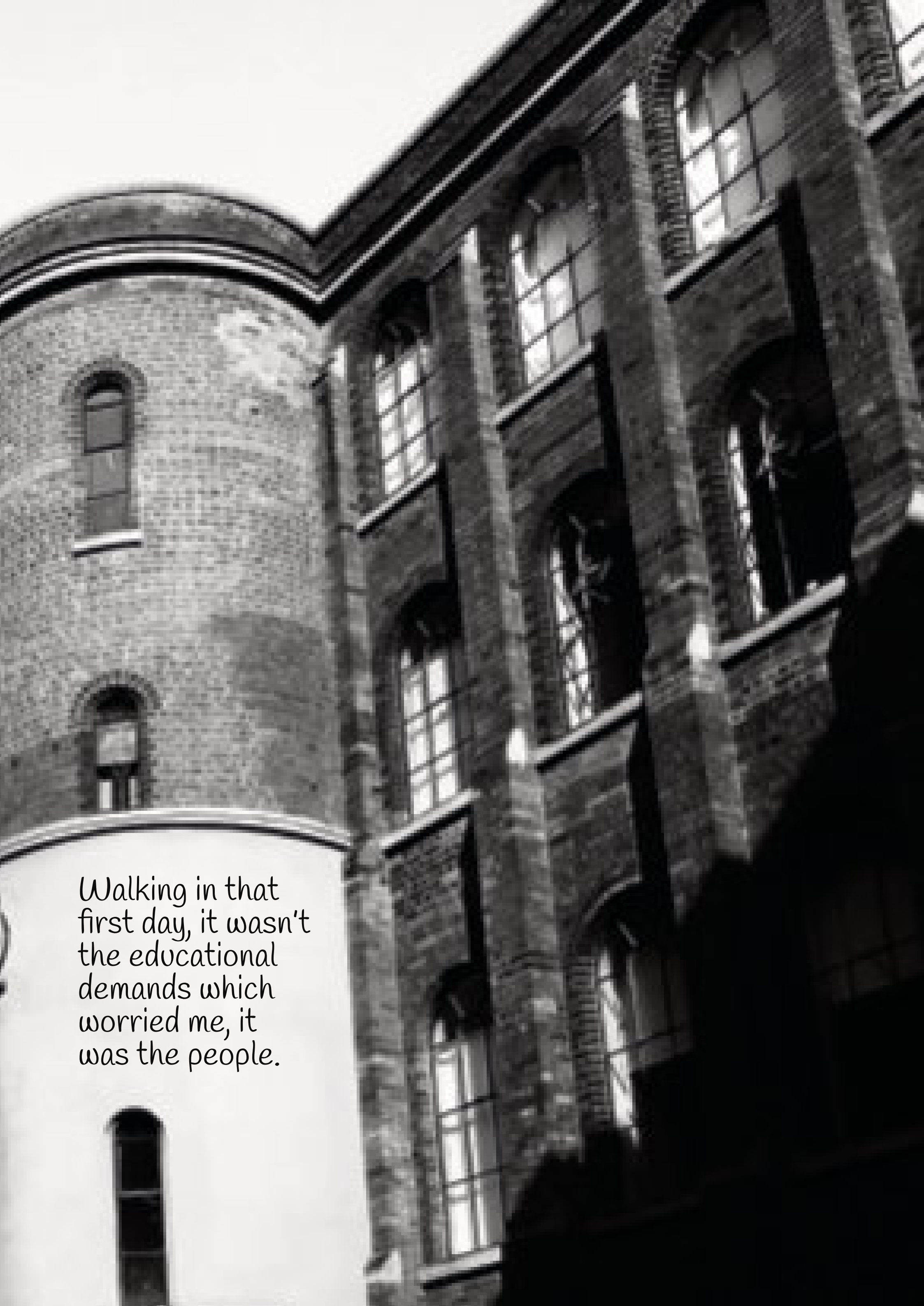
September
2020

First Day
Selfie

I was slowly
rebuilding my life
after a long period
of illness when
lockdown hit.

Already fragile
social circles
collapsed, work
disappeared, and just
being in the same
room as someone
could be a life or
death issue.





Walking in that
first day, it wasn't
the educational
demands which
worried me, it
was the people.



Being around
people again
was weird but
there weren't
many of us,
and most of
them were
called
Charlotte.

The college computers
were unusably slow,
the WiFi didn't work,
and I was having a hard
time taking "art"
seriously, but I was
slowly finding my feet.



And then
Lockdown
Two hit.

College life
was reduced
to 30
minutes a
week on
Zoom.

So I spent my
time annoying
Anti-
VAXXers
and
calling it
art.

COVID
idiots

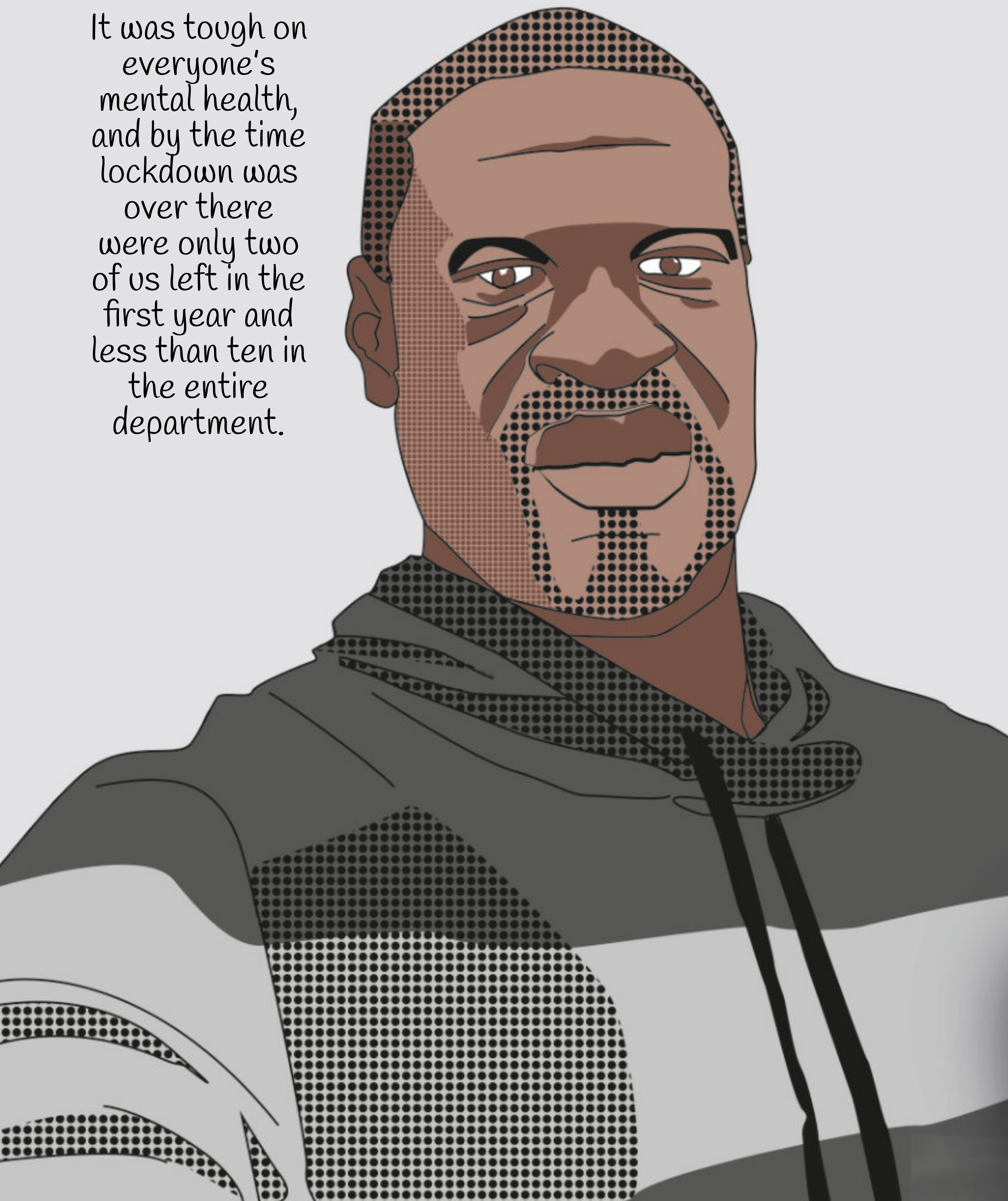
are coming

@TRECEN24

Gatecrashing an
Anti-VAXX
protest, January
2021.

Photo by Richard
Jackson

It was tough on everyone's mental health, and by the time lockdown was over there were only two of us left in the first year and less than ten in the entire department.



We left that year, not as friends but
as fellow survivors.

Random strangers thrown together
by circumstance whose only link was
a shared experience.



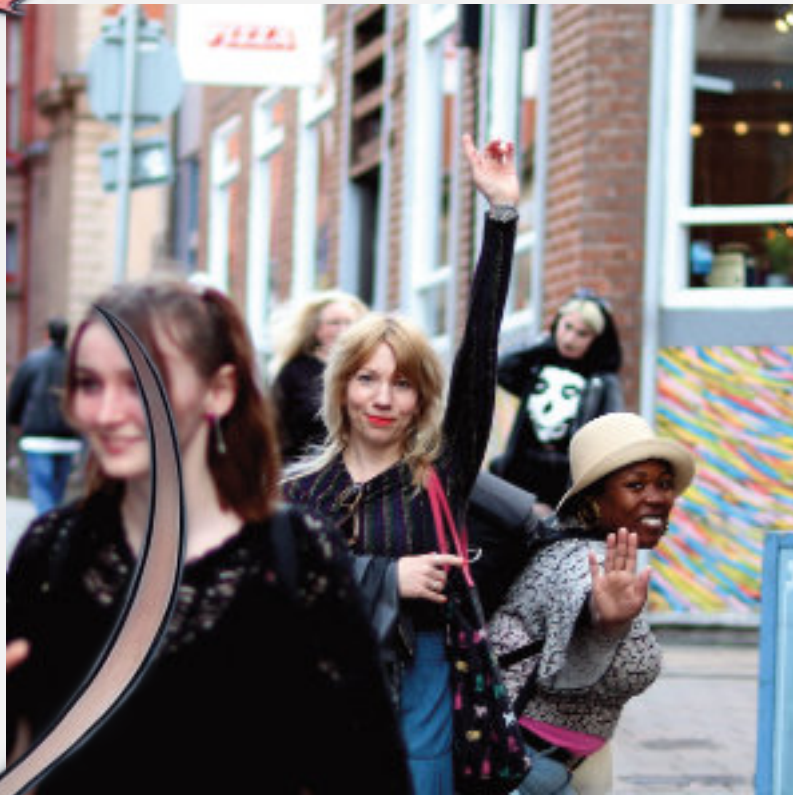
The start of the second
year saw a new influx of
students.



The WiFi still
didn't work
and the
computers
were now
totally
unusable but
our studio
space came to
life with
conversations
and ideas.



And the pubs were open.

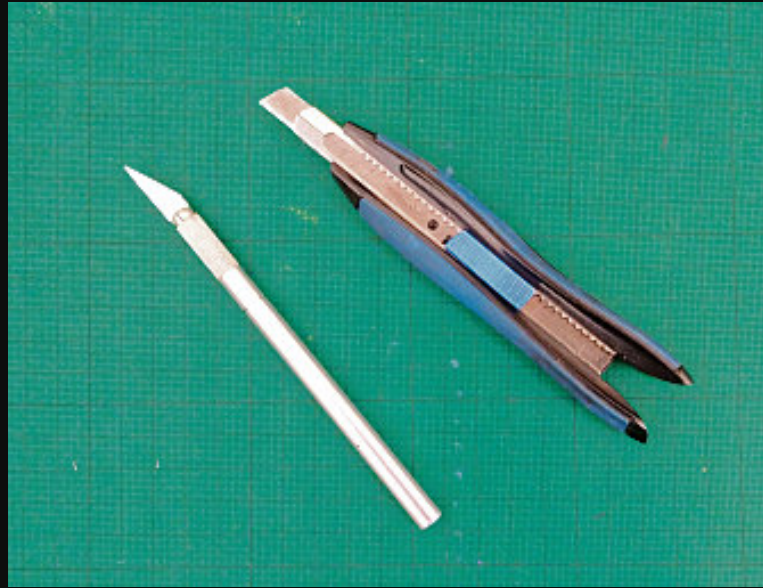


For the first time we could socialise outside of college, friendships began to form, and I started to feel like I belonged.



AND THEN...

You learn a lot about people in positions of authority when you challenge that authority.



One thing you learn, is whether they have actually read the rules they are meant to be enforcing.

At this point V [redacted] N [redacted] demanded to search me. I politely refused, pointing out that she has no right to. She insisted that the Code of Conduct allowed her to search me.

In the case of one of the college's junior managers, they clearly hadn't.

V [redacted] N [redacted] handed me two pieces of paper. One was my enrolment form showing I had agreed to the Code of Conduct and the other a copy of the Code of Conduct. I confirmed this was the Code of Conduct I had signed and handed back the Code of Conduct asking V [redacted] N [redacted] to show me where in the code it says I have to submit to searches.

V [redacted] N [redacted] was unable to show me where in the Code of Conduct I agreed to be searched.

V [redacted] N [redacted] immediately resumed her demands that I had to submit to a search.

The college, through either incompetence or malice (the jury is still out on that one) tried to pervert the disciplinary process.

On Friday 12th I received an email from M [REDACTED] C [REDACTED] with a copy of the Disciplinary Procedure and a brief instruction to send in my statement. The email contained no other information. However the email was CCed to V [REDACTED] N [REDACTED].

Having quickly read the procedure I immediately asked for clarification of M [REDACTED] C [REDACTED]'s role - was she acting as the Investigating Officer? I also raised concerns about her involvement with the procedure as she was a witness. I further raised concerns about my disciplinary email being copied to V [REDACTED] N [REDACTED], my accuser and also a witness. Finally I raised concerns that I was being asked for a statement before being sent all the relevant paperwork, in violation of the Disciplinary Procedure.

In M [REDACTED] C [REDACTED]'s reply she confirmed she was acting as Investigating Officer. This was a clear breach of the procedure. I replied that I was happy to trust M [REDACTED]'s professionalism and integrity but I reserved my right to use this conflict of interest as the basis of an appeal and/or legal action against the college.

I received no further correspondence from M [REDACTED] C [REDACTED].

Fortunately, somewhere in the college there were people who had read their procedures and recognised they had dug a big, legal hole for themselves.

Dear Chris

Following your disciplinary hearing on 1st December, the Panel considered all evidence presented and have concluded that no further action will be taken as a result of the allegations made to you.

Despite this, I gave serious thought to abandoning my course.



Events had poisoned
my joy, tinting the
lens with mistrust.

But slowly, with the support
of my friends among the
students & staff, a level of
normalcy returned.



Part 2

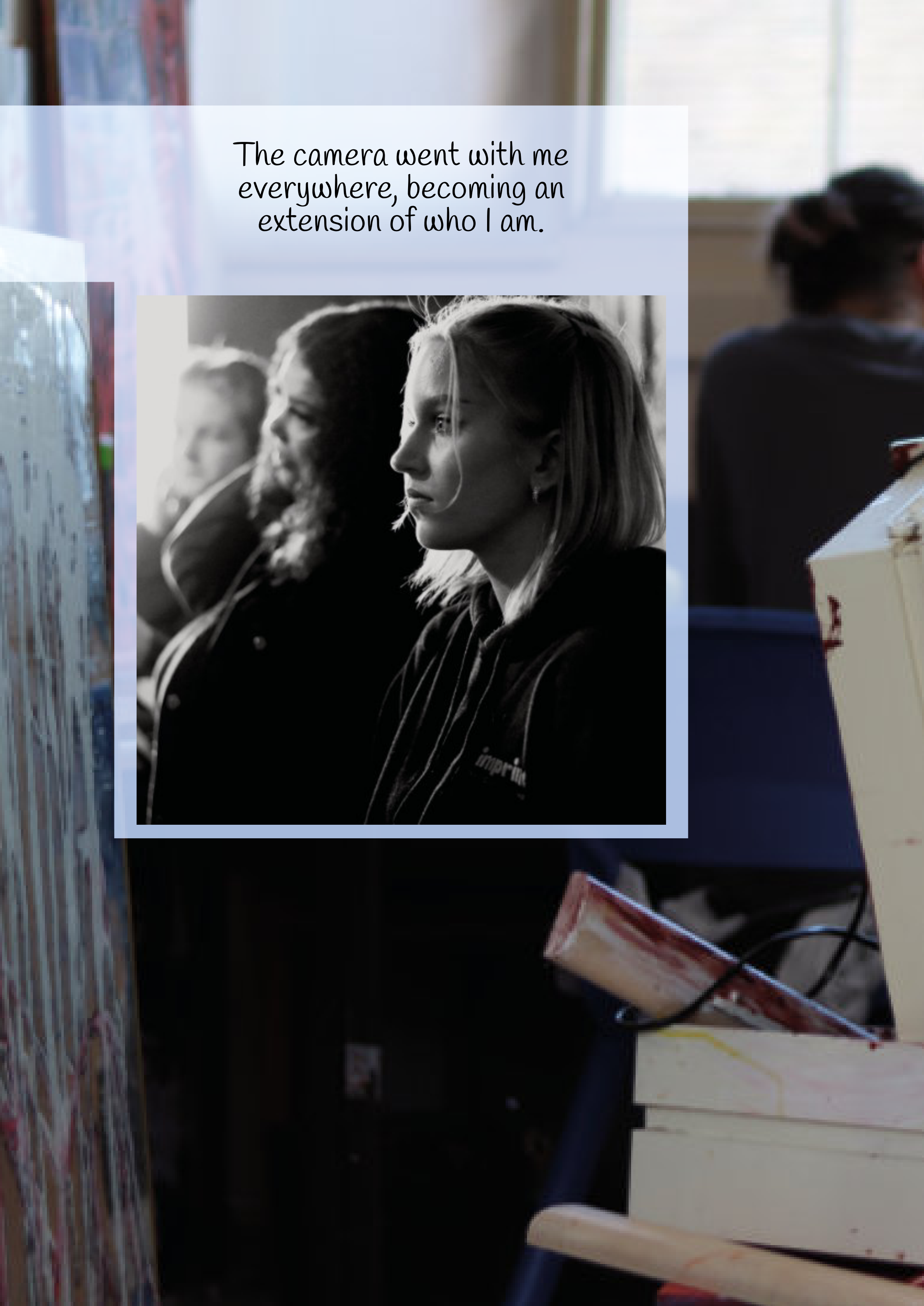
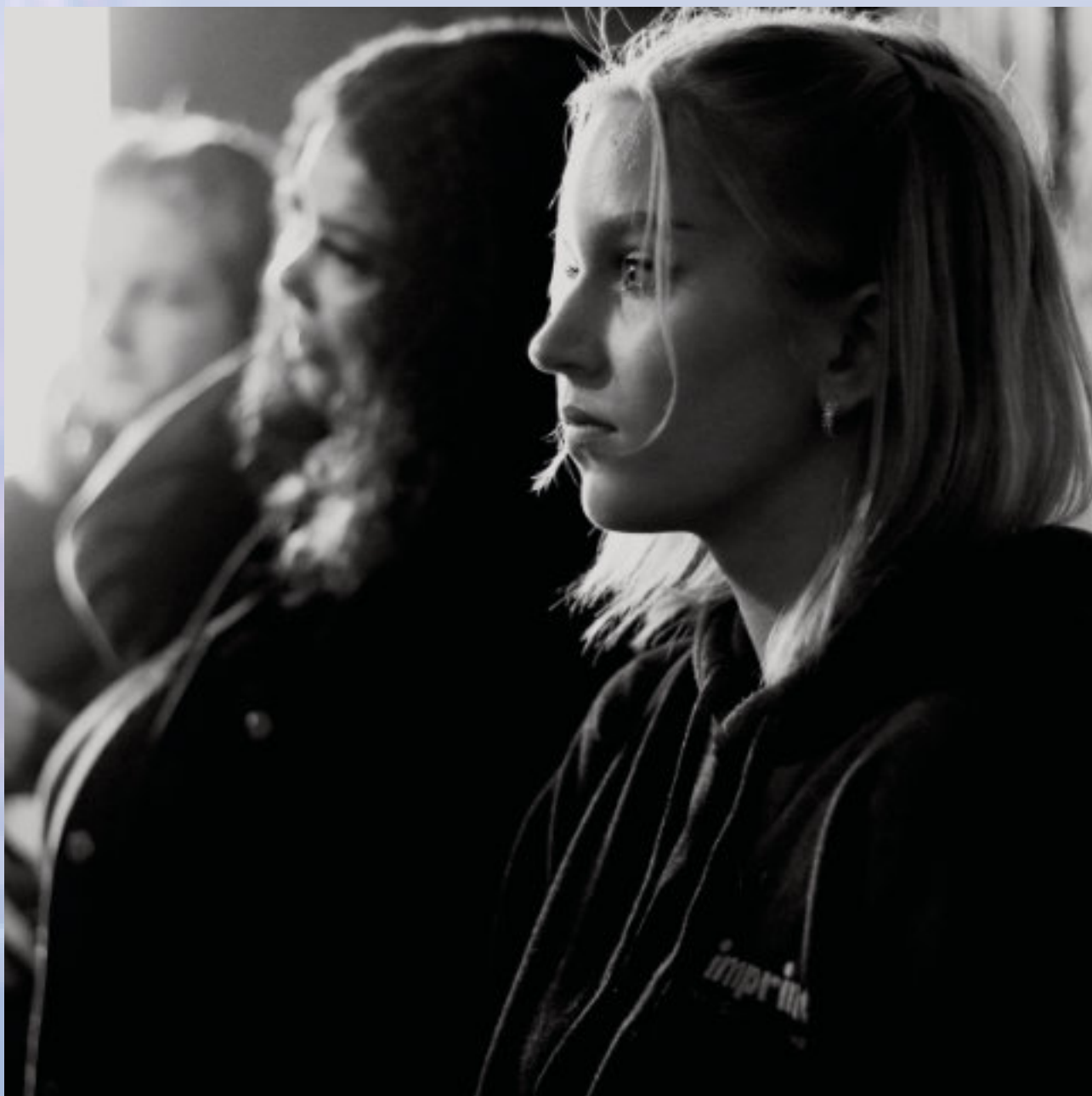
CLICK

It is not often in life you can
point to an exact moment when
things changed.

But the moment I picked up a
camera, I found a way to
explore art on my own terms.



The camera went with me
everywhere, becoming an
extension of who I am.



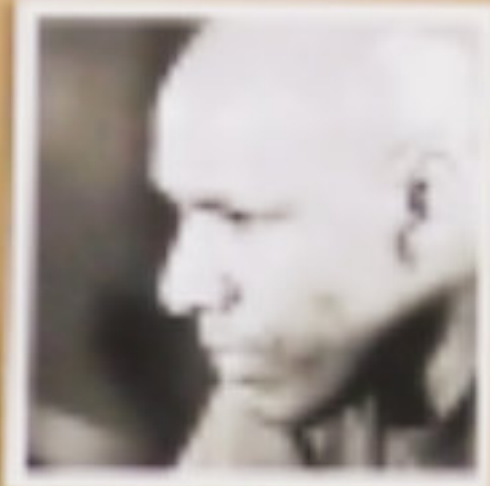


I was learning the limits of
the camera, and the limits of
people's tolerance.



But as my 2nd year
came to an end I was
struggling with what to
do with all the imagery
I created and the
whole idea of "Art".






Up to this point the degree had just been something to do during the pandemic, not a career path, but it was time to shit or get off the pot.



Returning in the
autumn, things
were different and
the same.

The computers had
been upgraded to
barely usable but
the WiFi still didn't
work.

Can You Fix
My Time ?

A blurry, low-angle photograph of a person with short, light-colored hair, wearing a blue jacket. They are holding a large, light-colored rectangular object, possibly a piece of paper or a board, in front of them. The background is out of focus, showing a dark, arched structure and a yellow light source. The overall image has a soft, dreamlike quality due to the blur.

There was also an
influx of new faces
and the studio was
busier than I had
ever seen it.

Despite the problems,





the course had become a place
of safety, recovery and growth.




It gave me the confidence to call myself a photographer



But I will never be able to call myself
an artist with a straight face.







But wherever this
unexpected road
takes me,



It's a future which only exists
because of the friendships made.



And for that, I am forever grateful.

*The story of three years,
one place and many people.*

