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My love affair with climbing

Breaking up was hard, but liberating



Amanda Milici, who graduates June 16 from UC Davis with a degree in environmental science and management, was rock wall manager for UC Davis Outdoor Adventures and travel coordinator for the UC Davis Climbing Club.

I was in a long-term relationship for about 16 years. Despite the beautiful places it took me and the amazing opportunities, my relationship wasn't exactly healthy.

We fought all the time. Sometimes I felt invigorated, alive and accomplished. But mostly I felt scared, uncomfortable, frustrated and incomplete. I knew something needed to change, but was afraid of losing everything that I knew myself to be. However, after 16 years of actual blood, sweat and far too many tears, I decided to break up with rock climbing.

I met climbing at an early age. Family photos show me at 4 or 5, halfway up an unknown rock in Joshua Tree with dad—an enormous smile on his face—belaying me from below. An avid climber himself, he took me climbing all over Southern California.

I loved going because the trips gave me opportunities to spend time with my dad and allowed me to explore California. But every time I tied into a rope, I felt an immediate need to get the climb over with.

Still, climbing quickly became a part of my identity. My high school friends referred to me as the girl who rock climbed, and my Facebook photos often featured me halfway up a cliff or boulder. More importantly, it was a part of the persona by which I knew myself. If climbing wasn't there, I'm not sure what else was.

During my first two years of college, I helped create the UC Davis climbing

team and I got hired at the campus rock wall. Despite the enjoyable moments and supportive community, my time spent climbing still left me feeling unfulfilled. So I put more time into it. I even read books and self-help articles about overcoming my emotional barriers. I figured that if I was even better at climbing, I would enjoy it more.

Yet, this logic continued to disappoint me. I finally knew I needed to let it go.

On a seemingly uneventful afternoon of my senior year after two hours at the climbing gym, I decided that it was time to break up. Some may call this the moment I gave up, but I call it the moment I gave in—to the desire to explore a new identity that wasn't centered around something I did not enjoy, that did not force me to live up to the expectations of others and that freed me of fear, frustration and the void.

My breakup with climbing has been a smooth transition, filled with self-discovery and growth. I even met someone new. Last October, I competed in my first triathlon, and it was love at first sight.

I revisit climbing every now and then, especially with my dad. My friends still climb, and I still work at the rock wall, but I no longer feel trapped. Letting go was the best decision that I ever made. It taught me that *breaking up* doesn't always mean *giving up*. □

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