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THE BEST ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED//DON'T BE LEFT WISHING THAT YOU WOULD HAVE

Katie Kieffer Community Columnist

A friend once encouraged me to soak the marrow out of life when she gave me this advice:

``Don't have `I-wish-I-would-haves.'''

Before her advice, I had lived my life in a partially dazed state, without really thinking about the consequences of many of my actions or omissions. I began to think of how much joy I received from a simple smile or ``Hello," and how many times I could have similarly brought joy to others. I thought of the countless hours I had wasted in grade school doodling or watching cartoons, instead of taking the piano lessons my parents had suggested. I felt shame and regret as I recalled instances when I had allowed fear to hinder me from attaining my dreams.

By hiding in the security of words and actions that were ``normal" and noncontroversial, I lost my own identity. Instead of gaining satisfaction by following the herd, I longed for my independence. I chose to waste precious time, thinking about myself or worrying instead of bringing joy to others and doing.

Many of my ``I-wish-I-would-haves" are common to humans. People tend to live as though Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon's mythical Fountain of Youth really does exist. They take life for granted.

I believe we would all be happier and more successful if instead we strove to make every moment count. We would be happier because we would be living according to our own beliefs and dreams. We would be more successful since we would set goals and fulfill them without letting fear stop us.

This is not an easy task. It is hard to smile when your head is pounding with a migraine headache. It is difficult to put fear and procrastination aside.

Nevertheless, we ultimately have to live with the consequences of our actions. If we want to be satisfied with our lives, we should strive to eliminate the ``I-wish-I-would-haves" from our mind.

Life is incredibly precious. Every second counts. It is our choice whether we want to use this time for good or evil, for success or failure.

NAME: **Katie Kieffer** HOMETOWN: Rosemount VITALS: Home-schooled through eighth grade; now a senior at Trinity School at River Ridge, Bloomington; accepted at the University of St.

Thomas, where she intends to study journalism. WRITING OBJECTIVES: To discuss education, include the pros and cons of home schooling; children; the human condition; and

patriotism/politics. ABOUT ME: ``When I was 7, I started going to my grandma's house once a month for sewing lessons. Last year, I entered the prom dress I sewed in 4-H and won grand champion and court of honor at the county fair ... I read a lot and listen to Jason Lewis over supper."