

BEMIDJI

STATE UNIVERSITY

Cheyenne Tordsen

Affliction

English, Creative and Professional Writing
December 7, 2017

HONORS PROGRAM

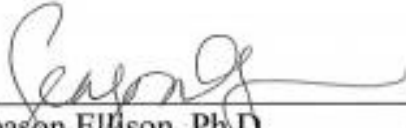
Bemidji State University
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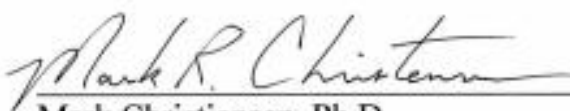
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Abstract

This thesis features ten creative works, depicting a nonfictional account of life with various disabilities. Six of these are creative nonfiction prose stories, and four of them are

poems. By writing these stories and poems, I write for consolation and to console those who harbor their traumas within themselves. I follow the stories of my own life, starting and ending chronologically, with the poems that follow each theme working as a retrospective reflection. The first prose story begins during the middle of high school with the theme following through the stories until the end of college, or currently. Some scenes of the middle pieces—the flashforwards and flashbacks—are not necessarily in chronological order, but neither are our thoughts. Because these conditions are chronic—meaning they persist for a long time or are constantly reoccurring—some of the stories overlap. The project ends with a nontraumatic story to illustrate the concept that, while disabilities do impact you, often for your entire life, they do not define or control you. While the events are nonfictional, some names have been changed.

This is a content and trigger warning for the following prose and poetry pieces. The content contains, but is not limited to, depictions or mentions of hospitalization, depression, blood, menstruation, needles, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, sexuality, disordered eating, addiction, self-destructive tendencies, and alcohol.

Artist Statement

My goal is to create a portfolio based on disability and its impact on the lives of the affected, their families, their friends, careers. Disability is a theme that has impacted my life in a variety of ways: from advocating for autism to developing a physical disability as a teenager. My portfolio will consist of writing I have done throughout college, following the theme of disability-based lifestyles. Such disabilities range from depression and anxiety to heart conditions. No matter the “severity” of a condition, it impacts people in similar ways; someone’s life can be destroyed by OCD just as easily as by lupus. All mental and physical afflictions can dictate and overtake someone’s life: the trauma of abuse and PTSD, the panic attacks and anxiety, the sleepless nights of nerve pain and fibromyalgia. The way medical conditions creep into the lives of everyone around the afflicted person is often stigmatized by society and those who complain are often considered weak. That should not be the case. If more writing about these experiences, especially writing about rare or often “unheard of” conditions, becomes accessible, I truly believe it would dramatically help everyone involved. Not only would people feel more accepted for who they are and what their lives have become, but the general population would become more educated and accepting. The goal of writing is to share, and that is exactly what I plan to do, through a mix of creative nonfiction and poetry.

My condition is considered “new” among the medical community, therefore little literature had been written that captures the unique events I have gone through. I cannot base my writing style off of people who understand some parts of my afflictions, because the literature that exists currently is either listicles and articles or medical journals. Because of that, my writing style was crafted by various authors I connected to as I grew into literature. This includes

juxtaposed authors: a 1920s Modernist, a young adult fiction writer, the *Harry Potter* books, and the people in the online disability community.

My writing style hasn't been influenced by one specific writer. However, there are some writers who I continually love, regardless of their relevance to disabilities. The first is F. Scott Fitzgerald. His stories are full of imagery and burst at the seams with literary devices. The second is Jay Asher, author of *13 Reasons Why* and other young adult literature from the 2010s. *13 Reasons Why* was recently turned into a Netflix series this year. Asher's works capture the reality of our world; *13 Reasons Why* is about a young girl's suicide and how several events tied together to push her over the edge. As you can imagine, this sort of subject requires a bitter realism. The Netflix series received harsh criticism about the content shown, regardless of the M rating and content warnings before each episode. I defended and continue to defend what the series portrays, because it is the unfortunate reality of young women everywhere. It may not be every person with depression's reality, but it is eerily similar to mine.

However, regardless of stylist influence, the Harry Potter series, as cliché as it sounds, has been an inspiration to me for over a decade. Before that series was published, I hated reading; writing 300 word book reports in middle school was the bane of my existence. But as I read the Potter series, I fell in love with reading, and it truly shaped who I am today. I could easily say that I've read the whole the series at least seven times. My first ever tattoo was the symbolic lightning bolt from the series on my arm, so that I could carry a reminder with me a constant reminder. I know it is not possible to replicate the magic J.K. Rowling created, but I desire to do her justice and write something into the world that will influence at least one person in the way she affected me.

My influences will blend with my theme through a mix of lyrical writing and gritty realism. Even though Fitzgerald is not a poet, I am inspired by his lyrical writing to describe disability. I hate the idea that medical conditions are “romantic;” they are not. However, Fitzgerald is one of the pioneers of Modernism and perfectly embodies “art for art’s sake.” I do not wish to make light of any medical condition in my writing, but I want to create art based off of my experiences. When I see the struggles people I know go through, or when I am going through a particularly difficult time with any condition, I am often inspired to create something out of the hell I am going through—a self-reflection on what I or others experience. I do not think I could live with myself if I only sat and wallowed in self-pity, so instead I create.

I recognize that we are no longer in the Modernist Era of literature. We are arguably in either in the Post-Modernist Era or a contemporary era, depending on who you ask and where you study. I would say that my second influence, Jay Asher, is more of a contemporary author. Contemporary literature is often described as reflective of society's political, social and personal views, often cynical or ironic way. I would agree that a lot of my works, no matter the genre, are often cynical and critique the status quo. Even if it does not involve health, I am often cynical because of what I experience with my health, and being distrustful and questioning why we do what we do is another theme within my writing.

My second influence, the realism from Jay Asher’s novels, also comes into play, to show how disabilities impact people. Sometimes “art for art’s sake” makes reality seem too romantic. Unfortunately I have faced many dreadful circumstances throughout the diagnosing process, as well as witnessing many injustices throughout my advocacy of others. I wish to bring these experiences into the written world; they do not deserve to be kept secret. People have a right to know so others can know that someone else has gone through the same thing.

This brings me to the struggle of actually sharing my work. Because of the content, my writing is incredibly personal. It is hard for me to admit that besides having Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, I also have depression, anxiety, recovered from EDNOS (Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) and was diagnosed then removed from the autism spectrum. Writing something so personal and working through the trauma that ensued is therapeutic, but it also brings with it the process of opening up wounds and exposing them to the world. The world is harsh; a lot of people don't care. Some people are filled with compassion; others are not. When I tell the complete truth and detail my experiences, I often receive mixed reactions. I wholeheartedly appreciate the people who are sorry for what I have gone through, even though I hate attending a pity party. However, some people come after me, trying to tell me that the condition I developed is not real because "they have never heard of it" or that it was "created by big pharma." But dealing with ignorance is a fact of life, and I would rather weed through all the negativity to educate one person than avoid conflict and change nothing.

That is why my project is important. Projects about something so intimate do not come around every year. Stories about the cold reality of life do exist—think of any love story ever written—but those stories touch people for a reason. They connect the reader to the author through a shared experience or emotion. Connection to any type of personal writing (i.e. coming out stories, abuse stories) is integral to someone struggling. It shows the reader that they are not alone, even though they may feel as if they are the only person in the world who feels the way they do. I want to create for others besides myself. Yes, writing is incredibly therapeutic, but I am not the only one who can benefit from writing. I want to show people that they are not alone. I want to show people that they can fight. I want to show people that just because they may be disabled forever does not mean that their lives are over.

Some people are already doing this work, although not many do it to the extent that I wish to. There is a website called The Mighty, which is full of published disability stories. The Mighty offers a community and supports all sorts of conditions, from depression to cancer. There are thousands of articles, three of which are mine. Because I am a published author on the website, I get a weekly newsletter with featured articles. These articles showcase raw emotions, rough stories, and the fire that ignited in writers after they experienced what they did. The trauma some of these people have undergone and the beauty they have created out of it inspires me to do the same. Even though most of these articles do not feature my own medical condition, we all encounter the same problems. If these people can write, then so can I.

Although I am content with the way I write and am happy with my written voice, I want to work on more than one genre. The people I surround myself with are vastly talented, and through them I find the inspiration to dabble outside of my comfort zone. My writing style is not finalized; I don't believe anyone's is. Writing changes over time just as the writer does. I won't be the next J.K. Rowling, and I probably will not become the mother of a new literary movement, but who says that those limitations define me? My writing will change, and I am excited for what that will lead me to create.

The works I create come from my own experiences and the experiences of others around me. I will tell the stories of the journey I face with my own medical conditions, as well as its effect on my friends, family, and other relationships. Many medical conditions are considered invisible. I cannot count the times I have been told "but you don't look sick" by people who do not even know me. I want to share these stories with someone. I want to show people who are also invisible that I can see them, that they are not hidden. I want to show people who do not

understand what it is that they are failing to see. The only way for me to do this is through writing.

Plan to Execute

The bulk of the project was done within the Capstone class in fall semester 2017. I worked on the project following the course schedule set by Prof. Gibbon. Once November came around, I worked with Dr. Ellison to combine my capstone deadlines and Honors Program deadlines so that I could graduate in December 2017. We decided that finals week would be the best time for the defense. I submitted my project to review with Dr. Ellison on November 17th, submitted it to the council on the 23rd, and presented on December 7th. Any reviews will be done before the semester ends on the 14th.

Evidence of Process

I started this project in 2015 when I wrote my first published article about my condition, Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS). This article was a lament to my past life, my healthy life, referring to it as the one that got away. I wrote more articles, and although none of those articles made it into this project, it jumpstarted my interest.

A year later, when I started the Creative Nonfiction I class with Dr. Christiansen, I attempted to write about other topics. It was not until the third assignment when I gave into my desire and wrote *8 Months*. The reaction from Dr. Christiansen and my class provided me with the confidence to write about what I knew: disabilities.

I collected what I had done in Poetry I and II and Creative Nonfiction I and II over the summer of 2017. After collecting, I had approximately fifteen pages of previous work. Around five pages required deep editing, which made the pieces longer. After that, I needed to write around ten more pages. I knew I wanted to write something, anything, about a disorder I had not yet admitted to anyone other than my partner, but I was unsure what to say. The content came late, as I did not feel qualified to address something I had not been “cured” of yet.

I decided in the Capstone class with Prof. Gibbon in 2017 to attempt a “happy ending.” I did not want to paint an illusion that my life is fixed and that I am healthy, but rather show the audience that I’m just okay, and that I am fine with being just okay. I am still sick. I still battle depression. However, I have fought for everything I have and have met people who make my life better. The intention of my project is to console people who are going through similar experiences, and that would all be for not if I did not illustrate that life does get better and that life is not a waste. Any medical diagnosis does not define you, but it does impact you.

8 Months

September 23rd, 2012.

I had a six-hour shift at the grocery store. The next day was a Monday: the first day of Spirit Week for my junior year and my third anniversary with my boyfriend. Even though I could feel a sharp pain in my back, I went into work because I'm a slave to capitalism and because my parents wouldn't let me go out with Matt if I missed work. Being the stereotypical overachiever and hopeless romantic rolled into one, missing work and our anniversary date was not an option. I never missed anything: a model student, girlfriend, worker.

About three hours into the shift, my boss found me doubled over in the bathroom, jumping from pain if anyone tried to give me a comforting touch. I was sent home. My mom brought me to Urgent Care immediately.

After vitals, I was transferred to the Emergency Room, due to my level of pain. When you go to the doctor for pain, the nurse will ask you to rate your pain on a scale of 1 to 10. For women, 10 is usually childbirth-level. I said 9.

The doctor ordered a urine test. I begrudgingly got up and made way to the bathroom attached to my hospital room. I gave the nurse back a cup of blood.

"You should tell the nurse if you're on your period," my mom scolded.

"I'm not," I replied.

Before even running the test, the nurses hooked me up to IVs and a morphine drip. I already have bad veins, but being dehydrated on-top of everything didn't help. The nurses missed my veins six times before they could get a stick. I was afraid of needles, but I no longer had that luxury after both of my elbow crooks became bruised, stained an awful off-yellow color.

I had an IV for dehydration on the right and morphine on the left. The doctor then ordered a blood test. My arms were occupied, so they took the blood out of my hand.

The doctor came back and told me that I had a large amount of e.coli in my kidneys, and that we caught my kidneys in the process of shutting down. My white blood cell count was over 23,000—the same as a person with leukemia. I was prescribed a two-week dose of antibiotics and kept in the hospital.

October 12th, 2012.

It was my father's birthday. I was still not feeling well. The pain in my back dispersed itself around the body like a flash food that never dried. I was constantly weak. I used to brag how I could lift just as much as my male cousins, but now even lifting myself was a challenge.

After dinner I stood behind the couch and bent myself over it, pressing my stomach into the bar supporting the back because the pressure was the only thing that made the pain go somewhat numb, with the simple logic of replacing uncomfotability with tolerable uncomfotability. My dad had his gallbladder removed at age twenty, so my parents thought that maybe that was the cause of my pain. After all, don't medical conditions run in the family? I went to the Emergency Room. The doctor ran an ultrasound and told me that I seemed fine, but he'd prescribe another round of antibiotics to make sure.

October 26th, 2012.

I couldn't remember the last time this school year that I spent the entire day in class and not in the nurse's office. I rested on the upstairs couch adjacent from the kitchen that doubled as my mom's office. I threw a blanket over my homework so that the unsolved problems wouldn't

stare at me the same way the doctors stared at mine. Compressing myself into a ball on the couch, my mom sat next to me, trying to massage my joints to stop the pain. It would work, but only for a minute before every nerve flooded with pain. Distraction was not an option, as there was nothing else to focus my mind on. The pain was physical, but the torment was mental. My mom broke the law and gave me one of her prescription Vicodin pills. It did not help. The only way I could describe it to my mom was that it felt as if my bones dried out and scrapped each other, constantly chipping away. It felt like trying to light a fire with two bones instead of sticks. It felt like death.

November 14th, 2012.

I saw a total of four different doctors about how I still didn't feel recovered from the kidney infection. I started collecting my hospital bands in a photo journal. My family doctor told us to "wait and see." I was missing 2-3 days of school per week. I started to throw up blood. I fainted every time I stood up. I slept on the upstairs couch near my parents' room so that my mom could take care of me. Some days I would sleep on the bathroom floor, because it was easier to stay there than to routinely make trips from the couch.

But this time, I was in a ball on the kitchen floor; crying from both pain, and being ashamed. My dad carried me to the car, which wasn't difficult as I had shed 10 pounds due to needing to throw up anything I ate. My mom took me to the hospital. My dad had to stay back to take care of my siblings, assuring my frantic little brother that his sister would be back.

I listened to my mom describe my pain to the doctor. I was too exhausted to do it anymore. We had to tell the story every few days. An hour passed. I was constantly shifting in bed, trying not to move the needle too much. One thing about being healthy that I took for

granted was the ability to sleep in whatever position I pleased. I was too afraid to move the needle, though. The nurses spent over an hour getting it in.

“How are you feeling?” the doctor asked me after he returned.

“About the same,” I said.

“Oh don’t worry, we’ll get the morphine going soon,” he said.

“Was that not what you were doing when you did that to her?” asked my mom, as she gestured to my patched-up arms.

“Well, we wanted to see if the pain was real or if she was seeking drugs, ya know.” I could see the anger rise into my mom’s face. A trained medical professional let me, only 16 years-old at the time, continue suffering because he didn’t believe anything could be wrong with me. “Her kidney ultra-sounds from her last visit were clean,” he continued. “There’s no clear cause of her pain.”

“That’s why you look for a cause,” my mom snapped back.

“Ma’am, the E.R. is not a place for diagnosis.”

“If it’s not for help or diagnosis, then what’s it for?”

“I’m going to recommend a therapist and some vitamins,” the doctor said.

“Vitamins? A therapist? Did you check her white blood cell count from last time?”

“We see a lot of young girls fake things for attention.”

“How do you fake a blood cell count of over 20,000?!” My mom was yelling. Several nurses came through the door and started to hurriedly take out my IVs.

“Ma’am, I am a doctor!” he shouted in my mom’s face.

“So am I!” shouted my mom, standing as tall as a five-foot woman could to get in the doctor’s face. At this point I let out a small laugh, because my mom was not a medical doctor, but a professor of sociology. The doctor didn’t need to know that though.

“Look what you’re doing to your daughter!” the doctor said. “She finds this entertaining. She’s doing this for your attention.”

“No I’m not! Why would I do this for attention?” I wanted to point out something specific, but everything was wrong, so I gestured vaguely at myself. I saved energy for when words were important, and I was glad that I used them when I did. This went on while nurses took out of my IVs and sent us on our way, with only a patched-up vein and no help to send with us. We were literally turned away by a hospital.

January 13th, 2013.

My 17th birthday. Matt managed to bring me out for dinner. I tried to find something special to wear, but all I could wear were yoga pants and sweatshirts. I tried to hide my body anyway, so sweatshirts were fine with me, even if it was a bright hideous pink. I honestly didn’t remember what it was like to wear clothes that fit well. I was down to less than 100 pounds. I was afraid to comb my hair, thinking any strand I touched would disintegrate upon impact.

I had been transferred to online post-secondary through my mom’s community college during the second semester of school. I missed 80% of the first semester due to sick days. I wasn’t even sure if students knew I still attended high school. I had found out that at least a

handful of students thought I was dead. I was offended that none of those people sent my family a sympathy card.

I spent my birthday angry at the world, with only a brief intermission for dinner and *The Hobbit*.

January 23rd, 2013.

It was my CT-scan at Children's West. This was the third specialist I had been referred to. The room was another familiar sterile white room, with seemingly out-of-place nature photos to brighten it up. The only difference in this room was that I was on a bed that would be moved into the machine after the dye was injected.

The dye once again went into my hand. I wanted to wince in pain, but I didn't have enough extra weight to cushion the needle and moving it was too risky. My mom came with me, against the doctor's wishes. She told me: "I don't have a uterus to make more babies, so I'm sticking with the one I have."

The dye going in through my hand once I was in the machine was the worst pain I had ever felt. Some people describe it as warm, but to me the liquid became like dry ice, creeping its way up my arm and throughout my entire body. Some people describe it as warm, but to me it was a blizzard spiraling out of control and casting ice over every single bone, muscle, and ligament. I let out a scream, but couldn't move. The doctors on the other end threatened to reinsert the dye if I screwed up the images. All I wanted was to rip out that needle. But same deal: more tests, fewer results.

May 10th, 2013.

I was finally at Mayo Clinic: specialist after specialist, negative result after result. I was being tested for a condition that Dr. Fischer helped coin in 1998. According to him, it has been around for centuries, but not recognized by the medical community and insurance companies until the 2000s. The test was medieval; I was strapped to a table, one arm outstretched. The arm was connected to a stimuli machine, which later left a circle burn on my arm and legs. When I was at Mayo, a nurse told me that it felt like a tattoo gun inside your skin and being on fire. As I got older, I realized she was right.

The table is later flipped, and my vitals were constantly monitored. I blacked out when the table flipped. At least the strap had a purpose.

Dr. Fischer's office was covered in drawings from other patients. I may have been 17, but you damn-well know I drew one too. Dr. Fischer was the most comforting doctor I had ever met. He had a deep, soothing voice. He's old, with the looks of a grandfather but the energy of a young father, and the compassion of both. He took the time to get to know me. He called me "Cheyenne Nicole" because he insisted that my middle name was as beautiful as my first. Every time I answered a medical question, he commented on my intelligence.

Dr. Fischer explained a condition to me called postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, or POTS. POTS usually happens after a bad infection, traumatic pregnancy, or any other sort of physically exhausting and demanding experience. It causes the autonomic nervous system to stop working, which causes my body to do a variety of things, including stopping the flow of blood. The list of symptoms took up three full pages in the book he handed me, but the most notable

were: reduced brain blood flow, fainting, trouble sleeping, esophageal dysmotility, nausea, gastrointestinal issues, nerve damage, blood pooling in the limbs, tachycardia, chest pain, profound fatigue, iron storage deficiency, low blood volume, muscle weakness, heat and cold sensitivity, intense muscle/tissue and joint pain, back aches, stomach aches, migraines, kidney troubles, and fluid around the heart. As he read the symptoms to my parents, he emphasized that this was the short list.

The booklet Dr. Fischer gave me said that researchers found that quality-of-life in POTS patients was comparable to patients on dialysis for kidney failure.

I was terrified.

September 9th, 2016.

I developed POTS nearly four years ago. I have been on blood medication for four years, pain killers for three. Every year I visit Dr. Fischer. My drawing is still there. He was a little bummed to find out that I did not pursue a medical degree like I had planned, but he still insisted I send him copies of my writing.

My recovery has not been a straight line. I wouldn't even say I'm in "recovery." My doctors like that word, but I do not. POTS is a chronic condition. "Recovery" would indict that there's a way to get better. There isn't. I missed 50% of my senior year of high school before I could get any painkillers. Last year, Dr. Fischer said I could start weaning off my blood medication. He says that every year and it never happens. Although I have gotten worse instead of better over the past year, I am doing the best I can.

The first few years of having POTS, I was bitter. I was in mourning for my pre-POTS life. Life with a chronic disability is restrictive, at best. I reflect on the days when I didn't get looks for popping pills in class, when people didn't joke about "buying" my painkillers, when I didn't black out every morning. But POTS has also caused many great things to come into my life. I have met amazing friends who understand me. I took up a writing position with a disability based website. I've spoken at conventions for disabled students. I've been prepared for the battle I will have with endometriosis—a condition I was diagnosed with during my junior year that caused my mom to lose her uterus. When everything is taken away from you, you learn to appreciate what you have and grow because of it. I have grown so much over the last four years, and while I wish I could have grown on my own and not because a tribe of bacteria decided to immigrate to my vital organs, I am still grateful.

Hope

I laid on my back in a windowsill bed of some cheap hotel in Rochester, Minnesota. My hands were folded on my stomach, and I didn't move them to open the curtains, but I could tell it was early morning. If I'm ever up before the sun is, I get this overpowering feeling of solitude before the rest of the world follows suit. But I wasn't alone.

"Cheyenne, are you awake?"

I nodded.

"How long have you been awake?" my mom asked, dressed but still soaking wet from the shower.

"Since yesterday," I answered.

"Because you wanted to be, or because you had to be?"

"Had to."

"Can you stand up?"

"I haven't tried in a few hours, but as of 2 a.m. I couldn't."

"Well that was four hours ago, so you're probably stuck, aren't you?"

I nodded again. "Does this hotel have any of Mayo's chairs or do I gotta make it to the car somehow?" I asked.

"I'll check the front desk," my mom said. "I'll grab breakfast too. What do you want?"

"I'm not allowed to eat before my table test, mom."

My mom finished drying off her hair and snuck out of the room. I shook my head. *I'm the only one in here, why are you sneaking out?* I reached down into my bag next to the window-bed and pulled out my Mayo folder, searched through the official paperwork, and found my plan. *8 a.m. table test. 9:45 exercise and breathing test. 11:12, that's a weird time, EKG. 1 p.m. blood draw. 3:45, meeting with Dr. Fischer.*

My mom came back into the room, arms full carrying a basket of muffins, cinnamon rolls, cereal and milk cartoons, dragging a wheelchair behind her. I was confused by how much she was carrying, but too tired to ask. "What's first?" mom asked. I handed her the planner in exchange for a bowl of Raisin Bran and poured the bowl into a Ziploc bag. Sometimes other "kids" at Mayo gave me weird looks for eating dry cereal, but I didn't care too much about anything other than staying alive when I was there. Still, I found it weird that in a building full of sick people, not even one would consider the fact that maybe I am allergic to milk.

She put everything else on the bedside table, then went over our checklist, as I struggled to climb into the wheelchair. She packed away my medications that hadn't been touched in 5 days due to Dr. Fischer's orders: painkillers, sleeping pills, vein constrictors, salt tablets, immune system support, and emergency heart pills.

"Dr. Fischer is sure convinced that you'll be able to ween off this year," my mom said.

I looked down at myself, wrapped in blankets, unable to keep my own autonomic temperature regulated. I looked at the ice pack wrapped to my hand, the heating pad on my stomach, my blue lips reflected in my phone on my lap. I looked at my feet poking out under the blanket, a deep bruised purple color, pooling with blood. "He sure has a lot of hope," I said.

Welcome to Womanhood

“What is the success rate of women with POTS having kids?” I asked, as Dr. Fischer analyzed my posture as I walked in a straight line. I walked from corner to corner in the rectangular room, working hard to keep the medical gown from flying open.

“Women usually are cured of POTS when they get pregnant,” he said in his typical soothing voice. He sat in the chair next to the tile that still bared my name from years before. “It has to do with the increased blood flow.”

“My friend has POTS and she had her tubes tied,” I said.

“Who the hell did that?” he asked, putting his clipboard down on the desk next to him.

“That one female doctor that works with POTS kids while you’re away,” I said.

“Is that the friend who’s a marine?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I think that explains it. Besides, you don’t have to worry about kids now,” he said.

“You’re barely 18.”

Message sent: “I want a small army of kids.”

Message received: “We’ll have one to two, at max.”

Message sent: “At least enough for a basketball team.”

“How long have these changes been occurring?” the doctor asked. I didn’t even know her name. She never told me. After all, it wasn’t important. Typically, doctors don’t exchange pleasantries when they’re wheeling you in from the parking lot.

“Since about when I started college, maybe?” I said. “I never thought about it. It was never late or anything, just getting more painful.”

I laid in the hospital bed, a familiar IV drip of morphine attached to me. I had been rushed in by my friend after thinking my appendix has burst. The doctors thought so too, until they did an ultrasound during prep and realized they were wrong.

“Endometriosis typically causes pain all month, because those parts are working 24/7, even if you only notice it one week a month,” she said. “Are reproductive issues common in your family?”

“My mom had her uterus removed due to endometriosis after my brother was born. Both my grandmas suffered several late term miscarriages, but I was always told that it was just ‘the time.’”

“Well, medicine has come a long way, but 1960 wasn’t *that* long ago,” she said, writing in her notes. “Anything else?”

“My mom was told she could never have kids but, I mean, yeah...”

She pushed her glasses back up to her face. “How would you feel if I told you that?”

Message sent: “If we ever have a girl I want to name her Charlotte.”

Message received: “Gross.”

Message sent: "It's a classical name!"

Message received: "It's a whore's name. I like Gertrude."

Message sent: "Are you fucking with me right now?"

Message received: "Well I mean, not like, currently?"

Message sent: "Do you just expect me to give birth in 10 years to a 37-year-old German bartender, lederhosen and all?"

"Can you explain what endometriosis is?" Dr. Fischer clearly knew, but he always made a point to let me explain things. Dr. Fischer has never given up on making me his next protégée.

"It's when the tissue grows outside of your uterus, like on your pelvis," I said.

"What tissue?" he asked.

"The tissue that grows to comfort an egg. It's like a baby cushion."

He handed me the pictures of my body—black and white and red. "You can see here that you have some on your pelvis," he said, pointing to the red spots, "which is the most typical because of the location, but also your kidneys, and maybe a bit on the ovaries."

"Does it go away?"

"You can do laser surgery to remove it, but it grows back eventually," he said. He reached for my hand. "It could be worse, you could have some in your nose."

"That doesn't happen."

“Oh it does. I didn’t work with the patient personally, but there was a study done here at Mayo with a girl who had some in her nose.”

“So what, she just got chronic nosebleeds for a week every month?” I asked.

“I’m sure she had some form of treatment, and so will you.”

Message sent: “I want the Weasley family but like reversed. A shit ton of girls.”

Message received: “But one boy?”

Message sent: “I want him to have a lil boy to fish with.”

Message received: “You want to encourage him to do the activity that you hate the most in the world?”

Message sent: “Yeah cause I don’t hate him. I’ll chill in the boat with a glass and let them do their thing.”

Message received: “Do you think an adoption agency will let you do a bulk-sale? Like a Costco for babies?”

“Wait, I thought I had endometriosis,” I said. The lab room was dark, as usual. This was not *my* room. This room didn’t have my name on it. This room wasn’t inviting. This room was a closet at best, shoved in the basement of the local clinic. This lab assistant remained distant in the corner. She only spoke to tell me to move, breath, or remain still. The nurse, who once again remained unnamed, stood next to her assistant.

“You do,” the nurse said. “What you also have here in your ovary appears to be solid, meaning it’s something else. Can you come in for more testing?”

“Yeah, I guess,” I said. “I don’t have summer classes, so I’m good whenever...”

“Do you have someone to give you a ride after the testing?”

“Probably,” I said.

“Good, I don’t want you to deal with this alone.”

Message sent: “I’ve always liked the name Harrison, and James is my grandpa’s name, but I just realized Harrison James would be Harry James...”

Message sent: “...so I’d be naming my kid Harry James Potter.”

Message received: “Christ on a bicycle you’re a nerd. You’ll get one shot at best for conceiving and you’ll waste it on some nerdy ass name.”

“So what did they call it?” Dr. Fischer asked.

“A noncancerous ovarian mass,” I said.

“And you don’t want it removed?”

“If I get my ovaries removed, there’s zero chance at having a kid in the future.”

Dr. Fischer pulled his chair closer to me. “You have to realize that even with ovaries, you do not have functioning ones, so your chances are slim.”

“But there is a chance,” I said.

“I don’t want you to get them removed either,” he said. “You have a lot to offer a child.”

“Like shitty genes.”

“Like your intelligence and your compassion and dedication,” he said. “If you do not want them removed, then do not get them removed, but be prepared for amount of pain you’ll be in.”

“What else is new?”

Messages to My Body

Lightning strikes muffled across my skin,
shooting themselves throughout me
as if my nerves were their canvas.
Bones biting my wrists,
constantly aware of every segment
inching itself slowly against another.
Blood pumping harder but going nowhere.
Constriction loosening deeper into my legs,
like a widening river
forcing blood to pool in limbs,
causing the inability to feel anything
besides the red hot burn of gravity.
Lack of concentration:
no attention deficit,
just a deficit of blood flow to the brain.
Heart rater quadruples upon standing,
but at least when I black out it means its numb.
My heart beats faster,
compensating for the work of other organs,
but it doesn't work, you've never worked,
is what I wish I could say but I know you're trying.

Babe

“Are we doing anything for Valentine’s Day this year?” I asked.

“I work like always. I told you that,” he said. He was concentrating on the video game on the screen. He broadcasted it with the projector I had bought him for Christmas.

“What about the day before or after?”

“Why are you so fucking needy?”

“I don’t need much. Even a bear from the grocery store is fine with me.”

“That’s cliché. Next thing you know you’ll want flowers on your birthday.”

“My birthday was last month. I’m wearing the necklace you bought me.”

“Oh yeah, I guess you are. It’s your birth stone, do you like it?”

“My birthday is in January. This is your mom’s birthstone.”

“What the fuck did you say?”

“Nothing. I love it.”

I played with the necklace. I heard the door to the front of the house close, indicating that his brother had left. Now that his brother had gone, we had the house to ourselves.

He snapped his fingers, not looking away from the wall. “You know what to do.”

“You’re moving your lips but not signing the words,” my friend said. We were driving around in the dark, making loops around town on the gravel roads that worked with the corn fields to hold the town together.

“Cause I can’t sing for shit,” I said.

“It’s your favorite band,” he said.

“Yeah and I know all the words but I’d rather not have the memory of my terrible singing permanently damage your ears.”

“This is a safe place,” he said, laughing.

A safe place.

“What did you think of the dress picture I sent you?”

“Why does it matter?”

“It’s my prom dress. I wanted to know what you thought.”

He pulled it up on his phone again, not letting me close enough to see it. I wasn’t allowed to be close to his phone. In the picture, I was wearing a royal blue ball gown, the ruffles floating down into a teal bottom. It was sleeveless, tasteful.

“Your mom said I looked like Scarlett Johansson in it,” I said.

“You may have the same amount of tits as her, but unless it’s a bad angle, you definitely aren’t as fit.”

“She weighs 140 pounds, babe.” *Why do I know that? Why am I able to pull that up in my memory?* “I only weigh 120.”

“Kids, dinner is ready.”

“Be there in a second, mom.” Matt got up and left his room. From the bedroom, I could hear him tell his mom that I wouldn’t be joining them for dinner.

“They are my favorite band, babe,” I said. “They don’t come to Minnesota often. I want to see them in Sioux Falls.”

“Who are you going with?”

“Zach. He likes them too.”

“Where are you staying?”

“We’ll rent a hotel room. My cousin lives nearby; he’ll check us into the room.”

“You aren’t staying in a hotel room with Zach.”

“He’s your best friend. Don’t you trust him?”

“I don’t trust you!”

“I’ve only been texting him to make plans, I promise!”

He got up and locked the door to his room.

“You’ve always liked those tall skinny guys, haven’t you? What’s wrong with me?” he asked.

“I like a lot of different body types, babe.”

“But you like his, don’t you?”

“He’s a great guy.” *Wrong answer.* I was now on the bed, trapped under his weight.

“You can’t go to a concert with Zach. You are going with me.”

“You don’t even like All Time Low.”

“That’s why you need to buy my ticket, and pay for gas.”

“If you want to come with Zach and me—” My hair was suddenly in his fist. I tried to push him. I just dyed it a new color last week. It was still fragile, ripping out in his hand. He was probably happy about that though; he hated my new hair.

“Shut up and flip over.”

“Have you ever thought about just leaving?” Mike asked.

“No, why?” I replied.

Mike continued stirring the pot of noodles he was cooking for himself in his dingy, but large 3 bedroom apartment. I rested against the wall next to the stove, half-paying attention to the terrible movie he said I just had to see.

“You could marry me instead,” he said.

“There’s usually a step before marriage,” I said.

“I mean, there doesn’t have to be,” he said, not looking up.

“Cause arranged marriages work so well all the time.”

“You’d have the gaming set up of your dreams though.”

“Tempting,” I said.

“Do you like this year’s prom dress? It’s sexier.”

My second year’s dress was graceful, a sparkly teal and silver, fitted, accentuating my already prominent cleavage. It slid down my hips, brought out the gray in my eyes and the red in my hair. It didn’t do much for the red in my cheeks, but that was nonexistent nowadays and could be faked with makeup.

“Looks expensive,” Matt said, eating the entire pizza he had made for himself. He had not asked if I wanted any.

“It was more than last year.” I took a deep breath. “Guess what? This one is a size zero.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, last year I was a four.”

“Keep that weight off.”

“The doctors said I had to go back up to 115 at the very least. They put me on medication.”

“Did you tell someone?”

“I never told anyone, Matt. They can see it, but they think it’s because of my heart condition.” I paused. “Mike said he is worried about my weight.”

“He probably doesn’t like what it is doing to your tits.”

“He’s my best friend, he doesn’t know what my bra size is.”

“If they were really worried about your weight, they would stop you from gaining it. By the way, who’s pajama pants are those? They don’t look familiar. They better not be Mike’s.”

“They are my brother’s.”

My brother is 10.

We were in his car, both in the driver’s seat. We were in there a lot. He didn’t like it when his mom could hear us arguing. I had complained again, so I was forced to be on top.

“I love you,” I said, something I had said countless times before.

Nothing.

“Matt?”

Nothing.

I climbed back into my seat, an incoherent rant escaped me. I was not surprised; he did this maybe once every other month. Still, I had the nerve to tell him that telling someone you didn’t love them anymore while you were having sex was, at best, tacky. He grabbed my neck in retaliation.

“If you want me to love you, then stop this fucking bitching.” He let go. “Again.”

“I don’t want to go again,” I said.

“I thought you loved me.”

“I do, but—”

He started crying.

“If you loved me, you’d keep going,” he said.

“Stop, please, I’m just not in the mood after all of that.”

He continued crying and insulting me until I gave in.

I sat in Bridgeman Hall, reading the course offerings that the Honors Department recognized as generals, planning my first semester’s courses instead of listening to the Director of Honors explain why I should stay in the program. I already knew I would stay since I was automatically admitted based on my ACT score.

My mom nudged me, and tried to sneak over to my other side so I could whisper into her one nondeaf ear. It wasn’t sneaky at all.

“He’s cute,” she said, pointing at some short guy in bright pink shorts.

“I’m still dating Matt when I get here,” I said.

“That’s what every couple says, hun,” she said. “He’s smart. Maybe he’s going to be a doctor.”

“Well, so am I, so I don’t need to marry one. I’m not going to be in second place.”

“Whose lipstick is this?” I asked. His white sheets were stained with a glittery pink tint.

“My mom’s,” he said.

“Your mom doesn’t wear glitter makeup. She’s in her 50s.”

“I had some friends from work over last night. If you’re going to be so on my dick about things, the least you could do is be on my actual dick.”

“Whose lipstick is this?” I repeated. “Is this Emily’s?”

“So what if it is?”

“We’ve been together for four years!”

“Well, if it makes you feel better, she isn’t as good as you.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“What the hell is wrong with me? You’re the one moving away for school! What the hell am I supposed to do while you’re gone?”

“I don’t even leave for three months!”

“Watch your fucking tone with me, you entitled bitch. You cheated on me first.”

“I was raped. I was held at knife point. What was I supposed to do, get my throat slit?”

“If you loved me, you would’ve! Instead you let him do what he wanted.”

“I could’ve died!”

“You’re just making an excuse for cheating on me. Nothing is ever your fault.”

I’m in a blue mesh shirt; my full hips hugged by black jeans. I’m talking to the one other English major at the party, one hand on my drink and one hand on my boyfriend’s leg.

“I’ve always thought your group was, like, the best group,” the other English major says, slurring between words.

“Why didn’t you say something years ago? We’re going out on Saturday. You can come with us,” I say.

Eric nodded. “Someone needs to actually take her to a bar and not a basement,” he says.

“There’s like—what?—thirty English majors? We gotta stick together,” I say.

My phone buzzes. I check it and take another sip of whatever the hell my boyfriend brought me. *Vodka and strawberries? Who cares, he made sure there was no caffeine in it for me.*

“It’s Matt,” I say. The music slows down, as if it was suddenly muffled by the other people’s smoke. I am aware of the speed at which my hands are shaking, but unaware if it is a symptom of panic or alcohol.

My slow-motion vision abruptly catches up to the world when Eric takes my phone and puts it in his pocket.

“I’m feeling a little light. I’m gonna grab some pizza. You want some?” the guy asks.

“No thanks,” I say.

“Watching your weight?” he asks, laughing at his own joke.

“Nah bud, she’s perfect the way she is,” Eric says, squeezing my hand.

“I love you,” I say, as the one other guy I know heads upstairs.

Eric seems taken back by my sudden need to exclaim this, even though it’s something I have said several times before.

“I love you too,” he says.

Messages to My (ex)Fiancé

You hit me up every few months.

Hey babe, where have you been?

When are you coming back?

Those annoying spiked vibrations from my phone
constant reminders,

constants like the scars on my arms,

ripped-out patches of my hair that never seem to grow back right.

Sometimes bruised memories of you

fade away and maybe

I get some peace. But you know just when to strike

and it's not long before the messages come back

an all too familiar punch to the face:

Sweetheart you can't run from me forever,

Who's going to protect you?

But you don't care about whoever says *do*
we were together

That anticipated voice in your head that just screams

Hit.

Her.

Again

“I cannot believe you’re doing this,” I said. We both stood on the carpet littered by our clothes. The music from before still played in the background, no longer covering up the romance but rather the destruction of it. The room dimly lit by a single two-wick candle on the bedside table and the occasional headlights from the street poking through the curtains.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

I simply stood and stared at him. I was not sure what to say, because it had been more than anyone had ever said. “You’re doing this *now*?” I said.

“There’s no good time to do these things.”

“There’s better times.” I paused. “You promised you wouldn’t leave,” I said, raising my voice with every point. “You promised me. I didn’t have to tell you about the attempt. You told me if I told you the truth you wouldn’t leave me.”

“This isn’t because of your mental health—”

“It always is,” I interjected. “You don’t want to deal with someone who’s depressed. No one does. That’s why they always go.” He said nothing. “If it’s not about the pill incident, then what else is it about? Is there a girl?”

“No, no, not at all,” he said.

“What is wrong with me?” I asked.

“It’s not about you, it’s about me.”

“I cannot believe that is the actual answer you just gave me.”

“It’s just the way I am sometimes,” he said.

This continued for hours. The back-and-forth of a breaking hearts.

“I am not safe,” I said. It was six in the morning, the sunrise coming through now, lighting up the face I no longer wanted to see.

“Have you taken your sleeping pills?”

“Well, yeah, we were supposed to sleep.”

“I’ll drive you home.”

The ride back to campus was a four minute drive that took thirty. As he pulled up to the hall, I turned. “I will not come back once you’ve realized the mistake you have made.”

“You won’t have to,” he said.

I walked, alone, straight back to the bathroom. I washed whatever was left of my make-up and him off myself. I opened my cabinet drawer, and looked down at my supplies.

“I am not safe,” I said to myself, as I reached my hand into the drawer.

That was the day my eating disorder relapsed, again.

Messages to Our Addictions

How many times must we do this?
When do we finally admit to ourselves
that there is a reason to our relapsing?
After how many times,
does it stop being the last time?
Is it after comfort ends
and nauseating begins;
or when you stop being my sense of comfort
and I start being the source of guilt?
“I promise, baby, one last time—”
promises don’t mean shit;
yeah, sure, we’re ancient history,
but those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.
You know this is not what I signed up for,
you know you are the only one
who can convince me to stop
yet here you are,
welcoming back the breakdown with open arms and a closed heart.
If the deterioration wasn’t enough to divorce us,
why would the loss of my self-perception
or my energy
or my freedom?
But don’t worry,
the cycle will stop spinning eventually,
once it’s forced to.

Star-Crossed

“I can’t leave the dorms after 11,” I whispered. You were holding me in my bed, spinning my hair around your fingers. Every time I snuggled closer the fabric of your swim trunks crinkled, a reminder of the beautiful failure that happened when you tried to teach me to swim earlier that day.

“No one will know that you’re gone. You’re not the one on duty,” you replied.

“I’m supposed to fill out a form if I’m going to be off campus at night. What if there’s an emergency?”

“There’s never an emergency. This is the summer. There’s only about twenty people on campus, and you’re one of nine RAs.” After some more badgering, we agreed to go. I threw on my dad’s old gray army sweatshirt that was about three sizes too big. It fit more like a dress; you could barely see my black shorts underneath. You kept teasing me about how I’m always cold and grabbed a blanket off my bed, throwing it over my head. I tried to walk to the car, with a blanket covering my eyes and your hand leading mine.

You helped me into your truck; I was too short to climb in. As we drove out of Bemidji, the only light was the blazing 1:00 a.m. on your car radio. We listened to old Shinedown songs, songs from back when Brent Smith was still doing cocaine and making good music. I told you the story of when my friends visited this place last year. They said they saw an alien. You laughed at me and we talked about the possibility. I said I get scared easily, and that if something spooky happens I’ll need you to hold me. You took the chance to tell me a ghost story from your childhood. The entire time you kept one hand on mine and one hand on the wheel, letting me squeeze it every time the story got too intense for me.

We pulled into a dock belonging to someone we didn't know, maybe thirty minutes outside of Bemidji. You helped me out of the car and let me jump into your arms. When you caught me, you spun me around, and we heard an animal scream.

"Is it safe to be this far out in the woods at night?" I asked, still off the ground with my forehead to yours.

"Are you scared already?"

"I don't want to get attacked by an animal," I said. You chuckled.

We laid out on the dock, my head on your chest just like it always was when we cuddled. I always laid this way because listening to your heart was my favorite thing to do; no one knew it unless you told them about the issues with your heart, but your heart did a triple beat every now and then. I was getting good at knowing when it would jump. I usually traced fingers along the tattoo on your chest, because it was raised due to your poor care of it when you were eighteen. I'm sure I traced it subconsciously as I looked at the sky.

There was no more light pollution. That night was the clearest sky I had ever seen. In front of us, the sky was speckled with stars. To our left, the Northern Lights were visible over the tree line. To our right, we watched lightning run across the sky. It was all I could have ever asked for in one night, and I'm sure you knew that.

"What's that star doing?" I said, pointing to a bright orb that was moving fast diagonally and in no pattern.

"Probably a planet," you said.

"What kind of planet moves that erratically?" I teased back, suggesting that it had to be the alien that my friends saw last year. "Besides, it not showing up on my star chart as a planet or even as a satellite."

“Your phone’s star chart?” you asked, pulling me closer.

“My phone’s *three dollar* star chart.”

“Who’s the biology major here?” you joked back. I opened my mouth to fire back with the fact that I went to space camp, and that wildlife biology doesn’t have anything to do with astronomy, but as soon as I tried to speak the meteor shower we came out to see started hammering the sky. I wish I could’ve recorded the moment forever: the differences in the sky, the streaks of meteors painted over, the colors in the corners, being here with you. I realized you weren’t looking at the sky—you were looking at me.

“Are you counting the meteors? You’re moving your lips to count.” I nodded. “You’re such a dork. I love you.”

“Really?” I asked. You kissed me. I don’t remember how long we kissed or how long it took me to answer, but I know I didn’t answer until you pulled away long enough to give me an opportunity to respond.

“I love you too.”

Message to Myself

i did not need a man to save me
it just happened to be a man
that held the umbrella
over me
during the ceaseless storm
of bullshit, bad luck, and bad people
and took me in
despite that i was weighed
down
by
drenched clothes
absorbing so much of the storm
they became a second
uncomfortable but indistinguishable skin
he could not stop the rain
but
he could shelter me
enough to downgrade
from a hurricane
to a tropical storm
and that is all i needed

Post Reflection & Analysis

I knew the general topic I wanted to write about, but everything that happened afterwards is simply because it was what felt right to me. I am admitting personal confessions in this project that very few others know the details of. No one other than my partner, not even my closest friends, knew about my EDNOS. I felt because of his presence, he needed to be included. Also, as cheesy as it is, when Prof. Gibbon asked me to include something that made me happy to help break-up the tragedy, he was all I could think of. I worked hard to illustrate that I did not need a man to save me, but not downplay the role he has had in improving my life.

As usual, the ending of this project was the most difficult. I knew I wanted to end on “Message to Myself” but I could not figure out what should go before. The 5 pages before *Star-Crossed* were the most difficult pages to write; I knew the beginning and end, and had to construct a story for the middle that met my expectations. I believe this was because I knew I wanted to write about EDNOS, but did not feel qualified to comment on something that was only dealt with not that long ago. I only managed to get a small amount of content out of that idea, but once I started writing about endometriosis, everything came together.

Original Thesis Proposal

My goal is to create a portfolio based on disability and its impact on the lives of the affected, their families, their friends, careers. Such disabilities range from depression and anxiety to heart conditions. No matter the “severity” of a condition, it impacts people in similar ways; someone’s life can be destroyed by OCD just as easily as by lupus. The way medical conditions creep into the lives of everyone around the afflicted person is often stigmatized by society and those who complain are often considered weak. That should not be the case. If more writing about these experiences, especially writing about rare or often “unheard of” conditions, starts to become accessible, I truly believe it would dramatically help everyone involved. Not only would people feel more accepted for who they are and what their lives have become, but the general population would become more educated and accepting. The goal of writing is to share, and that is exactly what I plan to do, through a mix of creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry.

The works I will create will come from my own experiences and the experiences of others around me. I will tell the stories of the journey I face with my own medical conditions, as well as its effect on my friends, family, and other relationships. Many medical conditions are considered invisible. I cannot count the times I have been told “but you don’t look sick” by people who do not even know me. I want to share these stories with someone. I want to show people who are also invisible that I can see them, that they are not hidden. I want to show people who do not understand what it is that they are failing to see. The only way for me to do this is through writing.

I have been inspired to create by many authors throughout my life. The Modernist literary movement of literature inspired me first, to make art for art’s sake. When I was first diagnosed, I wanted to create something out of what I was going through. Then my condition did not go

away, and I came to the realization that life would be like this forever. That's when the stories of Jay Asher and other contemporary young-adult writers came into action. The cynicism of these writers and the urge to question the world took over as I became bitterer. This transition must be chronicled in my writing, and I plan to include works inspired by both movements in my Senior Capstone project.

I also want to create for others besides myself. Yes, writing is incredibly therapeutic, but I am not the only one who can benefit from the theme of my proposal. A whole community of disabled people surrounds me; they support me and I support them. We have a bond, just like any other strong community. I want to create for them. I want to show people that they are not alone. I want to show people that they can fight. I want to show people that just because they may be disabled forever does not mean that their lives are over.

I often tell people that J.K. Rowling is an inspiration to me. This is met with groans or silence, due to how many people she has inspired and the assumption that I somehow want to write the next *Harry Potter*. I know this isn't possible, and it is not my intention. What I want to do is influence someone the way she influenced me. Those stories made me the person I am today, and if I can do the same for even one person, I will consider myself a success.

Sharing stories like the ones I want to put in my capstone is incredibly personal. It is hard for anyone to look deeply into their lives and examine what has changed. Reflection can be traumatizing; it can open wounds some didn't even know they had, but reflection is a necessity. Depicting this raw emotion to the world is how I plan to change it.

My works will be done throughout my courses at Bemidji State. Some pieces have already been critiqued in classes during Fall 2016, and others will be critiqued during Spring of

2017. Because of the variety, I plan to include around 8-12 works. I will combine my capstone and honors thesis during my capstone class in Fall 2017, which will be my final semester at Bemidji State.

Works Cited

Asher, Jay. *Thirteen Reasons Why*. New York, Razorbill, 2007.

Thirteen Reasons Why, also referred to as *13 Reasons Why*, is a 2007 young adult fiction story about a girl named Hannah Baker who committed suicide. Hannah sent tapes to every person who played a hand in her death, and the story follows Clay, who had a crush on Hannah and just received the tapes. Clay realizes that if just one person had done something differently, or if one person had spoken up, none of this would have ever happened. This novel was Jay Asher's first and was a major success in the young adult scene. He has since penned two more novels, and *Thirteen Reasons Why* will be turned into a Netflix series this March.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, Scribner, 2013.

The Great Gatsby is one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classics. Often taught to many students throughout many different grades, this story is a shining example of the Modernist movement. *The Great Gatsby* is bursting with imagery, symbolism, and commentary. Some critics often claim this work to be Fitzgerald's best. The poetic language used by Fitzgerald throughout *The Great Gatsby* has been an inspiration to many writers for decades. Fitzgerald was also born in Minnesota—a fact many Minnesotans often boast.

Rowling, J. K. *The Harry Potter Series*. London, Bloomsbury, 2007.

The *Harry Potter* books have been an inspiration to an entire generation of writers. Summarizing this entire series would be pointless, as very few people alive have not read these modern classics. J.K. Rowling's personal story also inspires writers, due to the fact that she wrote herself out of poverty. *Harry Potter* continues to be a smash hit with both

adults and children, as the wonderful writing, the suspense, lovable characters, and plot twists of this series pull readers in.