

Lost and Found

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Honors Thesis

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Thesis Proposal
Spring 2010

Through writing, life can be explored. As an artistic medium, writing is a helpful tool in expressing experiences, thoughts, and processes. Often, the act of writing can be valuable in the search for understanding and perspective. It can sometimes take on a mysterious role by revealing things to us, things that are not on the surface. Writing reflects more than just fleeting emotions, flippant thoughts, and errant ideas. When those things are put together in a cohesive way, with the assistance of setting, dialogue, and other literary elements, a bigger picture is formed. When a bigger picture is formed by a piece of writing, the work extends beyond the page, turning into a reflection of the human experience. When this happens, the writing transforms into something much grander.

For my honors thesis I would like to explore human understanding through writing. This creative thesis will touch upon many aspects of life, but will also focus more specifically on the way we experience loss in different situations. These situations can be, for example, the loss of a loved one, a house fire, or change of season. This thesis will include original non-fiction essays and poetry, each of which comment upon the topic of loss in some way. Through the nature of the creation process, this thesis will take a more biographical approach than critical or theoretical approaches. I would like to use various polished pieces that I have created throughout my career as a scholar of English, and also include new creations that fit in with my theme.

This topic is important to my artistic development because it explores earlier work as well as newer writing. The pieces will be arranged to show the progression and growth I have experienced as a writer throughout my college career, and will reflect new experiences that the time period encompasses. This thesis will reflect me as an artist because my work naturally

comments upon this theme. Loss is something that comes out in writing that may not be visible in other facets of life, and perhaps cannot be as easily expressed through other mediums. My writing often chooses its own topic, which reveals certain things about me as a writer. By exploring this theme that is natural to my work, I will also discover a greater understanding of myself as an artist and as a person. In this, I will also explore a very important element of life and what it means to be human.

Each of the books included in my working bibliography involve loss in some way. Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* includes the loss of a several primary and secondary characters. In *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson the character is raped at a party and has to deal with the loss of her virginity as well as several friendships. At the beginning of the novel she has also lost her sense of identity. In Kate Jacob's novel, *The Friday Night Knitting Club* the group of women suffer from the sudden loss of their friend to cancer. In *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery, the main character has lost her parents before the beginning of the novel and loses her surrogate father at the end of the novel. Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, set in Germany during the holocaust, depicts loss in an interesting and striking way. Loss of human life is brought up throughout the book since it is narrated by Death.

The losses depicted in these works reflect upon a meaningful universal. They portray an inescapable aspect of life. My thesis will attempt to join ranks with these works on loss to help explore loss as part of what it means to be human. Everyone at some time in his or her life will have to deal with loss in some form. Many of us will experience loss in several different forms. In the case of human death, the question is not if; it is either when or how. Everyone living will die. Because of this fact, often grief is a large part of life. The discussion of this topic can be

furthered through writing, as it reveals truth, accurately filters thoughts and emotions, and illuminates darkness.

Working Bibliography

Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993. Print.

Halse Anderson, Laurie. *Speak*. New York: Penguin Group, 1999. Print.

Jacobs, Kate. *The Friday Night Knitting Club*. New York: The Penguin Group, 2007. Print.

Montgomery, L. M. *Anne of Green Gables*. Bantam Skylark, 1992. Print.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print.

Introducing Lost and Found

This thesis has been a challenge and a joy. The topic is difficult, yet so crucial to personal understanding. The essays and poems deal with a difficult subject, yet one that cannot be ignored. Within this project, I've experimented with poetry. I've never considered myself a poet until I began putting together this work. Through the use of poetry, I've experienced one of the ways in which writing can lead to surprises. I think poetry is a great medium for this type of material because of its ability to handle heavy subjects through brief passages of text. Through the exploration I've done with this thesis, I've fallen in love with poetry as a form of writing.

While the main theme of this thesis is loss, humor and hope can also be found, as they are present on the road of understanding and a large part of life's journey and the way in which humans experience the different lessons that come their way. There is much more to the process than trauma or melancholy.

It is my hope with this work that I am able to contribute to the discussion on this topic, in a personal and insightful way, which will allow readers to contemplate their own relationships to this topic as a whole. Loss is something everyone has or will experience in his or her lifetime, and the discussion on this subject should not be undervalued or avoided.

Changes

Change is a natural part of life. Often when something changes, it may seem like something has been lost. During one's college experience many things change, as it is a very important time in one's life. There is a tendency to avoid change, yet one must embrace it in order to continue and grow. Seasons constantly change, and while growing up, friendships and relationships also become altered.

The Smell of Worms
Fall 2009

In my leather jacket I shiver,
Thinking of winter;
It's already cold.

Today we have rain instead of snow,
That comparison, and
The smell of worms to console us.

My feet hit the wet sidewalk, pounding against
The pavement of
At least my ankles are dry and my breath invisible.

I'm walking, mobile,
Moving proof of change and progress
Truth only a turn in season can bring.

Change
Fall 2006

I have heard before the only thing that remains constant in this world is continual change. Yet, for a substantial portion of my life I hadn't experienced the cliché. Change happened, but just not for me. I had the same family, the same friends, and was living in the same remote, Northern location as ever. I looked for a visual indication of change in my life and couldn't produce anything definite. Of course, I couldn't see myself as clearly as an outsider; the alterations in my life were so gradual, seeing the "same" thing everyday wouldn't prove to be outstanding. I was under the impression everyone was changing around me, but I remained the same. I have since realized it is those subtle changes in someone or something, which make all of the difference. Maybe one doesn't have to get plastic surgery to change her, one really just has to go on with day to day life, and to humbly allow those experiences to enrich her mind, and influence the person she is becoming.

My writing has changed. I no longer make the common pronoun antecedent mistake that was so common in my work. At first I was not even aware it existed, and now I am consciously making note of it everywhere (no wonder I had made it before). I no longer have long permed hair, and can drive a car legally. I used to love Harry Potter books, and still have affection for them, but, lately, I can only read them once or twice without them getting too easy and boring. My fingernails are no longer constantly painted, and my face is not constantly primed. Changes have also become more obvious to me as I inspect my life under a critical eye.

I have had experiences I would like to forget, and some I wish I had given more of my attention to. Sara, a girl who used to be my best friend, and still is sometimes, has the philosophy that she never regrets anything she has done, because those experiences helped to

form who she is today. While that philosophy has some amount of merit, I wonder if she says it to make herself feel better about some of the poor choices she has made. We all have the same body, skin, and face everyday, but our cells are constantly changing, growing, dying and renewing. Our appearance rarely looks exactly the same either. Moods and conditions happen.

I do not park in the same spot everyday, and although the walk might feel the same to my legs, it is different. My route differs depending upon the weather. There are different people smoking outside of Hagg-Sauer hall as I walk to class. My classmates say different things and I learn different things from my classes. As I take a step back from life, it becomes much easier to take in. My first month of college is almost drawing to a close, and already I have learned a lot. I have taken in much experience, which will change who I will be. While each of us becomes encompassed into our own self-centered activities it is hard to grasp the concept of change, not only within ourselves, but in society. One of my honors professors said something the first day of class that has encouraged my own thoughts on change, "If we are able to picture a past that is much different than the present, then we will be able to picture a future that is much different than the present." Things do vary from one day to the next and will without ceasing whether or not they are noticed now, or if they take decades to be recognized.

Change notices us and doesn't care what we have to say about it. Sometimes we do notice change in our lives, and care, but are left helpless. I cried as my friends and I grew apart. Crying didn't alter anything. People change and so do relationships. Change can either indicate progress or instigate undoing. I moved on and accepted the changes in my life and eventually have grown to be okay with being independent from my old ideals of relationships. As change comes in many forms we have to accept it, or live in bitter misery. Sometimes, we are lucky it is not so noticeable.

My Best Friends
Fall 2008

My best friend is in Germany. She has been there since the beginning of September and I don't believe I can yet conceive how much I will miss her. It is still too early. Sara's contract is for six months and she will probably stay in Europe longer than that if she likes her family. She is an Au Pair. Sara and I have known each other since dreaded middle school and it is only a true friend that will like you through the awkward years. Her family is my family too. I hope Sara knows I am happy for her. I say it over and over and over and over, wanting her to believe it. I want to encourage her because she is my friend, and it is the truth.

My other best friend Caitlin wonders if I think Sara has left us behind, but I told her "No." Caitlin is in Fargo. She works at the Fargo Public Library and likes it so much she is going to grad school next year for her M.L.S. degree. Caitlin and I did P.S.E.O. together, the nerdy, Hermione-like girls we were, and still are. Caitlin and I used to skip choir class together. Our teacher didn't even know we left campus during his class. We also memorized the presidents together in A.P. U. S. History class, made fun of the historical reenactment video we sometimes had to watch, and laughed, perhaps too much, at the proceedings of the clowns sitting next to us. I most likely will go to grad school too. We both agree that it is a cop out to avoid the "real world."

Casey is married. Last year she became a child bride and moved to Flagstaff, Arizona. I still consider her a best friend, although we don't talk much. We directed a one-act play together in high school. "The Big Dipper," it was called, was less than mediocre. Casey and I used to dream together. One night we sat on a bench in her parents' garden gazing at the big dipper and talking about the future. Life is different now. To be honest, I think she will get divorced. I

might be wrong. I am cynical and harsh, but her husband is less than desirable, and her judgment is poor. Despite the distance, her heart-shaped face is lovable. Every day in History of the American Southwest when Dr. Murphy mentions Flagstaff, Arizona, I think of her.

Cheri studies in England. She has always been a traveler. She has always had an appetite for foreign food and accented men. I know the least about this best friend. As much as she experiences the world, she also hides herself away from it. She doesn't share much. I don't even know her major, some best friend that I am; I hope that she does. Her mother was my Girl Scout troop leader in elementary school, and hers was the house that held all of the parties each weekend in high school. They weren't those kinds of parties. Each was unique, and they rarely involved illegal substances for minors. One summer we stole large pieces of paper from the middle school and created pictures, masterful paintings for her basement walls. They were beautiful, a bonding experience. I will never have the same connection with Cheri as I have with the other girls, but I hope she has that with someone. I do love her.

I am lucky to have a few best friends and many good friends. Life has changed so much for all of us; it is different. After graduation, Cheri's mother got remarried, sold our old party house, and moved to Alaska. Nothing, not even going to separate colleges, was more symbolic than that. I have learned that the building which had housed the impish activities of our youth is now used for house-church services. I shudder to think that the posters of Aragon and Darth Vader, and our own artwork, are off the walls.

I am the only one of the girls that stayed in Bemidji, but they all come back. There needs to be some sort of base left standing, especially since the house has sold. In high school we had adventures together, and now in college, all of our adventures are apart. I am reminded that I wrote a paper of the same topic in College Writing 1. I guess it is a fact that these women are

always on my mind, wherever I go, whatever I do, and usually whenever I write. Someday, when I am older and less judgmental, I will write a book or even a book series about us and our adventures. I will have to change a few things to not get sued of course, but the book will still be real. I will chronicle everything that did and didn't happen. I will write in detail and dialogue. Perhaps, I will be able to write everything that I had wanted to happen.

Material
Fall 2008

I remember the pants that I wore the first night that I kissed him. They were light blue and fit my body perfectly. It was a night of getting everything I thought I wanted, it was a night of celebration, and a night of perfectly bad judgment—but oh how I relished that eve in my light denim jeans! For a time after that, those pants remained my favorite article of clothing. To put them on was an instant boost of confidence. I wore them often. Then one day, I threw them away. I outgrew more than just the fabric, although perhaps it had taken too long. Truthfully, those pants weren't looking as good as they had when I bought them. They were faded, tattered and torn, and overall, not really worth saving. Once I had finally decided to throw them away no attachment lingered.

I had already changed and was freezing in the van in my white, cotton pajamas. The other girls were wearing dresses of mine. One of them was black. It had a small layer of red crinoline under it. The other dress was light green. It was the horrible, elegant strapless bridesmaid's dress I had worn earlier that year at a wedding. The dress looked better on her though. I don't remember what he had worn. We were all good friends, bored, and adventurous. I threw away those pajamas long ago, but I still have both of the dresses.

The dress I wore winter formal night was gold. My mother had pointed at it in the store, and remarkably, I agreed that I loved it. It reminded me of Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*. I wore fancy, long, white gloves, and dangly earrings. My hair was curled by a familiar girl into ringlets. I loved wearing the dress, although the night was an interesting disaster. The DJ played bad music, as two of my party crawled under the table, turning up in inappropriate places. Later in my gold dress, I leaned against him on the couch. I could tell he was smiling, though I

couldn't see his face. His arm was carefully wrapped around my middle. The dress hangs in my closet and I long to loan it to someone deserving. I hope that she could have a similar evening in it.

The skirt and top that I wore when I graduated high school looked just fine. The skirt was navy blue and I had bought it at a thrift store. The shirt was an innocent light blue. The only quality piece was the set of red high heels visible under my gown. Mostly, I didn't care what I wore. It was miraculous I didn't choose to wear black. I wanted to look pleasant enough, but I thought the occasion was pointless. It was all a waste of effort, a waste of money. The energy could be put to better means. I didn't see how I had achieved anything worth celebrating. I hadn't really tried, gotten A's anyways. I hated the occasion. I hated the party at which I was forced to be the guest of honor. I hated everyone and everything. I only still have the heels. I don't know where the rest of that ensemble went.

The polyester dress shirt didn't fit quite right. I had bought it in a hurry. I had bought it because it looked decent and it wasn't morbid black. It was pink. Pink was my grandma's favorite color, wasn't it? Would her favorite color distract her from thinking of grandpa? Could it at least make her smile? For once I didn't want to shop for clothes. Searching for funerary attire somehow isn't very satisfying. I didn't even like polyester. It scratched my skin, but I paid no attention to fabric when I tried it on in the dressing room. Good enough. I haven't worn it since. I guess I haven't found the right occasion.

Clothes can be reminders. The shades of color, texture of fabric, or fit are accessories to the memories. The garments can be symbolic of feelings and mood. Perhaps I am looking into this too much. I know that not everyone would feel the same. Are they really just clothes—

disposable and necessary? Sure, they may just be tiny threads of fiber sewn together into differing patterns, but isn't that what we all are?

A Few Words about Slippers and Kitty ThrasHer Ass
Spring 2010

Cats can be more than pets.
They can be friends,
Comfort,
And honest love, even when you
Abandon them for hours,
All day long.

Friends can be more than friends.
They can be super-heroes,
Fearless,
Pull-you-up-by-your-bootstraps,
Even when you haven't been true friends
For years.

Both of my best friends are cats, but
Only one meows.

Kitty ThrasHer Ass (of Roller Derby fame) is
Opinionated and loyal. She makes great mixed
CDs and has a never-ending supply of
Organic chocolate.

Slippers is a little beast from the Humane Society.
(She's the one that meows) and she's
Soft, cuddly, and fluffy.
She bites.

Both girls are here and there and everywhere
For me.

A Poetry Slam from a Woman to Her True Love's Lover
Spring 2010

(Take that Albert!)

I was the
One
Who
Let you have her.
You're
Welcome.
Forget about impressing Mom
And Dad.
They are small beans
Compared to me.

You take her
Away
Almost every
Day.
It's ok
As long as she is happy.
Meanwhile, I am reduced
To having girls' night
With a
Boy.

Yes
I may be jealous.
It should be
Expected. She's a
Prize and she was mine
Before the introduction of
Guys
Like
You.
And you are lucky that I do
Like you.

Just remember, and
Don't
Forget!
Although
You are her
BF,

I am watching you and
I will
ALWAYS
Be her B
FF,
Which
Is one more F than
You.

People in Particular

People are perhaps the most difficult for us to lose. The bonds and relationships human beings form are unique and hard to replace. Sometimes the loss of a person in our lives can be the result of different things such as a breakup of a romance, or the death of a friend. Whatever the cause of the loss of a person in our lives, he or she will be missed. This is also one of the most common types of loss.

Multiple Choice(s)
Fall 2009

I miss: a. you b. us c. me d. all of the above (answer: d)

I am filled with: a. hope b. resentment c. confusion d. all of the above (answer: d)

I feel like: a. shit b. eating cookie dough ice cream c. taking a bath d. all of the above
(answer: d)

I want: a. you b. us c. me d. clarity

The answer is always d.

Sweethearts
Spring 2010

High school sweethearts
Sometimes turn
Sour.

People change and develop,
Also grow
Apart.

(And that's ok with me
As long as
You

Know that you
Were loved by
Somebody
Good.)

The Great Divide
Spring 2010

We'll never escape that day.
You came over and we sat
And talked
About you and me,
Everything and nothing too.

You remember it, I'm sure.
Maybe not quite like I do,
But you
Were there breathing too.
You were close enough to touch.

And we did touch, didn't we?
Hand upon hand, tear to tear
We were.
Past tense, plural: were.
Minutes ticked away from us.

Soon all time and space were gone.
Dreams were long gone, ever gone.
You left
With a long goodbye,
The great divide toward

Freedom.

Hindsight Spring 2010

Call it what you wish: attentiveness, bullshit, woman's intuition, or incredible super powers. Occasionally I just know things. It's a gift I'm still figuring out. It doesn't happen very often. I can't turn it on or off and usually I don't learn I am right about something until later. But it happens. Sure, there are plenty of things I've been completely oblivious to: shady, untrustworthy people, family and friends in distress. I don't know everything, and I am not able to flip the switch on when it happens. If I look back on those times, though, I can notice a general tone in ignorance in my attitude, a tone of ignoring any possible sign that I should have caught onto if I were paying attention, if I had wanted to know. I'm sure not many people would believe me about my gift. You are reading this right now, for instance, and think I'm full of shit. Perhaps you think I'm crazy or lying, but I'm fine with being those things in your eyes. I'm a skeptic too and I wouldn't believe me either. Yet, it's about me and I know it's true. It's something I've learned about myself. I didn't look for it, plant it, nor wish it into existence. It's just something I've noticed. I'm scientific about the diagnosis and my theory is based upon inductive reasoning. I'll never be able to prove it to you, but I've gathered a strong enough case to convince myself.

This is how it works. For an unexplainable reason something or someone will come to my attention. The origin is uncertain, but it's always something I haven't thought about in a while. Sometimes I've never thought of the possibility. I don't know why I think about a specific person. I don't usually think anything of them initially. I get a feeling of concern about them, or a gut reaction is produced for an unknown reason. Perhaps examples would explain the phenomenon more convincingly.

The first time my gut came to my attention was the day my sister's house caught on fire. I was hanging out with friends when fire trucks, police cars, and ambulances passed our vehicle. I yelled at my friend Cheri to pull over to the side of the road for more than just an issue of safety and etiquette. Something was wrong. Someone I cared about was in trouble. I immediately thought of the family members who lived in the direction the emergency vehicles were going. I wanted to say something about it but I never did. Even though I had a very strong feeling I ignored it. I viewed the feeling as irrational and didn't want to voice such craziness. I didn't get the phone call about what really happened until an hour later. Yes, those trucks were going to my sister's house, responding to her fire. While I was eating Dairy Queen, she rushed her children to safety.

Another time a gut feeling took over me was at a party with the same friends who were in the car. One of my friends disappeared to the bathroom, which wouldn't be so peculiar, except she was there for an uncharacteristically long time. She also went to the bathroom in the basement instead of the one on the same level as us. After a while, being a good friend, I checked on her. No one else noticed her absence. I was silly and knocked on the door, covering up my concern with joking. I asked her how she was doing. She didn't say much but quickly opened the door. The sink was on, water running, and she wasn't washing her hands. The toilet flushed simultaneously. She quickly shut the water off and appeased my silliness. She followed me upstairs to be with everyone else. I wondered if something was wrong. I had a bad feeling. I had seen her eat an awful lot of chocolate cake earlier in the evening. For some reason I knew she was bulimic. The weird incident and my gut feeling combined and made sense. I didn't confront her, aware of the gravity of the accusation. I still wanted to be wrong. I hoped I was wrong. I confided my suspicion in our other friend, Sara. I said I wasn't sure (although I felt it),

and we kept the possibility to ourselves. A couple weeks later Casey confessed. We didn't say a thing to her about our theory, and she confessed.

I should have seen the breakup between Josh and me coming, but I didn't want to believe the signs, although they were everywhere. It was foolishness and ignorance on my part to remain that oblivious. Ignorance wasn't bliss. However, it happened. I stopped thinking about him and grieving him a long time ago. He's not a part of my life. We're not even friends on Facebook. I don't want to go back to him and I never will. I just know those things. I haven't thought of him in months, but for some reason his name and personage recently kept cropping up in my mind. My thoughts of him were random and for no reason. These things had caused me to ask mutual friends how he was doing, which I'd never done before. After a bar conversation with a friend of ours I found out Josh was not doing very well. There was more drama in his life than ever. A girl attempted suicide in his honor, and if he hadn't called someone she'd have bled to death. At the hospital she didn't wish to see him, but told his friend it was his fault. What a burden to bear on one's conscience. He was a nice enough guy to me, and I can't convince myself a suicide was his fault. Sure, he may have been guilty of many things, he may have made her feel poorly (I honestly don't know any more information), but he cannot take the sole responsibility of an unrelated person's efforts. She was responsible for her own actions, just as Dido was responsible for hers in *The Aeneid*, and Juliet her own in *Romeo and Juliet*. It was sure something that would affect him. After I learned of this crisis, I knew I'd thought about him because of it. I knew he was going through something pretty bad and I didn't know what.

And I've noticed something about my gift. In all of these instances, I've had gut feelings about people I've loved. I'll always look up to my big sister just because she is my big sister. I do love her. Early in our friendship Casey had wrapped herself around my heart, and I'll always

love her, even though now we are miles and states apart. Even though I've wondered if it was true love, I do know now I loved Josh. He'll always be my first boyfriend and I'll always hold the title of being his first girlfriend. Much like the love I once had for him, my intuition can only be confirmed in hindsight.

Status Updates
Spring 2010

Although you are no longer "in a relationship" with me,
And I am "looking for: friendship, dating, a relationship"
(I'm open to possibilities),
Maybe someday we can talk and be cordial.

I never thought we'd be "friends" again.
I "unfriended" you, erased you from my network, "removed the connection."
But, who knows, I'm a big enough person.

Maybe on that day I'll be "married to _____,"
You'll be "married to _____,"
(Never each other),
And we'll laugh out memories.

We'll "comment" on how our lives have gone,
"Like" the decisions we've made,
Gossip about our "mutual friends,"
And "accept" the past.

(I'll view your "profile," and you can see "my photos" of my children.)

And we'll thank each other for being practice
For the "connections" we've made offline.

Jo's Almond Cake Recipe
Given Fall 2007

Preheat oven 350.

Put shelves in the center of the oven. Put a sheet of foil on the top shelf, cake pan on a cookie sheet—bottom shelf.

Cream:

- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ C. Sugar
- 1 Large Egg
- 1 Tbsp. Almond Extract

Add:

- $\frac{2}{3}$ C. Milk
- 1 Stick Melted Butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ Tsp. Baking Powder
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ C. Flour

Put batter into a greased pan. Bake about an hour. Check doneness with a toothpick. While still hot sprinkle with sliced almonds and sugar.

Tuesday October 7, 2008
Fall 2008

My knee felt stiff. Every time I bent it I could feel a little pain. Every time I picked up my foot or flexed the muscles in my leg my knee popped without making a sound. My attention became alert to that new, unpleasant popping sensation, but I didn't take the injury too seriously. I had never had problems before. I knew I didn't have a bad knee because it wasn't just my knee that had ached. I was stiff everywhere. My entire body wasn't working up to par. My body wouldn't listen to my commands, and things I had taken for granted as a dancer—like not tripping over my own feet—were becoming harder to do.

On this Tuesday night it would have been easy to blame the ache on carelessness. I was starting to fall into a bad habit of not stretching before dance class. This particular night, we hadn't even used the barre to warm up as we usually did. I was destined to pull something or upset a part of my body. It was a stupid thing to do, but neglecting warm-ups was only the obvious reason why I felt sore. I also had a list of other possible explanations.

I could blame the weather. It had been rainy and dreary for the last couple of days. The sun hadn't come out for a while, making it hard to enjoy the colorful, dying leaves meeting their full potential. It was the sort of weather that made everyone desire to slow down and nap. I had longed for the opportunity to slow down although it had never come and undoubtedly my body was lazy too.

Normally, I liked the cloudy, rain days, but I had a nagging feeling the dark weather was a preview for the coming winter, and I didn't want to think about hibernation just yet. My friend Sara sometimes used to claim when it rained her knee hurt or maybe it was that when her knee hurt she knew it would rain. I had heard other people say similar things, trying to predict the

weather with changes in the body. They claimed it had something to do with barometric pressure. Always a skeptic, I had never given into that superstition in the past. I couldn't convict it for my uncooperative body at class; I had more evidence to work through.

There were too many things happening in my head that were unresolved. I had much to do: homework, papers, and midterms that seemed to all be due at the same time, work and trying to raise money to fund my prospective trip to Germany, short and long distance relationships to keep up with, a novel to finish, chores that were easy but time consuming and necessary, personal wellbeing. Perhaps the reason why I couldn't perform was because my mind wasn't there, but years of muscle memory told me otherwise.

I had other things on my mind. The music played and I tried to keep myself sturdy and graceful. I tried to make my elbows disappear and my feet turn out. I tried to pull my shoulders backward to leave an elongated neck and a slightly upturned chin. I tried to glissade and tendu and rond de jambe but my feet hit the wooden floor without precision or poise. This was a new problem for me, much greater than my popping knee. My movement lacked composure.

I knew what it really was. The cause really hadn't gone any further than the forefront of my mind. The feeling was impossible to ignore: heaviness. The room was heavy. The air was heavy. My body felt heavy along with it and was stiff from carrying the extra weight. Emotion penetrated the studio. My always optimistic dance instructor hardly smiled as she taught us the steps to the new emergency dance we were learning. I couldn't expect her to smile though.

We had always been a close-knit group of dancers. We knew more about each other's personal lives than was common, and sometimes dance class turned into a therapy session. We also cared for each other. It was easy to know what our instructor was thinking as she taught us

the modified steps to a song that we had done a couple years ago, because generally, we felt it too.

One of the members of the class, Jo, had cancer. I had known she had cancer since I had met her; she was very open about it, and liked to give everyone updates as to how she was doing. She would alert us to the times when she would have chemo, and we would promise to keep her in our prayers. In between therapies she would go on ocean kayaking trips and bake us wonderful, tasty breads and cakes. I always admired her splits. She is at least 40 years older than me and can stretch her legs into more than a 180 degree angle. The cancer had gotten nastier lately, and we hadn't seen her at class in months.

A couple of days prior to my knee-popping, Jo's doctor had told her that they had done all that they could do. Her health was declining rapidly. This was no surprise to her and she had accepted her body's path. She was planning on donating her remains to the clinic for research, and had asked that the liturgical company prepare a couple of dances for a memorial service celebrating her life. That is why the room was heavy and full of emotion.

Only a strong person could plan her own funeral like that. I remember visiting my grandfather's grave last memorial day with my grandma. She and my grandpa had both of their names engraved on the headstone and I yearned to ask my grandma if it had been a weird experience to see her name on it, but I held my tongue. It would have been a horrible thing to ask, yet I couldn't help wondering if it had disturbed her. Wouldn't it bother someone to recognize her own name etched into stone?

Jo isn't dead, although she is anticipating the event. My dance instructor is still holding out for a miracle. I don't know if I believe in miracles, but I do believe that when my toes skid clumsily across the wooden floor, when my knee pops without warning, and when I trip over my

glissade, I know that I will miss Jo. I hate to think that I won't be able to enjoy her company again. Perhaps I will.

Email Retrieval
Fall 2008

From: Diane Halverson
To: Cyndi.Fenske@st.bemidjistate.edu
Cc:
Date: 10/15/08 10:11 pm
Subject: JO
Attachments: (385 Bytes)

This just came into my mailbox....Diane

Jo Hamilton passed away this morning at 5:15 am. There will be a memorial service First Lutheran Church in Akeley MN 11:30 am on the 25th of October.

Dave

Wednesday October 25, 2008
Fall 2008

This paper is long overdue. This theme has been pushed back in my mind. It is hard to confront. The edges are pointed and razor sharp. Nothing can be done to dull it. It hurts. She is dead. It would be easier to type, "She is gone," but I don't feel like that kind of statement portrays the truth accurately enough. People can try to find euphemisms for death to avoid stating it directly, but they are ineffectual. The true feeling of loss never leaves. In writing "She is gone," the wording isn't right; the tone isn't real.

It would be also inaccurate to say, "She is gone." It does not convey the change that took place when her soul left her flesh, the change that took place when the scalpels at the Mayo clinic began cutting through her corpse. Jo has been gone for a long time. She hasn't been at class. I haven't seen her. In her absence, she has been missed. Now she is more than absent from dance class, she is absent from Earth.

Death is strong. There is no hope. Whether or not I wanted to admit it, there always was a hope that she would heal and dance again. Now the only hope that my class has is to heal and dance for her. Friends of mine have jokingly said they would dance on each other's graves. Their rivalry has always been playful; this sort of joke was not ill-received despite its horrible connotation. I can't believe the relevance this phrase has had for me. Our group of dancers actually performed at Jo's memorial service.

Dancing at the service wasn't the easiest way to spend a Saturday. My pink, leather ballet shoes faltered on the carpet next to the church alter. I feigned fluidity in my movements hoping the music would allow for a few seconds delay in my timing. Piqué, plié, and relevé in first position somehow became demanding.

I didn't cry but I wanted to. Waiting in the wings, we passed around a box of Kleenex. My eyes glossed, but my makeup remained unperturbed. I pictured Jo watching us and smiling. It was the only thing that steadied my arabesque.

Our group sat together afterwards. We talked about Jo, but it was painful. Instead, we talked about a million other things as we ate our Jell-O salad, almond cake, and wraps.

I kind of feel closure. This wasn't unexpected. I think I was able to hold myself together so much because I couldn't see her lifeless body. I only have good memories to recall. It is not that I didn't know this before, but it is strange to think that everyone I know will someday die.

Dancisters
Spring 2010

Jo.
She danced in front of me and
I always admired her grace.
She
Made every movement perfect, with
Every muscle stretched and firm.

Cancer
Is what she had when she
Put down the cakes, breads, and rolls in her
Hands, offerings of her friendship.
The disease followed her everywhere, on every adventure, expedition, and quest.
Although she tried to leave it behind.

Gone,
And she left us and we were given
The honor of dancing for
Her
Funeral on that sad day,
In a sad place.

Only
Because it was Jo, we danced.
She was much loved.
And,
For me, because I cared about, admired, and
Wished I'd have gotten to know her better.

Life Experience
Spring 2010

Fact: everybody will die sometime. There isn't anything subjunctive about that sentence. When I was 17 I worked in a nursing home as a feeding assistant. The shifts were short and the hours inconvenient, but none of my other friends were making \$8.50 an hour, well, none except Sara. She and I got the job together, although we didn't work together. There were many people there for our interview, and it was nice for us to both get jobs. She had previous experience in food service and I answered my questions in a caring and thoughtful way. We had to go through specialized training for our job, too, which made us feel extra-important. In training we learned not to wear nail polish so our fingers wouldn't be mistaken as food, and we learned to refer to bibs in a more dignified way. "Clothing protectors" they were called, were glorified bibs, and they were quite necessary in the feeding of the elderly. Spills happened frequently.

And we were important, really. We made sure the clients received their food and drinks, and even spoon-fed some of them. At first the job was difficult because I didn't know the clients by face, but after a while, I knew them. I knew what they wanted to eat. I knew what their dietary restrictions were. I knew what they liked to talk about. I was pretty good about communicating with them. Perhaps that was because I'd spent so much time with my grandparents growing up. We would talk about the good old days, baseball, and flower gardens. The weather was a topic everyone could appreciate. I didn't know anyone who liked talking about the weather more than the elderly. It was most likely a habitual concern of theirs left over from decades spent farming. One client's husband came in frequently to eat with his wife, and while he would help her eat,

I would feed the woman sitting across from her. He was a great talker, and I learned a lot from him about being a doctor during the polio outbreak. He was really a sweet old man.

During the few months I worked there, I developed relationships with the clients. One woman took pleasure in calling me sweetie. She was a younger woman and always had knitting in the lap of her wheelchair. She wanted to hear all about my life, and often told me she thought I was a "pretty, young girl." Once after dinner I brought her back to her room. There were dolls and stuffed animals everywhere, maybe a hundred of them. Another of my favorite women was very forgetful, but a brilliant piano player. She wouldn't remember how to get to her room, which was across the hallway, but often, without any announcement, during the middle of dinner, she would get up and play the piano from memory.

Not everything was wonderful about working there. For instance by nature, nursing homes have a hierarchal structure. The RNs were on the top followed by LPNs, CNAs, the rest of the staff, and then the feeding assistants. I often had to work closely with the CNAs and they tripped over their limited power. Although the feeding assistants only worked for two hours at a time, we experienced the brunt of the CNAs' wrath. Some of them were nice, though, but not many. There was also an odd smell in the air most of the time, which was unnamable. The pay and the relationships with the clients made the job worth keeping most of the time.

I had only been there three months, but the job had worn at me enough where I wasn't willing to put up with it anymore. I still lived at home, and didn't need the job. Besides, I had too many other things going on my senior year of high school. After a

particularly trying day, I put in my two weeks notice at work. I wanted to experience other "career avenues" as my Spanish teacher helped me write.

It was nice to be free of that place. Knowing I didn't have to go back for work was liberating and valuable for my mental and physical health. I expected to feel that way and it was great. What I didn't expect was to miss the clients as much as I did. I felt bad about not saying goodbye to them. I didn't even tell them I was quitting, and wonder what they thought after I stopped showing up. Did they miss me at all? Did they ever think about me after I left, as I still thought about them? After my job there, whenever I read the newspaper I would always read the obituaries to see if any of my former clients had passed. For the next couple of years I recognized names and faces of people I had known: Elmer, Audrey, Estelle, and May. They were names from a different time, people from a different time. As they went, their knowledge, wisdom, and experience went with them.

Material Loss

Nobody likes losing things. Humans can create attachments to things. Although possessions are easier to replace than people, we may still grieve for them and miss them.

Star Kisses, Salvador Dali, and Smoke
Spring 2007

A night out with my girlfriends sounded like a good idea at the time of departure. It was the middle of June and we were finally ready to talk again since graduation night. We met enthusiastically. It was time to put childish high school ways behind us and converse like real women: a sign that we were really still kids. Every one of us was there: except Casey. Casey's parents sent her away the last half of our senior year (sort of an intervention), and sadly, we were used to getting together without her. Cheri had been in Montenegro visiting her latest foreign-exchange student boyfriend, Moki. Caitlin and Sara were there too, and we all had much catching up to do. Unsure of where the night would take us we piled into the Blue Whale (i.e. Cheri's mom's van), and went cruising around in the mellow town of Bemidji.

On our way to Dairy Queen I yelled, "Pull over," as ambulances and fire trucks passed us. Astounded I was the only one who knew pulling over to the side of the road was standard driving procedure, I sat in the seat breathing. Breathing was really all I could do at this moment because my heart had sunk into a moment of panic. For some divine reason the piercing sound of the ambulance awakened a part of me that was truly concerned. I noted the direction and thought of my grandpa and grandma, my house too. I wanted to say something to my friends like, "something is wrong," but didn't. Rationality told me I was just being paranoid and I kept quiet. I had completely forgotten the moment of panic within two minutes.

I sucked on my cherry Star Kiss as we sat along the bank of Lake Bemidji just across the street from Dairy Queen and across the water from the college two of us were attending in the fall. I don't like the cherry flavoring in Star Kisses, but I always made sure to get that flavor to avoid having my mouth turn unnatural colors. I really wanted a grape one. Abandoning our

childish treats, we began to smoke cigarettes, and learned of places such as Montenegro, Cohasset, and Concordia Language Villages. The water was relaxing, the wind playful, and the sun warm. We had a nice chat, and were actually getting along again. Courageously we crossed the busy two-lane highway, and made our way back into the van.

On the road again, we anticipated the fresh atmosphere of Target with its red signs and clearance racks. My cell phone rang. It was a tune from an Italian opera called *Nessun Dorma*. It was my sister-in-law Dana on the other end and I prepared myself to say no to another babysitting offer. Didn't she know that I had my own night life? She told me, "Kay's house is burned to the ground. Carson was playing with fireworks in his closet." I said, "Okay," and pressed the red end button. I forgot about my sister, she lived in that direction too. I was right about the feeling, and for once, I didn't wish to be right. I realized we were sitting by the water, and just blocks away from where my sister's house was burning. I was so close to the tragedy and didn't have a clue. Sitting next to me, Caitlin noticed my blank stare of shock, and asked me what was up. I told the girls in the car what I had just heard and they didn't say much. They asked me if anyone was hurt, and I didn't know what to tell them. Why hadn't I asked that? I called my mom, and she said everyone was alright, the house was completely ruined, and the cat died. She made me feel a little better by stating that, logically if anyone was hurt, Dana would have said so. I agreed that of course that is what I thought. My mom told me to try to help Kay with her kids. I had forgotten too, she was pregnant.

I was not looking for Kay; in fact I thought she was at Dana's house. Cheri was taking me there, but before I wanted to stop at Kay's house to see the damage. The house was still standing, and actually looked quite the same from the outside. There were fire trucks and ambulances (the same ones that had passed us earlier), and my sister and brother-in-law covered

in smudges of soot. I can still imagine the chaos and horrible smell. When Kay saw me she tried to make a joke, then she cried. I had never seen my big sister cry before, although her house had never burned down before either. I had my friends leave me off there, knowing the rest of the summer would be different.

A couple days later, we were allowed to go into the house. The house was fummy and dark. It was a whirl of desolate energy. Everything was covered in a dark residue. The windows were all cracked and darkened, and the couches where I had sat on the night before were weighed down with the same soot. Nothing was salvageable. It was hard to think of it as the same house, and in fact, it wasn't. In the kitchen, closer to where the fire had started, strange things had occurred. It was like one of Salvador Dali's paintings. The kid's tennis shoes were melted to the sunken microwave next to a lunch box that had gotten equally as mangled in the intense heat. Noticing a Dali painting on the ceiling of my dentist's office I thought it was a pretty clever place for it. As my teeth were drilled I focused on the objects melting together, and the different oddities, as I looked for new things to keep my mind off the gross feeling of the drill, and the pain. Oppositely, I didn't want to notice anymore of the oddities that the house had to offer. The surreal feeling was too gross.

Miscellaneous Loss
Fall 2009

Innocence,
Security,
The suitcase I took to Rome,
Feeling,
Smell,
My childhood home,
Memories,
Freedom,
Grandma's hope chest,
Treasures,
Money,
The puppy I loved best:
All gone,
Good bye
I'm sorry too.
No going back,
No return,
Adieu.

Roaming Around...the World
Spring 2010

I had never gone anywhere until I was sixteen. Since my dad worked all summer long, my family didn't go on vacations. When my brother and sister were little my parents took them places, but when I was added into the picture, family outings and adventures were too much work. It was easier for them to stay at home, and who could go anywhere when there was summer baseball and softball practices to attend? I had always longed to travel. I have a natural curiosity for everything. The Travel Channel used to be one of my favorite things to watch on TV, and after each program I would promise myself I would go to those places and do those things. I promised myself I would go to Disney World, and I know it will happen some day. I'm still young enough to know experiencing other places is still possible. When I was sixteen I went on a trip out west with my cousins and aunt and uncle. They were generous enough to include me, although they didn't have to. I loved Mt. Rushmore, Big Sky, Jackson Hole, and Yellowstone National Park. The ever-present propaganda was interesting, the glimpses of nature I had on that trip were heavenly, and I liked visiting historical sites like Deadwood. It was a great trip, but after a while, it ceased to satiate my thirst for travel. I wanted to go further, and learn, and explore.

Imagine my surprise when I found myself in Rome, Italy for spring break. I had been planning the trip for a while, but I couldn't believe my plans actually came to fruition. It was the highlight of my year; it was a trip of a lifetime. I couldn't believe I was more than an ocean away from home. It was also my first flight. I didn't have the option to be frightened or sick. I knew I had to go. It took three flights to reach my destination: Bemidji to Minneapolis, which was short but gave me a headache, Minneapolis to Amsterdam, which was long, but not

uncomfortable, and Amsterdam to Rome, which gave me my first chance to hear real Italians speak real Italian.

Our stay in Rome was great, interesting, but partially nerve-wracking. I was out of my comfort zone and I had read too many warnings on the U.S. State Department's Website about everything that may possibly go wrong. My advice when traveling: don't read about what to do if you die abroad. If you are dead, your knowledge will not help the people around you. If someone in your company dies, mourn for them and call the embassy.

Rome was amazing. Everything around was a sight to see and I did my best to be a sponge and take it all in. I was in the land of Virgil and the Pope. I observed the Mediterranean lifestyle of those around me. The locals had so much vigor and passion in their lives. Every word they said was like making love. One night at the Nag's Head Scottish Pub, people stood crammed together to watch soccer. Everyone cheered and booed very loudly. The energy made me care about soccer, even about teams I had never heard of. While I was in Vatican City, the art and architecture almost made me a convert. Throughout Rome, the men were flattering, the gelato was delicious, and the women were fashionable and sophisticated. For a city so ancient it was definitely alive with life and doing. During break I had dodged one of the biggest snow storms in Bemidji, and the sixty degree weather nourished me. To be fair, there were ugly things about Rome. The pollution and traffic gave the air a foul odor; the streets were home to many gypsies and beggars, and one of our cab drivers tried to rip us off. Yet, even those things are signs of life. Rome made me feel alive. It made me face fears and grow. It made me awake and even more curious. It definitely gave me something to process.

I hadn't even finished putting away my souvenirs, when less than a month later, on Good Friday, my childhood home caught on fire. Sparks from the chimney ignited the shingles. The

sparks voraciously ate through all layers of lumber. After many hours, the flames were finally put out. Although most of the edifice was still standing; the experts considered the building totaled. I was able to recover some of my things, but most of what I had, owned, or was, was gone, at least until it was replaced. Things that were salvaged were damaged either by fire or water or smoke. I left the scene of the fire before it was put out and did the only thing I could do to keep my mind away from it. I went shopping. I also much needed the new things.

For the first week I lived at my boyfriend's house. It was a safe, comfortable living arrangement, but it was not suitable for long-term use. I couldn't reside there permanently. For the next couple of months my best friend's parents adopted me and I became the troll in their basement. Most of the time I stayed in my cave; occasionally I came up for sunlight and food. I liked living there. Her parents didn't make me feel like I was imposing in any way, and I had a nice space to myself. They didn't keep tabs on me, yet they cared. I pushed through the rest of the school year, and surprisingly did well: 5 A's and 1 B, and that B was in Shakespeare in His Age. Although I spent many nights writing term papers, I hardly engaged in real writing. I hadn't anything to say because of my abundance of material silenced me. I hadn't broken down the elements yet and I wasn't able to compose anything from them. I didn't read much either, except one Harry Potter book; I didn't listen to music. Dancing was a chore I obediently continued instead of a joy. Sure, I was alive during this time period, but I was not living.

After my time in the basement, I moved for a third and final time for the year to a farmhouse that had been in the family for over 100 years. I settled in there, knowing I had found a more permanent home. I considered all of the places I stayed as homes; yet, they couldn't replace the one I had lost. My roaming was over for the time being.

It was a tough time, but I had Rome to think about. It was the shining star in my dark sky. It'd seemed like a dream. I couldn't imagine that not very long ago I walked the same streets as Caesar Augustus. I had gotten the adventure, experience, and knowledge I had always wanted through these events. Afterwards I knew I was a worldlier individual. Maybe I was not as sophisticated as the Roman women, but I felt a bit closer to them. I had seen a thing or two.

PTS—A Moment
Spring 2010

Sirens

I hear them.

They shriek in the night.

I take deep breaths, close my eyes and

Fight the compulsion to cry.

Fear

Hits my center.

It burrows into my core.

I feel it in the four corners of my feet and

The tips of my fingers, and the ends of my hair.

Carefully,

I notice direction,

Grasp for logic and reason,

Even make phone calls but,

I still feel the sirens.

They are calling to me.

More

There are many more ways in which loss touches our lives. Not all of them can be discussed within this thesis, but here are a few to add to the collection.

Anecdotes and Amputations
Spring 2010

There is a lot I don't know about my dad. Like any subject, as I learn more about him, I realize there will always be more I don't know about him. Although he worked a lot when I was younger, I grew up in the same house as him. We didn't talk very much day-to-day, but he was there when it counted: volleyball games, ballet recitals, and orchestra concerts. As I got older, I formed a strategy for interaction with my dad. He liked history and politics, and as I learned more about those subjects in school, I was able to devise conversations with him. And we had good conversations. Through those calculated conversations with him I was able to prove I could understand, critically think, and know what he was talking about. The Vietnam War was more than just a name, science was more than a subject, and history was more than the past. Our relationship grew this way. Soon, we expanded our conversations.

Usually, most of my information about my dad's personal life comes in the form of stories. He likes to tell true tales, and they are usually interesting because he lived and continues to live an interesting life. He grew up on a dairy farm, went to college, enlisted in the Navy, served in Vietnam, and has had many different occupations and businesses since. He is eccentric but smart, semi-unapproachable yet friendly. Some of the stories he tells over and over again. They are moving around in his brain, waiting for him to write them down. He told me he intends to write them down, some day. Most of the stories are humorous, featuring him doing something unconventional like convincing my aunt she could fly if only she ran fast enough, or using Vietcong tactics in some epic battle with the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Some of the stories involved his time in the Vietnam War, but like the others, they focused on humor instead of horror. I've never asked him about the horror. That is a difficult

subject to approach. I am curious, though. I could use my dad as a great resource for knowledge, but I don't. I won't bring it up unless he does. Instead, piles of burning shit, a disagreement in music, and "accidentally" blowing up an important memorial are the stories I get to hear. My favorite stories are about the things he smuggled home from the war, which were ingeniously packaged and sent through the mail. Who ever thinks of putting a gun in a phonograph? Eccentric describes him well, but I don't think it touches on how odd he is.

I haven't heard every story. It may have seemed so, because some have been repeated, but I honestly haven't even broken the surface. I had known that fact before, but it was reiterated just recently. I was told a new story a couple of days ago. My dad's finger was partially amputated in the war. Isn't that something I should have known? Is that something I have a right to know as his daughter? Do I have a right to know anything? I wondered why I had never heard the story before, but after hearing it, I can guess the reasons for its being left out of my education.

He was a CB in the war. "Construimus, Batuimus" meaning, "We Build, We Fight." His main job was a welder, but I'm sure he had other duties too. On one of his jobs he had gotten his finger caught in a machine, which took off the top of it. The medic couldn't fix it, so my dad was sent to one of the main medical facilities. That is where all of the people with serious cases were treated. He saw many people missing limbs, and a lot of blood. He described one person in particular with a blown-off leg. There was nothing, just "meat." My dad had to be at this hospital for several hours because he wasn't priority. Every time, just when he thought he could get it taken care of, a helicopter would come in with more injured men. Impatient and ready to leave, my dad asked one of the newer guys there if he thought he could fix the finger. A skin graft was needed, and although the new guy had never done it before, he had seen it done, and

was sure he could do it himself. That was good enough for my dad. He wanted to get back to his base. And, unconventionally, his finger was fixed.

Although he has always been a risk-taker, the atmosphere of that hospital must have been pretty gruesome for him to be willing to let someone inexperienced and possibly unqualified fix his finger. Yet, something tells me war is different. I was given few details about my dad's time at the hospital, but I can fill in the rest for myself: horrific sights, the smell of burnt flesh, and the taste of blood. I am an English major, after all. I can be creative. After this story was over I realized I had finally gotten a little bit more out of him, as I had always wanted. Yet, I don't think he liked telling me that story. There wasn't the same mischievous expression like there usually is when he tells an anecdote. Suddenly I am glad for not asking him to divulge more of the war. I'm not sure if he would want to. I'm not sure if I would want to hear it, either.

Eminent Domain
Spring 2010

A project has started in your area
And they will
Take
And take
And take.

You'll smile, or cry, or turn angry-red
But it will
Not matter either way,
One bit, at all,
And tough beans.

Just hope you can give a good case.
Get a lawyer
Or at
Least a
Video camera.

And watch through the lens (It'll be easier)
As they take
Away
Memories, pieces of your life, history
And your free will.

In Defense of Nature Trails
Published in the Bemidji Pioneer Fall 2009

The nature trails around Horace May Elementary School should not be jeopardized by the U.S. Highway 71 MNDOT project and MNDOT should consider alternative options in the placement of a driveway to the school. The nature trails are a valuable facet of the elementary school, and serve many edifying purposes. For instance, the nature trails give students a unique opportunity to learn about conservation, local animal and plant life, and the eco-system. It is important to teach children to respect the environment, especially with the pressing issues of global warming. There are hardly better ways to do so. While we want to teach children the value of nature, tearing down forests to build a highway sends a completely different message about what receives priority in the adult world, and children do pick up on things like that. It conveys the message that saving money is more important than the protection of the environment, even more important than their education. The nature trails around Horace May Elementary go beyond their use in science classes, and even educating the next generation on conservation. The trails offer more than hands-on study. They also provide a place for alternative exercise, a release from the busy atmosphere of the classroom, and a place for students to renew their focus. Horace May Elementary with its nature trails is an important part of the Bemidji community and the Bemidji area school system. If school nature trails cannot be enjoyed in Bemidji, Minnesota, where can they be enjoyed?

My Inheritance
Spring 2010

A couple months ago I was at the hospital with my best friend, Sara. Her grandpa wasn't doing well, and before long, important discussions were had with hospice. I was with them when he died and I did my best to be an anchor, taking care of my second family. I was more than there for Sara because Raymer had become a second grandpa to me after my own had passed years ago. Raymer played baseball against my grandpa's team, and whenever he would recall a game I remembered my grandpa Ed. They grew up in the same generation. I held Sara's mom's (my second mom's) hand as we both said an icy, final goodbye to Raymer. She needed a daughter to be there with her in the room and I was happy to be there for her. I also went to the visitation in Sara's absence. I became the strong daughter that family needed. It was easier for me to fill the role because I had a couple degrees of separation from the grief. It was also a natural role for me to fill because that was who I was. I was a good, strong daughter. Their family had done so much for me in the past year, I was glad to be able to be there for them.

When my own grandpa died I was 19 and he was 91. I cried a little, but mostly I was the strong one in the family. I wanted my mom and dad, perhaps even my older brother and sister to know they could deal with their own grief without having to worry about mine. They didn't have to wonder about the baby of the family; I could take care of myself. I was with them much of the time, yet also on my own. I was surrounded by cousins who felt similar about how the death of our grandpa was hard on us, yet most likely more difficult for our parents. I've always been a grandma's girl, and I cuddled up to her as much as she'd allow, but she was too busy being a good widow to be consoled by me. She was doing so well, yet I knew she was held together by the brightly colored threads she often used for embroidery. She courageously

greeted every visitor we had, and she knew all of their names, affiliations, and family histories. She's good like that. She's a good host. She's a good family member and friend to have. While I was independent, I was also with my family. I realized I wasn't very alone at all.

After my grandpa's death, things became almost normal again. Our family matriarch never ceased to lead us. At the age of 88 she still worked in her garden, quilted, and took care of her old house. She was a strong example for her family. She also began to give away her things in preparation for a move from the farm to an apartment up town. Her sewing machine was to go to my sister and guns went to my brother. Locketts and baseball memorabilia went to my cousins along with various other heirlooms and unique artifacts. I received the hope chest Grandpa gave to her as an engagement present. It was my inheritance. Sure, Grandma said goodbye to a lot of possessions during this time, but she also passed on the memories. She shared her history with us. The rest of her old things were sold at a yard sale. As moving day approached I cleaned out her refrigerator, throwing away things with passed expiration dates. On a particularly sketchy item was a date that made me smile and say, "Grandma, you've had this $\frac{3}{4}$ of my life!"

The expired good was a testament to her long life, especially growing up in the Great Depression, which was only one of the many ways in which she turned into the strong woman she is. She was the oldest in her family and had seven younger brothers, which she helped take care of. When she was fourteen she worked in her uncle's house to pay for her education, and before she married my grandpa, she was a career woman in an office. She then became a farmer's wife, which was no easy task. Since they were dairy farmers she spent many of her waking hours washing out bottles. In the final years of Grandpa's life, she took care of him. This often required lifting Grandpa and he was at least twice her size. There were many more

things she did to keep both of them living on the farm as long as possible, which are amazing at any age.

Many people think I look like her when she was my age. I take it as a compliment. My dad is fascinated with showing relatives our graduation pictures side-by-side. We do look alike. I'd like to think that I've inherited more from her than her graduation smile. Maybe I'm a bad quilter, and my bread will never rise like hers, but I'd like to think I've inherited her strength: strong hands for kneading, a strong affection for people, and a strong, tenacious will for living life as it goes on, and on, and on.

Youth
Spring 2010

I never used to look my age. I've always looked younger. The fact that I was the youngest in most groups of company didn't help how others perceived me. Once, when I was sixteen a rude friend of my mother's said I looked twelve. That is certainly not something a sixteen-year-old girl wants to hear. I never wanted to look older. I never tried to look older at all. All I wanted was to be seen as age-appropriate. Sure, high school can breed a society of girls trying to look older than they actually are. There were plenty of girls who wore a lot of makeup, dressed in revealing clothing, and smoked, but I never did any of that. Those things were not concerns of mine. All I wanted was to enjoy the moment. I believed youth was something to savor--but that didn't mean I wanted to act like a child, either. I wanted to grow. I wanted growth to be noticed.

Another time, after I had just turned twenty, I was carded. They wouldn't let me into that movie theater until I proved to them I was at least seventeen. I laughed at this, but under the humor was a bruise. It was symbolic to me because I had just recently removed myself from the "teen" label, and I was moving up to an age of adventure and freedom. It was not like I was trying to get alcohol or anything. I just wanted to see *Pineapple Express* with my boyfriend. He was only four months older than me and he never got carded, for anything, not even alcohol.

For a while I had a theory about looking young. It was all about hair color. From studying films and TV shows stereotypes associated with hair color, and to a certain extent, complexion, came to my attention. Blondes and people with lighter hair were often portrayed as innocent, sweet, and young, while brunettes and darker colors were associated with sophistication, worldliness, and maturity. Blondes were seen as clueless and naive; those things

which are also associated with youth. Alfred Hitchcock used many blonde women in his films, which emphasizes the unsuspecting/innocent stereotype. With light red hair, and a very light complexion, I've always associated myself with the blonde stereotype.

Grief ages people. I had heard the convention, but I had never given it a second thought until I experienced it. Nobody can possibly have nice eyes after crying that much. Day after day, month after month, I did it. I bought special, waterproof mascara because of it. Most often, it was easier not to wear makeup at all, but I tried to make myself wear it when I had the time in the morning to put it on. My eyes were in a constant state of puffiness. Even after, the bags under them were still visible. I knew I looked older. I felt older too. The experiences aged me. A lack of energy and efficacy aged me. How many years? I'm not sure. Possibly later twenties, but who knows.

I bought new perfume yesterday. It is the same scent I wore in high school, but it doesn't make me feel younger. It just makes me smell like me. For a few years I hadn't worn it, but I'm glad to use it again. The scent makes me smile, among a lot of other things. Smiling and happiness are the secrets to a youthful existence. If one can find them and keep them, no fountain is needed. As healing comes to me in all forms, especially smiling, laughing, singing, and dancing, I am younger than I was last year. I think I look it too. In a sense, I still feel older, but without relinquishing the dashes and heaping spoonfuls of youth, which are a part of me again. Experience and innocence have compromised with each other. It is now that I finally look my age. And the perfume? Clinique Happy Heart.

Solo
Spring 2010

After the day
Is done,
I'm alone.

I'm listening to
Truth music
Silently.

It moves me
To my feet,
My tip toes.

My arms brush
The air
And soon

My entire body
Floats and
Turns.

Soon I am
Free, relieved,
Medicated.

Smiling and joyful
I bend and
Leap.

I take in deep
Breaths of
sound.

I am dancing
In the
Dark.