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The Awkward Year(s)

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The Awkward Year(s)

By Kate Seaholm

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing

Linfield College

December 14, 2016

Approved by ___ *Signature redacted* _____

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Based on Many True Stories

awkward

adjective

1. causing difficulty; hard to do or deal with.
2. causing or feeling embarrassment or inconvenience.

This is my story.

Preface

The sun cuts through the overcast clouds, landing right onto my left shoulder. I haven't realized it yet but it's really sunburned and I won't be able to sleep on my left side that night. I'm sitting outside a Starbucks in Irvine, California where a random guy just ran up from behind me, tossed a folded piece of paper onto my laptop, told me to call him if I wanted to get coffee sometime, and then sprinted across the parking lot and out of sight. The next day I called him to get coffee and — sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself. Don't forget about this guy though. There's a whole story that goes along with him.

Let's go back to me sitting in the sun, burning to a crisp without my knowledge. I had my laptop open on the table in front of me, positioned at a very precise angle so the sun didn't blind me in its reflection. I was working on my senior thesis for college. I had originally thought that I wanted to write all about my adventures from my semester abroad in England, but a few days after my initial brainstorm, after I put myself into even more wonderfully complex and uncomfortable situations, I decided that my mother was right, once again. Being the competitive person I am, I try to avoid using her ideas to jumpstart my writing because I figure I can come up with something better, something more interesting. But that's not always the case when your mom is also creative and she knows it. So yes, I am writing what my mom has wanted me to write about for years. I can already feel her gloating.

In my 20 years of living, I - like many others - have run into some awkward situations. But for some reason awkwardness seems to be a powerful constant in my life. Every time something utterly ridiculous or out of the ordinary happens to me, my mom always says, "There's another scene for your screenplay." So to calm my mother bear and to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing, I am going to retell a great deal of the awkwardness in my life. When I was young, I used to think I was cursed with bad luck because my initials sounded like "curse": KRS. I'm not letting go of that theory, not yet.

Girl vs. Garbage

Standing at our kitchen table rolling and wrapping 150 freshly printed newspapers in a thin layer of water resistant plastic wrap, my dad tells me stories of his paper route days from when he was a kid. As the ink from the papers transfers onto my hands, the rolled and wrinkled papers wait for that moment when my upper lip begins to itch and I have no choice but to scratch it, inadvertently giving myself a semi-permanent mustache; payback for crushing 150 newspapers into my bag built to hold 100, on a good day. My dad beside me relives his glory days of when he delivered papers every morning before school and twice on Sundays along his route which included a hill he had to trek up and down on his bike. Each week he comments that I should feel lucky I only have to throw papers on doorsteps one day a week and that my route is flat. *I would take his route if he would just stop talking about it.*

With 150 papers rolled up decently on the table, I slip into my newspaper carrying mechanism which definitely does not help my popularity in school. 75 papers on my front, 75 on my back, I waddle oh so gracefully over to my bicycle and climb on. Just like my favorite toy as a kid, I weeble and I wobble, but I don't fall down. And just like that, I'm off.

The clouds threaten to suffocate the earth on this particular Wednesday. Backed up against the Cascade Mountain Range they release all the water weighing them down so they can float higher. As I approach each driveway on my list I walk up to the front door, still on my bike, and toss the doormat a paper. Even four feet away my aim is pathetic. There's a reason I don't play basketball. And just like that, as one awkward mass, my bike and I slowly scoot back out of the walkway and on to our next address. Now remember, it's raining. The clouds are socked in, it's pouring, darkness surrounds me...no, I'm lying. It's a beautiful, clear, sunny day with 100% visibility. I twist those details in my recollection of this event only to make what happened next less pitiful, but my conscience won't allow me to lead you astray any longer.

Wednesdays just happened to be the garbage man's busiest day too. I never gave their work schedule much thought until I began my job because it wasn't until then that I

had to learn to dodge all the big, blue obstacles along the street that were the garbage bins. For anyone with even an ounce of grace, this would not be a problem, but as my mom likes to remind people, I wasn't named Grace for a reason.

So on this particular autumn Wednesday, with my bag getting lighter with each house I passed, I rode atop my high horse, gliding down a small incline on the sidewalk. And there! Do you see it? Just ahead sits a garbage bin on the sidewalk instead of on the shoulder of the road. No problem, I saw it plenty in advance and I have complete control over my bike. There should be no story here, but there is. 30 feet ahead, coming in at a speed of approximately eight miles per hour, I was on an inevitable collision course. My brain relays to my arms to tilt the handlebars slightly to the left to avoid impact, but my arms reply with the sass of my fifth grade self, "Talk to the hands 'cuz the arms ain't listening." I make contact with the obstacle.

In that moment I felt transported into a Tom and Jerry cartoon. My front tire hit the edge of the bin, followed by my handle bars. Rejected by garbage, I ricocheted off the bin, off my bike and face first into the middle of the street. Newspapers flew *everywhere*. Dabbing my chin to reveal my wounds, I scramble to kick all of my papers out of the way of cars. *If someone I know drives by right now, so help me I'll...* "You all right, Kate?" I look up to see a couple acquaintances from school on the other side of the road. I send them reassurance that I'll live and they're on their way again.

The rest of this Wednesday continued to go downhill from there. My inability to avoid a completely visible garbage bin led to a pain in my leg which I convinced myself and my mom was serious. A trip to the doctor's office and an X-ray later, I was reassured of my perfect health, minus a few scrapes and bruises. I tried my best to hide my embarrassment and my increasingly obvious scab on my chin, but the timing was not in my favor. The next day was Thanksgiving, where my grandparents would sit on the couch, sunk in too far to get up, and my aunt would lean against the banister with a glass of cider in her hand while my dad pokes his head in from the kitchen as the gravy bubbles on the stove, just in time to hear my mom remind everyone: "We didn't name her Grace for a reason."

The Blood Test

The sun was trying to break through the thick blanket of clouds that always cover Washington. I had just returned home from my summer in California and I was overdue for a doctor's visit. Being that I was now 20 years old and trying to prove to myself that I could be an adult all on my own, when my mother asked if I wanted her to come with me, I firmly said no. I didn't know at the time, but that was the worst decision of my life. (Well, of that day. *Life* is a little dramatic.)

I put on my new-to-me, black and white striped sundress and started the thirty minute drive to my appointment. My sunglasses took me back to California but the overcast weather put my head back in the clouds. Journey's "Don't Stop Believing" rattled my windows and vibrated my seat, shaking my nerves awake. There was nothing to be nervous about. This was going to be a simple check-up to mark down in the books that I was still alive and well, or so I thought.

When I arrived, the lady behind the counter with the hand sanitizer at the ready, brought to my attention that I hadn't been to the doctor since I was a minor, making it necessary to switch from my pediatric doctor to one with worse manners and less patience. The only doctor available at that time was someone fresh out of school named Panni, Doctor Prince Panni.

I should have picked my purse off the counter, turned around and walked back out those doors right then. His name was Prince for one thing, and on top of that, Prince Panni? My nerves brought the worst out of me and I mocked my doctor before even meeting him: *Please, call me Dr. P.P.*

I turned from the counter with clipboard in hand and scoped out the waiting room. One kid with a bowl haircut played with and sneezed on the toys in the back corner. A heavy set man with crumbs in his beard waited up front, and a mother paced up and down the aisle, cradling her crying baby, looking for its mute button. It wasn't an ideal environment for someone whose heart raced each time the door opened and the nurse called a name. Twenty minutes later I was summoned, so I followed the nurse back to the scales. I had grown three inches since my last visit and gained a few more pounds (from

the added height, not the freshman or sophomore fifteen, of course). Left alone with my thoughts to wait for Dr. P.P., the anticipation swelled like a pimple ready to pop. The agonizing silence is universal and never changes. The hands on the clock echo with each movement, ricocheting off the eggshell walls. The posters about STDs and pregnancy tacked to the bulletin board suddenly seem overwhelmingly interesting. And the mirror hanging on the wall beneath the fluorescent lights shows off every imperfect pore tracing your skin.

The door swung open unexpectedly, triggering a heart attack. Taking a moment to catch my breath, Dr. P.P. wasted no time with polite conversation. He cut to the chase, targeting my comment of having stomach cramps every once in a while. Despite my best attempts at telling him that I am in fact a woman and those are kind of part of the package, he insisted on a pelvic exam or at the very least, blood work. My eyes twisted in their sockets. Confused, I respectfully declined the random and unnecessary pelvic exam but he insisted that I get blood work done. Other than my completely expected monthly cramps, he had a point that I should have tests run so that we had a baseline to work from in the future. I unwillingly agreed as my mind flashed back to my past experiences with needles: being held down by nurses because I wouldn't sit still long enough for them to stab me, or nearly passing out from the pain of the flu shot. No fond memories came to mind. My adult exterior was appropriately calm, but beads of sweat grabbed at one another on my forehead as my 6-year-old self inside wanted to jump up and down and throw my fists at anything within reach.

I smiled ungratefully and exited the holding cell. Walking down two flights of stairs I followed the signs towards the laboratory, then took a number and sat down, not caring about the germs infecting me because I'd rather get sick than be stabbed. I tried laughing off my nerves, I tried to turn my nervous energy into excitement like how I do before giving a presentation, but nothing worked. I just shook in my seat and fought back unnecessary tears with a stupid grin on my face. There were fish in the lab, I tried to distract myself. That didn't last long. I started people watching—the waiting area was

packed. I watched as person after person disappeared behind the curtains and returned moments later with a colorful bandage on their arm. It seemed to be no big deal.

“Nick! . . . Kate!”

I was called back along with the 6-year-old boy who sat next to me. With only a curtain between us I could hear his breathing intensify, and the curdling screams as the needle pierced his delicate skin. He wailed louder and more dramatically than my brother used to when his ears would pop on airplane rides. The boy walked past me, admiring his crayon bandage, cheeks soaked in tears, but still smiling. “Is that it?” I heard him ask. *Okay, Kate. If he can do it, you can do it. It’s no big deal.* The nurse enters from curtain number two on my right. She rolls up my sleeves ever so slowly to develop the climax. My arms begin to burn, anticipating the sharp needle about ready to puncture my skin. I look at the speckled tile ceiling above me, think of a happy place and assure the nurse that I am all right. Pinch. Eyes closed. Fist tightened. “Oh drat!” the nurse exclaims. I turn my head to see a needle and plastic tube speckled with blood, outside of my arm. Trying to remain calm, I asked her what happened. Apparently the needle popped out of my arm, like I was rejecting it for some odd reason. Like I hate needles and have a very low pain tolerance or something.

“Let me try the other arm. The suction needle should do the trick,” she adds. The fluorescent lights and the painted white walls and drapes seemingly fill my head with helium. As the room spins around me I see her go over to the drawer and pull out a larger needle, equipped with a handle that is used to literally suck the blood from your arm. This little old lady nurse was going to kill me and eat me and the only happy place I could think of was in fairy tales but my mind went straight to Hansel and Gretel.

And there goes the needle. It was as large as my vein, no room for error. I could physically feel it inside my arm as it sent static to my ears. Her warm, rough fingers began pressing “gently” around the injection site, and then I felt the cold metal needle leave my body. As I turned to put pressure on my wound, I noticed no blood in the tube. Looking between the nurse and the needle, she shrugs and says, “Well, I only get two tries. Let me go get Ulga.”

I hear this beautifully masculine voice float like thunder around the curtain to my right. “You need help?” The curtain is ripped back to reveal Ulga, a handsome man of a woman from Bavaria. Her hair is braided and pinned up and her accent is heavy. The static in my head blocks out all else. Day turns to night.

I can hear the grandma nurse as she scurries across the linoleum floor and places a cup of water in my hand. My shaky hands raise the Dixie cup to my lips as my white surroundings begin to reappear, still blurry. “You need ice pack too?” Ulga’s voice is forceful and ignites fear and respect. I can feel her roll her eyes at me, *pathetic little white girl can’t handle a needle*. She brings me an ice pack anyway, not from the freezer but from the cabinet. It’s one of those you must beat to a bloody pulp in order to activate. Ulga seemed too pleased to activate it. *Bang! Boom! Bang!* The table beside me rattles under her fury, sending shivers like shocks throughout my body. I am helpless. “You don’t look so good. You should lay down.”

Grandma on one arm, Ulga on my other, they parade me past those lucky patients who get their blood drawn on the first attempt. They plop my blind and limp body into the new seat which refuses to recline back. Ulga and my first nurse stand on either side of me, trying to push the seat back. Finally it gives way and my feet fly above head before settling back into the chair. I felt like I had been drugged and was waiting to be restrained and experimented on. My eyesight began to come back so I could now see how many people entered and left in one minute or less. They all looked at me with concerned yet menacing eyes, the way you look at someone sitting in the principal’s office: curious to know what happened but judging them a little because you know they must have done something to deserve it.

When Ulga returned she still had trouble finding a vein so she wrapped me in heating pads, bringing all of my blood to the surface, ideal for harvesting. Once she chose a vein and acted upon it, the process was over in less than a minute. It really was no big deal. As I slowly stood up from my place on death row, Ulga asked if this had been my first time having my blood drawn. I nodded weakly as she laughed and shook her head with her back to me: “Worst experience ever.”

Barcelona

I'm lost. *Wonderful*. Two of my friends and I had decided to take a last minute weekend excursion to Barcelona, and I, trying to save money every chance I could, booked a flight two hours after the one my friends were on. I didn't think much of it, until I emerged from the subway in downtown Barcelona and took a right instead of a left. My two years of high school Spanish did not help me much. I had no wifi, no data, and no map. I was left to wander the streets and ask every pedestrian, every sales clerk I could find, if they spoke English, hoping that someone would say yes.

"Tú hablas inglés?" played like a broken record from my mouth for three hours before finally getting the response I needed. After receiving directions to the hostel we were staying at, I eventually found my friends sipping margaritas at the restaurant next door. They were calm and enjoying themselves as I landed in my seat with a thud, sweat dripping from my forehead. I was exhausted, but I had made it.

If I can find my way around Barcelona with only two hours of sleep and a language barrier, I could do anything. Or so I told myself.

“Wanna see my sailboat?”

If you didn't read that question in the voice of a 26-year-old creepy male who's on Tinder, a sketchy “dating app” with a bad reputation, I'm going to have to ask you to go back and read it again.

Done? Great. You may be wondering why I was even on Tinder to begin with. Well, asking random strangers at Starbucks if they wanted to be my friend wasn't getting me anywhere, so Tinder was the logical next step. At this time, I was in Southern California for the summer because I had an internship with an advertising agency, helping write and edit scripts, which is right up my alley. But it's an unpaid internship so I basically drove 20 hours practically from Canada to Mexico, without air conditioning, by myself, passing a jeep engulfed in flames along the Grapevine, just so my pale skin decorated with freckles could be burnt to a crisp in 90 degree weather. The terms “independent” and “crazy” have officially become interchangeable.

I'm a friendly person. When I studied abroad in England for a semester, I was fine. I made friends. But I also had four and a half months to do so. Two months, one summer, to make friends? That was a challenge I had no choice but to accept. My first two weeks in California were great. I had some quality *me* time. But even though I like to think I'm super awesome and hilarious, there's only so much of me that I can take. I decided I needed to step up my game if I wanted to meet some other friendly faces, so I turned into my dad in the way that he says hi to everyone. When we're in the Dairy Queen drive-thru, he doesn't care how many cars wait impatiently behind us; he won't order until he asks the cashier through the intercom how they're doing. Stopped at the sidewalk for pedestrians? He'll tell them to have a nice day as he drives past in his F-150 truck. Say we're standing in the frozen food section at the grocery store and someone else grabs the same bag of frozen potatoes as him. He'll start up a conversation based on that: “Oh good choice! Hi, my name's Jeff Seaholm! I'm a U.S. History teacher up in Lynden! How are you today?”

While it is irritating, he does make people feel good about themselves and in turn he's confident and excellent at having conversations with complete strangers. So I started

to greet people in a similar fashion and be overly friendly to every person I met at Starbucks or just walking down the street. The only problem with my situation was that people in Southern California are not as friendly as those in the Pacific Northwest. Maybe five people would respond positively to my gesture. Other than that, glares and eye rolls were a popular response. I even got the occasional air kiss from guys old enough to be my dad—*lovely*.

After a couple weeks of enduring this failed social experiment, my head spun around having to alternate between both sides of my conversations. So yes, Tinder came to my mind. I was extremely hesitant about making an account because of its reputation, but I figured that it would be fine because I just wanted someone to go to the beach or go on hikes with for the summer, and that's exactly what my bio read. After hitting submit and following the onscreen prompts, I had four "dates" in one week, all with wonderfully awkward and creepy guys.

For the most part I was just entertaining myself by texting a bunch of random people and practicing my social skills. Some of the guys were nice and fun to text with while others were very creative and offensive in their flirting attempts. Cue the sailboat guy. *He seemed cool over text*. This disappointing remark would soon be a familiar taste on my lips.

I pulled up by the boathouse at the harbor and went searching for this guy. It was 6 p.m. so I thought we might get dinner but there were no restaurants in sight. I figured we could walk along the beach and talk, no one usually says no to that suggestion, but the clouds rolling in from the west blocked out the sun setting and I didn't see any point after that. I opened my car door with no clue what we were going to do out here, but I was determined to make something work.

Trying to find people whom you've never met, in a populated place, based solely on one or two photographs on your phone is a challenge that never ceases to amuse me. On average, I seem to walk up to about three people thinking they're who I'm meeting before realizing they have no clue who I am. The reactions are priceless as I walk within

feet of strangers and then suddenly turn another direction. This time was simple though. I was able to pick out my new acquaintance because he looked so awkward that he had to be the one I was meeting. He stood behind a locked chain link fence that led out to the docks the sailboats were tied to. His slender fingers coiled around the fence, his pants exposed bare ankles above his white Vans, and his hairline was receding. The pictures on his profile resembled him but were clearly from his heyday. His eyes bugged out from his head as he scoured the groups of people walking around the boardwalk. He finally caught onto my stare and sent a fumbled wave of the hand my way. I made it to the fence before he could get the gate open so our first few words were shared through the chain links. Finally managing to figure out the complexity of the lock, his left arm stretched out in search of a hug. His stringy fingers wrapped around my shoulder and pulled me to his side as he asked: "Wanna see my sailboat?" I was already planning my escape.

Have you ever walked along those docks that the fancy boats are tied to in the harbor and wondered how strong the breeze would have to be to blow you off balance and into the water? I hadn't either until this evening. As he led the way past a dozen boats and no other people, I felt like I was walking the plank. If I needed to I knew I could swim away, I was a strong enough swimmer. But I kept walking. I probably should have turned around but sometimes I let my curiosity get the best of me. Only in hindsight do I remember that curiosity killed the cat.

Climbing aboard his boat only escalated the situation. It was dirty and out of sorts, the cushions were thrown out and he was supposedly waiting for new ones to be made. I let him sit down first and was sure to choose the bench opposite of him, even though he had kindly laid out a towel for me to sit on next to him. I tried to keep an open mind and decided to give him a chance. He was probably just as nervous and unsure as I was. I asked every introductory question in the book: What do you do for a living? What are your hobbies? Do you take your boat out much? His answers were useless, he didn't even know how to sail. There was nothing to work off of.

For the next twenty minutes I talked more about myself than I ever have as I simultaneously sent out a prayer that something would interrupt our meeting. Right as I moved on to talk about my favorite hike in Edinburgh, his sailboat neighbors welcomed themselves aboard and the boys started comparing their boats. This gave me the chance to send an SOS text to my mom. About five minutes after the lovely strangers disembarked, my phone rang. Apologizing for the interruption, I answered it and all he heard was: “Hello? ... Really? ... Where’s Sam? Can’t she let you in? ... Okay, give me twenty minutes.”

As far as he was concerned, my roommate locked herself out of our apartment and no one was around to let her in. He missed out on the other side of the conversation that consisted of my mom telling me to leave and text her when I was home safe. I apologized more than enough for the situation and left with a skip to my walk, hoping that would get me off the plank quicker.

Note to self: when a stranger asks you onto their sailboat, say no.

The Question

It's the age old question. The one everyone goes to when there's a lull in the conversation or when playing truth or dare. It's the one that draws the most curiosity. The one that brings tears to the eye from laughing so hard and turns the storyteller's cheeks a nice shade of red. It's one of those stories that you can look back on and laugh at now, but it traumatized you for days or weeks when it happened. That million dollar question? What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?

It took me 20 years but I finally came up with a solid, embarrassing story that everyone would agree is embarrassing. See, when asked this question, I always had trouble coming up with an answer. I had plenty of awkward stories to tell, just take your pick from this collection. But *embarrassing*, that was the challenge.

My go-to story went a little something like this. It was the first day of first grade. The sun broke through the clouds as I went skipping out to recess in my new dress that my grandma had made for me. (I have to hand it to my grandma. It was a pretty cool dress. It had school buses and crayons and smiling sunshines — everything my second grade self wanted in life.) Reaching the edge of the pavement, my best friend Kelsey and I paused to decide where we'd go first. The slide, we agreed, looked like something a first grader should tackle. Tall and silver, it towered over the rest of the playground. We watched as some kindergarteners attempted to ascend the ladder but failed to reach the top due to nerves. Kelsey and I exchanged a look of confidence and superiority. We knew it was a first grade level slide.

With great strides we walked to the base of the ladder. It looked taller from this angle. My palms began to sweat so I generously let my friend go first. She climbed up and slid down with no trouble at all. Now she was at the base of the slide cheering me on, along with the entire first grade population. Some looked supportive while others had that look in their eye like they were just waiting for my inevitable failure.

I carefully wiped the beads of sweat from my palms, transferring them to my dress, and I began to climb. Halfway up, I made the mistake of looking down. Hadn't I learned anything in my six years of living? Never look down!

Everything went blurry. I saw my life flash before my eyes. I heard my parents tell me they loved me. I couldn't let them down! I cleared my head and lifted my foot to the next step. One foot after the other, that's all I had to do. Before I knew it I was standing victoriously at the top. I should have sat my rump down right then and slid down, but I had just overcome the greatest challenge in my first grade career. I had to stand atop my podium and take in this moment.

It was right then, at the peak of my self-confidence that a gust of wind lifted up my dress and exposed my Little Mermaid underwear to the crowd. As the wind dissipated, the laughter and judgmentally pointed fingers filled the air. My face turned red hot instantaneously so I smoothed out my dress, plopped down and slid down the slide. And that was the single most embarrassing thing to happen to me for the next fourteen years. When I would finish telling this story, I was always left with blank stares, confused looks and the dreaded follow up question: "That's it?" I was always disappointed that I didn't get a laugh. Not even a pity laugh. But now I have a story to tell. Go ahead and ask me.

What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?

It all started during my summer in California. There was this guy who called himself German. I had found this one on Tinder too. We had met up and gone on a successful hike near Los Angeles. He was nice enough and easy to talk to. Afterwards, he got to practice his tour guide skills as he showed me around the Hollywood strip. We ate at the California Pizza Kitchen, looked for celebrities and tried avoiding pick-pocketers. It was great — nothing out of the ordinary. Then he asked me to be his girlfriend, causing everything to topple because the feelings were not mutual.

Fast forward a couple weeks and the US Open for surfing was taking place at Huntington Beach. German invited me out for a beach day. With no other plans on my agenda, I agreed. As I head out the door, he texts me to say he's hanging out with his bro and asked if he could join us. I didn't think much of it, just another person to be socially awkward around. Little did I know that the boring get to know you questions wouldn't be necessary.

With the squeak of the front porch door, the unknown anticipation swelled. “Kate, this is...” and our eyes met. The door slammed shut behind me, branding this moment into my memory. As luck would have it, his *bro* and I had been texting through Tinder for the past month. I finished German’s sentence by saying, “Jimmy!” My eyes darted between the two of them as if I were watching a ping pong championship match. My mind raced. *Both of you are on Tinder and both of you matched with me. This ought to be fun.*

As it turns out, it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. We all got along well enough and it was off to the beach we went.

If you’ve ever been to a California beach in the summer on a weekend then you understand how crowded it can be. Not only was this day perfect beach weather and on a weekend, but it was also during the US Open. With the amount of sunbathing people and towels spread out I could have crossed the entire beach without touching a grain of sand. Somehow still we managed to find an unclaimed patch near the pier. The guys plugged in their phones to their speaker and we became the life of the beach party.

Time passed. Peanuts were eaten and skin was burned. Cooling off in the water seemed to be the logical next activity. We grabbed the Nerf football and made our way down to the water. Jimmy and German trekked out to deeper waters so that they could dive for the football, right into a wave. Trying to show off or just looking stupid, I couldn’t decide. As for me, I tried to stay in knee-deep waters to keep my balance but over the course of throwing the football back and forth with the guys, I had been drawn out into deceptively deeper waters.

The football was thrown near no one so both Jimmy and I went after it. As soon as he caught it I turned to see a monster wave coming right for us. We had somehow made it a good 25 feet into the water and all I could think was: *this is how I die.*

Darkness. Eyes shut, mouth open, I was tossed around weightlessly. When I came to a stop I was sitting on shore, weighed down by a pound of sand in my swimsuit bottoms. As I wiped the saltwater from my eyes I saw that the wave had taken out Jimmy too. He sat next to me and we watched in a daze as German ran toward us frantically.

Assuming he was coming to see if we were all right, I was thrown off when he didn't stop where we were situated. He ran past us. Jimmy and I exchanged confused glances, and then one of us no longer looked confused.

“Oh shoot!” (Only he didn't say shoot.) I looked down to realize that I was topless. The monster wave couldn't just wipe us out, it had to take my bikini top as well. That's what German was chasing after with such determination.

I'm not sure who else saw what happened but knowing my luck the eyes of the entire beach were on me.

And there you have it. It took me 20 years but I finally have an embarrassing story to tell. What do you think? Would you give me a pity laugh?

Before I Begin

My dad's character has begun to take form thus far, but there's so much more to him than his overwhelming friendliness and thundering teacher voice. As much as I have tried, I cannot limit my father's awkward contributions to my life to one regular story, left to blend in with the rest, so I am branching off. What follows in terms of my dad's character, has all happened at one time or another. The reactions and attitudes of my character however, have been altered. While Jeff is based on my dad's unique personality, I needed a situation that would appropriately incorporate all the quirks my dad is known for. In order to do that I created a fictional plot and timeline that highlights my dad's individuality. Hence, while the daughter shares my name, her personality and reactions do not reflect my own.

No feelings were damaged in the writing of this story.

THE LAST STRAW

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

JEFF is asleep in his bed. His 18 year old daughter KATE walks into the room.

KATE

Dad? Dad! Dad wake up!

Kate shakes Jeff awake. He rolls over pulling the blankets over his head.

JEFF

10 more minutes!

KATE

Come on! We have to start driving!

Kate walks to the end of the bed and pulls the blanket off her dad's bed. Jeff quivers.

Kate picks a pair of jeans and a shirt out from the closet and throws them at her dad, still in bed.

KATE

Get your lazy butt out of bed already!
You can't stall forever. Sooner or
later you're going to have to drive me
to college.

Kate leaves the room. Jeff groans and rolls out of bed.

JEFF

Ya know, I had the strangest dream last
night. (beat) I dreamt that my little
girl was all grown up and she was forcing
me to drive her to college.

KATE (O.S.)

Not a dream!

JEFF

Not a good one at least.

Jeff slowly puts his pants on and walks out of his room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Boxes fill the living room. Jeff and Kate stand surrounded by them.

JEFF

Well, we better start loading them up I guess.

They both grab a box and walk through the front door.

KATE

What is that?

A mini van sits in the driveway. Jeff looks back and forth between it and Kate.

JEFF

Umm that's our car, honey. You've driven in it before. Don't you remember?

KATE

But I thought we were taking the Prius?

JEFF

Oh, no! No, your mother had to drive that to her convention today. Besides, all your boxes wouldn't have a fighting chance of fitting in that. We'd have to take two trips, at least!

KATE

But, but I'm going to college today! I can't drive in on my first day in a mini van!

JEFF

Oh, well why not? Mini vans are very sensible vehicles, and it's a family car. All anyone will think is that you love your family, that's not a bad thing, is it?

Kate gives her father the death glare.

KATE

Have you met our family?

JEFF

Ha ha, there's that sarcastic sense of humor that you know I love. C'mon, this'll be fun! You and me, just like old times!

Jeff and Kate finish loading the boxes into the mini van.

INT. MINI VAN - MORNING

They get in the car, Jeff goes to start the ignition but pauses.

JEFF

This is the last time you'll be sitting in the driveway for a few months. Any last words you'd like to say? Memories you'd like to reminisce? Feelings you'd like to share? (beat) No? Well I have a few. You were about seven years old when I taught you to ride your bike in this very driveway. Remember that? I wrapped you in pillows and a boatload of duct tape. Ha! You did look pretty silly, but I wasn't about to let anything happen to my baby girl. You know, I -

KATE

Daaad... Can we just go already?

JEFF

Right. Sorry. Off we go then!

Jeff starts the van and backs out of the driveway.

JEFF

Man, when you were just a baby everyone always told your mom and I, "Cherish every

JEFF (CONT'D)

moment. They grow up fast!" Oh, I didn't think much of it, but they were right. Seems like it was just yesterday I was holding you in my arms in the hospital. You were wrapped in a little pink blanket and you had the biggest lips I'd ever seen on a baby! Now look at you. All grown up and I'm driving you to college! I just can't believe it. I -

Kate interrupts her dad and turns the radio on. She turns up the volume as Luke Bryan's new song comes on.

She turns in her seat with her back to her dad and rests her head against the seat.

A few moments pass then Jeff turns off the radio. Kate looks at him suspiciously and turns it back on. Without hesitation Jeff turns it off again.

KATE

What are you doing?

JEFF

Well I just thought that since we're driving to college and I won't see you for a few months that you might want to talk a little.

KATE

Well, I don't. Especially not about my chubby baby lips.

Kate rests her head on the seat again, but her eyes stay open. Silence floods the car. Kate rolls her eyes.

KATE

Fine.

JEFF

Oh, good! Say, remember when you were little, oh maybe four or five, and you stole your grandmother's red lipstick and then smeared it all over yourself? Ha, boy were

JEFF (CONT'D)

you in trouble. But you looked so cute and helpless with your chubby little legs that we just couldn't bring ourselves to do anything but laugh.

KATE

Daaad!

JEFF

What? You said not to talk about your chubby baby lips. You said nothing about your chubby little legs! Oh! And remember that one time -

Jeff continues talking but Kate tries to block out his voice. She pulls her hood over her head and slouches down into the seat, preparing for a long drive.

The digital clock on the dashboard changes from 10:00 to 2:30. Kate is looking out the window. Jeff's voice becomes clear again.

JEFF

...and you cried and cried and cried your little heart out. I remember telling my friends that you had just -

KATE

Hey! Hey, you just passed the exit!

Kate watches the sign as they pass the exit.

JEFF

Oh, I wanted it to be a surprise! I decided we could take the scenic route instead! You know, one last adventure with your old man before you head off to college! What do you think? Are you surprised? You are, aren't you?

KATE

But it's already a six hour drive!

JEFF

Oh, I knew you'd be surprised! C'mon,

JEFF (CONT'D)

it'll be fun! We can check in up until
6:00 tonight. (beat) What do ya say?
For old time's sake?

KATE

(annoyed)

(beat) Why couldn't mom drive me again?

JEFF

Oh you know she had that big, fancy
convention she had to go to. She's been
planning it for months now and today's the
only day she could reserve the convention center
for! She's been working so hard on it, I
couldn't let her miss it! So I said,
"Don't you worry. I can drive Kate down to
college. It'll be just like one of our old
road trips, just like we used to do!"
Remember when we used to take road trips
during the summers and go camping and stuff?
Well anyway, she thought it was a lovely idea,
using her words. So, here we are! Just you
and me, out on the open road again! (beat,
starts singing) On the road again... I just
can't wait to be on the road again!

Kate shuts her eyes and covers her ears with her hands,
trying to block out her dad.

The digital clock on the dash changes from 2:45 to 4:15.

Kate still stares hopelessly out the window. Jeff points
out the front windshield.

JEFF

Oh, look! There's a bald eagle up in that
tree! Wow, look at how huge that nest is.
Oh! Oh, there's another one! Must be a momma
and a daddy eagle. Don't you think?

Kate's eyes suddenly open wider. Her face turns to a smile.

KATE

We're here. We're here! Finally! Thank God.

Jeff parks the mini van and Kate hops out. She looks around smiling and starts swiftly walking towards the sign that says: "Registration."

Jeff steps out of the car. He looks around, saddened, then follows after Kate.

INT. REGISTRATION BUILDING

Kate walks up to a door with the sign "Registration" taped to it. She goes to open the door but can't. The door is locked. She looks back at the sign: "Registration: 1:00pm - 4:00pm." She checks her phone: 4:17pm.

Jeff catches up to Kate, still standing outside the door.

JEFF

Well, what are you waiting for?

KATE

They're closed.

JEFF

What do you mean they're closed? They're supposed to be open until 6:00, I checked!

Jeff pulls out a paper from his pocket and unfolds it. He consults the paper, then looks at Kate nervously.

JEFF

Oh. The welcoming ceremony is at 6 tomorrow night. (beat) I looked at it quickly this morning, I must have glanced at the wrong day.

KATE

What? Was this part of your plan? Make me late so I can't register and then I'll have to live at home with you and mom for the rest of my life? Huh?

JEFF

What? No, I-

KATE

We're only 15 minutes late. Someone has got to still be here.

Kate starts to knock on the doors. When no one appears she starts to pound on the doors. Suddenly, a WOMAN walks out of a room in the back. She walks over to the doors, unlocking and opening them.

KATE

Thank you so much! It would seem my dad is trying to sabotage my attempt to obtain a higher education.

The woman looks at Jeff questionably.

JEFF

She's kidding of course. Kids these days!

Kate enters the large room, full of tables. She finds the table marked "N-Z" and walks over to it.

KATE

I'm Kate -

JEFF

I'm sorry, I didn't get the chance to formally introduce myself. I'm her father, Jeff. Jeff Seaholm. I teach U.S. History up in Lynden. It's my fault we're late, I apologize for that. (beat) Oh boy is my daughter excited to start school here in a few days! Oh, I just love this campus and this small community. This is a very safe town, is it not? How would you rate the security level of -

KATE

Dad! You've done enough already. I've got this. You can go wait outside, I'll be there in a minute.

JEFF

(beat) Oh, okay. Well it was very nice to meet you!

The woman looks confused and overwhelmed with information. She forces a smile. Jeff shakes the woman's hand.

JEFF

Have a nice rest of your day!

Jeff exits the room. Kate watches him leave then turns back to the woman embarrassed and red in the face.

CUT TO:

EXT. REGISTRATION BUILDING

Jeff is standing by a bench outside the building talking to a family he's just met.

Kate walks out of the building, a packet of papers in hand and walks past her dad.

Jeff sees Kate pass him.

JEFF (O.S.)

It was nice meeting you. Good luck in school!

Jeff fast walks to catch up with Kate.

JEFF

So did you get everything you needed?
Student I.D. card? Dorm key? Which
dorm are you in?

Kate hands him the packet of papers.

KATE

(annoyed)

Here. My dorm's on the other side of campus.
Why don't you drive the car over and I'll
meet you there? I think I'd like to walk
through campus.

Kate walks off. Jeff calls after her.

JEFF

Don't be silly, I can just drive you
over. Come on, hop in the car.

KATE
(short tempered)
No, it's fine.

JEFF
Oh, okay. I'll be right there.

Jeff pauses, watching Kate walk away then turns and walks off in the direction of the mini van.

EXT. DORM BUILDING

Kate stands outside the door alone as families enter and exit with full boxes. She smiles at them as they pass her. Kate checks the time on her phone, 5:10, then looks back at the street.

The mini van pulls around the corner. Jeff honks the horn twice and parks right in front of the building. Jeff gets out of the car as Kate walks up to him.

JEFF
Sorry that took me so long, I -

KATE
Where have you been? It takes you 45 minutes to drive from one side of campus to the other?

JEFF
Well, no I -

KATE
Where have you been?

JEFF
(beat) I started driving over here right away, but then I saw a woman and her daughter trying to carry these big boxes into a dormitory. All I did was stop to offer my help. I was just planning on helping that one family, but then other people started asking if I would help them and well, I didn't know what else to tell them.

KATE

I don't know, how about "My daughter is waiting for me across campus to help her unload her things. Sorry but I have to go."
(beat) That's all it takes!

JEFF

I-I'm sorry. I guess you're right. I should have done that.

KATE

Come on, I've been standing out here forever. I'm on the second floor, room 201.

Kate walks to the back of the mini van and opens the door. She picks up a box and heads inside. Jeff follows shortly after her.

INT. DORM - EVENING

They walk up the stairs and exit onto the second floor. The first door they see is room 201.

JEFF

Right by the stairway. That's good. You'll be able to make a quick escape in the event of a fire.

Kate glares at Jeff, rolls her eyes, then turns and unlocks her door. She walks in and sets her boxes down on the bed by the window.

JEFF

It's bigger than I was expecting. That's nice. Lots of storage space, you'll need that. (Jeff puts down his box.) Ya know, when I was in college my room was the size of a closet. Granted, I didn't have a roommate but still it's nice to see things have changed since then.

Kate leaves the room and heads down the stairs. Jeff pauses then follows.

EXT. OUTSIDE DORM - EVENING

They make several trips back and forth between her room and the mini van.

INT. DORM - EVENING

Finally, boxes cover the floor of the dorm room.

JEFF

Do you want me to put the sheets on your bed?

KATE

If I say no, will you leave?

JEFF

What? No, silly. I'm yours until tomorrow!

KATE

(sigh) Fine.

Kate starts unpacking boxes. Jeff begins to put the mattress cover, sheets and comforter on the bed. Jeff looks over at the empty bed on the other side of the room.

JEFF

See, we're not late. Your roommate's not even here yet. (beat) Do you think her father's trying to sabotage her opportunity to obtain further education too?

KATE

No.

JEFF

Oh? And why not?

KATE

Because she's coming tomorrow night.

JEFF
(beat) Oh. Right.

Kate continues unpacking boxes. She doesn't bother looking at her father.

JEFF
Where do you think you're going to put your posters?

KATE
I don't know.

JEFF
Oh, well what about your -

KATE
Ya know, I think we forgot a box in the car. I'll go down and get it.

Kate leaves the room, Jeff pauses then puts the final pillows on her bed.

EXT. OUTSIDE DORM - EVENING

Kate walks out to the van and opens the door. She takes a deep breath. She then looks around for something to take back up to the room. She finds her half empty bottle of Diet Coke and an open envelope.

INT. DORM - EVENING

Kate reenters the dorm and walks back up the stairs. As she rounds the final corner she runs into DREW.

KATE
Oh! I'm sorry, I guess I should watch -

They make eye contact and Kate suddenly becomes nervous.

DREW
No, no. It was probably my fault.
(beat) I'm Drew. I'm moving

DREW (CONT'D)
into the third floor, got here early
for football.

KATE
Kate. I was just umm, bringing up the last
of my things to the second floor.

Drew looks at the Diet Coke and envelope in her hands.

DREW
Yeah, best not to forget those crucial
items.

Kate looks down at her hands then back up at Drew.

KATE
(embarrassed)
Oh, uhh it's a long story.

DREW
(beat) Anyways, hey, my roommate and I are
going to watch the football game tomorrow
night in our room. You should come up
if you have a chance. (beat) I can't
promise there'll be any Diet Coke but
I'm sure we can find something you'll like.

KATE
(nervously)
Sure, y-yeah. That sounds like fun. What
room are you-

The door to the second floor opens suddenly. Jeff steps
halfway out into the stairway.

JEFF
Oh there you are! I thought
you said you were just running down
to the car real quick? Anyway, I was
unpacking some more boxes when I found
an old friend of yours!

Jeff's right arm comes out from behind his back. He is
holding a beat up old Mickey Mouse.

JEFF

It's Mickey! I found him on your bed at home so I packed him away for you. I can't believe you almost forgot to bring him along with you to college! I don't know how you would ever be able to sleep without him. Well, good thing I saw him at the last minute. That's why I always double check everything. (noticing Drew for the first time) Oh, hi there! I'm Jeff. Jeff Seaholm.

DREW

(to Kate)

Do you know this guy?

Kate pauses, exchanging glances with Jeff and Drew.

KATE

(quietly to Drew)

Uhh, nope. He must have me confused with someone else.

JEFF

Ha! Like I could ever get my baby girl confused with someone else!

DREW

(to Kate)

(beat) Yeah, umm I'll see you around.

Drew continues walking down the stairs.

JEFF

Oh, okay! It was nice meeting you!

Kate furiously walks up the stairs, past Jeff and into her room. Jeff follows after her happily.

JEFF

He seems like a nice young man. Maybe he'll be your first college friend.

Kate glares at Jeff.

JEFF

What? (beat) What'd I do this time?

Kate shuts the door behind Jeff.

KATE

Even when I'm at college you STILL can't let me have my own conversations or let me register by myself or, or! Do you think you can meet someone new and NOT introduce yourself to them? (mockingly) "Hi, I'm Jeff. Jeff Seaholm. I teach U.S. History in Lynden. I wouldn't be surprised if you've heard of me."

JEFF

Wait, where is this coming from? What are you talking about?

KATE

YOU! You never let me do anything by myself! You always have to intervene and give your input! You always have to talk to everyone and introduce yourself! You always have to talk! I'm tired of it! I'm tired of having people know me only as "Mr. Seaholm's daughter." My name's Kate! I thought at least I could be myself at college but you STILL can't let me do things on my own! How am I supposed to grow and learn if you never give me the chance to do so?

Kate stops abruptly, shocked at what just came out of her mouth.

Jeff stands there astonished.

JEFF

I-I'm sorry. I never knew you felt like this. Believe me, those were never my intentions. (beat) I'll let you unpack the rest of your things.

Jeff starts to leave the room. He stops then turns around.

JEFF

(delicately)

If you still want to have dinner tonight, like we planned, there was that Mexican restaurant right when we came into town. It's right there on the main street just a couple blocks away. I'll be there tonight, around 7:00 after I check in to the hotel. (beat) I'd appreciate it if you'd join me, (beat) but I, umm, I'd understand if you don't want to be seen with me in your new community.

Jeff opens the door, leaves the room and walks down the stairs. Kate sits down on her new bed that her dad just made up for her, astonished at her words and confused by her dad's subtle reaction. Boxes clutter the floor. FADE OUT.

INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jeff sits alone at a table in the back corner. Mexican music plays in the background. He checks his watch, 7:30, then glances at the door. He takes a sip of his drink. A WAITRESS walks over to his table.

WAITRESS

Sir, I'm sorry but you'll have to order something if you want to keep this table.

JEFF

I'm waiting for my daughter. She should be here any minute now. (beat) Please, just five more minutes.

The waitress nods then walks away. Jeff sadly looks down at his hands wrapped around his drink.

The door opens, ringing the bell above it. In walks Kate. She looks around the restaurant, then sees her dad and walks over to him. He looks up from his hands as she approaches.

JEFF

Oh, I knew you would show up!

KATE

Did you know that there are three Mexican restaurants on the main street here?

JEFF

Really? Oh, no I only saw this one.

KATE

Well the other ones are quite nice too.
(beat) Okay look, I'm sorry for what I said earlier...

JEFF

Oh, I knew you didn't -

KATE

But that doesn't mean I regret saying it.
(beat) I need you to get that, (beat) it's just, you have to learn to let me do things on my own sometimes.

JEFF

Oh, (beat) no you're right. I know I shouldn't smother you as much as I do sometimes, I know that. And I'll try my best to get better at that. It's just, you're still my little girl. I don't want to lose you so I try to hold onto you for as long as I can. (beat) You'll always be my little girl and I'll always want to protect you and be there for you.

KATE

See, you say that all the time but nothing ever changes. You still *smother* me and never let me do anything on my own!

JEFF

(hesitantly)

Okay. So, what does that mean? Can you forgive your old man? Give me another chance?

KATE

I don't know. (long pause) Only if you promise to give me my space. Let me try new things, make mistakes, and learn things the hard way. Do you think you can do that dad? (beat)
Dad?

Jeff stares off screen.

CUT TO:

INT. JEFF'S LIVING ROOM (JEFF'S DREAM FLASH FORWARD)

Jeff is sitting on his couch in his living room reading a newspaper. The clock reads 7:30. Jeff turns the page in his newspaper. The heading reads: "FBI'S MOST WANTED." Underneath is a picture which resembles Kate. The description reads, "Kate Seaholm: Wanted in five states on several accounts of grand larceny, and two accounts of second degree murder."

The doorbell rings and Jeff gets up to answer it. Kate stands there, 27 years old, dressed in black, bangs swept over her eyes, a cigarette in one hand and a beer bottle in the other. Two kids in ratty clothing stand on either side of her.

JEFF

Kate? What have you done? I can help you!
Please, let me help you.

KATE

No, Dad! I don't need your help. You promised you'd let me try new things, make mistakes and learn things the hard way, well here I am! And it's all thanks to you Dad!

JEFF

What? No, I never meant for this to happen! No, please!

KATE (V.O.)

Dad? Dad?

INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Kate shakes Jeff out of his imagination. Jeff looks around confused.

KATE

Dad! Hello? Are you okay?

JEFF

Huh? Oh, yeah. Sorry, I was just lost in thought.

KATE

Okay, well?

JEFF

(beat) Well what?

KATE

Do you think you can back off a bit or not?

JEFF

I don't know if I can. (pause, Jeff begins to nod his head) But I'll do my best. (beat) Don't do drugs. And don't become a thief. Oh and stay off the FBI's Most Wanted list.

KATE

(confused)

Wait? What are you talking -

JEFF

Those are my conditions!

KATE

Oh-okay? I think I can manage that Dad.

Jeff jumps out of his seat and gives Kate a hug.

JEFF

Don't you forget, you're always going to be my little girl. I'm always going

JEFF (CONT'D)

to do my best to protect you.

KATE

Okay. I'm 18 now though, an adult, you can start to back off a little.

Jeff lets go of the hug and smiles at Kate.

JEFF

Okay, I'll work on that. (beat) Are you hungry? I'm starving!

Jeff waves over the waitress. Kate looks at her dad curiously.

KATE

You know, it's only a six hour drive down here. Maybe, I don't know, (beat) only if you want to, but maybe you could drive down one weekend and we could go on a road trip together.

Jeff looks up at Kate. His face lights up with a smile.

KATE

We haven't driven around out here before. I'm sure we could find some things to do. (beat) But only if you want to of course.

JEFF

Are you kidding?! Let's see, I think I have a Friday off coming up in a couple weeks. I could -

Kate forces a cough.

KATE

Eh-em.

JEFF

Oh, umm, (beat) you know now that I think of it, I might wait until October to come down. (pause) That would allow you to get settled in and make new friends. (beat)

JEFF (CONT'D)

Plus all the leaves would be changing colors by then which would make for a very nice drive.

KATE

I think that sounds like a great idea.

The waitress walks up to the table.

WAITRESS

I see your daughter finally showed up.
So, what can I get started for you tonight?

Jeff looks over at Kate as she begins to order. He watches her, smiling, then gives the waitress his order. They hand the waitress their menus and she walks away.

Jeff and Kate sit at the table together, and start talking once again. FADE OUT.

Dear Diary

Like I've said before, I have the worse luck ever. Nothing major usually, just a lot of little things that tend to build up. Through the course of studying in England and exploring California on my own, I now realize that my bad luck stemmed from my insecurities and my tendency to overthink things. I could tell you how my mind would act out every possible outcome of a situation before it actually took place, or how my mind raced with each comment I made, wondering if it was stupid and worrying that whoever I was talking to would stand up and leave right then, or how if things didn't play out exactly how I imagined in my head, I'd be disappointed. I could tell you all of this, but as my writing professors always say: "Show, don't tell."

Majoring in creative writing, people assume or even expect me to keep a journal. I don't. I've tried several different times though: At age eleven I bought a journal with a lock on it from the Dollar Tree and took it with me on vacation, wrote two entries and then lost the key. For my 15th birthday my friend gave me a Mickey Mouse journal but it was too cute, I couldn't bring myself to ruin it with my insignificant scribbles. When I studied in England I tried keeping track of the places I traveled and the adventures I had, but I bought a new pen in the shape of Robin Hood's arrow from Sherwood Forest, and that pen was far more interesting than my stories—I'm like a seagull with shiny objects, I get distracted easily. From these failed attempts at doing what a writer should do, my memory has turned out to be my favorite journal. Anytime I need a story for class, I know where to find one. Granted, some details might become twisted and exaggerated as they make their way to the page, but the gist is always the same. For example, I went on a group date during my freshman year of college. It was nothing out of the usual, but this is how I remember it.

From my mental diary:

Entering the dining hall at college is always an inner struggle for me. The doors, in need of some WD-40, announce my arrival into the room lit up by fluorescent lights from which headaches ensue with prolonged exposure. The jocks and fraternity guys sit

to the right, occupying the couches to watch football on the television screens, the baseball team to the left is easy to spot as they all wear matching purple jerseys. The girls at the table floating in the center of the floor all wear similar skinny jeans, boots with straps and elegant, thin sweaters. I can feel their eyes on me, judging my baggy jeans and sweatshirt.

I remember my manors as the lunch lady swipes my ID card, and I quickly choose something edible and sit down. Walking through the front doors, it's like someone gives me shoulder pads that weigh me down, and then after putting my dirty dishes on the conveyor belt, I can ditch the weight at the exit. I have to eat in order to survive through my next class, otherwise I would never set foot in here.

A few weeks ago in the dining hall, after I had just watched my dishes disappear along the conveyor belt to be cleaned, I turned and headed for the exit, ready to unload the weight of being watched, but my path was blocked. Drew, this football player who I had met during the first week of school, blocked my escape. His broad shoulders blocked the beautiful light from just outside as his beard followed his mouth as it moved into a smile. "Hey!" he said. I hadn't seen this guy or talked to him in months. What could he possibly want from me?

"You play tennis, right? Do you have your tennis racquet here with you?" he continued. Shocked that he remembered that one detail I shared with him way back when, I took the bait and confirmed what he had said.

"Yeah I have my racquet with me. Why? Do you want to borrow it?"

"No, I was thinking maybe you'd want to play tennis sometime? I'm a natural Rafael Nadal but I'd go easy on you." He looked pleased with himself. I didn't know who that was. All I could focus on was the door behind him.

"Well, I haven't played in a while but I guess we could sometime." My armpits had grown sticky and my eyes darted between his gentle yet demanding smile and my freedom.

"Great! I'll text you!"

“Okay, sounds good.” And with that I fled. I walked to my next class just as I had done the day before.

A few days later sitting in class, my pocket vibrated. I forgot to put it on silent. My curiosity got the best of me and I subtly snuck a peak at the screen. It was a Facebook message from Drew. He must have finally realized he didn’t have my phone number. *Want to play tennis tomorrow, say 4?* That worked for me.

Standing with my toe on the baseline, my hands shook as I threw up my arm. The tennis ball shivered in the air. That wouldn’t do. I caught it on its way back down. Second serve was successful and after that point was played out, it was clear Drew was no Nadal. He got no points on me and I didn’t hear from him for the next month. Apparently I shamed him into silence.

The leather couch in the game room was questionably speckled but I claimed it as my own while watching *Tangled*. My phone next to me, saving my friend’s seat, came to life with an unexpected message from Drew: “A couple guys and I are going bowling, wanna come?”

No, I didn’t want to go. I’d rather curl up on this couch and watch Disney movies with my friends who it was appropriate to be quiet around. I didn’t want to go out in the rain. Go meet up with Drew and who knows how many strangers. I didn’t want to be social. I didn’t want to, but I knew I couldn’t be a hermit forever, so I said yes, as long as my roommate could tag along. I had to balance out the scale in some way.

The five minute drive to the bowling alley was filled with nothing but nervous panic attacks. I hardly knew Drew, and taking on an entire posse of guys was a challenge I happily avoided up until this point. The rain tried to beat some sense into me but the windshield wipers refused to let me decipher its message.

Walking into the bowling alley, my presence was not announced by the squeak of the doors, rather the annoyed *ping!* of the automated bell. Drew was hunched over in one of those tacky plastic chairs that refuse to let you keep good posture. Around the tree and

down the rabbit hole, he tapped each shoe checking their laces before noticing the trail of rain water that traced my path from the doors to the front counter. I tried to mask my nerves with excitement as I noticed the *four* guy friends sitting in the chairs next to him. I was outnumbered.

When I get nervous, I smile, consistently. My mom says she can tell when I'm uncomfortable because my teeth will be dry from doing nothing but smiling. I think Drew sensed this too because he offered up a hug as a peace offering. As he lifted his arms I could already see sweat stains on his shirt. We hadn't even started yet and he was already a sticky mess. And with those broad shoulders, he went in for the hug, popping my safety bubble, the only thing keeping me sane. I should never have left the comfort of that stained couch.

Six gutter balls later and my nerves had struck me out. His friends cheered on my lack of skill, trying to be positive although there was no redemption in sight. Drew tried to distract from my embarrassment by wrapping his arm around my shoulders, as if that would help. My attempt at being more social had turned into a group date that I did not sign up for. I was out of my league.

I was not sorry to see the game come to an end, the sooner the better since I was an astonishing 50 points behind the rest of the group. Fleeing from Drew's next get-to-know-you question, I took shelter back in my dorm room. While I wanted to make new friends and be more social, I wasn't prepared for a group date situation. I didn't feel too bad though, he was a hugger, it would never have worked out.

I see now that in order to become the social butterfly I had my sights set on becoming, I needed to step out of my comfort zone and get off that couch. Eventually I would face this truth and intentionally put myself in situations that made me socially uncomfortable for the very reason to break out of my shell. Unfortunately, Drew would never see this side of me.

Let It Happen

Party of two! Party of two! The cast member's voice echoes throughout the caves, swerving along with the line of anxious families in matching Mickey ear hats. After a solid 10 hours of hanging onto each other's shirts like leashes and dodging stroller wheels before they had a chance to run over our feet, our parents were more than happy to sit down and save seats for the nighttime firework show. My younger brother who now towers over me like one of those robots that leads the way for the stormtroopers, still has energy to spare and I feel the need to hit every ride at least twice. So bidding adieu to our parents hunkering down on the sidewalk, we beeline through the crowd on our journey to the Indiana Jones ride.

The sign at the entrance discloses the wait to be 70 minutes from "this point" and the never-ending line behind the turn stile doesn't offer a different opinion. This was not our first time at Disneyland though. With one look I knew what Ben was thinking and our mission was put into motion. Slithering through the ropes we surface at the turn stile, inquiring about a single rider's pass and proceed to walk up the exit, passing all the tortured souls refusing to break up their group. In the past, every other time my brother and I chose to do the single rider's route we were able to stand next to each other in line the entire time. Our six year streak was about to be broken.

Reaching the checkpoint before embarking on our adventurous ride, the cast member split us up like cattle. My not-so-little little brother walked through the gate with no problem but as soon as I approached, the cast member forced her arm down creating a barrier between siblings. "And we'll stop right here," was her only comment. Turning, expecting to see the mass of riders behind me, I am shocked to find no one. One single, single rider left and she stops me. With outstretched arms I cry out to my brother, "Wait for me!" Just as the whites of his eyes disappear into the abyss, the lane beside me opens up, allowing all those in wheelchairs to proceed before me. With slow progress four, five, six wheelchairs and their families bypass me before the rope restricting my advancement is lifted.

I try catching up to Ben but it's no use as the lady in line in front of me, who I named "Susan," struggles to steer her wheelchair through the gates and around delicate toes. The hand railings switch back and forth to fit as many people in the confined space as possible, but with each corner our progress would be delayed because the edge of her wheel kept getting caught. She'd put it in reverse and try to make a wider turn the next time. I'm sure my brother was already waiting for me at the exit but there was nothing I could do. I was doomed to be stuck behind "Susan" who apparently is not a fast learner. Just when I thought we were in the clear, there was the ramp. With no brakes and no way to stop gravity from taking over, she kept making progress with the line but as soon as it halted she began to roll backwards. At first she apologized for slamming into my shins and for breaking every toe in my unprotected foot, but after the fourth ramp we both knew our fate. As the wheels started their clockwise rotation "Susan" would proclaim like a gospel singer, lifting her chin, closing her eyes and shaking her head, "Just let it happen! Just let it happen."

My mom use to tell me that if I rolled my eyes one hundred times they would get stuck looking up. If that had been true, my brother might have been startled by my appearance when I finally made it out of the exhaust filled caves.

Standing behind "Susan," my eyes automatically rolled in synch with her wheels. Our slow progress was torture but the fresh air upon exiting was all the more rewarding. Leaning impatiently against the dusty rocks outside the ride, Ben perks up when he finally sees me. "What took you so long?"

I start to retell my journey but as "Susan" rolls down the exit ramp and past me one last time, I can't help but laugh.

Lost in London

Sleep deprivation and motion sickness are not a good combination. Have you ever taken a ten day bus trip around Europe with a snoring Turkish bear, had your ferry delayed three hours due to high winds and then tried to find someone in London at night in the pouring rain? I'll walk you through my experience.

The planning started two months prior, in October, when my friend and I attended an informational meeting for a ten day trip around Europe with the Travel Club. It sounded great, and the free Dominos pizza was a bonus, but the trip extended two days into my dad's stay in London. He was visiting for Christmas but I couldn't resist Belgium, Amsterdam, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and France. As I sat in my seat, dunking my greasy slice of pizza into the ranch dipping sauce, I was torn between seeing Europe or seeing my dad. And then they said the magic words: "If you sign up tonight we'll throw in a free day trip to Disneyland Paris!"

I signed and initialed every piece of paper thrown my way before I could even think of how to tell my dad that I was abandoning him in London for two days while I visited Paris. I was sure he'd be fine with that.

When the day came to load into the bus, my friend Carley and I quickly chose two seats next to each other and tried to save the seat behind us for our friend. The bus was full, and so was the one trailing us. Everyone looked to be international students from Asia, all nice but all plugged into their music and headphones already. It appeared as though it would be a pleasant trip. And the seat across the aisle from us was empty so there would be extra foot room. Just as the bus began to pull out of the parking lot, the tour guide got a phone call and asked the driver to wait. In eager anticipation I looked out the window, wondering what we were waiting for. From a distance I saw this large man walking towards the bus. I couldn't quite make him out but it looked as though he was carrying a few bags. As the blur got closer I could tell that he was heading for our bus. The doors opened and the entire bus rocked as he stepped onboard. Sweaty, hairy, and drenched in cologne, the 6'4", 250 pound man was forced to choose the only available seat, right across the foot and a half aisle from us.

He quickly tried to become friends with everyone, talking loud enough for the bus behind us to hear him. And after no one wanted to talk, he fell fast asleep. Mouth agape, drool cascading, nose hairy, he snored. Practically shook the entire bus. The first one was a surprise, no one was sure of its source. But the second and third and each one to follow confirmed who was to blame. Some laughed, some poked him to try and wake him up (unsuccessfully), and Carley and I were unable to get any rest even with ear plugs as barriers.

Getting on and off the bus, we tried to switch up our seating arrangements, but everyone was comfortable in their seats, except for us. For the next ten days and seven countries, the snoring, lack of space and stench of cologne was our norm. Our friend behind us nicknamed him the Turkish bear after learning that our new acquaintance was from Turkey.

Fast forward to the end of our road trip, we had been sleeping primarily on a bus next to the Turkish bear or in some hostel bunk beds that resembled prison cells for the past ten days. We had reached every destination and completed every excursion. Now all that was left to do was to catch the ferry from Calais, France over to Dover, England. When we arrived at the ferry terminal, after being warned to watch for people sneaking under our buses to hitch a ride to England and then almost being rejected from England for forgetting my passport on the bus, we were notified that due to high winds our ferry would be delayed three hours. This was only a problem if you had a schedule to keep or were grumpy. Everyone on the bus fell into one or both of those categories.

I was supposed to meet my dad at our drop-off location in London at 7 p.m. But without a way to contact him, I arrived just after 10 p.m. and found everyone but my father. I waited at the hotel on the corner and then walked around the block to the train station in hopes that he would be there. I went to the office and had an announcement echo throughout every London train station: "Jeff Seaholm, please make your way to the information desk, your daughter is looking for you. Jeff Seaholm." No Jeff Seaholm arrived. Come to find out later that my dad had been waiting at the wrong hotel down another block, and then had gone to the tube and had an announcement echo throughout

every tube station: “Kate Seaholm, please make your way to the nearest information desk, your father is looking for you. Kate Seaholm.” While I searched above ground, my dad traced the route underground. I walked to our flat several blocks away, but without a key I was stuck outside. The smart thing for me to do would have been to wait there for my dad, but I was sleep deprived and motion sick from the ferry, it was already midnight in downtown London and if that wasn’t worthy of a movie scene already, it started to pour rain. So instead of thinking clearly, I spent way too much money traveling between the hotel and our flat, hoping to run into my dad somewhere.

When I was younger, my mom would read me a book called, “Are You My Mother?” It was about this lost baby bird asking everything he ran into if they were his mother. That night in London, I was that baby bird. Soaking wet, I checked the hotel, the train station, the tube stations and the flat, all the time asking if they’ve seen a man looking for his daughter. Each new location’s response was similar to the last, “Are you Kate? Oh, you just missed him! He said he was heading toward...” and I was off to my next destination, where I would have just missed him once again. Finally I told the nice ladies in the underground that I was going to wait at our flat and asked them to relay that information the next time they saw my dad. They didn’t think it would be too long since he had just based through there with tear-soaked cheeks because he couldn’t find me. Twenty minutes later, as I sat on the curb outside the locked doors, I heard footsteps echo down the alleyway. They began to get closer and move faster. And then I heard, “Pumpkin girl!” shouted as loud as can be. It was nearly 1 a.m. and I had finally found my dad.

He wrapped me in his arms and more tears were shed, mostly by him. We shared our stories from our game of tag as we searched for any place open to get food. Nothing was open, so my dad, being the overly friendly man he is, walked into the nearest hotel lobby and told the poor receptionist our entire sob story with the intention of them helping us find food. To my surprise and my dad’s delight, they offered to order us pizza to be delivered to the lobby. Their English accents were too thick for my dad so I stepped

in as translator for the next several minutes. They let us stay in their lobby to eat the pizza, provided we didn't soak their couches with our raincoats.

My dad talks a lot on a regular day, but after the night we just had, I've never heard him talk so much. I wasn't able to sneak in two words. I simply sat back and filled my stomach and my heart, feeling at home listening to my dad use up his word count for the week.

Gullible

Remember that random guy I mentioned earlier? The one who tossed his number onto my laptop at Starbucks and told me to call him if I wanted to get coffee? Let's dive into that story a bit deeper.

I was 19 years old and a foreigner in California. I had been there about one week when I decided to go sit at Starbucks and try to be productive. Before beginning my road trip south, I had declared this to be the summer I was going to be more social and truly be myself. I had just gotten out of my first serious relationship and thought it would be a nice change to put myself first and do what made me happy.

First step: make a friend. With this in mind, I sat down next to a guy I found easy on the eyes. On a normal day I would never have thought to do that but I figured if I stutter with my words and stab my cheek trying to get the straw from my drink into my mouth, I would never see him again in the chaos of California. I could move on to my next unsuspecting target, sipping their carmel macchiato, no problem.

We exchanged the deep and meaningful, "Is this seat taken?" "No, go for it," conversation, and then he put on his headphones. He must have thought he was too cool or maybe I was already annoying him, who knows. I will admit though that I was slightly disappointed when he stood up and left without another word a short ten minutes later. But I got over that quickly. And so I sat there, baking in the sun, working on my laptop, friendless. No one bothered me and I bothered no one.

I plugged into my own music when no one sat close enough for me to talk to. My foot tapped along with "I'm a Believer" from Shrek, creating an earthquake for the ants below scrambling over a fallen piece of pumpkin loaf. I was torn from my pleasant isolation when suddenly a stranger's hand was on my shoulder. My eyes shot to the pepper spray in my bag. My aunt had placed it in my hand before I left home, wrapping my fingers around it and making me promise that I'd take it with me, so there it sat on top of my Wheat Thins and bottled water boiling in the heat. But before I could reach for it, I turned slightly and recognized the face at the end of the arm. It was the attractive fellow whom I had such a deep and meaningful conversation with not twenty minutes ago. The

corner of his mouth twitched into a nervous smile as he tossed a minuscule, ratty piece of paper onto my keyboard, made his comment and then dodged cars and their unappreciative horns as he ran across the parking lot. I assumed his destination to be a car, but I lost track of him as he ran between some trees.

The next morning I woke up with the sun but waited an appropriate three hours before giving him a call. His accent was thick through the phone, making me that much more awkward as I misunderstood what he was saying. Annoyed with the struggle, I interrupted. I asked him to meet me at the same Starbucks (a neutral location full of witnesses), a few hours from then, and assuming his mumbles were confirmation, I hung up the phone.

Three hours later I pulled precisely into a parking space at Starbucks and went in to get my usual: a 12 ounce, sugar-free hazelnut latte. Emerging back into the blinding sun, I scoured the parking lot for my mystery friend. Nowhere near my Subaru, I picked him out. He was the only one trying to look casual leaning against his dusty Honda Accord but having to jump back occasionally due to the heated metal singeing his arm hairs. He was tall, 6'3" at least, maybe 6'4". His brown locks brushed across his forehead effortlessly and his shirt was carefully selected for me to admire the benefits of weightlifting. Initiating eye contact, he held good posture and came in for a hug. I'm not used to feeling small, being 5'11" myself, but as his arms opened wide for the embrace, I understood how my cats feel when my black lab wants nothing more than to play with them. He means no harm but he's just so much larger than them. I was engulfed.

Learning that I was new to the area he insisted on showing me the ropes of the Southern California lifestyle. I mentally took down his license plate number and texted my mom before climbing into his car. As we drove down the winding road to the beach, he made a point to repeatedly mention this trip to Europe he was going on with his brother in just a week. I let out a puff of air as I thought, *Wonderful, I make a friend and he's leaving in a week.* That was all that crossed my mind.

My mom says I'm gullible. My dad argues I'm too trusting.

The ripples of the road led us out to Laguna Beach. At first glance I thought this city was new to me but as I found my way around town better than he did, I realized this was not unfamiliar territory. Waiting at the traffic light across from the beach, I took off my sandals in preparation for the warm sand. The white man on the sign lit up, giving me permission to walk, but I ran, straight for the water after the rude awakening of the sand as it tried to melt the skin off my feet. I jumped the waves the way I did when I was little with my dad: like jump rope.

I walked along the wet sand, avoiding the children running to and from the waves unaware of their surroundings. My heavily accented friend followed. We laughed and talked, a wave caught me unexpectedly and in response to his laughter, I splashed his precious Air Jordans. He had no choice but to join me in the water then. As fewer people populated the beach, my new friend asked if I wanted to go skinny dipping. I thought he was joking but quickly discovered he wasn't as he began to strip. I think he just wanted to take off his shirt to make me aware of his rippling pectorals that were only slightly restricted by his tight, navy blue t-shirt. Still, I told him to get dressed, there were children nearby for goodness sake. I continued down the beach as if I wasn't associated with him and he eventually caught up with me. We wandered around the town a bit, then ordered high-end sandwiches with ingredients I had never heard of. He talked about his major in psychology, I smiled and nodded politely as his words drifted in one ear and shot out the other. I jumped at the next lull in our conversation, suggesting ice cream as an alternative to psychology.

He was a trickster, I was beginning to catch on. He was disappointed in my lack of a reaction to his exclamation: "Don't move! There's a spider on your back!" Then he tried a different approach as we sat on the steps outside the ice cream parlor. I was holding my generic, plastic water bottle in one hand, protecting it from the sun when he convinced me that there were words written at the bottom of the bottle. *My mom says I'm gullible.* In one motion I put the bottle to my eye like a telescope and he squeezed it with such force that the water erupted out of its container and drenched me. It was 80-some

degrees out so I wasn't mad at anyone but myself for falling for that. But as he sat there with his ice cream cone in his other hand, I knew what I had to do. I changed the subject, mentioning the muscular, bronzed, shirtless guys playing volleyball on the beach. I almost forgot about my mission. Turning back to him, I poured all of my attention into his ice cream. When I could tell his curiosity was struck I asked, sincerely concerned, "Is that a hair in your ice cream?" As he moved in to investigate I grabbed the cone and smeared it into his face. Rocky Road dripped from his beard to his shirt, which forced him to change shirts, *of course*.

He attempted to give me the silent treatment, but I accepted the challenge and he had no chance. We hopped back into his car to explore another city and for the next twenty minutes as we drove toward Newport Beach, he tried his best not to talk to me but he couldn't help but roll his eyes and laugh as I gave him driving directions and updates every tenth of a mile. Halfway to our destination he gave in. We filled the car with sarcastic remarks and out of tune singing on our way to catch the sun dip into the Pacific. Obstructed by only a few wispy clouds, it still had a ways to go before being tucked in so we climbed out over the rocks underneath the pier to get the best seats around for the sunset. As the sun sunk deeper, its light danced across the top of the water that bubbled gently against the rocks. The sun disappeared, dragging my blissful ignorance with it.

Before all light disappeared for the day, we climbed off the glazed rocks and began walking back to his car. Halfway back I paused, tilting my head to the stars. The sky was so clear. With my back to the light pollution, I admired the glittering sky and how it perfectly coexisted with the ocean horizon. The waves crashed at my feet and it was a comfortable 75 degrees. Everything seemed in place.

My heavily accented friend wrapped me in a hug from behind. I had forgotten he was there. Whispering in my ear he said: "You know, they say whoever you think about when you look out at the ocean is the person who has your heart. I think you've got my heart." Uncertain chills shot down my spine, but before I could react he spun me around and kissed me.

I didn't reciprocate.

He was thrown off, to say the least. I explained to him that it wasn't because I found him repulsive or anything, but since he was leaving for Europe in a week I simply didn't want to get attached. That's when he laughed and took a step back. His hand rose to his chin as he turned in a circle like a fox before lying down to rest.

"Have you ever seen *Wedding Crashers*?" he asked casually, looking up from the sand in search of my response. Confused, I shook my head. He continued. "Well, the guys in it go around telling girls at weddings stories to try to get them into bed." My heart began to pound as the waves crashed beside me, drowning out all other noise. He kept talking, "Leaving for Europe is my story. . .but it didn't work on you." His forehead wrinkled as his eyebrows caved inward trying to figure out where he went wrong. I stood there paralyzed while my mind shot out in a million different directions. *Did he really just say that? Was he that dumb to just tell me his play? Not the brightest bulb in the package. What is wrong with you? How did I not see this coming? What is wrong with me? Really? This liar just kissed me.* I had so many questions but as I looked into his eyes that showed no shimmer of shame, all I said was, "I don't care for liars. I'd like you to drive me back to my car now, please."

He didn't want to. His skull matched his accent: thick. The lanyard attached to his keys dangled from his jean pocket, moving calmly in the warm breeze. In one swift motion I ripped it from his pocket. I was going home whether he helped me or not. He jumped in the car as I started it up, his first smart move of the night. I followed the road along the coast in silence. He, in the passenger seat, flipped through the radio stations, searching my face for any sign that I liked that song. Or that one. I gave him nothing. I jumped out of the car from my crooked parking job at Starbucks, thanked him for the nice day, wished him well and cut straight to my Subaru with quick strides. I should have pepper sprayed him when I had the chance.

Red-handed

I am four years old and guilty. It's Easter morning at my grandparents' house on Bainbridge Island. The green grass I can see from the porch is speckled with dew and colorful plastic eggs filled with treats. Ceramic rabbits sit atop the fireplace mantel, out of reach from my good intentions. My grandma's fine China decorated with roses is spread out over the dinner table. I am told to wait on the couch with the fluffy, stuffed Easter bunnies that are impossible to hurt. The doorbell announces my parents' arrival. I jump up to greet our guests, still in my oversized Tweety Bird t-shirt. My daddy is wearing my favorite Easter Bunny tie, and my mommy looks so pretty in her blue dress. Looking between my pajamas and my mom and dad, I knew I had to step up my game. I ran to the bathroom, gave myself a once over and then found my grandma's ruby red lipstick in the drawer. My grandma always puts on lipstick to look pretty so I was sure it would do the trick for me too.

My four-year-old hands smeared the lipstick delicately over my lips until I looked as pretty as the Joker. But I'm still underdressed. Looking back, I think I had the same mentality with lipstick that I do now with Duct tape...Duct tape fixes everything! And with swift, elegant movements I began applying lipstick to my face, arms, legs and even Tweety Bird (we all had to look our best).

The thought that my appearance resembled a murder victim never crossed my mind. Instead I looked at my jack-o-lantern smile in the mirror and gave my lipstick-covered self a pep talk. *I looked good*, just like my mommy and grandma. And with that, I walked with the confidence of a lady out of the bathroom to join the family. Although I welcomed them with a smile and open arms, no one met me in the same way. My mom's eyes remind me of Wile E. Coyote's reaction when he looks down to see he's run off a cliff. My dad doesn't hesitate, rushing me back to the bathroom as I hear my grandma's laugh echo off the high ceilings.

Clean and in my Sunday best, we eat ham and mashed potatoes before hunting for Easter eggs. Later my mom shows me the proper way to apply Chapstick, baby steps. As

my mom tries to wash the last remnants of lipstick from under my fingernails, I feel sad that I ruined my grandma's lipstick. But there was nothing I could do about it now. They had caught me red-handed.

Afterword

Developing an idea for one's senior thesis and then proceeding to complete the project is a task every freshman is made aware of at the start of their college careers. The majority of students don't contemplate what their project's topic should be until their senior year, and even then they have an entire year to work on it so they are able to take their time. For some students like myself however, the senior thesis project approaches sooner than for others. Entering Linfield College I already had completed my Associate's Degree through the Running Start program at my high school in Washington. With this, I knew I would be at Linfield for a shorter period than the rest of the freshman I started with but I was still determined to make the most of my time. Through countless creative writing courses and my study abroad experience, I have learned the ins and outs of writing, strengthened my skills and technique use and gained life experience that I have been able to draw from when writing nonfiction.

With these skills and lessons under my belt, I began my final semester at Linfield confident and prepared to complete my senior thesis. I had begun developing ideas and writing its content over the summer which provided me with a good place to start. Through revisions and additions, workshops and meeting with the Writing Center, I am proud to present my senior thesis to the Linfield English Department.

Throughout my career at Linfield, I have taken several different creative writing courses, all of which consistently remind us as writers the techniques to include in our stories and poems that will help add depth, realism, and authenticity. Image, voice, character, setting and story are the five basic techniques to remember, with the addition of scene, reflection, research, transition and focus when writing nonfiction pieces. While these techniques are important to remember, they sometimes get taken for granted in upper level courses by those who have more experience with writing. Speaking from personal experience, I often think these writing techniques come as second nature and if dismissed during my initial writing process, I add them into later revisions. I did not realize how taking these techniques for granted impacted my writing until I enrolled in the Introduction to Creative Writing course during my last semester as a Creative Writing

major. Initially I was concerned that this class would be simple review and that I wouldn't learn anything drastically new. I was pleasantly surprised to discover how helpful this class was in my development of my senior thesis.

I caught myself beginning to take the five standard writing techniques for granted. This course reminded me of their importance and of the crucial roles they play throughout stories. It was useful to be reminded to include image, voice, character development, setting and story while in the process of writing my senior thesis.

Including my unique voice throughout my work has always been one of my strong suits in my opinion. Writing from personal experiences and writing about characters I have come in contact with or whom I know well has provided me with strong story lines from which I can develop. For my senior thesis I wanted to convey my sarcastic voice throughout each story. While each short story and memoir don't initially connect on a greater plot, I wanted a consistent voice to be what tied them all together.

In writing about awkward experiences from my own life, my hope was to provide readers with light material that at face value makes them laugh, but that also has a depth to it if they care to look further. Voice is how I thought best to convey this to readers. Through the use of a sarcastic tone that laughs at itself, I aimed to make my stories relatable on some level. In my story titled "Girl vs. Garbage," I recount a memory of my dad and I working on my paper route when I was younger. He relives his glory days and talks about when he was a kid, seemingly with no end in sight. With my comment: "*I would take his route if he would just stop talking about it,*" my hope was to strike a memory from my readers of a time when their parents or grandparents would tell similar stories: "When I was a kid..." I think a majority of millennials can relate to this experience.

Possibly the weakest portion of my writing has been trying to include enough setting so that readers can be fully surrounded by my stories. "Add more setting" is a common comment I get during workshops and it was at the front of my mind during my revision process. I have come a long way with working setting into my plot lines and I am proud of the progress I have made. Through future revisions, setting will continue to

be a focus of mine while Professor Joe Wilkins' voice echoes in my head: "If we don't know where we are, we can't know who we are."

Looking to professional writers' work in times of writer's block has been detrimental while writing my thesis. I enjoyed researching Tina Fey's *Bossy Pants* to see how a known actor and comedian retold her life and how she used a humorous tone to her advantage. Two professional writers whom I have looked back on repeatedly however have been Alice Walker and Benjamin Percy. I was introduced to their work as writers during my Intro to Creative Writing course this semester, another reason why I am grateful to have taken this class.

I was drawn to Percy's piece titled, "Me vs. Animals" because of the tone throughout as well as the formatting of the story. Percy wrote a series of short stories about different events involving animals and sectioned them apart from one another but included them all in his final work. The formatting itself as a compilation of short stories caught my attention because I was working on a similar format for my thesis. While each of Percy's stories have an obvious common theme, I still referred back to "Me vs. Animals" when considering which order to present my stories in.

In addition to the format and setup of Percy's short nonfiction, I also appreciated his humorous voice throughout. While talking about the possibility of being chased by wildlife on a hike, he comments, "Always hike with someone you can outrun." After finding a hiking partner, Percy ends this short story with the statement, "I could outrun Patrick if I had to." All the while writing about something relatively serious and not usually funny, Percy ends his story with a punchline of sorts. This stood out to me and inspired me to do the same. In my short story titled "Gullible," I retell a date gone wrong. Thinking back to Percy's story, I wanted to end this memory with a funny punchline to lighten the mood. Referring back to a comment about the pepper spray in my bag that was brought up early in the story, I end by saying, "I should have pepper sprayed him when I had the chance." Benjamin Percy influenced my ending to this story.

Alice Walker's creative nonfiction story, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" influenced my attention to voice and was even the inspiration for my short story

titled, “Red-handed.” Walker recounts her life from the young age of eight years old up through motherhood. In each section of her life, her voice reflects her age beautifully. As I wrote stories from different times throughout my own life, I wanted my voice to reflect the unique experiences and time periods of each. With Walker’s work in mind I realized that the way we say things is just as important as what we choose to say, and each element can tell readers something more about our story. Throughout each of my short stories I tried to get in the mindset of myself at that particular age and in that specific scenario, and I tried to write on the page what I would have said and thought back then rather than how I would retell the story now. “Red-handed” in particular draws from Walker’s work because I began with the same words she did: “I am *blank* years old and...” I found that starting a story this way puts me as the writer in the shoes of my four-year-old self, and it also helps readers to then understand what age and voice I am drawing from.

Working on my senior thesis has taught me several things about myself as a writer and my writing process. Before bringing in my pieces for workshops and peer revisions, I read my work with the knowledge and the background of physically being a part of these experiences. For me, these stories were funny and ridiculous, a way to look back on these memories and see the silver lining rather than getting swept up in the drama of it all. However, after receiving feedback from others, not all readers understood the sarcastic tone. While I read these stories and laughed, some read them and were worried about the situations I had put myself in. They had interpreted my stories completely differently than how I intended them to be interpreted.

I was aware that different readers have unique interpretations of stories based on their background and own experiences, but this feedback made me realize that I needed to make my intentions clearer and to provide enough background on the page that there were no holes that readers would need to fill in with their own information. All of this background was in my head, but not all of it had made it to the page. This was the first time I fully understood the importance of not brushing over any details that are significant to the story.

In order for me not to skim over any important details, I discovered that I need to put down my work and not edit or read it again for several days after writing it. I noticed that when I would return to one of my short stories shortly after writing it, I would find few if any places that could be improved. I wanted it to be complete so I found no flaws with it. But if I gave myself distance from the piece and returned to it at least a week later, I would begin to notice holes in my story and places where I could develop the storyline or characters more or provide more images and details. Space and time became key components in my editing process.

While my most efficient editing process became clear to me throughout my work on my senior thesis, my writing process has hardly changed. I write most productively in quiet spaces with no distractions, and when I give myself long periods of time to write. I find it hard to write a coherent story in short time frames. The only thing that has changed about my writing process this semester is the addition of chewing gum while writing. My stomach used to become an issue while writing longer stories. Hunger would beckon my attention at the most inopportune moments and would wreck my train of thought. Chewing gum while writing keeps my stomach satisfied, and keeps me awake and focused.

After graduation I plan to move to Southern California to pursue a career as a writer in the advertising industry. During the summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to work as an intern with merit/andrew, a small advertising agency in Irvine, California. Over the course of my internship I worked alongside the head writers, helping them brainstorm ideas and write scripts for commercials they were working on at the time. In addition to this writing experience, I also would edit each script and PowerPoint presentation before merit/andrew sent them off to their clients. I enjoyed this fast-paced environment where I had to write and edit to meet deadlines. I also enjoyed the quick turnaround with clients and new projects because I always had something new to work on. At the start of the new year I will move back to Irvine and begin work with merit/andrew or another advertising agency in the area. Writing scripts and story-driven

advertising was a new genre introduced to me this summer, but has become one that I fully enjoy.

I plan for writing and/or editing to have a dominant, professional position in my life after Linfield College. In five years I hope to have gotten my foot in the door of the writing and advertising industry in California and to have started to make a place for myself there. In ten years I would like to be settled in California and to have a job where I have consistent opportunities to write, and to be in an environment that continues to challenge me. I do best with a busy schedule and new challenges so I look forward to the fast-paced lifestyle of Southern California and the career options ahead.

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