



Northern Kentucky Area High School

# Creative Writing Contest Winners



# 2018

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The Department of English*

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# Girl in Overalls

*After Klimt's "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I"*

She stands before it,  
shoulders even with the edge of the frame, watching.  
Faded blue eyes glued to paint,  
trailing along the rivers of it,  
following the brush strokes  
as they swirl and curve,  
curl and stream.  
She stands in contrast,  
muddy overalls and sweater  
no match for spots of red and blue,  
for deep comers of green,  
for gold.  
The others stand around her,  
a haze of murmurs,  
of sharp black coats,  
low heels that click along the floor. Glances tossed around her,  
whispers passed between curtains of hair, pamphlets waved like paper fans between  
slim fingers with heavy rings.  
And when no one is watching,  
when the whispers have gone quiet  
and the people tucked away,  
she reaches out,  
just for a moment,  
to place her hand upon the paint,  
to feel the oil on her palm,  
the foil on her fingertips,  
just to know what it must feel like,  
to live a life in gold.

# Girl in Bath

*After Kahlo's "What the Water Gave Me"*

The water gave her reflections,  
thin ripples of flesh,  
eyes that peered back out at her,  
but of a duller shade of blue.  
Same cheeks, flushed like roses,  
same hair tied back with string.  
The water gave her time,  
time to sit and think,  
to stir the water with her hands and sink,  
sink until her ears were warm  
and all that came above  
was the curved bulb of her nose  
and the tips of her eyelids.

The water gave her freedom,  
from mother on her shoulders  
and father on her back,  
from hands reshaped by bruises,  
by callouses, and pain,  
from feet that ached to run,  
to flee out into the sky,  
but could only walk,  
the long, slow pace of life.

# Girl in Flowers

*After Millais's "Ophelia"*

She swam with waterlilies,  
all tangled in her hair,  
threaded through the strands like beading.  
They collected around her wrists  
like delicate pearl bracelets,  
looped themselves around her neck,  
chained pendants swinging on her chest.  
They curled around her earlobes,  
dangling earrings to match,  
and draped themselves along her hand,  
a ring for every finger.

And as she drifted,  
bathed in jewels  
that would reap and sow again,  
she gazed up through the sky of flowers  
and whispered the world  
a story.

# Eventually

we would live  
in oregon and on sunny sundays  
you would wake up first  
and fill your cup  
to your heart's content  
plaid pajama pants slung low on  
sinking hips  
your eyes sink to meet mine  
griddles sizzle and  
soft sounds of cartoons linger  
in the background  
i kiss your neck and then we feast  
like kings  
we take sure  
footsteps back to bed  
there's no reason not to  
laze the day away  
in a haze of last night's escapades  
you drank champagne with me  
at 3am even though it gives you a  
headache above your left eye  
we live together to laugh  
privacy is our best friend  
during late nights and unforgettable times  
yet we always keep the windows open  
fresh air is hard to come by  
summer nights dwindle on as we try  
to adjust to the freedom of independence  
running to the grocery store  
is no longer a chore  
doors aren't locked anymore  
darkness seems to come at just the perfect time each night  
i lay on the white duvet  
and you lay down next to me  
skin on skin and hand on hand  
legs twisted like the roots of a joshua tree  
and even when the cold breeze  
gives you goosebumps the next morning  
you smile and sigh and  
drag your hand down my thigh  
excited to begin and end each day  
in a way that's never been before  
contentedness and coffee.

# Oceans Within You

i tug at your socks and i pull them off, i tug at your hips and pull them closer to mine.  
your soft white skin sticks close to your bones. your body feels like the ocean sounds,  
in motion but at peace nonetheless.

the tide pulls you in and washes you out as the moon changes  
and it begs the question,  
were you ever even there?



# For Aus10

i search for more than meaning in your italian leather shoes  
every few steps my heels catch the carpet  
and i stumble a little  
you look back  
and smirk  
and catch me  
every time  
you sit and expose your unexplainable rainbow striped socks  
i chuckle  
and i notice that  
your velvety white skin  
clings so close to your bones  
a pointed collarbone is so close to poking through  
and even though  
your suit sways from your shoulders  
fresh linen on the taut clothesline  
i still call you stunningly handsome  
and you still  
knock me off my feet

# Sheet Marks

Memories from last night cling to my skin,  
And leave an imprint like that of a clammy contorted sheet  
Wrapped tight for too long.

Their presence shown by the the rolling trenches now embedded in  
My flesh and only revealed in the dusty light of dawn.  
In the reverence of the morning there is silence,  
And in the cradle of my bed,  
There is only peace.

Yet when the entangled covers are peeled away  
From a mess of sweat and grimy tears,  
Traumas from my deepest dark bubble up.

The recollection of inconsolable delirium and hysterics,  
The glistening rage  
And words that fell agonizingly from my mouth.

These memories macerate my mind like a hand shriveling in the bath.  
They undo,  
Untie and  
Unnerve me,  
All within the first few seconds of the day.

# Lawn and Order

When moving into your new suburban neighborhood,  
Attend the BBQ reverently and with a labeled casserole dish,  
Exalt the suburbanite on their 3 variations of rhododendron,  
Cautiously approach the millennial wearing headphones only out of dire necessity.

When in church, make absolutely positive you are in YOUR pew,  
Raise a manicured hand to your mouth and  
Mutter about how Cheryl has really been letting herself go since the divorce.

At Whole Foods, ensure your potato chips are hidden beneath labels  
ORGANIC,  
VEGAN, and  
GLUTEN FREE.  
If you see someone you know, pretend to be engrossed by your artisanal mustard label.  
Only 25 calories per tablespoon and made by Moroccan monks—stupendous!

If approached by a carnivorous wine mom,  
Forcibly shape your mouth to form an expression of utter astonishment.  
Profess in a voice akin to aging Snow White,  
“We must have lunch soon!” —do not mean it.

Remain vigilant during your encounters with SUVs and large vans,  
Especially those with stick figure decals in the window.  
Their family is better.  
Accept it.  
Amazon Prime your own stickers within the hour.

Don't blame the holidays,  
You were fat in August.

# Cart-Wheels

This new gift of a boy arches over the shopping cart  
Peering at a litany of labels.  
"Chocolate or vanilla?" he inquires  
As though frozen cheesecake was a pressing decision.

I gawk as the chilled glass doors fog upwards,  
Frost begging to meet his blush toned lips  
Hovering just in front of their surface.

"Maybe chocolate tonight," he says,  
Hinting he wants my approval.

I plant my hands on the cart handle,  
Savoring the momentous mundane.  
I nod, vaguely aware of his words.

"Chocolate it is. Did we get everything?"

Thoughts of the future, of present collective nows  
Orbit and glow around my head  
But I stare at the pocket of his shirt.

"What?" he says,  
Catching my fixated eye.

You're the only person I want to grocery shop with.

"Nothing," I murmur,  
"Did we grab the carrots?"

# How You Left Us

I'm trying to peacefully piece apart the puzzle pieces of this partial mind I'm pushing through.  
while you belligerently stay blind to the blunt fact that I'm broken without you.

These tormenting thoughts of telling you how I truly feel. Remain unrecognized by my  
reconciled reality reeling farther away reconsidering my definition of real love.

letters letting us know of your final leaving is all you left us, and how I miss your happy heaven  
like voice, hardly missing a beat. But depression doesn't describe the number of demons that  
entered my doubts that night you left.

You use to serenely sing me to sleep ever so sound so I'm sure you can see why I can't sleep  
without the sound of my big sister singing sweet dreams.

I tried writing some tired tribute to you yesterday.  
I broke down before I could finish the first sentence.  
sentenced to a senseless life  
without my best friend and I hate it.  
Powerless, colorless, consumed, confused, oppressed, depressed tell me sis.  
Which one described how you constantly felt  
enough to tell yourself your little brother could constantly deal  
with the image of your favorite black Perry Ellis belt around your neck.  
You had grown dangerously cold when I found you.  
your hands,  
the same hands that fed me through a bottle were terribly cold,  
no longer containing your  
mother-like touch.  
you stared back at me but it wasn't you,  
they weren't the same mocha brown eyes with a slight upward lean at the corners.  
No they weren't the same eyes that cried when you did bad on a test,  
they weren't the same eyes that lit up when I did the "voice"  
you said reminded you of Dad  
before he left.  
No.  
It was death,  
empty, cold, and uncaring to my wants and needs.  
they were blank, no longer holding the shine that showed so bright,  
why couldn't you see it like I did ... why didn't you need me  
how I need you?

# Art of the Lepidopterist

Benjamin Lowe spotted his butterfly as he felt the brush of chilled morning air against his cheeks and the tingle of a gentle gloom in his bones.

At the first sign of dawn, he spotted a clearing of golden-rod. There was a brief moment where the stalks shivered in the breeze as though a thousand souls were departing. A beam of sunlight sliced through the haze and fell upon his watch.

The beam skittered off the shiny surface and reflected an array of colors onto the butterfly. He snatched the specimen with careful speed and precision.

Lowe's red Toyota truck rumbled home after his successful kill and a wide cheshire grin spread across his face when he glanced in the rearview mirror. Ben's white knuckles gripped the steering wheel but relaxed at the sight of the body. He closed the heavy wooden back door and put his specimen in the spacious refrigerator. He satisfied his ravenous appetite with a meal of rare steak and whisky, then retired to his lab to type up field notes and post them to his blog.

## Field Notes

8:37PM

This particular morning, I captured a specimen.

Her wings caught the wind and her black tendrils glimmered in the first light of day.

She looked like a forgotten red glove lost in pristine snow, her bright colors a stark contrast from the cold drudgery of the world.

4:35AM

My need for a new addition to my collection has been overwhelming.

I'm not sure what to call my compulsion. Quite frankly, I'm not sure what I am. I just know something isn't right. There's a darkness inside me.

I hide it but it's always there, tormenting and plaguing my every thought with desire.

Pink Floyd once sang, "There's someone in my head but it's not me."

I call that someone my lurid voyager.

I cannot fight it and I do not need to because I am connected to something. Some other part of me that I did not know existed.

In this darkness I cannot think straight. The thoughts are cocoons hanging in the dense forest of my mind. My eye is set on a butterfly with auburn tendrils.

8:00 PM

I managed to capture the butterfly with auburn tendrils and a Cabbage White.

The Cabbage White has beautiful round wings and is as pale as polished marble.

However the butterfly with auburn tendrils, a Bhutan Glory, is different from anything I've ever seen. I performed meticulous study on her and discovered why she had flown away from home.

There was a small bead of life nestled inside her.

10:59 PM

I have mounted both the Cabbage White and the Bhutan Glory with auburn tendrils.

I love to gaze at them behind the glass and admire their soft, feather-like appearance.

I must go. Someone is knocking at my door.

Until next time,

B.L.- The Real Butterfly Collector

Benjamin Lowe shut down the computer and crept up the stairs leading from his laboratory to the kitchen. He peeled the musty curtain away from the window so he could see the visitors on his front porch.

"Rodney, what if they can't find our daughter! She wouldn't just run away like this!" a woman stammered.

"They will Clara, I promise. Eve doesn't have anything to hide. She's probably with Clarice," the man said as he patted her arm. Ben opened the door and its rusty hinges emitted a squeak like that of a wet rag cleaning a window.

"Hello we're Rodney and Clara McNamara and we're wondering if you've seen our daughter Eve and her friend, Clarice Johnson," the woman began.

"Eve has red hair and Clarice is strikingly pale," Rodney interrupted.

"Clarice is delicate, and Eve has auburn hair to be exact." Clara finished and glared at Rodney as though he had just told her she looked fat.

"Nope haven't seen them. Sorry!" Benjamin answered hastily. His movements were that of a puppet—agitated, jerky, and entirely not his own. Mustering a counterfeit grin, the voyager closed the door.

Lowe glowered at their figures shivering in the frigid air. His ragged breaths slowed, and he poured a cup of coffee while staring out at his overgrown lawn. The gentle gurgle of liquid hitting the bottom of the glass triggered a vague memory of kittens lapping milk off linoleum floor, the scent of dying roses blowing in from bushes beside the porch, and the distant chatter of his mother talking on the phone.

Lowe was jolted back to reality with an unfathomable longing—a longing different than that of his lurid voyager. It left pang of sadness and rampant anger behind the field guide in his left breast pocket. Flipping on the radio, he thought of his butterflies, the Bhutan Glory in particular, and flipped to a station. The melody drifted from the speakers as lazily as the steam rolling off the cup of coffee resting on his work table. He looked up at his specimens, seven at the current moment. Lowe grabbed a mounting pin and held it up to the florescent light, admiring its twelve-inch length.

Minutes ticked by and the curls of steam from his cup dissipated. He began to tour the room, careful to avoid tripping on the plastic covering the floor. Lowe inspected the small flecks of red that led up to larger puddles below his table. He had had a lovely time mounting the butterfly with auburn tendrils. He peeled off a label and wrote,

*Eve McNamara*

*Bhutan Glory*

*Auburn Tendrils*

His beautiful butterfly was displayed in a place of honor... pinned to the wall. Preserved next to her was the humble bead of life bobbing around in a comforting enclosure of formaldehyde. Benjamin was certain he would never live to match their beauty again.

# With a Strip of Gauze

## Jeanette

I was in the hallway walking with my parents to my little brother Eric's third grade classroom. I looked at the pretty murals on the walls and the confused families wandering from room to room. We stopped by Eric's room and my parents talked to his teacher for a few minutes. Per usual, several people stopped and stared at me, even adults. It's like people have never seen an Arizonian before.

After talking to his teacher, my parents took me down to my classroom. Eric seemed content playing with some of his new classmates, so away we went. I've always envied my brother; he has a natural charisma that seems to draw people to him. He has everything that I have, well, except cerebral palsy.

When we arrived at room 207, the teacher greeted us warmly and showed me to my new seat.

"I'm Mrs. Maylen," she said cheerfully.

"I'm Jeanette," I replied slowly and carefully, so she could understand me.

As her conversation with my parents shifted more to small talk, I turned my attention to a girl who walked up to the doorway. Upon noticing her, Mrs. Maylen motioned for her to come into the room.

"This is Mae," Mrs. Maylen said. "She'll be one of your best friends here at South Bend."

"Hi," I said, as clearly as I could muster. A dark cloud loomed. What if I just blew it?

"Hi," she replied sheepishly. My mom nudged me and winked. Her warm hazel eyes always seemed to say that everything would be alright. I looked back over at Mae, and I caught her eye right as she turned away and hid behind her short brown hair. I made a note to myself to not forget her name.

## Mae

*Thats it*, I thought to myself as I schlepped down to my new fourth grade teacher's room for open house. *Summer is over*. I'd always liked school—no, tolerated it. School lacked pizzazz for me—a fourth grader who was easily bored by the clockwork times tables and hand turkeys. I'd always been fairly popular, don't get me wrong, but I never grew close enough to someone to call them my true best friend, and as everyone knows, by fourth grade the best-friend clock is ticking. This year, I decided, was going to be my best-friend year. I scanned the room for any potential candidates.

There was only one other girl in the room at the time, so naturally she became the subject of my best-friend evaluation.

"So do you like it here, Jeanette?" Mrs. Maylen asked.

"Skcheeleah," responded the girl.

What the heck is wrong with her? I wondered. I examined her closely, but I didn't stare. That would be rude. Her blonde hair was gathered in a sleek ponytail, probably to keep it out of her rusted hinge of a mouth that flashed a crooked smile—if you could even call it that—at the teacher. This girl would definitely not pass my best-friend test.

"We moved from Arizona last month," said the woman with her. "Ron got a new job at one of the banks in the area," she continued as she gestured to the man standing next to her. Then, her voice dropped to a whisper. "This move has been rough on

Jeanette, as making friends is a challenge for her."

"Mrs. Wilson, I can guarantee you that won't be a problem here at South Bend Elementary. I'll make sure of it," replied Mrs. Maylen. It was then that Mrs. Maylen noticed me hovering in the doorway.

"This is Mae," Mrs. Maylen said to Jeanette. "She'll be one of your best friends here at South Bend."

"Shkli," said Jeanette timidly.

"Hi," I responded awkwardly as my parents walked into the room, marking the end of this stiff exchange. Mrs. Maylen said her farewells to the Wilsons, then walked over to my parents to greet them. I wasn't going to let Linette, or whatever her name was, get in the way of me finding my true best friend.

\*\*\*\*

I was sitting in my seat twiddling my thumbs as the teacher introduced the class to Jeanette.

"Jeanette moved here from Arizona a couple weeks ago. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?"

Jeanette held up a stuffed bear, which looked like it had seen better days. "This ish Bwblueberry. I've had him sinche I waz a baby." I saw one of the boys in the back corner suppress a snicker. I didn't see why someone having a favorite stuffed animal was so funny; after all, I had my stuffed Muttsie that I hugged close late at night when there were storms.

Suddenly, Jeanette's voice faltered.

"I miss home," she cried, especially slurred, but I heard her perfectly. Everyone looked around; some held back smiles of disbelief. Unexplained anger swelled inside of me. How cruel to laugh at someone in a time like this. Just this morning I stifled back tears as I waved goodbye to my mom from the bus stop. Every fourth grader has a favorite stuffed animal.

## Jeanette

This was humiliating. My tension grew as I saw each pair of eyes stuck to my brace and the drool flowing from my mouth. Knowing laughter was imminent, I froze. My voice wavered silent. Now I was in a trance. Ever since I moved here, I tried to avoid talking about home. I tried to push it to the back of my mind to avoid situations like this. Yet here I was, starting to cry in front of my fourth grade class. I sobbed and sobbed, making a complete fool out of myself. All I remember was Mrs. Maylen taking me into her arms and Mae looking up from her lap, trying to meet my tear-filled eyes.

## Mae

Later that day, we were released to recess. We all lined up, forming a haphazard cluster in the midst of everyone's excitement to get outside.

When I got outside, I walked around the playground by myself pathetically kicking up mulch. As I looked around I saw Jeanette walking by herself too.

"Hey Mae," whispered Mrs. Maylen, snapping me back into reality. She jerked her head in the direction of Jeanette and looked as if she was going to say something further, but I knew what she meant. I nodded; this was now unavoidable.

"Hi," I said awkwardly.

"Hi," Jeanette timidly responded.

"Do you like it here?" I asked.

"Yeah," said Jeanette.

"What's your favorite color?" I inquired.

"Purple," she answered. I felt stupid. She already told the class that.

Knowing that I was miserably failing, I continued, "Mrs. Maylen is awesome."

"She seems nice." Mrs. Maylen blew her whistle, signaling for us to go inside. Jeanette and I walked over to the spot to line up.

"What's your favorite TV show? Mine's *The Suite Life on Deck*."

Jeanette giggled. "I don't like that show. I like *Good Luck Charlie*." I let out a giggle in disbelief. Jeanette smiled at me and snickered.

From there, we began to laugh uncontrollably before Mrs. Maylen interrupted with a smirk. "Come on, you two."

### Jeanette

I loved recess at Wedgewood Elementary in Arizona. Now I could see my reflection in the peeling purple monkey bars and the bright yellow slides tarnished with scuffs and dirt. As I took it all in, I noticed Mae. She made her way over to me.

I've never been into small talk; I wasn't very good at it. But I knew that if I didn't try I would be stuck in a friendless pit. Surprised about each other's favorite TV shows, Mae and I began giggling, which turned into cackling; it was the kind of uncontrollable laughter that makes your ribs burn and tears form in your eyes. It was the kind of laughter that scrunches your nose and tickles your spirit.

### Mae

One day at recess we ran outside, so excited to play now that it was spring. The balmy sun rays danced across the pavement and a gentle breeze whisked our hair into our eyes. The birds sang in harmony and the mood was light; everyone was enthusiastic for the end of the year. Jeanette and I decided to go watch the boys play basketball.

Suddenly, all of the boys started laughing and pointing in my direction. Confused, I looked over at Jeanette and realized that the fingers were directed at her. The elastic in her shorts had snapped.

"Mae?" Jeanette wailed as tears welled in her eyes. She reached down with her one working hand and managed to pull one side of her pants up; the other side still sagging enough to see her underwear.

"Jeanette," I said, "Let's go inside." I helped her keep them on as we slowly walked to the clinic. As soon as I explained what happened to the school nurse, she found a long string of gauze and threaded it through Jeanette's belt loops.

"I'll be alright, Mae. Thank you so much for helping me."

"Of course, Jeanette. That's what friends are for."

### Jeanette

"Want to go watch the boys play basketball?" Mae asked.

"Sure," I responded as we walked over toward that court and leaned against the fence. The sun smiled at me and it was as if the trees whispered "Jeanette" when they rustled together. Everyone was having a good time, and no one stared. I felt as if I had finally found my home.

Suddenly, Mae began to shout excitedly. Seeing that Daniel

had just scored, I began to jump up and down. My pants began to feel a little loose, and by the time I grabbed them with my one hand it was too late. With my pants around my knees, I was a beacon for laughter. Every boy on that court stopped dead in his tracks to point and laugh at me. I started crying.

Mae looked over at me and gasped.

"Alright," she said, "Let's go inside."

"Hi, Ms. Vidal," Mae said when we got to the nurse's office, "Jeanette here had a little accident with her shorts, and she needs some help. I remember one time when the elastic on my shorts broke you gave me some gauze to tie it with."

"Sure thing," replied Ms. Vidal as she got out some scissors. Relieved that this torture was finally over, I thanked Mae and she left the office. The nurse unrolled the gauze and cut a long strand and threaded it through my belt loops. She then tied it in a taut bow. That knot wasn't coming undone anytime soon.

\*\*\*\*

A couple months later my parents sat my brother and me down at the table for a talk. It was finally summer break, although it was off to a rough start. Shortly before school let out, my dad got laid off and began the search for a new job, while my mom had to find work as a secretary for a large industrial firm just to keep money going into the bank; she would come home every day with glassy eyes. But glassy couldn't describe the pain in them now; she stared blankly out the window. When I tried to look at her, to look at those warm hazel eyes that always seemed to say that everything would be alright, she turned away. Her eyes were still hazel, but they were a stormy hazel, an empty hazel. I looked down at the table, the jagged wood grain seemed to spell out the promise that my mom made to me here one year ago. Texas, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Kentucky.

### Mae

"What?" I shouted. "Again? They need to look harder. I'm sure there's a job here somewhere!"

### Jeanette

Mae's mom was driving us home from her house, where we spent the day while my parents finished packing. By the time we got there, the movers had already packed up all of our furniture and finished carrying out our bins of clothes before they started off to Jetmore, Kansas. I asked my mom if I could go inside by myself one last time. My mom understood; she always understood.

I stepped into the family toom, tears in my eyes. I saw my brother and me playing video games past our bedtimes. I walked into the kitchen and saw my mom baking pies while singing into the spoon with Pink Floyd in the background. I saw my dad rapidly punching numbers into the calculator, his brow furrowed. Lastly, I saw the four of us at the kitchen table, saying grace before dinner. The scene then shifted to my mom's blank gaze out the window and my brother's tears staining the wood. I quickly turned away and stumbled up the stairs.

I thought of all of the times I had tripped down the stairs, and all of the times my brother hid in the stairwell ready to shoot me with his Nerf gun. Next came the part I was dreading the most. I creaked open the door to my old room, as if opening it slowly would prevent the memories from escaping. I saw Blueberry and I snuggled up in my bed. I caught glimpses of Mae dancing around and snapshots of us playing with my toy dogs. I



sank to the floor, sobbing.

Then there was an arm around me. I don't know how long Mae had been there but it could never be long enough.

### **Mae**

It was almost like old times. Jeanette and I traded our final Silly Bandz, played our last Wii tennis game, and watched our last movie. We were both on edge, but neither of us would say anything; maybe if we didn't acknowledge the cloud on the horizon, it would dissipate.

As we pulled up to her house, a large shadow fell over Jeanette's face. We got out of the car and Mrs. Wilson came over to say goodbye to my mom. Jeanette asked if she could go inside one last time and I followed her to the door.

"Can you just wait a minute, Mae? I just want to be alone for a few minutes, please."

There were tears in her eyes, and before I let mine tear up I managed a "Sure." I walked around the front yard and sat under the big oak tree that we were playing in just the other night while our moms sat and chatted and our dads smoked cigars. The movers were carrying out the last of the boxes. Suddenly, something caught my eye. Shoved down the side of one of the boxes of clothes was the pair of shorts with the broken elastic. They still had the bow of gauze tied around them, the knot intact.

The moving truck pulled out of the driveway so I figured that I better go say my final goodbyes. I inched my way up to her room and put my arms around Jeanette. She turned and threw herself upon me. It was then that I thought of having to start my best-friend year all over again in fifth grade. Jeanette made school more bearable for me. That year, in Mrs. Maylen's fourth grade classroom, I didn't notice a single times table or hand turkey.

Both crying, we leaned against each other until we heard the front door open. We stood up and walked outside. I gave Jeanette one last hug. "I'll miss you so much," choked Jeanette through sobs. But I heard her perfectly.

# I'll Go With You

(Fan fiction of Prisoner B-3087)

4:00 a.m., Oświęcim, Poland

Kapos rush into my barrack, saying, "Appell." Roll call. Not wanting to be stricken by their clubs, I get up and walk out of my barrack. My friend, Otto, follows. Other people just stay there, so tired from the painstaking labor and anorexic from the immense malnourishment which was the Birkenau Concentration Camp. The Kapos begin swinging their clubs, forcing those who have disregarded their orders to go. Cries of pain follow the stiff beating sounds of the Kapo's club. I continue to walk, as much as I want to help the muselmann, all skin and bones, in pain.

Otto whispers to me, "Did you hear that a Kapo tried to escape last night?"

"Really?" I ask, confused. No one ever tries to escape here because if they get caught, they will be shot on sight. Rudolf Hoss, the leader here, kills more Jews than anyone else here, almost to the point where he does it for fun. Just two weeks ago, he grabbed a whole section of roll call and sent them to the gas chambers. The wails of those walking to their death still haunts me to this day.

I remain silent as I shuffle up into my respective spot at roll call. I remain standing tall and seeming strong, for he will kill off anyone who even appears to be a muselmann. Out from his home Hoss comes, his posse of soldiers following him. By the expression on his face, something will be going down this morning. He walks up in front of us several thousand Jews and looks blankly at us.

His armada splits up, walking the line of prisoners and looking at each of us. I watch from afar as a soldier grabs the arm of a prisoner, who appears to be a muselmann. His arms shiver as he is pulled, but he remains sturdy. The soldier soon walks by me, looking at the skinniness which is my body, malnourished from the slop they feed me and the punishing tasks they jokingly call "work."

"Alles gut," he mentions, walking on. All's good.

The shaking that took place in my body suddenly relieves. As much as I am pleased to get to live another day, living also means another day of labor, stale bread, and wooden beds. If I knew I would end up in these conditions I would've been more thankful for the simplest things, like toothbrushes and clean clothes. Now, I'm stuck in camps like this for who knows how long, stranded with tattered clothing and an unwanted tattoo.

"Gefangene," Hoss says. Prisoners. "We need to move to a new concentration camp, so we will be shipping only the finest of our prisoners, and gassing, hanging, or shooting the rest."

"You will never kill me!" someone shouts. He runs off in an attempt to escape the camp. Shortly after, two guards follow him and shoot their guns. Crack! Crack! He is most surely dead at this point. He makes no sound as the two soldiers drag his barely living body in front of Hoss.

"See, this is what you don't want to do here," Hoss points out to us, "Fellas, hang him and show him what they've done."

The soldiers drag him to a wall and grab a rope. One takes the frayed, blood-stained material and ties it around his neck, while the other gently sets the poor man on a chair, almost as if he were rocking him to sleep. Once everything is in check, they nonchalantly kick the chair out from under him. The guy falls, with his neck bones snapping and him hanging there, lifeless.

Hoss smiles grimly.

"Ah, I've always enjoyed watching people get hung the most."

Oh how I wish I could swap places with Hoss. I sure would like to show him how it feels to be put to labor every day.

"Now that that is settled, let's get on to choosing the men going to Majdanek."

Following his commands, the soldiers line up in front of them and go in front of the prisoners, by groups. They begin to look at each camper once again, and point left, the direction of the gas chambers, or, if you're lucky, right, which is the group heading out to Majdanek. I stand there on my twig-like legs, beginning to quiver again.

Otto looks at me and says, "Jack, I don't think I'll be heading to Majdanek. I'm way too weak to do labor and not a bit of endurance can be found within me."

As much as he doesn't want to die, what he says is true. He was getting closer and closer to becoming a muselmann, especially with the outbreak of influenza in Birkenau. The eruption of sick people in our camp had sealed the fate of hundreds of innocent lives. Even Hoss received it, and in return, killed 400 people for spreading the virus on to him.

"You're the only one I have, Otto," I say innocently, "and if you're going, there's no way in these camps of hell I won't be going without you."

"No!" He whispers to me, his lips barely moving. "You're the person who can survive this, Jack. Don't let my death bring you down with it!"

From behind, a person taps my right shoulder, bruised from lifting heavy rocks. He says the guard is coming, and that I should shut my mouth. As a polite response, I tell him to mind his own business, for I truly don't have a reason to live. *All of my direct relatives have been gassed off, and since Otto is going to die, what will I have except stale bread, bad sleep, and nothing to live for?* I think.

The guard comes up to Otto, with his green, fitting clothes seeming so special in this place of tattered pants and wooden clogs. It doesn't take him long to recognize his scrawny body isn't suitable for Majdanek. He points to the left, watching tears from Otto's face drip as he walks eastward to the gas chambers. A rage fills the insides of me, but that just might be the grieving process.

He then walks up to me, feeling my muscles and looking for the bags underneath my eyes, caused from the torture device they call the beds of the barracks. He stares into my eyes, with his green pupils penetrating my soul. But I stare back, trying to seem tough, though underneath the surface, I'm just an average 15 year old boy who wants his family. He points to the right, and I give him a look so angering I don't think I'll be able to make that face again.

"Nein!" I shout. No! "You won't send me to Majdanek! Send me to the gas chambers so I can die in peace with my friend!" I screamed the words so loudly my voice cracks.

The soldier whips out his polished wooden rifle, points it at my right shoulder blade, and says to me sarcastically, "Great choice, prisoner B-3087." He then points the barrelled gun at Otto and then back at me. "Why don't you and your little friend then come up to this wall, so you both can die in peace, right in front of this crowd?"

I look him dead in the eyes, looking into depths of the soul I never thought eyes could travel, and gain enough confidence to move his gun barrel away from my shoulder, saying to him, "Try me."

He grabs the barrel of his gun, points it at the soaked ground, and says, "Then why don't you two both follow me."

Otto and I follow him over to the infamous wall of death, where many a prisoner was shot to his or her death. We both look at each other, somewhat solemnly, but also smiling. If we were to go out, we for sure would go out together. *Birkenau was the epitome of hell. How much worse can it get after I die?* I think. After getting to the wall, we stand against the spot, marked with blood, where the soldiers shoot the prisoners that were worked to death. We both face the wall, so we can't see ourselves being shot, which I am actually thankful for.

"Alright, you two, stay right there and don't move," a soldier says to us.

I look Otto into the eyes, wanting to say so many things, but at the same time, wanting to say nothing. I remorsefully say to him, "Sorry. I caused you this painful death."

"I was gonna die anyways," he says, "and hopefully we'll be able to hang out in wherever we'll go after we die."

"Yeah, that'd be cool," I say. "You're my family now, so wherever we go down in the vast history of the earth, our names will be there, together."

"Three, two, one," a soldier mumbles, "and ... zero!"

A crack noise was made, and the lights of life that were Otto and I were dimmed out to death.

# Saved by My Pen

What happens in Paris stays in Paris, or something like that. Like the time I was about to board a nine hour flight and suddenly had the “uh-oh” feeling and didn’t make it to the bathroom before, well, I needed to—leaving me red-faced and in desperate need of new Hanes in the middle of Charles De Gaulle.

In middle school, a representative from a grant foundation visited to conference with my orchestra director in order to consider giving us a grant. As a normal person would, upon greeting he extended his hand. Being a somewhat socially-competent preteen, I reciprocated the gesture. His eyes widened, he pulled away, thanked my teacher, and we never heard from him nor his foundation again. Let it be noted that when I washed my hands, the dryers in the 7th grade hallway girls restroom were “out of order until further notice.” I suppose wet handshakes from middle schoolers aren’t good impressions for gentlemen with messenger bags giving grants.

Needless to say, I’m a pretty embarrassing person. I dirtied myself in the heart of the city of love, I managed to defund a program with a single handshake, and I have a deathly fear of vomit. That’s right, something about the natural bodily function of emesis spiraled a young me into years of—I feared permanent—trauma.

Over the years people have tried to console (?) me with the reality that everyone is afraid of something. Though this is true, there are different types of fears. There are legitimately founded fears, like being afraid of snakes or flying in planes. Then there are irrational fears, ridiculous things that are highly unlikely to occur yet still make us feel uneasy. This category includes getting struck by lightning, stranded at sea, or getting eaten by a shark. As vomiting is generally not viewed as life threatening, the fact that it falls into the irrational category made me constantly question why the very word struck as much terror into my small body as Mike Tyson did to his two-eared opponents.

But that’s the thing about life: Our stories aren’t ours to write. La Fortuna can throw crazy hurdles our way, ruining our plans and altering our minds and sometimes turning our worlds upside down. We are the characters in the books of our lives, yet every chapter seems like a curveball. And I got stuck with—

*Emetophobia: a phobia that causes overwhelming, intense anxiety pertaining to vomiting. This specific phobia can also include subcategories of what causes the anxiety, including a fear of vomiting in public, a fear of seeing vomit, a fear of watching the action of vomiting or fear of being nauseated.*

I remember every single detail of that day. I was wearing a black skirt and a mauve blouse with little silver beading, and my Mary Jane shoes with little white socks scrunched with a ruffle. It was a hot, sleepy Wednesday, the third day of first grade. It was spaghetti day; every Wednesday was spaghetti day in the school cafeteria. We lined up for recess when Rachel Cornell threw up—everywhere. It seeped into the cracks of the overhead projector, stained Jack Lawson’s shoelaces, and splashed upon my legs. All of the other kids screamed and ran outside, and probably didn’t even remember the next day.

I froze. I couldn’t cry. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t hear. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t.

The teacher pulled me aside and wiped my legs clean, then

sent me to the playground with everyone else. It was a hot day, but not pleasant tingling hot. It was the kind of hot that sucked all of the moisture from your body, making you feel like you stepped into a hazy portal. I spent all of recess pacing back and forth, kicking up mulch.

One foot in front of the other. Ten steps this way. Ten steps back. The whistle. Sitting on the bus. Walking home from the bus stop.

I threw open the door and screamed, the kind of scream that makes your bones shake and your chest burn, the back of my throat cracked and tears exploded from my eyes. I lunged up the stairs, ripped off my clothes and threw on the faucet to its hottest setting. I hurtled myself into the shower and scrubbed my body so furiously I had scratches down my legs and arms, my hair knotted into a nest. I sank to the shower floor, screaming, shaking, shivering, tears mixing with water and frantic sobs that quickly turned into hyperventilating wails.

I turned off the water and put on my pajamas. I brought my pillow, blanket, and stuffed dog, Brownie, down to the couch and lay trembling under the weight of exhausting weeps. That night, I lay awake, eyes fixated to the ceiling, hair plastered around my face with tears. I tried to time my gasps to the tick-ticking of the clock, the only noise that reminded me that I was indeed awake. My mom stood next to me, rubbing my back until my muffled whines turned into a restless sleep.

The next morning I woke up crying. From a bowl of cereal, I managed to eat one mini wheat, which between hyperventilations I choked on, so I guess my cereal quota that morning was zero.

“I can’t go to school mom I can’t—go—mom—go—can’t—what if—it happens—again?”

When I got to the school I immediately asked to go to the nurse’s office. Sometimes the nurse had saltines; nibbling the chalky crackers was sometimes all I had eaten that morning. Every now and then she had different mints, their peppermint flavor always soothing my senses. Though I wasn’t home and therefore not completely safe, the smell of menthol meant that I had escaped the immediate danger at hand. Throughout my time in elementary school I sure spent a lot of time in that place for a kid who was afraid of sick people.

I was blessed and cursed with a photographic memory. I will spare you of details like the color of shirt I had on during each of my episodes, or the name of every single person who has ever felt nauseous around me, but I assure you—I remember it all.

In first grade alone, eleven kids threw up at some point. I became well acquainted with the school counselors; every time a kid puked in class I would sprint out of the room and straight to Ms. Taulbee. Ms. Taulbee had a poster in her office: a silhouette of a man climbing a mountain captioned “believe.” I would trace my eyes across the dusty plastic frame, following the man up the mountain. Sometimes I couldn’t help but to think that I was climbing my own mountain and that I too just had to believe that this chapter of my life would be over soon.

Months passed, accompanied by lots of PTSD-style panic attacks. I became obsessive; if my mom could get me to eat, it

was only after I carefully read each expiration date and scanned ingredient lists to make sure there weren't any vomit-inducing ingredients. Besides school, I refused to leave my house in fear of being around someone who might throw up. I was a hypochondriac; a few times my anxiety would give me stomach aches, which made me worry more, which made me throw up. My parents knew that what was happening to me wasn't normal; I wasn't even living. I was a vegetable petrified by fear. For years, a little Mae's mantra was "I wish I had anybody else's brain but my own."

I walked into the office one day and my mom had left a Wikipedia page on the screen, the obnoxious artificial light mocking, blaring.

"It is common for emetophobics to be underweight, or even anorexic, due to strict diets and restrictions they make for themselves. The thought of someone possibly vomiting can cause the phobic person to engage in extreme behaviors to escape the perceived (and sometimes very real) threat of that particular situation, in which the phobic person will go to great lengths to avoid even potential situations that could even be perceived as 'threatening.'"

I began going to therapy. Until third grade, I saw a child psychologist regularly. Her room was dimly lit and she had a big leather couch. The blinds were always half drawn. I would sit on one side of the couch across from her desk, her kind and knowing eyes melted the ice around my mind. It was she who told me to see myself as the main character in my own story, and that my phobia was simply one chapter. She asked me to describe to her one paragraph from the book of my life that made me feel happy.

In my happy scene, I'm laying down in front of our fireplace with my dog cradled in my arms; the lights are dimmed and snow dances on the window pane. I'm drifting off to sleep by the crackling of the fire, the TV turned low in the background. The embers radiate, intertwining with the warmth of her fur. I'm not crying, I'm not anxious, I'm not depressed. I'm completely and inexplicably content—I'm home.

Every time I felt sad or worried, I was instructed to paint that picture in my head, building line by line until the paragraph was complete.

For my episodes during the school day, Ms. Deal, the school counselor for the older children, was my saving grace. She had a little heart rate monitor connected to her computer with an image of a hot air balloon, and you could only make the balloon float by exercising deep breathing until your heart rate was back to normal. It became a game for me, an oddly calming activity.

I remember one time, while in D.C. visiting my grandparents, we were in the third row of the minivan when my brother began the pre-puke cough. We had a travel DVD player strung between the seats in front of us. I dove over the DVD player and onto my aunt. My dad pulled over. My brother was fine.

And that's the thing about a phobia. It isn't some little fear that's only relevant during the storm or while you're on the roller coaster. It slithers and squirms until it's manifested itself into your life in every way possible. It used to be my pet peeve when people would see a spider and shriek, "Oh no! I have arachnophobia!" Do spiders crawl through your nightmares and whisper taunts in your ear until you spring up, coated in a film of sweat? Do spiders, even without their physical presence, somehow manage to construct a cage around you from which you can do nothing except fanatically scream for freedom?

I learned to cope. After more therapy and my newfound independence starting middle school, I learned to be my own counselor. I started asking myself, "So what? So what if someone throws up? So what if I do? What's the worst that could happen?"

And that's the other thing about phobias. It becomes less and less about the subject, and more and more about the underlying fears. After all, whether or not someone throws up in front of me is completely beyond my control. So what was I really afraid of?

I was afraid of not having control, I was afraid of the obstacles that the world had in store for me, I was afraid of never being normal again, and I was afraid of living my life in terror.

I was afraid of myself.

I was afraid of my own power, the power that lay woven in the darkest folds of my mind that had constructed the entire thing, all in my own head. I was angry, angry at Rachel Cornell, angry at the world, angry at myself. It was a dull, yet painful anger, flamed by the thought that my suffering was my fault. I had created a monster that I could not stop.

And then, when I found that being angry was getting me nowhere, I began to look for the light. If I, Mae Ann Imp, have the power to drag myself down into a seemingly never-ending cycle of darkness and pain, then I have just as much if not more power to lift myself up into an equal magnitude of happiness.

I am my own worst enemy. And it wasn't until I conquered myself that I felt free.

So even though we don't get to write our own stories, we can revise, edit, and publish them. And I have been saved by my pen.

# The Boxer

I knew I was crazy on a Friday morning.

6:55 a.m. Mom said she was “worried for a little bit,” in reference to my childhood problems with circles. She made that point evident with emphasis on the ‘ed’ because her daughter was doing just fine now. The commute to school blurred into routine as my manicured nails dug into my thigh and the motor murmured in the background.

Seven years ago, the world didn’t feel wrong at that time, it WAS wrong. “No no no! Dad stop!” I’d scream, kicking as he spun me three times clockwise; the dizzying spirals engulfed me and I knew I’d collapse and the beige ceiling would swirl in circles in front of my eyes. *Not right not right not right*, my brain would yell back at me. *Make it right!!* it alarmed ceaselessly. Once released from his arms, my feet would tumble wildly while attempting to whirl three rotations counter-clockwise before the back part of my mind said it was OK and my lungs could finally fill with air.

7:20 a.m. *Brake lights ahead.* “Worried for a little bit.” I almost drove off the road I was so fixated on the dust on the dashboard. “Worried for a little bit.” There were stupid little crumbs there too. “Worried for a little bit.” *What was so wrong with the way circles make me feel?* I had stopped talking about it for years now, stopped acting that way even longer. I pause at the stop light clicking from yellow to red above me; I straighten the steering wheel and grab a duster I keep in the console. *Did I make my bed?* Yes, I put down the duster to look at the picture I took of precisely folded sheets before pressing the glowing red delete button. Green light.

7:35 a.m. I’ve experienced the feeling that engulfs me when something is out-of-place for as long as I can remember. That out-of-place sensation is the same feeling you experience when your pet has just been run over or when a colossal wave is rolling towards you and the crest extends above your head and you collide with a force so overpowering you think you’ll die there in the ocean, or the moment when in the middle of the night you feel so absolutely alone there is nothing in the universe which can fill that gargantuan tear in your heart.

7:38 a.m. My mom always called those feelings the bird on my shoulder; some days it chirps, other days its claws dig into my skin and it pecks my ears out until I DO THE THING. I’ve always pictured it as the Fruit Loops toucan.

Imagine that feeling of the worst moment of your life every time my dad spun me around three times and I couldn’t go back the same way or when I tum to close a door and can’t remember which way to circle back to make it even in the grand scheme of door-turns.

7:40 a.m. I was most certainly crazy. Mom was worried and that means something is wrong with me. I walk up the school steps swiftly. I count each step as a letter—*A, B, C, D, E* I pause to say hello to a friend—*F, G, H, IJKLMNOPQR* and arrive on my desired floor slightly out of breath.

7:42 a.m. The alphabet calms me, a finite amount of letters for an infinite amount of words. The thought is overwhelming, like realizing my tennis shoes are laced too tight on one side but not the other. Those twenty-six letters mean everything, even encapsulating those indescribable feelings. *It’s too tight. I can feel*

*it squeezing my foot.* I repeat the alphabet when going up stairs because it means the cycle of letters can repeat until I’ve finished the flight so I can accomplish anything in the time it takes to say it.

7:45 a.m. Now in class, I fidget with my too tight left shoe. I took my OCD medications for the first time in a while but the side effect is that the extra serotonin binds to receptors in my gut and I feel nauseous. I go to school anyway because missing school means I will fail. *I’m fine fine fine.*

I’ve always hated the number three. I used to believe numbers had feelings and emotions like people. Number three was always the loneliest because number two had friends and number one was alone but instead of being unaware that number one was alone, it had to stand right beside number two. That’s why three sucks. Sometimes I feel like that lonely number I forced to be with the happy number two and so instead, I prefer only the number two because it always has a buddy.

7:50 a.m. I check my custom agenda, careful to cross out each completed task from yesterday and fill in the square if it can be postponed. Colored-in boxes are the bane of my agenda because I was not competent enough to complete the assignments. *I am not good enough. I need to manage my time more wisely.* The colored-in box means somehow, despite a meticulous schedule, something fell through the cracks and could not be done. More than one filled in box means I am a capital F, Failure.

8:15 a.m. *I forgot to study for an assigned 30 minutes last night and the test is one day away.* My friends laugh at how upset I am. “Calm down you’re so organized!” they tell me, but they don’t understand that I am not as good as I want to be. *I have let myself down.*

9:30 a.m. I open the planner again, its rows are neat and mostly crossed and it brings me an extreme sense of gratification like when you finally finished a massive project that has been burdening your entire existence. I begrudgingly clear a space for tonight, drawing small arrows towards Sunday and filling in other boxes. I rationalize I’m not a Failure if it gets done.

11:00 a.m. Everything in life has a check box, no matter how big or small the project is, and every day I work and work and work to cross it off so I’m not a to-do list Failure. That is the most disheartening feeling in the world, to not finish a project, and to leave an unchecked todo list box. If I write something down, it gets done at least a day before the due date because *what if another todo list task is added? What if I don’t have time tomorrow?* There are twenty-four hours a day and I schedule seven of them for sleeping, eight for school, and five for work, leaving me exactly four hours to finish everything and volunteer. The pressure to be better than I was a year ago, yesterday, fifteen minutes ago eats me alive. I do not sleep if there are uncrossed boxes because otherwise I lie there on my bed and imagine textbooks with pointed paper teeth tearing me apart from the bottom up.

2:00 p.m. The toucan on my shoulder has been pecking at me for hours now and the boxes stack up. I have work and can’t do homework now, but I don’t worry because I do not have time do so. *Happy, unworried, toucan.* My schedule has exactly seven hours allotted for Sunday afternoon to do designated assignments, I can worry then. *Apprehensive toucan.*

3 :50 p.m. I pull into my parking space at the library and put on my name tag. If I don't arrive exactly ten minutes early to work, I am late.

3:55 p.m. If I'm not working five minutes before work, the world is not OK. Being late is not OK. If I am late for anything I will be in a bad mood and the toucan will be upset with me. That feeling you get when everything is destined for failure and you have no chance of making it right is exactly how walking in at 3:58 feels.

4:01 p.m. I haven't missed a day of school or work all year and you better believe I won't miss it for something as trivial as a fever. Hand sanitizer is good enough. Don't breathe near me if you're concerned.

4:38 p.m. I chatter with friends and place books back on the shelves, finally feeling some semblance of comfort. *Homework is on Sunday*, I remind myself as thoughts begin to wonder towards piles of reading, of meticulous schedules and of flash-cards. Insurmountable pressure fills my head and my brain dissipates into a nebulous cloud of due-dates.

6:45 p.m. Each book has a place here and that makes me happy because no book is alone. They know where they live and somehow that makes the world a better place. I return books to their home and they live there until someone else checks them out. That's pretty magical if you ask me and my Fruit Loops toucan.

9:20 p.m. I go out to dinner with my friends; the four of us sit together and I justify that at least it isn't three people so two pairs of two people are just as good. I ignore the sound of their chewing because if I focus on it, mom will definitely know I went crazy. My toucan nods in agreement. Instead, I smile and laugh and have a good time ignoring all the little things like the crumbs on the table and the bird on my shoulder and the boot on my right foot that feels funny and the light flickering two tables away. It'll all be okay because the bird isn't pecking, the books are in their homes, and everything is as it should be. I scheduled time to be me today. I'll worry about it later.

# Coming to Terms With Crazy

I have what is known as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, a mental disorder characterized by certain obsessions or compulsions to perform certain actions. That doesn't really explain what it is like to have it, but it's a rather nice, clinical way of putting 'I have to make sure that I touch the dinner table an even number of times with both hands or it bothers me.' Ever since I was diagnosed in second grade, OCD has affected me in some way, and almost never positively. But, I will say that coming to terms with it, and understanding that it didn't define me or make me crazy, has been one of the larger arcs of my life. And, I can say I have come out okay. Today, it is almost negligible.

I can still recount almost every detail of January 12, 2008. I was in the middle of religion in second grade at Saint Gertrude School. Sister Mary Sheila was explaining the difference between mortal and venial sins. And I had the sudden, inexplicable urge to write my name on my desk—a plastic-made-to-look-like-wood and painted-blue-metal thing small enough for a second grader. I didn't know why. I knew it was a bad idea—I knew I would get in trouble, I had never done anything of the sort in the 7 sparkly-clean years of my life, and above all, as Sister was explaining, defacing property would be a sin. I didn't end up doing it. But, it weighed on me heavily. It was like the little voice in my head—a bit deeper, less squeaky, non-speech-impaired version of my second-grade self—was yelling at me "Do it! Do it!" Later that day, I had less severe but just as strange urges—to touch the table in the hallway that held the third grade's dioramas of planets, even though I was waiting towards the front of the line to go to lunch several feet away, to make sure that I always walked the same number of steps of every concrete section on the hallway, to touch the ground with both of my feet an equal number of times. This was my first personal introduction to the idea of OCD, but it was certainly not my last.

After about a week of similar occurrences, I decided to tell my mom that I 'was afraid I might have oh-see-dee'. Luckily, or unluckily, because of the circumstances, I knew what OCD was. It had a history of running in the family. My brother had it, too. Between this and poor eyesight, I really had it made in the gene pool. Regardless of whether OCD does run in families (I have heard conflicting opinions), I have been forever grateful that I knew what it was. I can only imagine trying to explain my thoughts and maybe, eventually, get a diagnosis from a psychiatrist. So, after an extremely awkward conversation on the living room couch, my mom hugged me and told me, "lots of people have OCD. I'll take you to the psychiatrist, and you'll feel better. Okay?" I nodded.

Despite my bit of prior knowledge of OCD, I still had questions. Would I be like those people on TV who disinfect their doorknobs every five minutes and wash their hands until they are raw? Would I spend hours every day making sure things were in proper order? And, most importantly, was I going to have to sit in an uncomfortable couch and tell some stranger about my mother? Luckily, none of these came to fruition. After one session with Dr. Amy, as I called her, and I have since forgotten her complicated last name, I felt a bit better. Sure, I was still anxious and confused, but I was starting to understand what OCD was and what it meant to have it.

Slowly but surely, I got better. The medication (50 mg Sertraline) I was put on made a huge difference, but also just as important was learning about OCD and how to deal with it. Dr. Amy and my parents helped me understand it in simple terms, and I learned how to get rid of my compulsions. It wasn't an overnight process, but by third grade I was definitely feeling a lot better.

In fifth grade, which I regard as the worst time of my life for unrelated reasons, I saw a new habit coming from OCD—hair-pulling. This one took some time to deal with, but Dr. Amy and my parents still had some good suggestions and helped me work through it. I still find squishy balls under my bed. One time, I forgot my medicine on vacation and spent an entire day freaking out over mayflies (which, in my defense, are horrifying). I've also had some troublesome habits of nail-biting and the like, but nothing in comparison to what I used to have. Eventually, I stopped seeing Dr. Amy and instead went to a psychologist. Meetings became less 'you're trying' and more 'so are you doing good? That's good.' Sometime around Freshman year, I stopped noticing it. Today, I am hardly bothered by it at all. I don't even go to a psychologist.

OCD has given me some of the most challenging times of my life, and I hate it. I am not going to say that although it is tough, it ultimately made me a better person or anything like that. It was (and to some extent, still is) annoying. Other people are lucky not to have it, and I curse my genetics/environment/whatever caused my OCD. But, I have gotten through it to the point I might as well not have it, for the most part. I feel like I can be proud of that, no matter how many hairs I pulled out and tables I re-touched to get there. I am thankful for modern medicine and mental health knowledge (which is still lagging considerably behind physical health knowledge), and all the people who helped me along the way.



# Meet the Authors



Brady Boyer  
Covington Latin School  
Shelia Gray, teacher

Fiction, third place  
"I'll Go With You"



Anna M. Impellitteri  
Conner High School  
Jessica Covert, teacher

Essay, first place  
"Saved by My Pen"  
Fiction, second place  
"With a Strip of Gauze"



Lilianna Darnell  
Covington Latin School  
Molly Jacobs, teacher

Essay, third place  
"Coming to Terms With Crazy"

Catherine Kremer  
Dixie Heights High School  
Kris Gillis, teacher

Poetry, second place  
“Eventually,” “Oceans Within You,”  
“For Aus10”



Lauren Michell Myfelt  
Dixie Heights High School  
Kris Gillis, teacher

Poetry, first place  
“Girl in Overalls,” “Girl in Bath,”  
“Girl in Flowers”

Ahmed Sherman  
Holmes High School  
Karen Zaino

Poetry, honorable mention  
“How You Left Us”

Maribeth Stafford  
Notre Dame Academy  
Lynn Dickman, teacher

Fiction, first place  
“Art of the Lepidopterist”  
Essay, second place  
“The Boxer”  
Poetry, third place  
“Sheet Marks,” “Lawn and Order,”  
“Cart-Wheels”

