

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Nicolette O'Donnell for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemistry presented on May 19, 2009. Title: Writing Down What No Echo Can Ever Repeat.

Abstract approved:

Judith Bowker

Abstract:

This thesis consists of an autoethnography of a sexual assault survivor written using poems, journal entries, annotations, photographs and song lyrics. The ethnography is a chronological record of feelings the author experienced during the day prior to the attack and emotions she navigated during the year and a half after the attack. The period of writing extends between January 27, 2006 and November 5, 2007. The author includes songs that inspired the poems and journal entries; these songs led to deeper reflections as the author weathered sensations of depression, anger and confusion. The author's own photographic art visually represents steps she has taken on her emotional path of healing. The thesis was assembled in the third year following the incident as a reflection and healing process for the author.

Key Words: Ethnography, poetry, sexual assault
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Writing Down What No Echo Can Ever Repeat

by

Nicolette O'Donnell

A PROJECT

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Nicolette O'Donnell, Author

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my Mom and Dad for their support. For always telling me that doing my best was good enough. Their support gave me the courage to write this thesis and without them, it might still be in my journals. I love you both very much. To my sister, Kate, thank you for being my best friend. When there was no one who could understand what I was feeling, you were always there for me. To my brother, Eddie, dragging me to the library all those times to study until 1:00 AM was worth it. You helped me stay in school and encouraged me to believe in myself. Even when school seemed impossible, your cartoons always helped me see the brighter side of the picture.

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Writing Down What No Echo Can Ever Repeat

PREFACE

What follows is a series of poems, journal entries, annotations, photographs and song lyrics. The journal entries and poems are reflections of my emotional state while dealing with a personal tragedy, a sexual assault that occurred on the night of January 27, 2006. All of the journal entries and poems, written between January 27, 2006 and November 5, 2007 have dates and times when they were written. Each journal entry and poem appears as it was written. I did not edit the text and did minimal editing afterwards to correct spelling and to arrange the poems in the aesthetic formats.

Approximately three years after the journal entries and poems were written, I began to annotate the poems. Most of the annotations of the poems have been completed in the last few months. In all of the annotations I have included the feelings I had and the places I was when I wrote the poetry. In addition to the annotations, pictures and music were also added for some of the entries to enhance what I was thinking and experiencing at the time I was writing the poems.

Writing and reflecting about what I have written has been important to my process of healing. I think sexual assault survivors should have outlets beyond the normal conventions to help them heal. By sharing this thesis, my hope is that other survivors and their friends and family members will be able to read my story and better understand the range of possible emotions they might experience.

Writing Down What No Echo Can Ever Repeat

Chapter 1: January 27, 2006

12:42 AM

Annotation: Times like these make me question myself. I have stayed up the past three hours doing something I hate... physics. So I can eventually do something with my life. I have cried multiple times tonight and for what? I am releasing this pressure I feel inside, yeah I want to succeed but at what cost? I want to be happy, too, and I want to have a life, someone to share it with. I am always told I am beautiful and why I am still single... it hurts because I don't know why and I don't like it. I am not okay with it. My brother is a great encourager. I just want to get past all of this. I want to be free from these chains around me, from all of these hard classes. I want to be home again with Kate. I miss her. I hate being alone, yet my roommate is gone and that's when I study the best. I am terrified of being alone. I hate the way some girls treat and look at me in the house. I liked when Carmen came over today. She knows me and I know her. I don't think I have ever told her about the nights I cry but she knows more about me than anyone.

12:59 PM

Her Cell

In the corner
 Empty chair
 Sitting quietly crying in despair
 Opening that window letting in the cool breeze
 She is alive she is free
 Asking her maker to guide her hand, she closes that window and stands
 Alone on the floor is one set of footprints
 As He is carrying her to deliverance
 Unable to move she gives in trusting that God will heal her from within
 Each pace forward she forgets all her regrets for she knows what is coming up and what
 is next
 He holds her and guides her so that she can stand, like a child she will never let go of His
 hand
 Her grace is His guidance
 His words her own
 She is healed
 She is one

This music helped to inspire the poem Her Cell.

Everything¹ by Lifehouse from the album No Name Face

Find me here, And speak to me.
 I want to feel you, I need to hear you.
 You are the light, That's leading me,
 To the place, Where I find peace again.

You are the strength, That keeps me walking.
 You are the hope, That keeps me trusting.
 You are the life, Into my soul.
 You are my purpose, You're everything.

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you?
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better than this?

You calm the storms, And you give me rest.
 You hold me in your hand, You won't let me fall.
 You steal my heart, And you take my breath away.
 Would you take me in, Take me deeper now.

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you?
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better than this?

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you?
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better than this?

Cuz you're all I want, You're all I need, You're everything, everything.

You're all I want, You're all I need, You're everything, everything.

You're all I want, You're all I need, You're everything, everything.

You're all I want, You're all I need, You're everything, everything.

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you?
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better than this?

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you?
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better, any better than this?

And how can I stand here with you,
 And not be moved by you
 Would you tell me, How could it be,
 Any better than this?

Would you tell me,
 How could it be, Any better than this.

Chapter 2: February 2, 2006
12:40 AM

One Way Ticket

Not feeling empty
Knowing there is a promise
The presence of a spirit inside of me and working through me
Taking nothing for granted
Not afraid to cry because I never know when I won't be able
Sharing and not being scared of judgment
Looking toward the future and not being worried
Waiting for someone special and knowing they will be there
Taking my time to enjoy each moment
Saying I love you to my brother for the first time in a while
Talking with my parents everyday and knowing they are there
Looking toward my sisters and feeling support and doubt in sharing
Excited to learn more about the word
Knowing my life will go on
Picturing one set of footprints until I can be there to make two
Forcing emotion to work through the pain
Hating to be alone but not wanting to share secrets
Wanting to grieve, waiting for path to follow
Needing an outlet for emotion
Wanting to be a happy girl



Figure 1. Mt. Hood from Above

Chapter 3: February 12, 2006

11:17 PM

Journal entry: I'm so tired. I hate feeling like this, so weak, so not my self. I feel so numb. This is the first time I have been able to cry in days. I don't want to be in this house anymore. I can't be here and pretend anymore. I'm not okay and I don't want to be treated by a shrink. I wish I could just be. I want to get my homework done and not be so behind.

I want to be home. I don't know if I can handle all of this pressure anymore. I'm so tired. Tonight I want to cry.

All of my energy is gone. I want to cry myself to sleep.

This is a bad night, I just can't do this alone. I want to be loved.

Chapter 4: February 17, 2006

11:45 PM

Annotation: Imagine yourself sitting down, your back firmly pressed against the back of an old wooden chair. While you sit a feeling of complete contentment runs over your body. From the top of your head through the ends of your big toes you completely relax. Letting out a sigh, you move. The chair creaks back and forth with an eerie, “see saw” sound that resonates through the room. Each movement makes that same noise. The see saw is so unique that you could pick it out from anywhere. Although you are relaxed, there is still a heavy weight that bears on your shoulders. The weight draws through your back until it is resting solely on the seat. The five slats that make it up are old and worn. The imprint feels like it was made just for you. Many women have sat in this very place, working on papers, talking with friends or making the decisions that would change their lives. But you are here for another reason.

You are alone in that chair looking at the window. A soft white chiffon curtain falls to the right side, hanging from the white window frame to the floor. Peacefully the curtain rests without a breeze. The window is closed, the inside is adorned with white metal crosses, marring a view of the empty-leafed oak trees outside. The sun has set hours ago and you still sit there watching, looking out the window. Even as you sit there, something pulls you to reach farther into your core, to an emotion you cannot express.

Something tells you to listen to music, to melodies that help you feel what you cannot express. Deep in your chest you feel this tightening a painful, aching longing to let go. The words seem like they were written for you.

You write allowing the words to flow freely from your thoughts without hesitation. Without fear of being hurt, your emotions flow onto the paper. Releasing that last bit of hurt you are feeling inside, you surrender to these words:

Trusting

It all seems so quiet.
 There are so many things that need to be said, but for the lack of words there is no sound.
 As if someone is playing a trick on the heart to bring the mind peace.
 I take my time slowly and think about each moment.
 If not, why do we even go on?
 It's so fragile the thoughts that are coming out.
 Towards some destiny that has yet to be pondered by the lowly and meek.
 For there is that feeling of trust but the lacking of strength that leads our days, our
 thoughts and our minds. Each step forward is a leap across a chasm of faith .
 Its more about the emotions than the acts that we go through.
 In time the healing and the pain subside.
 For what cost do we stay?
 It finds the monetary value shame and the pleasures of life empty.
 For what do I say that has not been spoken? What can there to be done that is not already
 known? Giving all of oneself to surrender in trust and courage.
 The endless drive of the spirit.

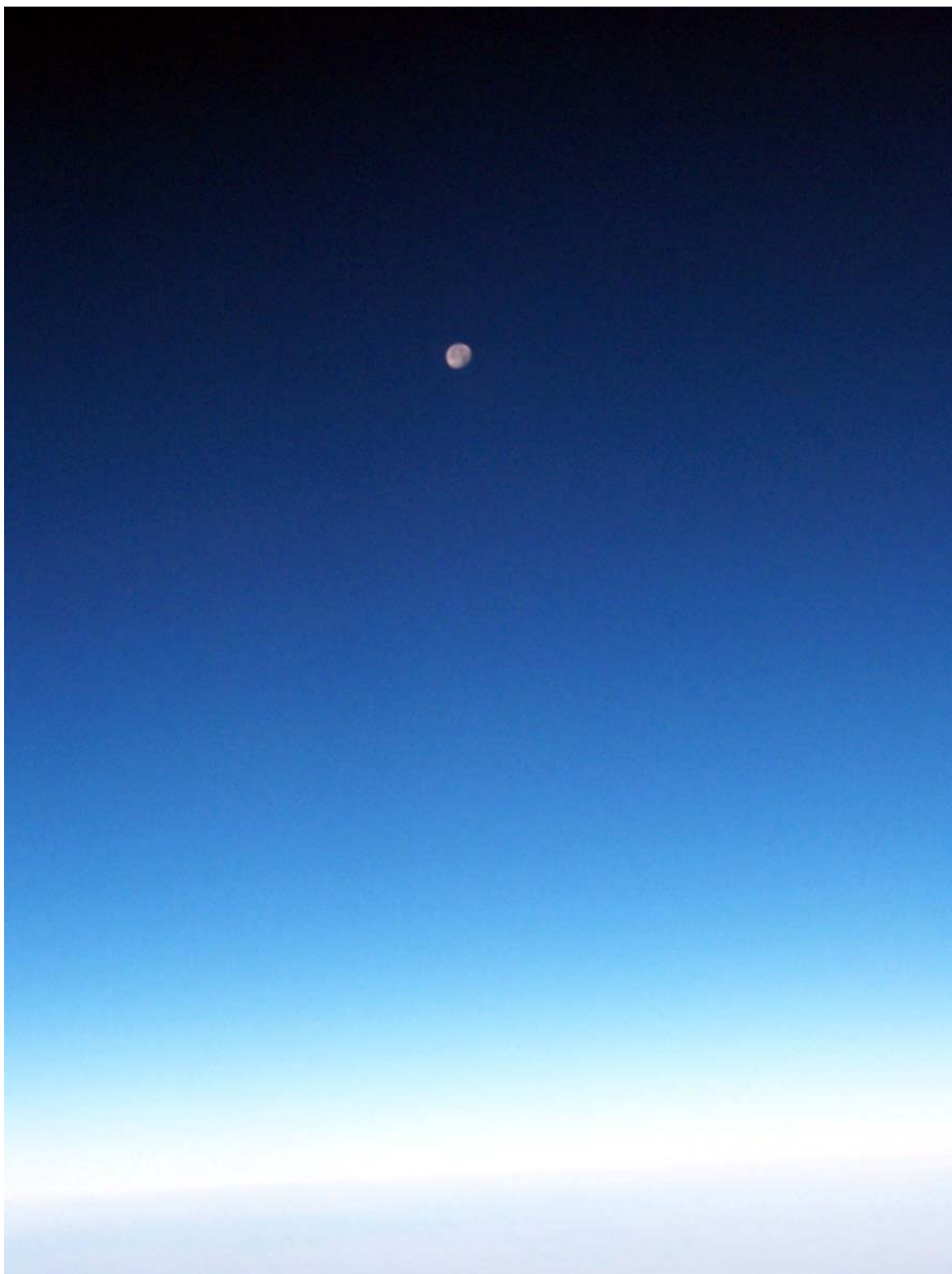


Figure 2. Piece of the Moon

Chapter 5: March 5, 2006

1:24 AM

Annotation: It's Sunday, mid afternoon. You are sitting alone in your room, staring at your phone. You just called Carmen. She is coming over to hang out and talk. You have not said anything more than, "I need a friend right now." Feeling like telling her what has happened is the best thing to do, you feel scared. You have not told anyone but your family and the women that were with you the night that it happened. As you are asking yourself again if telling your best friend today is the best thing for you, the phone rings. Carmen is at the front door. You quickly run downstairs to get the door. It seems like everyone is home. The house is very busy with each room playing a separate genre of music. With the cacophony of noise you feel like you might actually have some privacy in the paper-thin, four-walled eight by eight foot room. Feeling like nothing up to this point has felt easy, you sit down and say the truth. You have been telling everyone you are just sick, but Carmen that's not what happened... tears stream down your face. She is crying too. As hard as it was to tell your family this is aching just the same. Minutes pass and the only words that need to be said, "I am here for you." Tender thoughts are shared between the two of you and you become conscious of the sadness in her life as well.

Being vulnerable at this point is very hard for you but you understand later that it was healing to your mind to tell someone else. To know that someone else knew.

Fragments

Bearing witness to unknown thoughts
 Telling someone today
 Letting my best friend know and then feeling scared
 Sharing secrets to let the other person know that we care
 Acting as if everything was okay but not wanting it to work that way
 Not feeling satisfied with ignoring the actions of others
 Leading a double life that is painful to watch?

Annotation: After a long day you are still awake. Nothing can stop the thoughts that are racing through your mind. You are sitting in your room watching the movie, “How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days” trying to get tired enough to fall asleep. In that space between utter exhaustion and peaceful unconsciousness you realize that staying in the house was good but also could be the worst decision you ever made. You realize for the first time that you don’t want to tell the women in the house because it was so hard to tell your best friend today. Crying out softly in your room you fall asleep on the floor, alone.

2:31 AM

Part Two

It seems like I have made the right choice
 I’m not scared and that is scary to me
 I have always been the planner and right now I really don’t know how its going to go
 I am working on making myself better but I think I am going to have to do that through other people
 It takes me so long to really meet people and I think that today was a blessing that I got to talk to Carmen
 I needed her to be here and I think that she needed to let her thoughts out as well
 It was hard and I think I need to talk to her more and really find time to see Felicity and Whitney too
 I guess I am healing but I want more, I really want to not be in school I want to have a break, I really want to have a break

Chapter 6: March 12, 2006

11:52 PM

Annotation: Numb², the Webster's dictionary defines it as devoid of sensation especially as a result of cold or anesthesia, devoid of emotion: indifferent. You choose the second one.

You are sitting at your desk, rocked back on two legs of the chair. You have placed your feet on the desktop to balance yourself. As you look around in your space you visually check things with your eyes. Three drawers on the right, a place to put your key board: everything is in its place. You have organized it all because there is nothing else that you could be doing right now. The shelves up above have pictures of your family. Mom and Dad hugging. Brother being a goof. Then there is the picture of your sister smiling as she turns from where she is working on a computer. All of the photos are memories that are happy for you, images that should stir emotions of contentment and joy. Nothing. As you look with intensity at the photos of the ones you love you feel nothing. Your body is numb. In a sense you feel unable to move. You cannot feel. You are trapped in a continuous void of sensation.

This music helped to inspire the Journal Entry on March 12, 2006.

Numb³ by Linkin Park from the album Meteora.

Can't you see that you're smothering me
Holding too tightly
Afraid to lose control
'Cause everything that you thought I would be
Has fallen apart right in front of you

[Caught in the undertow / Just caught in the undertow]
Every step that I take is another mistake to you
[Caught in the undertow / Just caught in the undertow]
And every second I waste is more than I can take

But I know
I may end up failing too
But I know
You were just like me
With someone disappointed in you

'm tired of being what you want me to be
Feeling so faithless
Lost under the surface
I don't know what you're expecting of me
Put under the pressure
Of walking in your shoes

[Caught in the undertow / Just caught in the undertow]
Every step that I take is another mistake to you
I've
Become so numb
I can't feel you there
Become so tired
So much more aware
I'm becoming this
All I want to do
Is be more like me
And be less like you

Journal Entry: I am so tired right now. I feel so overwhelmed with this week, I want it to be over. I really don't feel like waking up tomorrow. I am watching my feet and they feel so disconnected. I can't move. When will this be better? I'm not sad but I don't feel anything.

Chapter 7: April 5, 2006

11:34 PM

Annotation: Today was different for some reason. You have a feeling of peace on your mind. The end of the week, another Wednesday, another bright day for you. You prayed a lot today and felt like there was someone finally on the other side. You openly said out loud a lot of what you have been trying to accept. "The women that I live with do not understand. I have to have a different lifestyle now. I hope they realize that my rejection for invitations to parties does not directly reflect on how I feel about them. I hope that the naïve outlook that I once had on going out does not end the same way. I hope they stay safe." Thinking of someone else has helped you realize where you are

right now and how you are adjusting to life again. This is the first day that you have said you are happy. It took 67 days.

Poem-Untitled

I just want to take time
I'm overcome by my emotions
But slowly breaking free.

I just want to cry, but in a good way
I feel surrounded by good people in my life,
and I know I am going where I want to be.

I wish I could talk with my friends but I don't know how they feel.
I don't want to put hope in nothing.
Someday we will be able to talk and I know it will work out.

Today was a good day, it takes acceptance and moving with strength.
I read some today, and I know I can with each step and thought,
I am moving on the right path.



Figure 3. Wildflowers on the Tundra

Swept Up

There are no words
but the dance of life,
speaks with a passion
no one knows.
Each movement is effortless
in the hands of the
trusting.
With joy and sadness
there is a beat, constant
that flows in the mind
and the heart.
More than once there
are trials, but proceeding
through the day, adding
to each, walking at
a pace that suits their one
step, breathe hope
that is the dance.



Figure 4. Daisy at Home

Chapter 8: April 9, 2006

11:23 PM

Annotation: You are at a retreat with your house. This is the time you decide to share your story. Everyone has gone to the beach. Some women are running in the water. Others are sitting on the dull grey-brown driftwood. The logs have been washed ashore after their own tumultuous journey through the surf and sand, resting at the tide line to remind all that come to the beach the power of the ocean from which they came. You are a patient person and the water is cold. You decide to join the people who are sitting. It is mid afternoon on Saturday and you are enjoying the heat of the sun as it caresses and warms your face. The big Northface jacket you are wearing insulates you from the occasional whispering breeze that creeps through the tall, green, beach grass. The sand tickles your feet as you dig a little hole with your toes in front of you. Looking towards the water you can see the white swells crashing against the dark sand. The wave sets are coming in very close together, growing up on the beach. You know that the tide is coming in for the evening. The water is blue green. The dark green kelp casts shadows as the waves break and recoil back into the massive ocean. The colors cast upon the horizon and the setting sun make you feel calm. The intense yellow is fading into a sherbert orange and tangerine color towards the water. There is still quite a bit of time before the sun sets but you feel like you could sit there on that grey-brown driftwood log forever listening to the crashing waves and the whispering breeze like nothing else in the world mattered.

Coming on this trip you knew it was going to be a release for everyone. The social pressure and standards you feel you must live up to at home are not here. You

talked with Sara about what you should do, wondering if this was a good time to tell everyone. You have been lying to everyone for weeks now. You have gotten quite good at it, actually and that is scary for you to think about. Even more intense is the feeling you are experiencing as you prepare in your head what you are going to say. As you think of those first words, “I have lied to you all...” a brick heavy on your chest hits you. Under your sternum feels like sand is being poured into it, sinking deeper into your lungs with each breath. Continuing to think about what you are going to say, you feel your arms get heavy, your legs grow weak and everything else collapses inside of you. All these sensations are happening as you walk back to your room. Feeling heavy, your body has gone into autopilot. Just like many times before. You sense a feeling of panic and terror run through your body. The pain of these emotions rips at your core. Each step hurts more and more, tightening, aching. Getting to the room door is relief. You will have a few minutes to let go of the tension you are feeling. Just sitting down on the bed, your entire being goes limp.

Everyone is in one room now, thirty women—a lot of people are waiting to say something about themselves, something that makes them who they are today. Feeling anxious and ready, the sharing is like popcorn around the room. The tears from so many heart-felt stories run warmly down your cheek. The held-in sobs from others break the silence between each story.

It’s your turn. You look at Sara and silently say to yourself that this is the right thing to do. Just as you had practiced, you spoke the words that would change forever the way you would relate to these women: “I have lied to you all...”

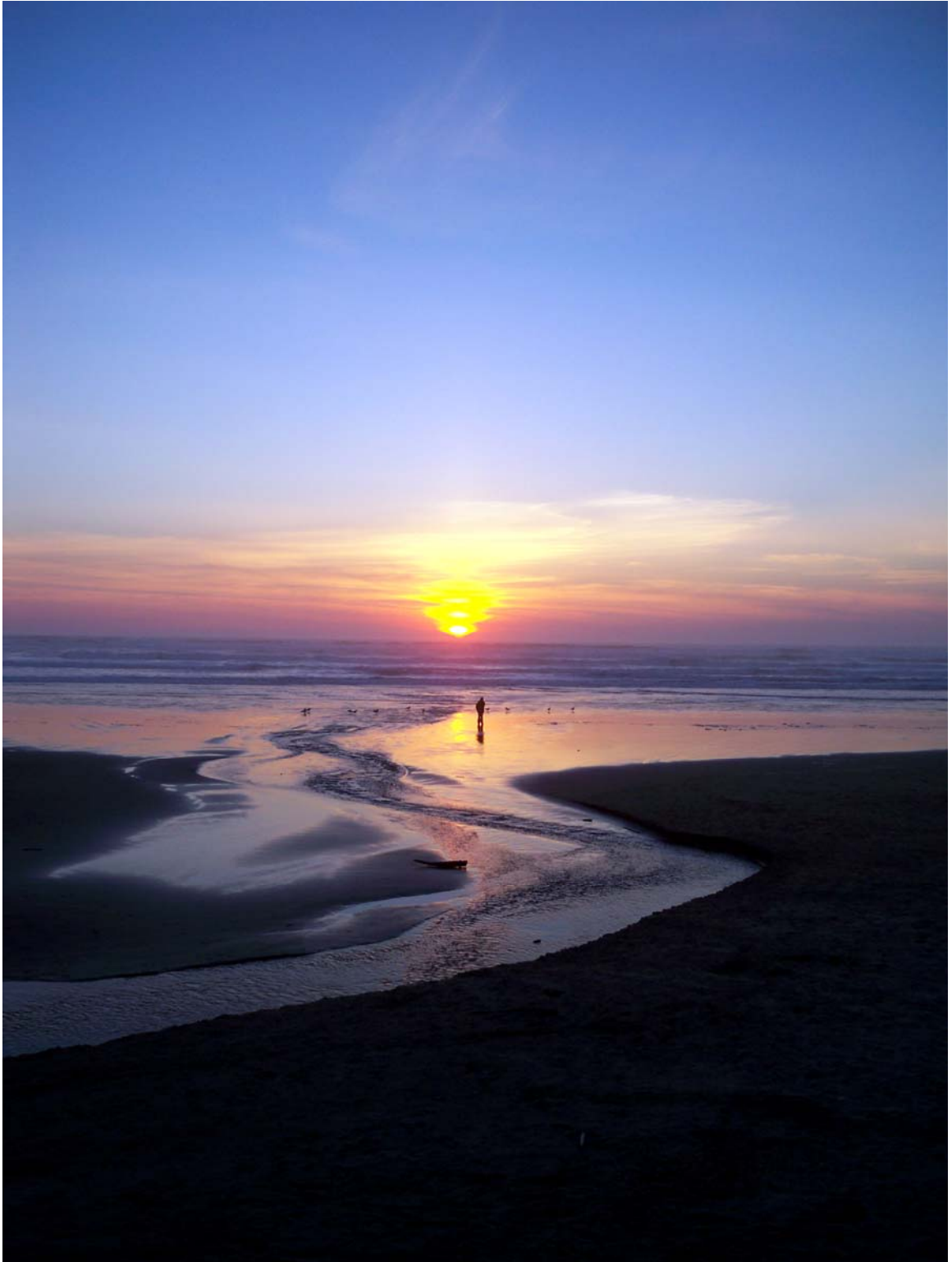


Figure 5. Sunset Soloist

Journal Entry: Is it possible to self heal?

To know somewhere in your soul that it will be alright?

Without a doubt I prayed to God and got an answer last night. I told my entire house about my deepest darkest secret time. I was lifted and feel like I can be me again and not hide under the shroud of self-doubt and desperation.

Within the days I have been in the house I have changed and grown into someone who is strong but humanely flawed.

If there was ever any doubt in my mind that God was at my side, it vanished last night. I said a silent prayer and asked for strength. Sara gave me a look that no words can describe, and I poured my heart out.

I was tired of lying, wishing, crying, and wanting.

I still feel alone but not in my heart. I have been renewed in the spirit that moves me.

I wake up and praise God I am here, that I can touch people's lives. I think that I am here to tell people my story. I am here to let people know it is all right to cry, it is all right to be lost, but also to know there is someone there.

Kappa Delta has silently supported me with my decisions in college. I don't think I could or would have stayed here at OSU if I didn't have the sisters in this house. Even though no one knew, I felt they were supporting my fight and me.

Now that everyone- almost everyone- knows I feel that my life can move forward. I have taken steps to new heights and the deepest lows but the light of God has guided me through the thickets and tangles.

My personal devotion had been strengthened by the friends I have made this year. I don't know my plan but I do know that last night I changed people's lives and changed the hearts of those who were doubtful. I want to be stronger and just overflow with the exuberance I feel right now.

I never want to be sad again, but I feel like crying now. I feel like crying just for the joy that I can talk about things and not be ashamed. I praise.

Psalm 30:11⁴

You turned my wailing into dancing.

You changed my mourning into dancing.

I am taking this weekend with my sisterhood and looking forward. I await the sunrise of the gladness that is to come and to change the hearts of those I speak with. I want to be the vessel of hope and trust. I am turning toward a light and power that overwhelms me to the point of pure ecstasy. I want to praise and give thanks for the blessings I have received.

Not all times are good but in time you will find the answer you seek. My path in being made and knowing is not as important as living.

This music helped to inspire the Journal Entry on April 9, 2006.

Candle light⁵ by Imogen Heap from the album iMegaphone.

I am alone, surrounded by	I am blind
The colour blue	My eyes
Inside a poem, the only	Are
Words I ever knew	Covered
Washing my hands, of the	From
Many years untold	The
For now I am banned, my	Outside
Future is to unfold	For I have lied, now all
	There is left for me
Would you take my	To do is hide
Candlelight	Take in a deep
Would you take my	Breath, I lift
Candlelight	My head
Would you take	For I am a new man
My candlelight	And I arise from my bed
Away from me	
	This is all there is, I can see that now
	I have to be careful with it, now it's been found
	So fragile, but powerful, this is the light
	Of my destiny stay with me, through every night

Chapter 9: May 25, 2006

12:57 AM

Annotation: You feel like there is this battle at the seat of your consciousness.

This inner depth of your mind is also thinking but not allowing your conscious thought to speak the words that are being formed. You struggle to express your feelings in a way that will allow your body to say words out loud. You feel like your perception of the world you are observing is acting like a snare, not allowing you to relax because every new thought pulls you deeper into a trap.

“No echo can ever repeat....” Your feelings can be so damaging to your psyche that you don’t want anyone to know this feeling is altering your personality, inward and outward. You are splintering into pieces of the person you were and the person you want to become. As your mind fractures, your body is also feeling unrest. Every impulse to

move rips at the wound that just scarred over. Feeling totally broken but being whole again would liberate you of one restraint and make you happy.

Inner Depths of the Conscious Thoughts Withheld from Reasoning

Acceptance is the grace that I seem to be withholding
Marking a time when I can't understand but know everything about
Letting go of my thoughts and just freeing my mind and soul to please my inner peace
Writing down what no echo can ever repeat
Mirroring a face that has morphed into a dawning sunrise of hope
Preceding a tender feeling of open and yet guarded fragility
Emotion not cutting at the core but kneading at the surface of the scar
Releasing majestic mind frames for a total oblivion of character
Beautiful happy stained moments



Figure 6. Tracing through the Clouds

Annotation: Your mind is racing tonight. So much emotion and so many streams of conscious thought. Like a racetrack with cars always moving left. Your conscious thought is overtaken by the counterclockwise race. This is not a solution to the problem. It all needs to end. You feel like the safety of this rapid thought is just a façade for the true snare that is keeping you from the truth. You really can go another direction.

12:45 AM

Poem- Untitled

A moment thinking about the depths and ways I could go
 Marking a new time but without the constant tick of the past racing forward
 Openness and willingness to expand the future and let more intense feelings come and
 make me absolute and whole

Redefining who I really want to be and be portrayed

At some point there is a lack of words and I feel movement
 Each breath is a possible reflection point
 Letting go of every barrier that heads my persistence

12:47 AM

Moments

Waking
 Breathing
 Accepting
 Moving towards a goal not set my standards placed upon me
 Moving towards life and happiness within my own path
 Taking time and making it my own
 Having grace but feeling a lack of connection
 Deeper thoughts into my reflection
 Calming and time take me towards an openness and tranquility.



Figure 7. Heaven's Window

Chapter 10: May 26, 2006

12:34 AM

Annotation: Realizing you have the ability to find something to make you feel better makes you less depressed about your situation. The only thing that hurts to understand is that realizing has to be done in small steps. The act of walking is enough for one day. Breathing is something that can be controlled. Accepting will only take time. You are at the first point in your life where you have to decide for yourself how you want to move forward. How will you acknowledge what happened and move on? Denial is easier it helps you hide, but you feel like you can't be living an empty life forever. The ease of lying to yourself is so time-consuming that you're getting to the point of

exhaustion. At this point you become aware that four months have gone by. Only now are you beginning to “realize” and accept for the first time.

Missing the Mark

More than a word
Shaking breaking losing all hope
How will you make your mark?
How will you make a change?

Take it all in, make it all yours
Don't lose time it's not your fault
Don't worry about what you can't change
Life's too short to be unhappy
Life's too short to feel unloved

Walking down your path
Jumping slumping looking for trust
Where are you leading your mind?
Where do you want to exist?

Take it all in, make it all yours
Don't lose time it's not your fault
Don't worry about what you can't change
Life's too short to be unhappy
Life's too short to feel unloved

Have you done all you can?
Look around are you really want to be?

Take it all in, make it all yours
Don't lose time it's not your fault
Life's too short to feel unloved
Life's too short to feel unloved

Chapter 11: May 27, 2006

10:32 AM

Annotation: You are sitting in bed in your room. The sun is shining and the cherry blossoms are scattered all over the ground outside. You are feeling better about deciding to confront your feelings, deciding to start accepting what happened then and what is happening now. It's odd that you are writing in the morning. Most of your thoughts have come when you have exhausted your body to the point where it had to force out every last bit of thought so thoughts did not keep you awake. You know your day is going to be full of decisions and agitating thoughts.

Making any choice, right now is like jumping over the Grand Canyon... impossible. You are unsure about how far you want to go now. Do you want to get to an unsafe point where you know you might fall back to where you were just a few weeks before? You know making any choice is going to be hard, but you ask yourself: Will it be too much of a risk?

Journal Questions

At some point, you have to realize it's all about how much you want to risk. At what point do you stop? Where is the cliffhanger you are trying to avoid? Is that chasm you have so desperately strived to jump across just out of the reach of your feet?



Figure 8. Yellowstone Carver

Chapter 12: June 1, 2006

1:40 AM

Today you had to diligently study for finals for your classes. Anger was the first emotion you felt when you finished. In a way you seem to be moving on, but it still seems like yesterday when you had to skip taking finals during the previous term. The stress of dead week has culminated into right now. You have reached a point you did not think was possible.

After spending time at the house, all you experience is anger. Your annoyance with immaturity has come to a head. The bitterness you have held inside for so long is ruining your chances to find peace. The way some women talk about their actions reminds you of momentary insanity. The women demonstrate no goodwill or responsibility with what they do. In a moment of restraint, your thoughts focus to the facts: you know they are feeling pain, too. Unlike yours but still something that alters their lives. You realize that you are angry because you are not able to help them understand they are headed for disaster. You do not have to be involved with them because you know they are only bringing you down. The friend group that once existed for you is now going to have to change.

Poison

I've cried those tears.
 Let that pain run through me like a poison.
 All that anger all that rage, what is it for?
 Why does it still haunt my mind, these tortures of the past?

Mark me like a child; make me something I'm not.
 Whatever you say,
 Make me something I'm not.
 Take it all back and walk in those shoes.
 Listen to the sound of disdain running from your lips

Untouchable for the breath of those reaching to the cold.
 I see through the lies,
 The disgust I have will never fully be known.
 You speak but I hear only hurting and hate.

Walk in the path that none should ever have to go.
 Envision that pain like glass through and through.
 See those truths powerful and frail.
 Feel that extreme, that high, sink to the low, become of them.
 Rise up and realize you are only human. You are the difference you see.

Chapter 13: June 6, 2006

12:57 AM

Annotation: Having normal emotions would make you feel better. Those feelings you desire are what everyone around you can experience. Sensing when it is okay to be emotional is a talent you have lost. If anyone could help you find your happiness, then maybe you could pull yourself up from this hole you have created.

Depths

I have reached a low and unreachable depth of sorrow.
I don't know why I feel so sad, so empty.
I have a constant reminder that I am tarnished.
I want to be normal and have those feelings
I want someone to love me.
I want to feel appreciated.
Why can't you be there for me? I have given so much without even knowing it.
I am a secret burden on your heart and my mind.
I can only hope to sleep, to dream.
To wake, and find happiness.



Figure 9. Torrey's Thunder

Chapter 14: June 8, 2006

11:48 AM

Annotation: You sit in the dining room. Last night was a big party night on campus. It seems like everyone around you is hung over. God! You don't miss that! You have your lunch "Sandwich bar," so you are eating a dry turkey sandwich with some grapes. Nonfat milk. In the tranquility of sitting there eating, they start.

As if this table, where you sat, is beckoning them to tell their stories, you hear what you know will make you hurt. The stories about the clothes come first. Short skirts and strappy, sparkling tank tops, breasts pushed out for the world to see. As if putting yourself on display in this way will get someone to notice you for the "right" reasons. Still eating your grapes, you can't help but continue to listen.

Apparently there was a big beer party. You think to yourself, "All those cute clothes now reek of cheap beer and Calvin Kline perfume. That's attractive." Before the women get into what they did, they ask you about your night.

Your inner dialog is racing with a funny comment like, "Oh my clothes were drenched in the apple juice I was drinking. Yeah, that movie I was watching in the TV room was pretty scary."

Instead you just say you stayed home and watched TV. It's a safe answer to offer, knowing that a small amount of ridicule will follow but it's nothing you have not heard before. All at once--as if it were planned--you get the typical response, "LAME!" Without thinking, you respond, "Well what did you do that was so much better?" As soon as you hear the laughs and snickers, you regret that question. The next ten minutes of stories are enough to make your blood boil. The stories haunt your mind.

Instant flashbacks overwhelm your thoughts. You respectfully exit the conversation because you know at this point you are an expendable element in their quest for status and approval.

You walk up to your room, instantly tired, but really unable to process everything you have just heard. The only place you remember in this house where you could reflect and feel better was here.

Unable to quiet your thoughts, you walk to the park and write down what you have just experienced. You truly can't believe the women act in these scandalous ways. Writing down your thoughts helps you realize that everyone lives to the beat of their own drums. Even if these drums eventually break like mine did.

Melodies

Annoyed at the careless thought
Selfish and cold you don't care how you think
You are told what to think how to act
Forget being the selfless one
You make me sick with sadness
You lack what I know all too well
I hope you listen
Time is a gift precious and not to be taken for granted
At what point do you think you will stop living for this world but instead for the next
I have so much pain inside and I am constantly reminded with haunting flashbacks and
visions of what could have been
Why are you so naive to the fact that what you say hurts
Don't think about it later because what if it's too late
I'm here and I am strong but inside I am dying a little
I am overwhelmed and consumed once again by the actions of another
I guess it's not their fault what makes them need to care
It's not their problem
I guess there are only a few people who can truly understand what I am going through
Anger and frustration is poured out in these words
While I hide behind a wall of perfection slowly crumbling beneath my feet
I can't hold it much longer before I burst into an emotional oblivion
My mind is running with the silent thoughts that I would like to say
I am sickened by the lack of responsibility that I see around me
What kind of environment have I put myself into
Why can't I just be exactly who I dreamed I would always be
I have so much time when I am alone to think and try my thoughts
I like the silence because no one can hurt me
When there are no words I am the only one that has the ability to torture me
That is what it is torture
A slow agonizing compression
Each noticeable breath is crushing but releasing life outward
That is all I want to be noticed for who I am- a life force that has meaning
I want that to be my goal to be who I am and not ashamed by what they cannot see
I hold myself back from the feelings I want to show simply because I am vulnerable
I never want to be hurt again
I want to be free of these memories that haunt me
My pain is only the physical word I can use to describe what I am feeling
There are no words to explain what my soul is aching for
If ever there was a time that I wanted to just write my thoughts aloud and scream at the
top of my lungs it is now
I want to drive to the beach and feel the ocean and just let it out
The waves will cascade and devour my echoes
They will be lost forever among the foam
Tragedy is that I am here alone with my thoughts dwelling on that which I cannot change

Chapter 15: June 17, 2006
12:32 AM

Desire a Dream

Is it weird that I am sitting here all alone?
It's so quiet in a house that should be filled with fifty wonderful friends.
I just want to talk to you and find the truth.
I think I let myself get too involved with everything.
I know what is meant to be will happen.
Bear in mind that the happiness you feel is your decision.
You should not have to explain to others that you found what makes you happy.
There are situations in life that are hard and it can hurt.
Realize that if you can find what you want to hold on to, then you will be blissful.

You can see it in your eyes.
Reading the words that were given to you.
Showing me the poem that you wrote.
It takes a lot to realize that maybe the life you are leading is not right for you.
It takes time and a lot of memories to find what you are looking for.
Someone will come along that makes that difference.

But if that person slips away, how will you know what's right?
You have to go all-out and just let your heart shine.
At what point can you say that it's not "all or nothing".
Take a chance on what you want and what you deserve
Don't settle for a fake smile and a passing glance.
If you can't say what you want and be who you are, then what kind of life are you leading?

Don't string along those who you can't help.
Look for the one who completes the puzzle.
Take a goddamn chance on what everyone wants.
Put some faith in the fact that the ones you leave behind will be okay.
You are the difference you want to be.
Desire what you dream of and realize it's what is waiting right in front of you.

Chapter 16: June 26, 2006

9:37 AM

Waiting for a calling

You calmed my silence when no one else could hear.
 Afraid of the awkward voices that are to be spoken.
 I left, reluctantly, unaware that I left my heart on the step.
 Was I naïve to think that you really wanted to wait?
 If the times you have in the days push me away, I am sorry.
 Sorry for putting myself on a line and then asking you to cut it.
 I guess I will know when we can speak again.
 I am in a corner and you have the ball.
 Please don't make the clock run down with the wait.

Chapter 17: July 1, 2006

1:42 PM

Annotation: You decide to get out of Corvallis and start fresh this summer.

Packing your car full, tossing the road bike and your big black cargo box on top of the car, you leave town. The mountain air is dry. Being a mile up in the Colorado Rockies will take some getting used to for sure. Leaving almost everyone behind is freeing.

The people you know in this new place are amazing examples of friends; they are people you know you can count on. Their silent support--the support they don't know they are giving--is healing and refreshing.

You are living in a dorm-style building with three people to a room and 20 rooms in a hall. Feels like being back in your first year of school. You set up your room. It's very small with a bunk bed, a single bed, dressers and a closet with just enough room to turn around. This small space might be the only difficult thing you have to deal with for the next two months. Piece of cake. The group you came here with is full of shining examples of how to be happy, how to follow something that is true.

The sky outside is a bright blue. You decide to walk around the area, experience what nature has to offer you here. As you push up a steep hill, you find a big grey-blue boulder to sit on. Catching your breath you sit on the rock, pondering the emotions you are feeling. As you rest, you realize that it is going to be an emotional place, but a place of healing.

Wondering

It's a lot of guessing.
Acting and playing a part that is not really written out for you.
Something got away from my mind and happened to move.
Something is different and I like it.
Can I go back and feel the same?
When is it okay not to be playing a part anymore?



Figure 10. Open Skies

Chapter 18: July 2, 2006

10:26 AM

Annotation: The week has been a long one. Nothing seems to be familiar but that is okay. You do not have to work today, but it seems as though you have just started just the same.

Moving to a new place was something you decided to do at the spur of the moment. Without hesitation or fear of leaving everything behind, you decided to break away from the pain you left at home. Having this beautiful morning is reassuring. Maybe that choice was not as rash as you thought. Having somewhere you could just be yourself; without having to explain why. What a freeing feeling.

Getting up before dawn to take a walk around the property, you remember a small pond just near the entrance road. The tall green grass along the path is pushed down; deer wandered there not long ago. The trail is worn and winding, not one made for human tread. Walking briskly so as not to miss the sunrise eminent on the horizon, you reach the water just in time. The sunrise unfolds in beautiful shades of pink, orange and blue. The watercolor hues flow through the breaks in the tall pine trees. A whispering breeze murmurs the beauty of this morning. The sting of the crisp morning air hits your cheeks but at the same time, the sun warms your smile. You wonder if this morning is nature's way of asking you to wake up. Looking out past the mountains with Longs Peak⁶ in the background, you feel invigorated about being in such a breath-taking place.

Shadow

Cool blue grey water ripples,
passing, caressing wind soothes
the warmth of the morning,
Relying on the tick of the clock
to find what is correct and just.
Don't doubt the time and the space.
There are reflections in the water,
changed by each new movement
and gust of wind.
That image on the water murks
the thoughts of the pure image.
If I could choose in this world
I would love to be a vision of purity.
I think I am reaching towards the shore.
It is unknown how or if I can get there.
The pain is apparent in the
shadows cast by the reflection that strives to be pure;
But cast upon the strength that someday you will be.

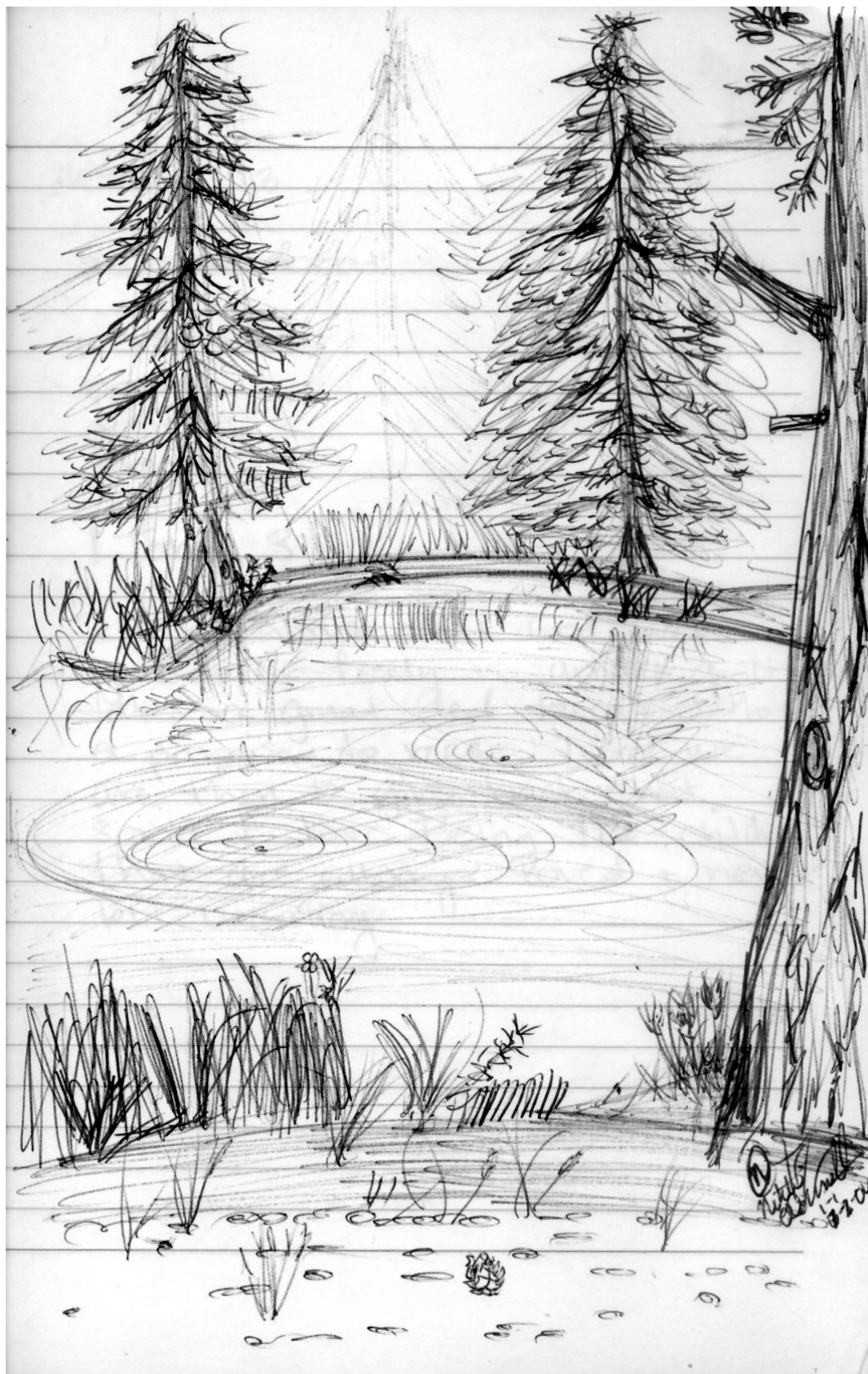


Figure 11. Sketch of the Shadows

This music helped to inspire the poem Shadow.

Twenty-Four⁷ by Switchfoot from the album The Beautiful Letdown

Twenty-four oceans	Twenty-four voices
Twenty-four skies	With twenty-four hearts
Twenty-four failures	All of my symphonies
And twenty-four tries	In twenty-four parts
Twenty-four finds me	But I want to be one today
In twenty-fourth place	Centered and true
With twenty-four drop outs	I'm singing 'Spirit take me up in arms with You'
At the end of the day	You're raising the dead in me
 Life is not what I thought it was	 Oh, oh
Twenty-four hours ago	I am the second man
Still I'm singing 'Spirit,	Oh, oh
take me up in arms with You'	I am the second man now
And I'm not who I thought I was	Oh
Twenty-four hours ago	I am the second man now
Still I'm singing 'Spirit,	And you're raising the dead in me
take me up in arms with You'	Yeah
 There's twenty-four reasons	 I wanna see miracles
To admit that I'm wrong	To see the world change
With all my excuses	Wrestled the angel for more than a name
Still twenty-four strong	For more than a feeling
 See, I'm not coping out	 For more than a cause
Not coping out	I'm singing 'Spirit, take me up in arms with You'
Not coping out	And you're raising the dead in me
When you're raising the dead in me	 Twenty-four oceans
 Oh, oh	 With twenty-four hearts
I am the second man	All of my symphonies
Oh, oh	With twenty-four parts
I am the second man now	Life is not what I thought it was
Oh, I am the second man now	Twenty-four hours ago
And you're raising these...	Still I'm singing 'Spirit,
	take me up in arms with You'
	I'm not coping out
	Not coping out

Chapter 19: July 5, 2006

9:31 PM

Annotation: At this point you know there is something wrong. Inside you are dying. This pain and hurt that you couldn't control is making you physically ill. As if to tune out the world, you decide to turn on the song that really put together what you were feeling. These words pour out from the speakers, crying out what you feeling:

“And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming
 Or the moment of truth in your lies
 When everything feels like the movies
 Yeah, you bleed just to know you're alive” ⁷

You are not sick. Violence is the last thing on your mind, but feeling alive is something you desperately want.

Move

You lead by faith, grace, love
 Sharing the inner depths of your soul
 Trembling from an unknown existence
 Moved by the life force within
 Firmly standing on a creaky plank
 Looking towards the stone of the hill
 Above you but within intent grasp

You walk above all things
 But below the hidden agenda
 Using each intending breath
 Move, purposely take a rock
 Switch your path upwards

A majestic purpose up on those mountains
 Rocks measure a mile, inches
 Are all the movements you can make
 Journey with wonder
 Caution with love
 Live without ceasing



Figure 12. Rocks, Water and Snares

This music helped to inspire the poem Move.

Iris⁸ by Goo Goo Dolls from the album Dizzy Up The Girl

And I'd give up forever to touch you
'Cause I know that you feel me somehow
You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be
And I don't want to go home right now

And all I can taste is this moment
And all I can breathe is your life
and sooner or later it's over
I just don't want to miss you tonight

And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am

And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming
Or the moment of truth in your lies
When everything feels like the movies
Yeah, you bleed just to know you're alive

And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am

And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am

And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am

I just want you to know who I am
I just want you to know who I am
I just want you to know who I am

Chapter 20: August 9, 2006

11:32 PM

Annotation: You are packing your bags getting ready to drive back home and all you can think of is everything you are about to lose.

You remember those first days, hard but also healing, when you were recognizing that life has so much potential. Those thoughts were freeing. Now you are unsure if that potential can be attained if you have to go back to school. Here you are able to live your emotions, crying and laughing. You ceased being consumed by painful thoughts: they stopped weeks ago. Now just the idea of going back makes your head spin in a flurry of irrational thoughts. The place you are headed is a minefield of insincere, frivolous inclinations, all crammed into one house, under one roof. And you are asked to coexist in harmony. You know that your days of consistency are about to end and you will have to

try even harder to remain sane in the chaotic mess. You pray you will be able to handle what is being set in front of you by going back.

Losing Everything

Tension in my chest
achingly it squeezes at
my heart.
My tears come in spurts
but nothing soothes this
discomfort I feel.
I want to release
Be fully unaware of
my surroundings.
Totally lost in the
Chaotic shifts in each scene.
Plainly marked and made to
be an individual
full of power and truth
not trusting my inner
thoughts but releasing
it all to a high power.
Tortured by my destiny?
Or fearful of knowing what awaits,
Avoiding sincerity at all
costs, to cut to the bottom.
Like a rag tossed and then
Churned about. Left wrung
out and in a heap at the
bottom of the floor.
Set above, please let me
be set above it all.



Figure 13. The Light Above

Annotation: You think about going back. Your inner dialog is racing saying, “Feeling trapped again by my mind, torturing me. Their comments [the women you will be living with], the actions you know they will do.”

Those thoughts make you feel bitter and angry again. You don’t want to have to deal with those immature decisions anymore. The actions of others seem to trap you. You want a pair of bolt cutters so you can hack away the chains and judgment they are about to inflict on you again. You start to question how you want to relate to people when you go back.

11:37 PM

Captive

Watched like a lion in
a cage, laughed at and
scorned by those blinded by
a brighter sunshine.

Banished from a greater
purpose but alive in a side
bar of malicious remarks.

Taste the bitterness on their
lips. Drawing each sour
breath with distain and sacrifice

you see me for a suit I wear
the surface scarred by pain
but underneath lies a greater purpose

Let me release my words
Scream for a joy I long to see
Let the iron bars fall at my feet.

Let my mind wander in the space
My body resume my journey
My spirit roar like a prideful lion.



Figure 14. Rocky Pleasant View

Annotation: It seems that as the hours tick by, your skills for reasoning with God are getting better. Yeah, right. You are illustrating the lifestyle you want to live when you get back. You attempt to envision a better picture, but with each image you place in your mind, something penetrates the tranquility and paints an angry scene. Maybe being so tired has skewed your true feelings. You question yourself as you see more and more bizarre images. Maybe at this point your picture-perfect scene is nothing more than a quixotic notion of what you think a perfect life should be. Damn.

11:43 PM

Picture

Let me just be
to awake in a vastness
alert to only one voice.

Let me be guided by you
live in a place where peace abounds.

I want to hope and feel
I dream of days to be better
I want my thoughts to be free

What cost do I need to pay?
How much do I need to learn?
What do I need to endure?
Is there a plan for all of this?

I see the suffering inside of me
a blank canvas tarnished by
a sling of vivid black.

Purity abounds but not within reach
let it be closer, you closer.
my picture is unfinished
let me be beautiful in your eyes.

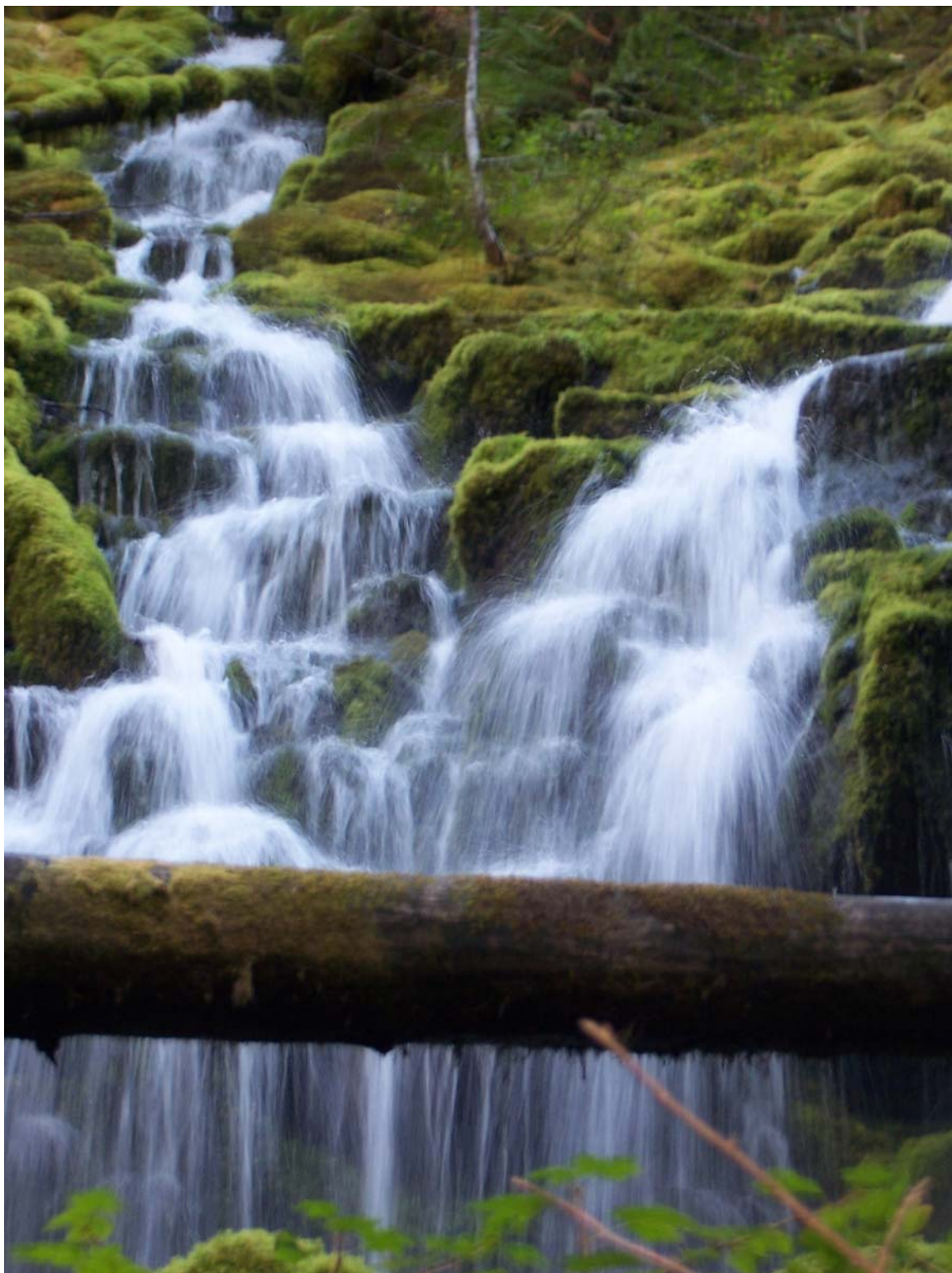


Figure 15. Soothing Falls

Annotation: You imagine yourself sitting at a window, the same window in your house that gave you answers before. You entreat yourself to protect your emotion because you know someone or something will bring back sensations that will make you suffer inside again. Almost falling asleep in your bed, you scribble down these words like a prayer and reminder you can read later.

11:47 PM

Friend

I see you suffering
 you ask why to an empty window
 The only reply you hear... is the breath you release.
 I wish I could understand
 nothing can be said to help you.
 It's a battle now to understand...the change is for a reason.
 Don't be quick to anger
 turn to a stronghold
 Weep for the pain, for your release is healing serenity.
 You are never alone
 among your friends you will be sheltered
 find comfort where you can
 if all you need is a kind word, turn to them and listen
 Find and release your suffering.

Chapter 21: September 20, 2006

10:43 PM

Annotation: You decide today to take a stand against people. The fraternity across the street has a philanthropic tradition of asking women participants to make up a dance routine to perform at their event night. The trend has followed that showing skin and doing stripper moves will help you win the competition. Deciding you couldn't do that made you feel good, but at the same time, other people thought you were judging

them. It seems like every decision you make is going to hurt someone, you or someone else.

Sitting in your room you are just crying because you don't want to lose friends, but you also want to hold yourself to a higher standard. You feel so locked-in again by the judging, piercing eyes of everyone you live with. Unable to be the person you became over the previous months is disheartening and hard to accept.

Just... Be

Shaken and torn,
So confused about it all,
At what point will I feel okay?
Who has to be so confused and broken?
Suffering in silence, hiding in the fear of judgment.

I want to go back.
To that safe place where judgment was only from the one above.
Entwined in the rapture of the caring feeling that is giving.
Feeling whole again, wanted for who I am.
I want to not be afraid of speaking,
Rather putting trust that I will be protected from their words,
Their careless and reckless abandonment of compassion.

This is the first time I have cried in months, since the 6-month time. Why, then, today do I feel so overwhelmed by it all? I wanted to do the dance so bad but I really can't see myself honoring God by being trashy and careless with my talent.
I just want to go back to Colorado, to all the people who loved me there. I could be myself and I loved the way that felt. I feel so trapped here.

Hebrews 3:13 ⁹

Encourage yourself daily while it is still today, so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin.

Psalms 119:136 ¹⁰

My eyes shed streams of tears because your teaching is not followed.

Chapter 22: September 30, 2006

12:05 PM

Annotation: The building you have moved back to is not the same home you left. The people are not the same people, and the community is not the same community of support. More than ever you are questioning your decision to come back to this place. You struggle to manage with only four or five people out of 45 or so who understand. So many recklessly pull you down. You feel like you are approaching the point where you need to separate yourself. School has just started, recruitment is over and the stress has all come back, diligently pressing your spirit lower and forcing you to feel low again. Knowing how it feels to hurt like that, you try your hardest tonight to fall asleep with hope that tomorrow will be better.

Remorse

Do you know what it feels like to be constantly wanting?
 To hold onto nothing but feel so trapped by those around you?
 My body is breaking like glass on the inside but my shell is holding firm.

I hate this place, this bitter frostbitten wreck of a home.
 Where is the warmth that I envisioned?
 Beyond that transparent lie of a friendship.
 Below the surface of perfection, there, there lies the truth.

Everyone one of us is aching for acceptance.
 We want so badly to be loved by everyone that we sacrifice our friends for it.
 When will this deceiving anger be stopped, at what point will it pierce the heart?

Be thankful you can rise above.
 It's not too late for you.
 Move on to what you know is better.
 Live according to how you see life.



Figure 16. Journey Through

Chapter 23: October 29, 2006

9:13 PM

Annotation: One month, it has been one month of unnecessary critical comments about your choices to keep to yourself. Disapproving remarks, analysis of who you are not anymore is hard to hear, hard to bear. Living in these four walls has rendered your figure lifeless and unable to be true to how you embrace who you are. Two days and the nightmare of Halloween will begin; frightening thoughts will be released all over again. Halloween is just a sad reminder of how some people can't respect themselves. You feel done with that and ready to move away from it all. You feel like an outsider in a place you once called home. Right now you know you must take the first steps toward finding a new place to live.

Releasing Tension and Saying Goodbye

Falling back into a time that was so innocent.
It wasn't hard to say that you were scared or alone.
All you needed to do was ask.

Now you have to be ashamed of how you look.
You bare all the burden on you heart.
Releasing all the bitter doubt on something you can't have.

Everything is out of your reach because you know it is wrong.
You are flaccid and unaware that life still goes on around you.
How do you wake up from this bittersweet nightmare?

Where is tomorrow?
Where is that sunrise?
Where is the bandage to cover these wounds?



Figure 17. Sunrise Watercolors

Chapter 24: November 3, 2006

8:25 PM

Annotation: You wish you played the guitar. Maybe just humming a tune will work. Words run through your mind. Homework is elusive and has taken a back seat until you finish this song. You are not writing the song for any particular person, but for everyone you might meet. Sensing people that pass you up because you are not fitting into their cookie cutter mold cross's the path of the song in your mind. You wish telling people how you feel were easier. Maybe this song could be a starting point.

Lyrics to Love

If I
 Wanted you to notice me, I'd
 Sit up a little straighter, I'd
 Fix my hair once and a while

I turn off the social pressure I'd
 Make you wanna remember I'd
 Make you want to try

So why do waste your time
 Thinking of someone else
 I'm sitting right here.. waiting for you
 All you do is cry

Cry for freedom from the chains of life
 A place to call your own
 A hug and smile and you're fine for while
 But who knows ..
 what gunna happen tomorrow.
 Who knows..
 What gunna happen tomorrow

Chapter 25: November 27, 2006

11:15 PM

Annotation: This poem is how you explain how you feel to others when you can't describe the hurt. You have decided to move out of the house. At this point you don't care if anyone understands.

Losing a Little: Where is My Best Friend?

You know those times when the only person you can talk to is your best friend? When there is something pressing against the back of your mind but you can't really, explain how it feels? That moment when the person on the other end of the conversation knows exactly what you mean and understand? That is the meaning of "there are no words."

I guess I really just wish I could talk to you right now so that I could get a feeling of hope. Alone I sit in my room because I choose to be here. The distraction is less but the fear is still there. Ten months to the day and it still haunts me. The moments when I can't breathe and it feels like there is a brick on my chest. I just want you there. I want something to make the chill of surrender go away.

I can lie to this inner voice all I want and save face for those around me, but in the end all I get is the same feeling. It's hard to describe a life. It's something you have to experience and convey with blank messages and thought provoking pictures. There is meaning behind every word and thought behind every key stroke, but it all comes to moving information through the hands out onto the paper so someone can read my inner dialogue. At what point will I share the true feelings I have? When I have the true words to detail every moment.

Few quotes move me as much as this one: Carpe Diem. Seize the day. But recently I read another that moved me: I hold my breath and wait for you to breathe.

Little can describe the true feeling of a breath. A soothing inhale and a sweet exhale. Maybe it is the feeling of life running through your arms and legs, that pulse of knowing you are in control of your destiny. You put your hands in the fact that tomorrow is what you hope for and if it is in the plans, you will make the best of what it can be.

Talk to me and tell me it's all okay. Let me know I can do this. It's all about my hands being wiped clean and me being able to start fresh.



Figure 18. Promise

Chapter 26: December 29, 2006

11:06 PM

Annotation: You have decided to go back to school so you can get work done for the classes you have to make up. Sitting alone in your room, the rain and snow mix is falling heavy on the pavement. The quietness and the music you are playing are helping you release pent-up emotions. You: being back in an empty home, feeling like a bag being emptied. You embrace the emptiness, having nothing left to hold you back from letting go.

Alone at Christmas

I have realized that I hate to be alone. I am sitting in my room after Christmas break alone. I came home to this house early so I could work on my physics and I have yet to do a problem. I know I should but I really don't have the will power to actually sit and do it. I am not being lazy. I just can't really understand myself?

All I can think about are the people in my life who mean so much to me. My thoughts are making me feel so sad. It's not fair that I am doing this to myself. It's all me. I chose to do this but why do I feel like this?

I can't be happy. I swear nothing helps me or will let my mind be at ease. I know I have my faith and that has helped me persevere but why do I feel like I am a one woman company without an assembly line?

It's all come to an end with me sitting here in my chair at my desk wallowing over myself and crying. It's hard enough for me to just cry but the release feels so good. I need to stop obsessing over all that is happening. I need my calm and peace but first I need to find where that is.

Sometimes, like now, I feel like my body is aching because of my emotions. I have everything material that I could want around me, but I am still just looking for something. It takes a lot to be complete. Some days I have what it takes. Some days I don't.

I'm going to go.



Figure 19. Rose Colored Sky

Chapter 27: January 18, 2007

12:25 PM

Bittersweet Emotions

A deeper ache now than ever. So twisted in every being of my body.
My double life is coming back to haunt me right now and it's scary.
I am lying to everyone and inside I am crashing.
Why can't I just admit to it and get help?
I just want to finish these stupid classes and get this year over.

Then again why am I looking for the next big break? I'll always be hoping for something to make it better.
It's not okay.
It's not ever going to go away and I will never really be healed from the emotions that just well up and happen.

This is the first time I have really felt emotional since I can remember. I can recount the date but the emotional set back wasn't there.

The life house song "Everything"¹ really sums up the feelings I have and then the song "Iris"⁸ by the Goo Goo Dolls can explain the daily battles I sometimes have.

I just want a hug right now. I want someone to come and hold me and rock me to sleep, making me feel safe. I am on edge with every movement, with every action I do, I can't stop this weird feeling of tension in my body.

It's hard to look at pictures and then have those memories taint the world I live in.

Iris is very good at saying, "I want you to know who I am". I'm changed and it wasn't my choice and I still have to deal with the daily effects the change has on me. The slight to the very traumatic effects alter my life everyday. Like at this moment when I am really not feeling like I am emotionally stable or physically capable of doing anything or like yesterday when I sat on the floor and couldn't move because I was so distraught and tired from my worry and anxiety.

If this is what I am supposed to be learning in my journey it sucks! I think my life has just gone "Whack" and it's not fun. I want to be happy and I think that it comes and goes. I need some consistency.

Chapter 28: January 19, 2007

12:23 PM

Annotation: What are the steps to healing? You ask yourself if it is okay to feel stuck. You have moved two times since coming back from Colorado. It has been hard to find a consistent, restful place. Around every corner is another thing to set you off and push you back down. Walking into a coffee shop after class, the intellectual part of your mind is teeming with coursework while your emotional psyche is questioning everything—a two year old just learning a new concept. Happiness: an idea that has eluded you for a while now.

It's like when your brother, Eddie, said, "You can't always wait for the next best thing. You will never be happy if you are always looking for something else."

You really want to stop living with the "if this... then" mentality. You know you are a different person than you were a year ago. Still, you feel like you need to be healed. You need someone to let out all the bad parts of your body. Maybe then you can stop feeling stuck in a place, unhealed. Maybe there you will be ready to take on more--if you can just let go of something.

Questions at DB

The last step, heavy and silent,
It eyes me apart.
What about all the other options considered?

Well then pass the time with all these
simple steps.
Do I want to be wondering forever in this permanent direction?

New courses, new faces, they all seem to
make it better but the crossing of paths always

happens eventually, does it really matter.

Passing up a chance, full of fear.
Crushed by my insecure hope of perfection,
marred inside from the bitter unrest.

Pass me up, move on please, let me choose.
It makes no sense to disappoint
don't struggle just chop slowly.

End quick, bleed fast, cry slow.
Looking back all you see is the grounded scar.
Tear up the memory and paint over the mess.

Build up a new frame.
Drive the stakes into the heart.
Brace for a heavy load.

Just don't forget the home sweet home.

Chapter 29: January 20, 2007

2:12 AM

Annotation: It seems like nothing is really meaningful anymore. So many tasks and things need to be checked off an endless list I have. At the same time I am trying to appreciate what is around me. I know I have been to the lowest point I can bear emotionally but I can see I am coming up from that place. A little encouragement here and there from people seems to be a needed reminder, so that I don't fall into a rut of wallowing. I am still learning to feel and comprehend being okay with accepting that encouragement. Being okay with the fact that many people don't really know why I am sad but they are supporting me anyway—a kind of weird courtesy that society believes is proper. Should I tell them? Is it rude to let them make up their own ideas about me? All these questions swirl through my head. Sometimes I wish for a simple, answer book I

could use. I guess I should appreciate the things in the present rather than worrying about what could happen.

Holly

It takes a new road to figure out you are on a new path.
It takes a burst of joy to realize how much you are hurting.
It takes a friend to recognize all the qualities you do not see.
And it takes a single breath to realize you are the one for me.



Figure 20. Mystic Cloud

Chapter 30: January 25, 2007

10:01 PM

Annotation: Today was awful, plain and simple. It has been a year and I can't stop thinking about this anniversary, a date I wish I could just skip. I don't want to see or talk to anyone right now, but I hate the feeling of being alone. My focus has shifted from school and finding happiness to getting through the next few days. Everything I have based my emotional healing on, is triggering sensation tonight. I am hurting so much and there is nothing I can do to stop the ache I feel. Sleeping keeps me from having to deal with hurt. Dreams help me think of what is possible. When I can sleep, I know I cannot be upset by anyone; it is a blessing and a curse. Being rested means I can avoid situations in life but I also have to let go of the amount of time I have in a day to experience getting better. I slept almost all day. Today was hard.

Bitter and Tired

I lay prostrate on the floor a hole burning like a ember in my heart
Welling up and crying over everything
The way the song plays
The words that play on the TV

It all makes this so much worse

Chapter 31: February 9, 2007

8:54 PM

Annotation: You decide to read some tonight. You still have many questions and sometimes you look for what you know is encouraging. Faith makes many promises; you invest a lot of trust in your faith. Tonight you decide to write down hopeful words from scripture onto a post-it note. Every other minute detail is plastered on notes around your desk; this note might actually be helpful. Maybe this note will help keep you from feeling overwhelmed, keep you calm and bring you back to a better place when life comes rushing back. It's a huge task for one little note, but maybe that's all you need.

Poem-Untitled

I cry, in the middle of the night
 I breathe its sweeping over me
 And you
 You make me feel so warm
 liked I'm loved

you say that I'm your angel
 and you walk every step with me
 and I know I can trust you
 but I'm always always so scared

Chapter 32: April 5, 2007

10:33 PM

Annotation: I am so angry right now. I went to class today and had to listen to an awful lecture about the difficulties life throws at women. I feel like a person inside of me pulls and twists my stomach. They are torturing me from the inside out. I am allowing

them to make me a shell of a person. I am so sick of the constant battle waging inside of me. Tonight I am taking a stand and writing to the thing inside of me, telling it that its days are numbered. I will have no more pain, no more hurt and no more exhaustion from this fight. Too much of my life has been lost. A part of me died but there is so much left to live for, so much to enjoy. Tonight I have had enough.

Feminist Class—Screw You

Bitter burning inside of me.
All day smoldering and catching the wind
Aches and spit
Up up that blood.

Working through
Staying awake in prison
Let me just breathe
Dammit I hate you

This is for all that crap
All those feelings

No this is not for you this is about you
Quit being so covered
I want to expose you

I want to make you feel
Have emotion that doesn't hurt
chop those words

put me out
I'm done burning
you have used all of your ammunition
It's over

Chapter 33: April 21, 2007

9:18 PM

Annotation: Starting over, still the same body but a completely different outlook.

Some parts of me are gone forever, good and bad things, but left behind so I can move forward. Instead of trying to forget everything, I am trying to learn that life can be okay. I will be okay because I can be a strong individual again. A part of me is hard to change but I know only time will help me understand how to deal with it. I don't want to be empty anymore. I want to feel full of hope. I want to experience life and benefit from the trials of school and work. I don't need to hold onto the idea that I will be like this forever. I can find security in believing I have reached a limit of who I can become. I now know I can be a greater person. I am done feeling sorry for myself and allowing myself to shun life by sleeping.

Done

Don't make me forget you
 Don't make me cry
 You've taken everything from me
 Hmm hmm yeah why?

Does it make you feel better
 Does it make you strong
 'cause I don't miss it at all.

And I want you to go
 I want you to run away
 Leave me
 'cause I don't need you
 Ohh ohh anyway.
 Ohhh ohh what da ya say?

I've stopped crying
 There is a smile on my face
 You are just a memory I have erased
 Hmm hmm it's about time.
 Hmm hmm I have a new life.

And I want you to go
 I want you to run away
 Leave me
 'cause I don't need you
 Ohh ohh anyway.
 Ohhh ohh what da ya say?

What can you say to me today
 That I haven't heard before?
 Nothing can break me that way
 I've won the score.

And I want you to go
 I want you to run away
 Leave me
 'cause I don't need you
 Ohh ohh anyway.
 Ohhh ohh what da ya say?

Ohh ohh anyway.

Ohhh ohh what da ya say?

Chapter 34: April 23, 2007

4:40 PM

Annotation: You just sat down at your computer, humming a tune, nondescript but just something that popped into your head while you were logging on. A stack of post-it notes sits near your pen jar. Lyrics of songs run through your head but a few lines keep coming back. Writing them down now seems like a good idea. Maybe later they will come back to help you finish writing a song.

Although you have the three lines of a song written, later in the day nothing else seems to fit with them. You decide you want to keep it simple—leave it just as you wrote it.

The Belief

Don't stop believing in me
Don't think you need to take this lightly
I am waiting on a star, shining for me

Chapter 35: April 28, 2007

8:13 PM

Annotation: Thoughts are running, chasing your conscious ideas out, replacing them with jumbles and anxiety-filled beliefs. Tonight seems to be filled with a panic as you can't get your mind to slow down. It moves faster and faster keeping you busy, not doing school work but trying to keep the thoughts from consuming you. The thoughts hold a tight grip as they run back and forth, here and there, pulling your memory of so

many places to the present. Dealing with all of the past is a daunting task right now and only sleep will make the race stop—that is, if you can find the time to actually fall asleep.

Opposite of a feeling

Leave me alone so
 Leave me ah lone
 Don't try to make this easier
 Just leave me alone

Leave me alone
 Leave me alone
 Don't let me go away
 Just let me go

Chapter 36: May 12, 2007

3:08 PM continued 11:16 PM

Annotation: Someone let you down today. It seems the people who meant the most to you are just falling away, out of your life. You have tried so hard to find trust and learn to put trust in people again, but it seems the only thing you can rely on is your faith. People are inherently flawed and they don't know how much they can hurt one another. You turn to prayer tonight, hoping someone will answer. The person who forgot to call today had no idea you would be feeling this way, and honestly, you do not have the energy or drive to tell them. Maybe tonight someone will answer your call and tell you not to worry and let go of regrets. You have accepted who you are but you are not sure if you are ready to let everyone else know. You don't want to be defined by what happened. You don't want anyone to know. You want to be seen for who you are and nothing else.

Lying to the world—saying you are okay—will have to work for now. Someday you hope that will change.

Raincheck

And I cry in the middle of the night
And you sit there
Sit there watching me

What did I do to make me feel this way?
'Cause I'm hurt and I'm dying inside
Hurt and done trying inside.

There is no answer at the door
I've knocked here more than once before
A hollow knock at the door.

An empty feeling so deep inside
A broken spirit trying to hide
All alone trying to hide

So sewn rooted in a lie
Growing up saying and goodbye
Taking chances saying goodbye

There's no regret as tears fill my eyes
I made my wounds show on the inside
Picture perfect to all the world

Only you know what you've done
I am still here as just someone
Just another someone

Nothing deep has been revealed to you
That's my fault for not being true
If only you knew
Maybe you would love me, too.

Chapter 37: May 20, 2007

7:45 PM

Annotation: People can be so mean. So many women in the house are inconsiderate and cruel. Maybe I brought on the verbal beating by the fact that I lie to everyone about my true feelings then get angry when they hurt me. It really doesn't make sense. The conversation usually starts the same, asking out of courtesy, "How was your day?"

"Fine," I reply not really saying it with feeling but screaming on the inside, "It was awful! I just hate school! I am so tired!"

"Why are you so snappy?" Asking that is like asking a bomb to blow up. I can't help but sarcastically reply, "Because people are annoying and inconsiderate and self-centered. If they gave a damn about people's feelings, they would stop being so mean to me."

With that answer most people write me off as the bitch and say, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," and sheepishly walk away. That's what it has come to: me, bitch; them hurtful. The pattern is increasingly wearing on my confidence. I don't like being known as the bitchy one but I do know that my true friends understand why I snap. They know why I have a hard time telling them about me. I don't want anyone to get close to me because the closer they get, the more they can hurt me.

Journal Entry: Well I am an idiot. Set myself up to fall. Well, my ego is not bruised nor is my body but the words that were said cut me deep. Let me shrivel and learn to grow again. My sincere lack of concern makes this a lot less painful. I just want to leave and not be in this town.

Chapter 38: May 23, 2007

12:13 PM

Annotation: Tonight you decided to drink. No other night has been like this because you let every alarm go off in your head but you decided to ignore every one. You are so unbelievably inebriated that you don't care about anything. Bitterness has been taking you for a joy ride and this circus of a night is ending with a big show. You are falling all over the house. Standing and walking is secondary to the fact that you are totally numbing the pain. The bottles and cans are stacked up and it doesn't seem to matter. This is an awful way to try to fix things. You remember this is something you did when you were stupid. "So why are you doing it again now!?"

You wake up the next day and realize that last night was not a great decision. You remember every detail, everything you said. It totally makes you feel sick—not physical sickness but disgust with how you acted. The act of drinking dulls the pain, but it also takes a lot away from you, time you can't get back. In the morning you decide that you can't use alcohol to dull the pain. You have to face those hard times and not hide behind a veil of delusion.

Beat

Just once that awful chill that runs down my spine
 That ache that screams in my bones and won't go away
 It hurts so bad
 It's a pain that I can't describe. It's like losing everything you have

You can't stop doing this to yourself
 You get to a point where it doesn't matter anymore
 You get too tired of trying and being good that you feel like you need to die a little to feel alive again

Are you done doing this?
 Will this pattern of death ever leave your life?
 That sting of emotion that leaves you crawling on the floor
 Makes you fall to the floor without a care
 You would rather let yourself cry to sleep than face the fact of what you have done.

Stop
 Please anyone help
 Give me anything
 I'm only empty when I have blinded myself from what others see

Quit trying to make me lie
 I don't want to do this and I need help
 What am I thinking
 I'm not and I can't be okay with that

Late night memoirs of a life that consumes me
 The empty smart one

Chapter 39: May 31, 2007

11:33 PM

Annotation: It is scary to think that something can haunt you everyday. That something can come up at anytime, anywhere without regard for what you are doing or how you are feeling. It can ruin your day. Some classes should have a warning about their topics and sensitivity should be taught when difficult subjects come up. Everyday for a year and a half is a long time. Think about re-living the pain for 516 days in a row. I

would not wish this recurring nightmare on anyone. I wonder what it is like for everyone else who is suffering. I wonder what people would do if they could understand this uncontrollable memory. Those who are living with it, I think, can understand the concept of believing this is personal torture. Maybe everyone will just have to learn to be empathetic to what they can't comprehend.

Statistics in a Journal

So today was hard. I had to sit in class and listen to statistics about violence against women. I was unprepared and had a sudden urge to leave the room because terror ran through my body. I sat in class and watched the power point presentation about how women in the country are battered and abused by men they love. Then came the slides about rape. Every 21 hours a women on a college campus will be raped. Ten and 4/10 % of those assaults will be in a fraternity. I am almost in tears just writing those statistics again on this page because I am one of them. I am one of the 18 to 36 women who are assaulted on the OSU campus every year.

All I could think about was a year ago when I was sitting in my human sexuality class and there was a question posed to the class about who in the room had been raped. It was a large class and I think I remember 43 people responding, "Yes". That day, today and I bet many more days to come will always be in my mind. It's not like I need a reminder, but it is uncanny how many times it comes up and I see the careless dismissal of the people around me. I am screaming on the inside saying, "THAT IS ME! HE DID THAT TO ME! HE TOOK SOMETHING FROM ME AND I CAN'T GET IT BACK! I HAVE TO LIVE EVERYDAY WITH THE FACT THAT IT HAPPENED AND HE IS STILL OUT THERE WITH NO PUNISHMENT!"

I have worked on forgiving but it's not at that point right now.

When I was sitting in that human sexuality class, I was next to a good friend of mine, the only man I had told besides my family. He reached out and grabbed my hand. I needed his hand today. It's been hard now that it has been a year and 6 months. I wish sometimes that I could not feel the pain. I really needed someone to trust today and I didn't know what to do. I have not felt such a deep hurt in so long but hearing of the reality that women face in this world is always eye opening. I needed his hand today. I still feel like I need that comfort because I am really crying on the inside.

Not a day has gone by without a thought of that day.

Chapter 40: June 28, 2007

11:07 AM

Annotation: You left everything behind again. You went back to Colorado because it was such a great place. The encouragement of people is amazing and makes you feel hopeful. Your responsibilities here are very different from school. It is a nice break.

Arriving early, you take a few days for yourself before everyone gets there. It is very healing to enjoy nature and to take life at a slower pace. There is a big thunderstorm tonight. The clouds start to roll in and the heavy raindrops are eminent. The dark grey shapes crawl over the peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park, bringing with them strong gusts of wind and deep pockets of rain. The first drops are always subtle, then without warning the lightning flashes and the crack of thunder rolls across the ground. the wood slat roof trickles and snaps with the rain. The sound is like a peaceful lullaby in a cacophony of nature's voices.

Breeze

The breeze sings songs of comfort
 The rustling leaves twinkling like the start
 of a storm
 the movement is so sporadic and yet there
 is a rhythm to it all. It is a blessing to
 be here in the commotion of nature but
 in the clutter of sound. As the clouds pass
 by always changing shapes. I wonder if this
 strong breeze is trying to change my shape
 as well. That constant commotion is all
 but lost on my heavy shape. It's the little
 changes I guess that make all the difference.



Figure 21. Glass Forest

Chapter 41: July 4, 2007

8:51 PM

Annotation: You are experiencing a lot emotions but your faith in getting better is waning. There are many unexpected stresses here, nothing that could have been predicted. Working so hard everyday and having to encourage others when they are on the brink of exhaustion is just one of the many difficult things. You are taking it one day at a time but it seems like something is wrong, something needs to change or you and everyone else might burn out before the summer even starts.

It Fades Lord

Like the flicker of a lightning bug
Like the slow shade behind the mountains
The intensity weans and flutters away.
Do you trust that it will come back?
Will the darkness overtake you again and keep you down?
Does the pain you feel in your chest well up and burst at the thought of being alone?
Where is the light because I fear the dark and I need rest.



Figure 22. Burning Sky

Chapter 42: July 8, 2007

8:00 PM

Annotation: This is the first time I have felt alone here. Many people are around me but these are not the people to whom I don't have to explain myself. I didn't realize I would be among so many of these people when I decided to come back. It seems okay though. I am a lot stronger now than I was before. I also know I am not the only one who feels alone. Many people have come here from many different stages in their lives and we are trying to fit, to make something of ourselves. We are all working towards a common goal but each day a larger wall looms that we have to get over. I would like to see my family but I know I won't be able to for another couple of weeks. It is weird because I never realized how dependent I was for their reassurances until now. I know I am perfectly capable of being okay here, but there just seems to be something wrong.

Unknown Boundaries

What reward am I looking for?
Do I really trust that I am okay here?
I am looking for acceptance from the people around me
when all I want is peace in my heart.
Is that peace here? Is it at home?
I would love to have fear and suffering not here.
I don't want hurt here and I want to be okay and happy.
I am angry inside because I feel so out of place
and not satisfied by my life here and I want to know if that is okay.
I want to be able to see my loved ones,
many people have others here that can uplift them.
I am not deeply alone but I am on the outskirts of the empty forest.
Where do I go to feel I am not alone and I am not scared?



Figure 23. Road to Travel

Chapter 43: July 21, 2007

9:32 PM

Annotation: The irritations of the past few weeks at work have come full circle tonight. I am tired of listening to other people accept that “it is hard” and so hold a pity party for themselves. I wish we had been given a notice that this year was going to be harder than the last. Everyone is feeling finished. With all the emotions I am dealing with myself as well as helping others with theirs, I am not sure I am doing the best I can. I can’t exaggerate the immediate need for change from this situation. I am not regretting coming but I am feeling like a failure. I can’t do my job and I don’t feel like I am being encouraged or helped enough to get to the point where I would be able to work. I don’t want to go home but I am not sure I still feel okay being here. I am just physically tired. Something is damaging my spirit and keeping me from being that best person I can be. I think I have to leave this place because I am starting to feel worse. I am shutting out every bad thing I am feeling tonight, on purpose, to try and prevail over this feeling of failure.

Locked Out

Don’t talk to me. I have shut you
 out, on purpose or without thinking,
 it all ends the same way. I’m sorry if I hurt
 you or made you feel pain. It’s too hard being so far away,
 it’s not fair to want and still be okay.
 I have a way with timing all of this very perfectly.
 Am I pushing you away?
 I don’t know except that I am trapped in a different world here
 and I am locked out of yours.
 The mark of a godly person is not if they fall, but if they stand up and move on.

Chapter 44: September 26, 2007

10:00 PM

Annotation: School started and I am not ready for the routine again. Recruitment started again and the fake smile was slapped back on my face. I don't feel very good about the whole melodramatic scene of women choosing a house to help define who they will be, possibly for the next four years. I wish we had a better way to do it all. At times when my job to recruit seems genuine and at other times I seem to be playing a part. The script is all written out and practiced; three years recruiting will make you go crazy. I just feel strapped into this amusement ride called "Spirit Week."

Tension

My movements are dictated in this sadistic manner, twisting my body and my forces. I can't control the urge to compress. I feel every muscle in my body tense. I resist the urge until it pulls at me and I release. Just become empty again.

Chapter 45: November 5, 2007

5:13 PM

Annotation: It's been so long. So much time has passed that it seems like fast forward is a permanent state in your mind. A clear division is evident between who you were last year and who you are now. Something about you keeps you safely apart from people who will hurt you but close enough to reach those who help you. This is the last time you ever want to feel like this—completely void. You can't laugh. You can't cry. You can't even be happy for passing a test. You know inside that you have changed for

the better and you are getting to a better place emotionally but you can't show it on the outside. Something is wrong and everything is about to change.

Lucid Image

Sitting in my chair there, there
 with a blank open stare.
 These images burst in but hit a
 wall.
 I'm not interested not at all.
 The speech is not clear, why am I
 here? Tired and slow sitting sitting here.
 A gap is created just over near
 it started small but its quite queer
 jagged and stretch my, my mind
 is at best lost.
 Sitting there with a chasm near
 just letting it in and steering clear.

CONCLUSION

At this point in my life, when I stopped writing, I decided stop taking the prescription depression medication. I changed to a different prescription when I left Colorado the second time. That prescription made me so void of all feeling and emotion that I knew something was very wrong. To be myself I needed to get to a point where I would be able to remember who I was. Over Christmas break, 2007, I went through a detox. I was under a doctor's supervision the entire time so everything I did was controlled. When my body started to realize that the medicine was gone, I was unable to stand up or eat more than a few crackers for three days. I was so ill from not taking the medicine that I considered staying on it, but after about a week I saw a turn around in my attitude. I was able to feel emotion and I started to have normal sensations again. I didn't

have the strong urges to write down my feelings in poetic form or free form in my journal. I began to feel like a person again.

Since then I have taken many steps to rebuild bridges I burned with friends. I have forgiven myself for many regrets I had. I can say that these days weeks go by where I don't think about what happened, and when I do have a flashback I know how to deal with it in a healthy way. Fewer events trigger me to feel sad or angry because I have let myself forgive and forget when something made me mad. I do feel like I have grown to understand who I am as a woman.

REFLECTIONS

Writing all of my thoughts down and taking the time to re-read what I wrote has helped me accept and forgive myself. I had normal feelings and even though I didn't always take a traditional way to care for myself, I know I couldn't have grown to be any better than I am today. I appreciate who I am and I appreciate the experiences I have had a lot more now. Nothing is too small for me to treasure and nothing is too large for me to accomplish.

My hope is that by writing this down and finally sharing it with people, they will understand who I was and why I am where I am today. Everyone can have demons in their lives. I don't want my demon to be a secret any longer. What happened to me does not define who I am. I want people to know that I didn't share it with them because I wanted them to know me for who I am.

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