Creative Writing Portfolio

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Arline Votruba

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**Introduction**

Students often find choosing a course of study to be one of the most difficult parts of college. For myself, the decision to study English came easily. It had always been my favorite subject, perhaps because I found it both challenging and rewarding to read, write and analyze literature. During high school I began with the idea that I would pursue a degree in secondary education with a focus in English, but over time that desire evolved into a dream to pursue my passion for creative writing.

Writing has always been easy for me. I never seem to run out of things to say and writing has allowed me to take time to organize my words in the most effective way. I like to imagine the page as an empty puzzle, waiting for me to arrange the words so that they fit perfectly in order to convey my message clearly. It was a creative writing course in high school that first opened my mind to the idea that I wanted to study writing in college. We completed writing prompts, read aloud and participated in group workshops every class. I fell in love with this schedule and decided that I would someday teach creative writing. The freedom of a creative course of study became something of a fixation as I began to apply for schools. Writing is a passion of mine that has grown with every workshop and literature class I have taken.

As I began my first writing courses at the college level I was able to recognize that there are many aspects of writing that go into becoming a skilled author. Prior to college I had mostly written personal journals and diaries, completely inconsiderate of my audience or purpose. Through discussions in creative writing workshops and literature classes I have become more aware of my intentions while writing. The pieces featured in this portfolio have been crafted with an intended audience, mostly targeted towards other 20-something college students who can relate to the experiences of losing a grandparent, going through a break up or dealing with the loss of a family pet.

The completed collection of works included in this portfolio is representative of the skills I have developed during my undergraduate semesters thus far. I approached each piece using the strategies I learned here at Keene State College. I have chosen to sample a variety of genres to properly convey the range of my talents as a writer. Through painstaking revisions and editing I have gathered the best pieces I have composed during college and organized them in this portfolio to signify the progress I have made as a writer. Although I always find that there are areas where my work can be improved I believe that this collection helps to exemplify my many strengths in writing poetry, creative nonfiction, and memoir. The pieces highlight my versatility as an author.

Most of my writing is very nostalgic and sentimental. First I begin by contemplating an event or experience that has moved my life in one direction or another. I consider what particular scenarios led me to this change and how I felt afterward. I approach the piece with this particular emotion or sensation in mind. Finally, I write my way to recreating this emotional sensation. I carefully structure each piece so it will lead the reader to arrive at an intended feeling by the time they finish reading the piece. This strategy was most difficult for me while writing poetry. It became the poetry pieces that required the most attention during my revision process.

Organizing my portfolio has forced me to approach my work through an alternative lens. It has challenged me to be more critical of my writing as I reread it through the perspective of an outsider. Writing at the college level has taught me to understand my piece through another person’s perspective because nobody else reading my writing will have access to my thoughts and pre-existing understanding of the material. Learning this has led me to be critical of what details are included in each piece.

It is often difficult to remove yourself from a piece in this way because as the author you know what you mean and anticipate the words as you read them. I tried to overcome this struggle by sitting down with each piece as if I had never read it before, searching for the pieces that didn’t fit and flushing out the parts of the stories that needed it.

The poetry featured in this portfolio represents my range of form and style. I feature specific poems as well as longer pieces with original poetry interspersed between narratives to demonstrate my range of talents writing poems. Poetry has always been a very helpful tool in terms of expressing my deepest thoughts and emotions, so it only makes sense that the majority of my portfolio pieces feature poetry. I find that poetry allows an author a certain sense of freedom that many other genres do not grant. The range of content in my poetry featured in this portfolio exemplifies the various subjects that I have dealt with and been inspired by during my creative writing endeavors since attending Keene State College.

Memoir is a genre I have always been fascinated by. I have read stories that portray themselves as memoir, such as Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried,* and felt compelled to understand the genre better. I read *Wild: From Lost to Found On the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Strayed, a true memoir, and became even more inspired to understand the theories and qualifications of memoir. Professor Kirsti Sandy has offered many important insights and explanations in regards to memoir to help students structure their own creative memoir piece. At first, like many writers, I struggled with the content of my life. It seemed to me that there was not much for me to write about that would be compelling to readers. Before long, the brainstorming and writing exercises we worked on in class turned into a story idea. I spent weeks working on my final memoir piece, *Requiem of Dog*. The intent of this piece is to explain the ways that my relationship with the family dog has moved me to become the woman I am today. Writing this piece was truly heart wrenching and revealed a lot to me about myself that I had not considered or recognized prior to diving into this subject. The memoir is demonstrative of my control of tone while writing.

This semester I was particularly challenged in my Experimental Non-Fiction class. This course requires that the creative pieces produced include a variety of genres. This means a completed experimental non-fiction essay could consist of narrative, poetry, play scripts, diary entries, lists or visuals. There are limitless genres to include in these pieces, which became the true challenge of writing an experimental essay. There must be a balance in the piece so that the reader is not too overwhelmed with the various genres featured; yet it is also important to push boundaries in this form of writing.

The piece “Forget I Said I Love You” was written for the Experimental Non-Fiction course I took with Professor Tirabassi this semester. It includes poetry, visuals, a wanted ad, narrative, and lists. The piece went through many revisions in order for me to find the proper balance of genres. At first when I wrote this piece I did not give enough backstory. As the class helped during group workshops I was provoked by their questions to fill in the blanks and finish the story so that an outsider would enjoy reading this piece.

It is important that I have taken a variety of writing courses because the different genres help to inform writing in various genres and styles. Many of the pointers that professors share in class can apply to other forms of writing, so I found that during my 3rd and 4th year of college I have developed my writing skills more rapidly than ever before. Being immersed in various writing courses at one time is essential in the development of writing skills. It has been the combination of workshops and literature courses I have taken here at Keene State College that have truly allowed me to grow as an author.

The intent of this collection is to offer the reader an understanding of my skills and talents as an author. The variety of genres and subjects are intended to create an overview of my development during a variety of literature and writing courses here at Keene State College. There were many pieces and genres for me to choose from, so I specifically selected the most developed pieces I have written as an undergraduate student. Eventually I arrived at this, a completed portfolio of works as near to final drafts as they can be at this point. As a writer I do not believe that a piece is ever truly “finished” but instead revised to its most recent form.

…of all the seasons

Pads of bare feet scrape hot tar,

windows rolled down in the car

hair tied loose atop my head,

sun beats skin ‘till it turns red

sensational bliss, each fresh cut lawn,

dewy grass glows green each dawn

water balloon fights that last all day,

hours spent hopping on farm field hay

road trips evolve from frivolous drives,

fresh tie-dyed shirts hang out to dry

at night we watch the fire flies shine,

our stained lips sip on cheap red wine

Build Me a Fire

Fire crackles in the stone pit,

sparks soar above the yard,

and heat radiates with ferocity

that keeps me from stepping any closer

to the swaying flames.

No need to move anyhow-

sitting cozy on your lap,

our bodies fit perfectly

with our fingers tangled together,

our breath, unintentionally synchronized.

The heat blasting from the flames

makes me tilt my head back

to embrace a cool breath of summer

and I catch a glimpse of the moon

brilliantly lighting the sky.

Peepers sing their summer blues,

while your lips whisper

into my ears

about how many hours you spent

imagining this moment.

I grab a stick and poke hot coals,

watching the way the fire rages,

agitated by me shaking the base

of chopped wood that we

ventured up the hill to gather.

Occasionally the fire cracks

as the peepers’ song persists,

keeping the flames alive

our own private dance

of waving orange heroes.

Trains Leave

Some mornings arrive

like a train we are trying to catch

and watch as it begins rolling

before our scurrying feet

reach the platform

taking with it, that last

enthused bit of hope

that convinced us today

may be worth

the morning ride.

With hesitation, then action

I stretch my bare toes

down to the cold dorm floor

to take my first steps

towards the day ahead.

My eyes crusted shut

I force my arm

back and forth

to scrub away

the hours of bad breath.

Opening my agenda

I begin to chisel

at the unyielding

“To-do’s”

navigating my sanity.

Crossing off one responsibility

only to scribble down two more.

One task at a time I chug along,

reminding myself to keep

breathing throughout the day.

As the wheels screech

on my mind’s one way track

I hop off the line,

and into my bed to rest,

before the morning train arrives.

To My Grandfather

My breath seemed to stutter when the funeral speaker announced, “Now Arline will share a poem she has written in memory of her Grandfather.” I quickly sipped my water once more and squeezed the folded poem tightly in my hand. As I unfolded it at the podium and glanced into my grimly colored and dimly lit audience it was as though a nightmare wiggled its way into the immediate moment before I could realize everything that was happening. There was the poem before me, which I had written outside on the front steps that overlook the pond days earlier. My job was to read it. Brightly colored flowers and leaves decorated the paper. The bottom left corner of the page had a little bird design, it was there cheering me on while my Grandpa’s body sat silent and motionless no more than 10 feet to my right.

One breath, okay. Another breath.. All right now you are going to look silly if you do not just begin, with a final inhale:

*To My Grandfather*

*While days pass quickly and life is had*

*a man transitions from child to dad*

*and later grandfather, but always a friend*

*until the very day his life on earth ends*

Good start. I disregard the sweaty palms and shaky veins. Keep going. I knew if I pushed onward the dizziness would fade and I would finish the poem.

Public speaking has always been a love of mine. I spoke at my elementary, middle, and high school graduation. I would always volunteer to read in class and at any interactive performance at public events. I don’t mind being that fool who makes myself vulnerable on stage, like the time I volunteered to be hypnotized on stage at the county fair. Today’s circumstances did not give my heart that same sense of adrenaline and joy. This public speech brought with it a dark cloud that made my heart sink.

*A husband to two*

*a father to four*

*a brother to three*

*and a friend to many more*

I felt nervous looking at the wrinkled old man. He wore plaid, he always wore plaid. I knew little of the man but I was sure if he was dressed, he was in plaid. He assumed his typical post-family meal position on the couch, feet up, about a breath or two from a nap. I had questions I wanted answered, so I forged a school project to bridge the gap of communication between us.

“Hi Grandpa, I am doing a paper in school and I have some questions for you.”

“Oh, okay.”

I asked him about my Grandma for whom I was named, and I asked him about his own father. I vividly recall the answer to the final question.

“What advice do you have for me, or any future generation in terms of life knowledge you have learned along the way?”

“Live by the 10 commandments. Don’t smoke.”

*His legacy shall remain alive*

*through all the good he’s left behind*

*like those piercing blue family eyes*

*or the words he has shared that were so wise*

“Hi Grandpa,” I said nervously as we entered the stale hospital room. The view from the window was nothing but a city street and a parking garage. Hospitals always make me really uncomfortable. I try not to focus on all the tubes connected to my Grandpa’s arms. His tiny TV was close to his face and the *Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups* had accumulated in a pile next to his bed since his appetite had gone away. I remember watching as his ribs wrestled to expand and retract. His body was weak and he sat up with a struggle.

“Hi, how are you?” he asked my mother and I as we entered.

Very well. I did not want to answer, nor did I want to ask him back. My mom’s eye’s shifted towards me and seemed to urge me to say something.

“I am going to visit my friends in Boston this week!”

“Oh, that’s nice.” He began coughing. The sound of whatever blocked his throat put a knot in my stomach that did not move for the rest of our visit.

“Karen, would you like to come discuss some updated information?” The nurse wore blue scrubs and smiled artificially as she stole my safety blanket from an already uncomfortable situation. My mom stepped out of my room.

There we were. Grandpa and I. Who is this sick, dying old man? It is not like we ever spent more than the major Holidays in each other’s presence, and even then it was to share a hello. I was always surprised when he would kiss my lips every single time we greeted one another, the scent of already smoked cigarettes would often rub off from his scruffy chin and leave me wiping my mouth with my sleeve as soon as it was polite.

Now I sit staring at him, scared to say something that may upset him, when he surprises me, “You know, your parents do a good job. They are getting all you kids educated, they are doing well, I am proud.”

In that moment I wanted to fall to the ground, pound my fists on the floor and wail. Instead, I smiled.

*To his children he was both a leader and a hero*

*passing down these and other traits, we’ll remember so*

*to his son Glen he left his calm, calculated demeanor,*

*to his daughter Debi, a sassy tongue*

*to his daughter Karen, the courage to be a strong leader*

*and to Brenda a desire to live under the sun.*

Months before he was stuck in that hospital bed, I had made a doctors appointment. Days before the appointment came the office called to tell me that the appointment was relocated to St. Vincent’s Hospital, where my Grandpa had been withering away for the better part of a month. I had not been to see him since that first visit just after he was first admitted. I feared how it may be if I visited him, but now I really had no option seeing as fate led me to his hospital that day.

After my appointment I called my mom to lead me to her and Grandpa. As we approached the sector where he was located I started to enter his room when my mom tugged my arm.

“Arline, we have to wear these.”

She started putting on a big plastic suit. Then she slid on rubber gloves. I followed along and we covered our noses and mouths with a mask. Finally, we could enter after taking every precaution to avoid contact with the fungus growing in his lungs.

“How you doing dad?” She was so strong. Not even a quiver. She marched in, updated her father about the family and all the good his grandchildren were doing, her words fluid, as though she was sitting at the kitchen counter talking to Grandpa over coffee. She was so brave, doing everything she could to keep him from being scared, and all I could focus on was the crackling sound that came with every attempted breath to stay alive. His lungs were as fragile as dried up butterfly wings. They expanded with a subtle click sound and contracted with a painful crunch.

“It’s been a long fight. I am about ready to give up. I just want to go home.”

“Okay dad. I will go talk to the nurse so we can get you home,” my mother did not stammer her words, she spoke calmly with a loving tone.

We each leaned down to kiss Grandpa’s forehead and exited the room.

We were able to relocate Grandpa to his home where he passed comfortably in his living room by the big window overlooking his backyard.

*As his brothers reminisce*

*of the days when they grew up*

*it is apparent Jon left them*

*their eternal youth*

*as they are always laughing,*

*loud and abrupt*

*about the unbelievable*

*stories they share as truth*

My Great Uncle Harry flew up from Alabama for the funeral. He had just been up weeks earlier to visit his brother in the hospital, this time he came to say goodbye. Each night Uncle Harry spent at our house his brother, our Great Uncle Jimmy, came as well. We sifted through boxes of black and white photos from their youth and the stories began tumbling out.

Over the course of those nights spent hanging out with the family before the funeral I felt as though I got to know Grandpa more than ever. Insight into the days spent working hard on his farm or stories of him and his brothers as kids getting wrapped up in mischief truly allowed me to understand Grandpa on a level I had never reached during his time spent on earth.

*To his children he accepted as*

*his own later when his kids married*

*Jon passed Julian the passion*

*of the great out doors*

*and Lila an adoration of the deep blue sea*

*his grandkids too, carry a slice of Jon within*

*to Michael he granted his smarts*

*Nicky that dimple by his grin*

*Arline an interest in people*

*Lauren a love of dogs*

*and Stephen hope to follow dreams*

*all these traits now carried on*

“Maybe he should ask the nurse if he could smoke another cigarette from the hospital bed,” my father laughed a cruel belly laugh as if the pain of watching her father die slowly was not enough. “He smoked on the way to the hospital. ON THE WAY!”

My mom would never break down in front of her children, but I could see the dismay across her blank expression as my father brutally attacked her dying father’s life choices.

I glanced at my oldest brother Michael, who had an expression of passive disagreement and to my brother Nicky who seemed to look too nervous to challenge my father. Again I looked to my mom who had just stood up to load her plate with a third serving of crab rangoons.

“I went over my father’s house today, he was mowing his lawn!”

We were all silent.

“Can you believe it? He is so active, I told him to take it easy.”

Eventually my dad circled back to his rants about Grandpa smoking cigarettes and my blood boiled.

“How about some sensitivity?! It is nothing that he can go back and change now and yelling at Mom really isn’t going to help. You are basically saying ‘I am right and if you disagree, you are stupid’.”

“Exactly, good, I am glad you understand.”

I stormed off to my room, unable to look at him in his utter ignorance any more that night.

*Today we do not say a last goodbye,*

*as he is with us forever still,*

*but today is a celebration to recognize*

*the lovely life that Jon fulfilled.*

*If ever a concern that Jon is far*

*go speak to his children,*

*brothers, his friends,*

*as they are living proof*

*he carries on*

*and that his legacy*

*will not soon come to an end.*

Finishing the last line of the poem I looked up at the blurred crowd of blacks and greys. I had forgotten that there had been anybody in the room listening. As I returned to my chair my relatives approached me with teary eyes to tell me how sweet my words were. I didn’t feel I had done anything grand. I was just telling Grandpa everything I had been thinking about.

As I approached his casket to say goodbye I folded the poem up and tucked it close to his cold body. My eyes watered and I felt my parents come to either side of my numb body to support me. My mom grabbed my hand and my father rested his hand on my shoulder.

“Someone told me if you kiss your father’s head one last time it will bring you sweet dreams. I am sure it applies for grandfathers as well. Kiss his forehead to ensure sweet dreams for the both of you,” my mom whispered in my ear. I kissed his forehead and wished that Grandpa could breath without pain now that he is in heaven.

Requiem of Dog

Recently she came to me in a dream. I do not remember where we were, but I know I was sitting on the ground with my legs out in a V the way I used to. She scooted close to me, her back against the inside of my left leg with her head resting on top of my right thigh. It always surprises me how real things can feel in our sleep- her warm fur against my leg, the rise and fall of her breathing and the sensation that we were once again really together. In my dream I just sat with her. I ran my fingers through her spotted coat and scratched under her collar the way she loves. I hugged her tightly around her chubby neck. She looked at me with her beautiful brown Katie eyes. When I awoke I was sure that Katie’s spirit deliberately came to pay me a visit.

The day we went to meet the puppies I doubt I knew what was happening. I was four, just a pup myself. As well as I can recall I was lying on the breeder’s kitchen floor on my stomach. The tiles looked big around my hands as I traced the cracks with my finger. The square tiles were off white and looked bland in contrast to the melancholy yellow walls. A gate blocked the doorway from the kitchen to the living room to keep the tiny spotted pups in their designated area. Four tiny babes, snuggling up to their mother, eyes just barely cracked open for the first time. I had no idea gazing at the fluffy pups- tripping over one another trying to be closest to their Mom- that the tiniest of the fur balls would soon be a member of my family. It was 1999 and I was used to being the youngest in the house.

When she was 6 weeks old we brought her home. Back then a day was measured in grass stained pant legs. During Katie’s first months as our new pet I spent hours running in circles around the backyard chasing her. We would run through the garden or roll in the grass while I laughed. I loved to call out, “I’m gonna get you” and pounce at her, running as quickly as my little legs would carry me. This was a game of tag that I never won, at least not until she was diagnosed. At about four years old she had put on weight, and we brought her to the vet to have her checked out. It was a thyroid problem that required daily medication. Even with medicine she slowly lost her energy. She became less active, almost always lounging around. Katie was overweight for most of her life. I would wave her toys out in front of her face, wishing for a playmate, and she would roll on her side until I would rub her belly.

Katie had a tiny black kitten Beanie Baby she stole from me when she was a puppy. When I saw the love in her eyes as she admired the baby kitten I decided it was hers to keep. She would pick it up in her mouth and carry it with her to her bed. She licked it clean and slept by it every night. She did not chew or tear at the tiny stuffed animal. She nurtured it with love and cared for it throughout her entire life. Sometimes she would be sitting in the living room with the family and get up to go to the kitchen. We would wait to hear if she cried to go outside but more often she would return seconds later with her baby in her mouth. She loved that kitten.

My father chose the breed. Dad always loved English Springer Spaniels because they are excellent hunting dogs. Since the breed is known for being working gundogs it is a common health precaution for a Springer Spaniel pup to have its tail docked. Docking helps working dogs because of their prolonged contact with undergrowth while hunting. The procedure of docking is frightening. One very common way to detach the puppy’s tail is to use a rubber cord to restrict the blood flow to the tail. Usually 24-96 hours later the tail falls off. Yikes, poor Katie puppy. I am not sure if it is the breeder who does the procedure, but when I met Katie her tail had already been reduced to a wiggling nub on her behind.

Every October when pheasant season began Dad would put on his orange hat and vest. He gathered pheasants that Grandpa raised at his home. Dad would tie the box of birds to his four-wheeler and drive off into the woods. Within moments he would be back and ready to bring his fellow hunters and Katie to the woods with him. I have seen my father lay down a pheasant before. When you flip them over and rub their belly they fall asleep. It was eerie watching Dad prepare the pheasants for a hunt- calming the bird, laying it down, moments later sending in Katie to wake it up for the last freighting breath of its life.

Usually a pheasant would stay put until Katie “put it up” by sniffing it out and awaking it. The pheasant would fly and the hunters would take their shot. When the bird plummeted to the ground it was Katie’s responsibility to retrieve it and bring it to Dad.

Generally Katie was slow, quiet, and very lazy. However her energy would always shift on those mornings that she saw the bloodthirsty orange hunting attire. Regardless of her thyroid problem when she saw orange gear she would hop out of bed, her ears would perk up and that nub on her behind would wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

“Katie did wicked good today,” my dad would beam with pride. He would go on to describe the way she had to sniff around in circles for a few moments before bolting to the location of the fallen bird. She would retrieve it and jog back in a hurry with the kill between her teeth until all the birds had either been shot dead or miraculously flown far away to safety.

You could always find Katie sleeping in one of two places. She would either rest by the sliding door in the kitchen in her bed or in the living room on her rug in front of the fireplace. She was always there. It was comforting to know that even when I was home alone she would be there. To this day there are times that I enter the house through the basement, walk up the stairs, and as I open the door I feel as though Katie is behind it waiting to greet me just as she did for 14 years.

Of course, like all kids, I went through phases. I remember being hell-bent on getting my own little lap dog when I met Mooch, my friend Haley’s Yorkshire Terrier. I wanted a dog to call mine. I didn’t want to have to share my little furry friend. Thinking about it now I realize just how wise my parents were when they told me to appreciate the dog we already had. I was begging them for a dog even though I hardly paid attention to Katie. At that time I asked my parents every day for a puppy. I wrote a report about why I should get a dog. I included information about the breed and images of adorable Yorkshire Terriers I found online. I wish I hadn’t spent hours researching “the perfect dog” when Katie was always home, either in her bed or lounging on her rug on the living room floor. Instead I should have been taking her on walks and rubbing her big fat belly. I wonder now if Katie felt hurt by my neglect. I wonder if she noticed when I stopped paying attention to her. If so, I hope she can remember the times I sat with her by the fireplace rubbing her back, telling her how much I loved her.

Looking back it pains me to think of the days that I would merely look into her sad eyes and turn away without paying her any attention. I struggled to spend time with her. She made me sad. Her eyes drooped like her flabby belly. She moved around slower than the days we would play in the backyard. I would get home from cheerleading to her greeting me by the door. I would simply pat her head twice and say, “Hi dog,” eager for her to move out of my way. Then I would zoom to the computer room to check my MySpace and AIM accounts. I should have taken the time to sneak her an extra treat before dinner.

My mother was Katie’s primary caregiver. It was obvious to Katie I am sure because if she needed anything she would badger my mother for it. In Katie’s old age she would follow Mom’s every step, often times getting in the way and tripping her up. Mom called it “sharking,” the way that Katie would circle her ankles awaiting food, water, or a pat on the head.

The best comparison I have to describe Katie’s personality is Eeyore the donkey from Winnie The Pooh. During the period of time that I lost my connection to Katie, her eyes hurt my heart. I saw her as miserable. I saw her as not wanting to do anything. She wasn’t sad; she simply enjoyed her sedentary lifestyle. As I imagine those days now, it was I who wouldn’t spend an extra minute to snuggle with her or go for a walk. It was I who chose to distance myself from the joy of petting a dog. Today I stop to pet dogs on the sidewalk any chance I get, and every once in a while on a good day one will cross my path who reminds me of Katie May.

Maybe it was when my friends started to notice her getting older that I began to care. They would comment on her drooping eyes or the way she would snore even when she was awake. She would snore so loudly that if I was upstairs in my bedroom and she was down in the kitchen I could hear her. Sometimes when I tried to fall asleep at night I would giggle at the ridiculous sounds of her snoring.

It is silly how some stories become household legends. Anytime somebody tells me that dogs can’t eat chocolate I imagine that day after Easter years ago. On Easter we would wake up and search the living room in the usual hiding spots for plastic eggs filled with candy. We emptied all of the candy into a big bowl. This particular year, we left the bowl out overnight. When we woke up and went downstairs Katie was lying on her back with her paws in the air, fat and happy. There on the living room floor were shreds of Tootsie Roll wrappers.

My favorite trick Katie learned was her song. We would sing, “If you’re happy and you know it Katie speak-” without missing a beat she would chime in with a bark.

Perhaps Katie inspired music. Every morning before school when we were all getting ready to leave whoever was there would freestyle songs for Katie. Mom, Dad, sometimes my brother and I would come up with silly lyrics always addressed to Katie as she wobbled around the kitchen in search of fallen toast crumbs. The songs were all random and we’d piece together lyrics like, “Katie dog, Katie dog, what will you do today? Eat some grub, like a shlub, and then catch some sun rays!”

During my junior year of high school I went through my first real falling out with a friend. It was the first time that a best friend became a distant stranger and on the day of my ex-best friend’s graduation I felt defeated. I remember being home alone and broken. I sat on the floor next to Katie by the slider door in the kitchen. I rested my head on her big belly and let the warm tears stream from my eyes onto her fur. When I lifted my head she sat up and moved right next to me. She looked deep into my eyes. I felt her sympathy.

By 13-years-old Katie was starting to show her age. She was hard of hearing. She could still understand us when we would motion for this or that, but at that age she was unable to hear our calls. Her body was breaking down. The three stairs from the patio into our kitchen became a burden for her hind legs. We would need to give her a boost to climb upstairs.

“Do you think that her pain is worse than her joy?” Mom asked. I can remember a few occasions when I sat with my mom in the living room and we watched Katie sleeping. Mom would fidget around and then ask me what I thought. She, like the rest of the family, wanted what was best for Katie.

Sometimes during Katie’s late months of life I would bring her outside with me on the deck when my parents had gone to bed. I told her to sit in front of me and after I inhaled a hit from my pipe I would blow it into her nose. Sometimes she would sneeze, other times she would start pawing my leg asking for more. We sat outside enjoying the warm summer air. The stars were always so beautiful at night in Oakham. I was happy that she let me gaze until I was ready to go in. When we went inside she had a smile across her doggy mouth. She would lie down and relax, comfortable and calm, she would fall asleep happy. I like to think that on those nights her pain was less intense.

I wasn’t there when it happened. I came home from school one weekend in the fall of 2014. Sitting at the kitchen counter my parents gave each other a look. They stepped closer and told me. My eyes swelled with tears.

“Do you want to know how it happened?” Mom asked. I could only nod.

I imagine how it looked based on the way that Dad told me about it. As I said, she loved hunting. It was her passion, her reason, her bliss. The sight of florescent orange sent Katie into another form of self. She was engaged and overly enthusiastic about her duties as a gundog. Dad took her to the backyard- the spacious grass surrounded by flowerbeds that we spent our youth chasing each other through. It was beautiful growing up with a yard so widespread that we trusted Katie to roam about all her years without a leash, no fence, and rarely a collar. Dad brought out a pheasant and laid it in the bushes. He pet Katie and told her how much we all love her even though her ears no longer worked. I know she heard him. Then he said, “Go get the birdie,” motioning for her to go out and put the pheasant up. I imagine the chubby old lady Katie as she wobbled across the yard with all of her might, making zig zags as she sniffed her way into the garden- a pheasant flew into the sky. She gazed up at the pheasant soaring into the clouds- my father pointed his gun and sent Katie to heaven.

Dad buried Katie in the backyard with her kitten Beanie Baby.

Life moves quickly. Much too quickly. Just as I began to recognize that Katie was an amazing part of my life I was moving to college. I think about her now. Her droopy brown eyes, her quiet demeanor, and the way that she was always there when you called.

One Thanksgiving, in Katie’s old age, the entire family went on a hunt we didn’t know would be our last together. Mom, Dad, Michael, Nicky, Katie and myself dressed in orange. I remember how slowly she moved, her legs often buckling and giving out beneath her as she walked. She didn’t give up though. She still sniffed out the pheasants and charged at their falling bodies, quickly presenting my Dad with his kill. I watched her closely that day, her bloodshot eyes drooping and her facial fur grayer than before. I noticed as Dad pat her head that he too had more gray hairs now, Mom had a new wrinkle, Michael was growing a full beard and Nicky was nearly 6 feet tall. Katie had grown up with me, with all of us. She was around for every major event in my life, just waiting by the slider door for me to come home. I watched Katie work hard to keep up on the trail through the woods. The autumn air was whirling through our ears, whispering that winter was coming. Colorful leaves crunched beneath each footstep. The forest surrounding the path was thick and overgrown.

When we returned home from the hunt I sat on the living room floor with my legs out in a V. Katie wobbled across the floor and scooted close to me. I sat there for hours stroking her fur, her back against the inside of my left leg with her head resting on top of my right thigh. I lifted her floppy ear and whispered, “Who’s a good girl?” She lifted her head and winked.

Forget I Said I Love You

* There is a certain sense of loneliness that can only be experienced after falling in love.
* A loneliness that blooms from the rubble of a love. It is colder than an all-by-yourself kind of alone. A loneliness that exudes sorrow in the form of a bowl of ice cream sprinkled with tears or showering long after the hot water has
* run
* out.
* The loneliness I am talking about only emerges when you have given yourself to another entirely, a sincere love. A love that defies boundaries and blends your very existence until- wherever it goes- it goes away.
* The loss of superior closeness shared between you and your love steals away a piece of you. When that love leaves, so does that portion of your soul that had been unearthed only through the very act of falling into love.
* Only you can seek that fragment of forgotten soul in new places.

On the first day of 7th grade, I entered my first Spanish class. Across the room, I saw the bushy blond curly hair and thick-rimmed glasses of the prepubescent man of my dreams. When it was time to work in groups, he came over to me and sat down. I noticed his Led Zeppelin tee and sparked up a conversation. We talked in class every day. Our friendship flourished with each passing month. We made all kinds of wild plans. He promised me that he would tattoo my name on his behind and I promised him that in old age we could choose death by suicide as we planned to motorcycle naked into the Grand Canyon when we both hit 85-years-old. We brought out the zany in each other. I will never forget how his big blonde curls and crystal blue eyes pulled me in. The next year when he cut his hair, the teacher didn’t even recognize him. I didn’t either. He was becoming a man.

7th grade: we spoke every day at school in Spanish class

8th grade: we missed each other over the summer, Spanish together again

9th grade: HIGH SCHOOL, we both drift into different crowds, he went on class trip to Six Flags with me

10th grade: we hardly talked but he went on the class trip to New York City with me

11th grade: the few times we hung out were great, just like old times, we bond on the band trip to Disney in California

12th grade: I was bummed when he didn’t ask me to Senior Dinner Dance

When we finally decided to date it was not as romantic of a chase as I imagined. His geeky awkwardness that I found adorable blinded me to the lameness of our “festering love.” I had fantasized it to be such a perfect love story: Girl meets boy in middle school Spanish, they bat eyes at one another and remain best friends for years. They reunite a year after graduating high school and reminisce. Sparks fly as they exchange words of “I always knew” and “I loved you too.” She graduates college and he gets his performance certificate at New England Conservatory and they travel the world, writing songs and writing stories while they busk from town to town.

In the summer of 2014 I visited Liam in Boston. When I saw him and the ways he had grown since high school I became more interested than ever. We started dating shortly after my first visit to the city.

On a hot July day we loaded the kayaks into the bed of my Dad’s pick up and cruised ten minutes down the road to Brooks Pond. I struggled to carry the giant kayak but refused his offer of help.

As we floated in the water, the wind was the only sound that rustled through my ears aside from the occasional *tap tap* as our kayaks collided.

We paddled around and enjoyed the sweet serenity of nonexistent responsibilities and one another’s company. We would paddle far enough that the view felt new and then we would simply drift where the wind took us. We talked for hours out on the open water, catching up from the many months spent apart at school.

Then, as I ranted about how wonderful this all was, I asked if he had anything to add.

“I love you.”

SPRING BREAK 2014

Pulling into the long dirt driveway, my body bumps and jolts. I finally catch sight of the huge log cabin through the clearing of trees and I park my jeep. The front door opens before I am able to unbuckle.

He hops in the car, “Are you ready?”

“Are YOU ready!?” I notice how much older he looks, his baby face vanished beneath a scruffy beard.

The ride to Northampton was a jukebox of reminiscing- broken record talk about the good old days, “When things were easy.”

“May I help you?” the woman behind the counter has ink across her entire body. She smiles at us with her head cocked. She snaps her gum.

“I am looking to get a butt tattoo- of a name,” He giggles like a kid.

I smile. Here we are, 7 years later, still best friends. He still makes me laugh with his cynicism and I still manage to drag a smile out of him on his worst days.

The buzzing of the needle swarms my ears like mosquitos. We giggle through the pain of his left butt cheek.

Early SUMMER 2014

Nervous to leave

by myself down the tracks

toward the big city-

everywhere I’d been before,

my momma brought me

Public transportation-

people do this daily,

if I ever intend to see the world,

it’s time I overcome any hesitations

of traveling alone,

otherwise

never go any place new

Late for my train-

another will be by soon

Choo-choo

On my way.

**The Proposal**

June 16, 2014 10:55am

I will never forget it. I was visiting a friend in Mystic, Connecticut. It was morning; the sun was out so I sat on her front steps writing in my journal. A blanket of sunrays warmed my bare legs. I was wearing my huge floppy sunhat and scribbling thoughts into my leather bound journal. Liam and I were texting.

Liam: Arline will you marry me? I feel like my life will turn OK, if you stick around.

Me: (: Wasn’t that the plan?

Liam: Just confirming.

**Crossing the Line**

June 17, 2014

I hop on the trampoline and nestle my body into Liam’s side. It feels so nice to finally cuddle in each other’s arms. We stare up into the dark until our eyes adjust. Finally our eyes register the pinholes of starlight spackling the black abyss. Of course, as we share our first real romantic moment, a shooting star soars across the sky.

His face moves close. Our lips touch. And again. He pulls away. A smile that could outshine the sun- our first kiss. Liam speaks softly, “It took long enough, 7 years?”

Serendipity (n): the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way

My first night visiting Liam in Boston was great. Excitement fluttered through my veins as the train rolled to a stop at Yawkey. Liam came to meet me and we went to his apartment a few blocks away, just around the corner from Fenway. After the grand tour (which took all of 45 seconds in the quaint apartment), we left Liam’s roommate Joseph to do some studying and Liam led me down sidewalks lined with cafés and bookstores. It was much different strolling around the city. Pavement replaced grass, streetlights replaced stars and it was much more congested than the small towns where we had grown up. We were passing a gallery as jazz trickled out into the street. I tugged his arm and led him into the art show. I felt out of place. I was in a flannel, his tee shirt had rips and the jazz band wore button-down shirts with ties. We listened and admired the ambiance of the well-lit gallery as a woman offered us champagne. Unable to present a proper ID, we declined. I remember watching the musicians, thinking how maybe someday I would be able to go see Liam play in a gallery.

“Next stop, Yawkey,” the uniformed train worker was always good like that, reminding me it was time to get going. As I stepped out of the sliding door I could see him standing there, smiling wider than the sky, mirroring my expression. We hugged despite the discomfort of my backpack bulging from behind me. We kissed like it had been years, disregarding the fact that just days before, we had done the same. Giddy as could be, we were floating on each other’s love, the way I always knew it would feel, that is, when I found true love.

That train ride became routine. The hours spent in his apartment, the frequent walks to the Christian Science Center. Hours spent lying tangled up in each other, sharing kisses, laughter, secrets and dreams.

**Sittin’ on the Dock of the Charles**

I can still feel the heat of that summer night in mid-August. The stars hid from me whenever I spent the night in Boston, but I knew they were up there sparkling down. We walked hand-in-hand down to the dock where we liked to sit. The Charles River could not have shimmered any more beautifully. The dock was flooded with young adults, like us, despite the late hour. A couple on the corner had a bottle of wine with two glasses while other groups of friends made circles around the guitar players. We sat, my arm wrapped around his, my head leaning against him. I looked at him, smirked and nibbled his shoulder. He wrinkled his nose back at me and let out a quiet laugh. He loved when I would bite him, even if he pretended otherwise.

SPLASH!

I quickly turned my head to see.

SPLASH! SWOOSH! SPLASH!

Wild spirits tore off their clothes and began jumping off of the dock into the water. Chasing each other in, they hopped into the glistening water and sparkled in the thrill of it all.

“I dare you to jump in,” I said quietly right up against his ear.

He stood up, took off his shoes and handed me his glasses. When he stood close to the edge of the dock, I stopped him, “You better get a running start!”

He stepped back then took off and joined the others who splashed before him.

Watching the smile, the bravery, the joy, I felt myself untying my bright red Chucks, anxious I was not going fast enough.

“Are you jumping in?” My friend Angela asked. I had almost forgotten that we came to the dock to meet up with her and our pal Glenna who had left the party before us.

“You are crazy!” Glenna added.

Disregarding their comments, I soared into the water to be with my favorite person. We soaked our street clothes without concern. We kicked our legs and wiggled our arms, we kissed each other in the river surrounded by strangers who swam in circles singing “One Love” by Bob Marley. When I looked into his eyes, treading water to stay afloat, I could see us as an old couple drinking tea on the porch reminiscing, about “That time when we were young.”

Walking back to his apartment in soggy clothes, I would squeeze his hand, and he would squeeze mine back.

Reasons We Fell in Love:

* those thick framed rectangular glasses
* that birthmark by his mouth
* the dimples when he smiles
* his gorgeous blue eyes
* years of friendship
* his bass-playing skills
* our inability to be too serious together
* our love of star gazing
* when he told me I was beautiful (and I wasn’t wearing any makeup)
* his inability to hush about his opinion
* a mutual need to adventure
* comfortably shared silences
* we kept our promises to each other
* he always made me laugh
* great listener
* his silly cynical rants
* his snoring was cute
* he didn’t pressure me
* his beautiful home
* the effortless flow of our conversation

Scribbled on a random page of my diary:

*He hugs me like a bear and makes me feel tiny. He is so strong and can pick me up no problem. The way he keeps playing with my hair or rubbing my back when I fall asleep assures me that Liam has so much love for me, it is rather a beautiful thing.*

* Post Forever
* Above me a gray cloud labeled You
* cirrostratus clouds hanging high
* like thin sheets
* covering the whole sky-
* threatening to spatter
* a rainy memory
* into the few glimpses
* of bravery I find
* on my best of dreary days.
* You never bring me a storm.
* Rain on me.
* Send the winds
* whipping by
* to sweep
* me again
* off my feet
* and thunder so I can feel you rumbling through my bones.

Before:

When I see you, I see us grown old

Our lives have been shared and stories all told

Each moment we spent together--

Honey, they couldn’t have been any better

No time was wasted I am certainly sure.

Each time I was down, you found me a cure

None other could keep me as safe

No other could look so brave

So until we see the grave

Your soul I will crave

After:

When I see pictures of us, I see love turned to mold

Since we last spoke you’ve been so cold

Those moments we spent together

Are mere memories of a young love

A summer that fell apart

Right from the start

I can hardly tell you

from the friend I couldn’t live without

no interest in rekindling the fire

that you already put out

So until we see the grave

Apologies I will save

Fall 2014

I moved back to school and he stayed in Boston. Although I always awoke in good spirits, there came days when I knew that we would not talk. He did not need to hear my voice the way I needed to hear his. I would scramble around, from workouts with my trainer, to classes, to the dining commons, to the library for homework, to voice lessons, participating in club meetings, and I would always find little moments to send him my love in a text or a call. His frequency of responding plummeted. My desire to clutch my fingertips to a love once effortless was beginning to grow exhausted.

Dear Inner Intuition,

Love seems far away. A knot has replaced the flutter in my tummy that used to light up my days. He doesn’t call when he gets out of work anymore. When I see him he is always tired. Last time he visited me at school, inconveniently during classes, I woke up absurdly early to pick him up an hour away at the train station. The next night I asked whether he was going to stay up with me or if I should drive him back to the station so I wouldn’t have to get up extra early to drive two hours before classes, he said he would stay up. I was hanging up decorations around my dorm when he started snoring. When I got up early to bring him back to the train station, he promised that he would stay awake for the drive. He failed at that too, complaining that he felt sick. There is no longer a spark. I feel like I am watching him instead of being with him. What should I do?

Sincerely,

Lost Lonely Lover

Dear Lost Lonely Lover,

You already know.

Best of luck,

Inner Intuition

*ARLINE hangs her arms over the railing and stares down at the water below.*

*LIAM: [steps closer to ARLINE]* Is everything okay? You have never been this quiet.

ARLINE: I have never run out of things to say, not to you at least. When this all started things were so great. [LIAM looks down] Lately you have not been the man I fell in love with. You have neglected to keep our communication going. You forget to call me, never mind compliment me or reassure me. Where did you go? Why did you stop trying? I can’t see where this can go when I feel I chase you down to simply say hello. The spark that lit up my world just weeks ago is a cold pile of ash. I am sorry, but I am not happy. I can’t be here. I can’t do this. I do love you and it breaks my own heart to have to say these words to you, but you gave up on us just like everything else.

Edit Profile CLICK

Family and Relationships CLICK

Edit CLICK

Single GULP

Save Changes CLICK

We solemnly announce the passing of a very young Love. Sometime in the early weeks of October 2014 Arline took the life of her romantic relationship on the bridge of Otter Brook Dam in Keene, NH. Just 3 months old, Love leaves behind dreams of turning into a lifetime. In her brief life here on Earth, Love was able to travel around Boston on hot summer days in the form of hand holding between her kin, Arline and Liam, who have not communicated since her passing. Love leaves behind many happy hours spent roaming the sticky city streets of Boston in July, nights of star gazing in the New England countryside of central Massachusetts, and hopes of going on to explore Europe as a unit. Love took with her his virginity. Although Love was a fighter, she was unable to persevere through the early weeks of a new semester as Arline began class again at Keene State. Love, although surely missed, is left behind with her closest kin at peace now understanding that she shall no longer suffer.

Ex-love-of-my-life,

Thank you for showing me that I deserve better

Thank you for leaving me with your comfy sweater

I’m sad that you let it get to this

I’m sad you clocked out when life got too hectic

You missed my show, time and time again

After promising so often that you would tune in

On top of it all you borrowed lots of money

I’m still waiting on my payback, honey

Of course there are days when I miss your face

and walking barefoot to our secret place

overlooking the river, the city, the chance

remembering all your silly little rants

You tickled me with sweet nothings,

Squeezed my hand to tell me something,

then one day when I was at school

you forgot all the things boyfriends ought to do

You no longer break my heart. The endless chatter of unspoken words swirling about my head has finally been typed and sent. I am awaiting a response that will never come. Your silence, my answer to move on.



I co-produced this corny video ‘Your Hand in Mine’ for a video production class. The video is online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jgozrtu4ULc and was created shortly after Liam and I broke up.

I broke up with him.

I stole his heart

and when I gave it back

tattered and worn

there were too many pieces

to reassemble.

Our love a delicate bloom

broken by summer days

spent walking hand in hand

along the busy Boston streets

or curled together under a tree

tracing the tattoo on his arm with my finger

sometimes outlining his neck with my lips

pretending that

we

would last more than a season

I told him without words.

He heard in my silence

the door to my heart

sliding to a close

and he could not muster

the courage to knock the door in

Outside the realm of us

outside the possibility

that this was just

a mere miscommunication.

I left him,

though I wish I never

had to make that choice.

Reasons we fell out of love:

* he was lazy
* he smoked too many cigarettes
* he thought his opinion was always right
* he forgot to call
* he broke promises
* he stopped playing bass
* he stopped playing with my hair
* he snores
* he stopped holding my hand
* he was always tired

WANTED

One true love. Requires an unending kind of attraction that is much more than just physical. Respect and fidelity required. Conversationalist preferred. Beards encouraged. Must be committed to a lifetime. Applicants must have a job, a valid driver’s license, and a working cellular phone. Female applicants will not be considered.

& then there was none

The very love that sent me soaring to the moon

alongside the glimmering constellations of stars

by a string tied to a celestial balloon

and guided me throughout space

for week-long trances,

soon popped against a star’s edge.

This tumbled me from the grave black sky

limp, my body rocketed down towards Earth

SPLASH!

& then that once love

sparkled in the reflection

of the Charles river,

where we had swam,

kicking off our shoes, wearing our street clothes

that time we jumped in after each other

in the middle of that hot summer night-

I forget who dared who.

The sweet words that used to make me weak

now worth nothing more than a cringe

of a memory long since lived

ever since the day I moved away.

Never previously pursued,

in a pursuit of perfect timing,

this trip to space did not last.

Soon I was trapped

twisting an old brass key to unlock the door

that led me into a room

lined with shelves

covered by unopened boxes

labeled “chance.”

I stepped forward to realize

entering that room alone

is better than to walk in

followed by a shadow.

\*

Silence is my secret weapon-

slicing away the pleasant view

we once saw standing in this place.

We overlook the water

that this mountain of rock dams

and stops from washing away

the road by which we got here.

Gazing at the bushels

of deep greens, reds, oranges, some yellow

seeing perhaps the same beautiful forest scene

but our minds

our hearts

disconnected long before I drove us

to the place you would soon regard

as the place our love drowned.

Afterword

Although it hurts that our friendship of 7 years vaporized into the atmosphere of “newly single,” I have managed to press on. Sure, I miss his friendship, but I have tried to reach out and he has yet to say a word back. On the day that I broke up with him, he just sat there quietly. The only thing he took time to vocalize was, “Good luck finding somebody who loves you as much as I do.” At first, it was shocking. I was fearful that I might have walked away from the real deal. Over time, it became clear to me that if he truly loved me the way he argued, he would never have left without trying to convince me that our relationship was worth working for. He gave up. He gave up the way I watched him do so many times in his life. I never thought he would give up on me but he did- the first day he forgot to tell me that he loved me. After a long time spent moping around with a brick in my chest where my heart used to be, I realized that I had done the right thing. I had not given up on Liam. It was he who gave up on himself. Our breakup taught me a lot about the way people change. It taught me that it is important not to hold onto a memory of a person, instead you must see them for who they are today.