

Artist's Statement

Poetry has brought about a new revelation. After this semester, I can confidently add another label to my name as a writer. I have immensely progressed in my creative writing skills and learned to express myself through words. This is very exciting for me as an English Education major because I have discovered a new passion for writing. Even though I do not feel I have perfected my writing, I do feel confident that I have the capacity to write imaginatively. This is a new development for me and a step in the right direction giving me the confidence to pursue English as a part of my future.

I lead a very busy lifestyle so poetry was a great challenge. I found it difficult to find time to step back and put all my bottled up feelings into words. However, I now recognize writing as the ultimate stress reliever. Poetic images would often come to me in the midst of chaos. I was forced to store the words in the back of my mind until I had the chance to jot them down on paper. I found it easiest to write when I was alone and removed from my crazy lifestyle. I live this semester with eight girls in a very small room so finding alone time was a challenge in and of itself. Writing poetry often meant getting off campus and away from any distraction that would fog my memory and creative vision.

With eighteen credit hours, extracurriculars, work, and a little time for fun I found little time to devote to perfecting ambiguous drafts of writing. Often I would rely on advice from my classmates to help me develop poetry that really illustrated my clear and genuine thoughts. Not to mention, when I first started poetry class I had only written three poems in my lifetime. I knew from the moment I sat down, this class would be a step out of my comfort zone. I have learned through experience that this zone of

proximal development is where some of my greatest accomplishments come from. I remember calling my mom at the beginning of the semester questioning whether English was the right subject for me and her encouraging me to give it a shot even though I felt different and unqualified. I am proud of myself for pushing through the semester and becoming the creative writer I didn't know I had in me.

Some themes I focused on this semester were the generic feelings of love and pain. I feel I learned how to express these feelings in a much more indirect, expressive, and original way. I have learned to look at love and loss uniquely and truly feel that writing is a way to place my feelings on the table and let them walk away. Poetry has actually helped heal my hurt and strengthen my love.

Writing about home was something that came naturally to me. In the poems *Hero*, *And Then We Were*, *My Favorite Circle*, and *Ann Arbor* I focused on my foundation, my home. Home for me is more than a place I go on semester breaks. Home is where I am my truest self where I have spent my entire life building relationships and strengthening my core. These poems have a lot of specific imagery and detail reminiscing on memories of my childhood innocence. College was a big step for me, a new beginning from "my so sweet crater of lemonade and snow tongues" (*Ann Arbor*). So the passion and imagery behind my poems written about home tend to be some of my strongest.

I have a newfound respect for those people I used to view as crazy writers. I can appreciate a good poem and can understand the feeling and individual meaning that goes into poem-making. My poems do tend to have a familiar sound and common topics but I do think each one I have written this semester has its own unique qualities.

I plan to continue to write poetry or at least keep a journal of poetic thought. I truly believe this writing is a therapeutic way to talk about my feelings.

My poetry is very personal and I rarely let my friends read it. There is a certain sense of vulnerability in my writing I do not like to show to my friends or family. This was also a really powerful aspect of class for me. I let my feelings show in front of complete strangers. There was a sense of comfort for me in showing my classmates my work and not having to feel judged or ridiculed. Poetry has been a great outlet to discover and develop my feelings.

When we got this Final Chapbook assignment I was excited to put together a folder of my accomplishments this semester. I wanted to make something memorable that I could cherish as a keepsake. I spent a great deal of time putting together this project because it is something that I value and will keep forever. My title *Soft As A Feather, Tough As A Nail*, really summarizes the continuous themes that appeared in my poetry. A poem that I decided to add that I have not turned in yet this semester titled *Fragile* gave me the idea of my heart as a box of nails. This image is one that really resonated with me. I thought this would be a great title for my Chapbook but then decided I needed to include the fluff of my optimistic poetry in the title as well. I think this is a good portrayal of me because I have a soft affectionate side that is often lost to the strong cover that I have built up over the years. Poetry is the art of vulnerability for me. I had never allowed myself to express my feelings in this way in the past and it has been a great outlet!

6-11 Breathing

Pages of

Poetry

Deathly Waters

Warmth never felt so hot.
As it did hidden under your protection.
Too content in your rigid clench,
to notice the scalding burns.
You slowly left behind.
And I think back to when

I lit the earth and our days
were spent like Petosky stones,
playing amongst sands of time.
You were the greatest lake and every day you made me dense.
Gravity triumphed so I fell into you
and each dawn I resurrected.

Until one day.
I realized your all encompassing power.
We no longer frolicked but trampled along the shore.
And when I tried to fuse with you
You left my feet to scatter
for the mucky bottom of your deep dirty water.
I sank further and further
and my clear vision fled.

No longer part of nature, but lost to it.
This underworld where I lurk
Where I've learned to use my gills
to bathe with the scaly mermaids
and forage for the remnant's of our laughter
on the bumpy floor.

Struggling for answers as to why
I meander at rock bottom.
To the pirates I'd rather go
Bartering and stealing. An escape
from the never-ending whirlpool.

My desire in
leaving a consuming world:
I yearn to rekindle the fire
which has been extinguished by your
wavy ways.

Ann Arbor

East is the lake, hard sand;
city of tall things

North is where I've never known,
the long legs of corn, and the empty drives

I have never run south, all I know is my hole; my so sweet crater of

lemonade and snow tongues

I never want to leave, and when we go on vacation
Or fly west or drive to a Carolina

My shoulders feel so out of place and expansive
Juggling my clumsy Midwestern neck

My blushing white shell.

Hero

He was born to hatchlings.
But a broken pack. The sky
rarely lit. Mother died.
And father left.
Courageous in murky moments.
Independent.

Until He met a woman.
She flipped His burnt out light
and she breathed into His face the breath of new life,
and man became a living soul.
Bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh.
Yet, she still had dreams.

First a boy. Black alfalfa cowlick.
Played catch and peed standing up.
It was what He always wanted, but still something missing.
Then came blonde hair, bump eared, bright hearted me.

Feeding me milk but mainly honey.
He taught me to love unconditionally.
And I did. Desired more than was healthy.
While He watched
me drool, left with dried-out eyes.
Teaching me to be Independent, that others
don't define me.

Take a drink,
or two or ten.
I learned the hard way,
He did. And He turned out just fine.
Consistently warned, but
a pack a day he smokes. The
hard way, He discovered and lives with it still.

Diligently work you never know when
abandonment strikes,
and the lone hummingbird sees white rain.
He never let me know the feeling, it only
shows in His furrow fissured forehead.
A sliver of His heart will always remain
solid as stone.

But the section where
my name is written is softest.
His subdued grin and wide eyes
I control.

Never forgot to say a prayer,
or two or ten.
Learning the easy way,
He did. And He turned out beautiful.

Fragile

This is something I need you to understand.
I bruise so easy, my fragile, jutting shoulders.

My chest is a box of nails.
I make a wish on every eyelash I lose,
Sometimes tearing them from my lids
For better odds.

You tightrope all my hopes.
I always dream of falling.
Jolt from my sweating sleep
Legs all hot; tangled.
My body swimming in itself.
Can't touch your knee
There.

No you don't want my lips
Anywhere near your throat.
Or under your chin.

Remember when I didn't kiss you in public
And you chased my hand
For days?

And Then We Were

We were different
I was chubby and awkward
Everyone thought you were a boy
We had dirt smeared across cheeks and uneven bangs
Across freckled foreheads
My birthmark was on my chest
Yours graced a scabbed up knee
I was one short year older
And I think you were jealous

We were gymnasts
I had strong legs and you were bony
There was a book you had about gymnastics
That sat right beneath your Bible
We decked out in rainbow printed leotards
Practiced handsprings on my mom's bed until our heads spun
Perfecting routine after routine
"The Formation" we called it
You could do a cartwheel, and I think I was jealous

We were blind taste-testers
Jellybeans were our specialty
I had all 50 flavors memorized
And you could never fool me
I always slipped black licorice onto your tongue
So you gave me buttered popcorn because you knew I hated it
We fought over every red one
Cause it was apple or Sizzling cinnamon, our favorites

We were top chefs
You were Rachel and I was Giada
The prettiest woman we'd ever seen
We burnt so many batches of cookies
That I learned to like char
I always crack the eggs
And you never wanted to
I let you lick the spoon
Even though you knew I wasn't afraid of salmonella

We were Olympians
You always made me be the goalie
You couldn't kick a soccer ball as well as I could
But you kicked my ass when we raced

From my mailbox to yours
And I think I was jealous
Of your spindly legs and calloused bare feet

We were art enthusiasts
The tips of our fingers scrapped against pavement
And chalk clouded tanned knees
We drew fruit on every sidewalk square
You thought yours always looked more appealing
And you hid the green from me
It was your favorite
We painted sunsets on your front porch
On printer paper with fat brushes
Tongues pressed into the corners of lips
In perfect concentration

We were rock stars
We wrote songs about heaven
And belted them out in my garage during storms
Thunderclaps were God's approval
And the raindrops bopped on the driveway
As we grasped onto jump ropes strung from your garage door
Microphones, but also lifelines,
Stretching just far enough into the havoc
We never knew when the sky would close in on us
And we wouldn't get a chance
To sing the next refrain

When we were old
Too old to play games
I cried myself to sleep
The day before I started high school
I wasn't so chubby anymore
And my hair was blonder
I didn't like the way chalk felt on my polished hands
Jellybeans were just sugar
I didn't know what to think about dirt under my fingernails
And matted hair, but

I was growing up, and I think you were jealous

My Favorite Circle

There is one big circle.
Where the snow piles high as Everest after a hard winter rain.
Where we hear the familiar call:
Everyone to the pavement playground
Prepare for a battle in your play shoes.

The rain keeps falling, day by day falling.
Children grow faster than the puddles that form there.
Eyes blink, rain melts.

Meet me halfway,
trudging through the mystical backwoods.
Time for a hunting.
Tigers, frogs, snakes and things.
Who would've thought we'd find?

Witches secret potions, the special brew,
only mixed by me and you.
Oak leaves, blossom petals
(the ones I could pick without you eating)
and tree nuts of all kinds.
Throw them in the hazing cauldron
and cure all our factitious disorders.

In the midst of play, we'd hear the call.
Rally the troops:
Everyone to the pavement playground
Prepare for a battle in your play shoes.

Moms and dads come together,
bringing along their dearest recipes.
Always talking about me and you.
They laugh, dance, and play
Living life just as we do.
Ask mom one to untie my shoe,
while dad two gets out the revolving waterfall.
Mom three made chocolate cookies
and dad one is the first person I see each morning.

That last August sun shone on the whispering oaks,
those last summer stars gleamed off the asphalt.
I hear the familiar call:
Everyone to the pavement playground
Prepare for a battle in your play shoes.

4 Poems with Pulpy Potential

Where I Go

Pentagon of white washed walls
Adorned room filled with felons
All entrapped for delinquency
And searching for redemption.

Ten cherry-dark rows
Meaningful soft spoken words
Mostly kept within
Minds of hopeless abducted wander

Beryl carpeted altar
Escape from the glowing fire
Effortlessly I anchor to the floor
Enlisting with my fellow convicts

Ivory lace-clothed table
Tiny wants and timeless willies
Travel like smoke
They dissipate.

Answers.

Alcoholic

Why do I keep drinking?
into a mindless stupor.
The clear vodka scars my throat
As it sloshes in the depths.
I melt. The warmth settles in,
I'm wasting my time on you.
If I didn't know better.
But Dammit I do.

Your my intoxicant,
The whiskey taste of your breath
and the euphoria scent of your chest,
Novio, you can't blame me.
for wanting to know whats behind
your big white grin,
behind your tough Cuban skin.

Dragging myself down.
Down to the fire that lurks.
I helped the inferno ignite.
Our breath swirling.
Our bodies take control
and haul us to distant domains.

You're a maze. No, a Labyrinth.
You refuse to discuss grave matters,
the silence slowly annihilating me.
You turn a blind eye to the supervision
don't revisit. I'm not family.
or tan yellow skinned.
Sometimes you forget I have it.
And it's thin.

It was a cobblestone midnight,
when we played pranks on the moon.
Before I faded into you.
In your heart, in your head.
In your arms, in your bed.
Under your skin.

Why don't you keep drinking?
Give me one more night with you.
If I didn't know better,
but Dammit. I do.

The Window

The dusk is a blindfold
too deep to break through.
Vanishing in a hopeless world
where there is no escape,
but the ominous willow still beckons

The sun is lost to darkness,
and shadows remain.
Permitting the black to soak in.

How can what's missing be found?
Left out in the fiery desert,
waiting for a peaceful kingdom.

All I know for sure
is I'm not home.
Have not yet arrived.
Here is not where I belong.

Secrets

Little unlit ledger
packed with miniature grey reveries
and your dark big hands
 shelter the black book
 from all the leathery looks.
Only three eyes allowed to behold,
what the black book bears.

Cruel creatures roam
in that dingy ink.
Do not let them escape.
Lock the portal, prevent the
cataclysm.

You're a pushover.
Too repressed to use your mouth
instead of your cryptic hands
to express your passions.

The lyrics alone are enough
to burn off dreams dreamt up.
I will never notice.
Nobody will.
Because of how
 you protect that black book
 from all the leathery looks.
So continue to confine your ambitions,

Be left alone.