

# EACH BREATH I TAKE

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## **Final Reflection:**

The best way to describe my time in this class would be raw and honest. This semester I have been the most open I have ever been in my writing. To say it was easy would be a lie because many of the topics I wrote about were difficult to relive. With that being said, I am the most proud of my most difficult work. The theme of the majority of my writing is love. That may be hard to believe considering most of my pieces are sad, but what I've learned from all the writing I've done is that all my emotions, whether it be anger, sadness or confusion, stems from love. Although love is supposed to be a good feeling, my writing is the perfect example of how love can be messy, toxic and heartbreaking and I am so proud I was able to incorporate all of that into my writing.

To give a quick little overview of my work, I've chosen to begin my chapbook with one of the most important friendships I've had. This piece was difficult to write because what I managed to discuss in about 3 pages, occurred over the timespan of about 10 months. I think it would be best to finish the semester the same way I started it, which is by being honest, so to be completely real, I cried while writing this piece. I struggle with letting things go, partly because I don't like to accept change and partly because I'm afraid of losing people and being alone. The ending of my friendship with this person forced me to be alone and during this time is when I feel I've grown into a better person that has learned how to stand on her own.

Although my memoir is an important piece to me, the one I hold the closest to my heart is my short story. This story is heartbreaking and extremely truthful. Even though the task was to take a personal experience and fictionalize it, I have to admit my story is mainly the truth. Minor details were fictionalized but for the most part everything that happened in this story also happened in real life. The characters and their relationship is based on my relationship with an

ex-boyfriend and it was very difficult to relive this moment while writing. I chose to write about this because at the time I had still been struggling to come to terms with no longer having this person in my life. This semester I was a bit distracted with my own personal issues and when I received this assignment I thought writing about this experience would be helpful for me to share my own thoughts without the fear of being judged. I cried while writing this also because I could feel every emotion I had felt a year ago all over again. Despite me being truthful in this piece, I did hold back a bit because it was too difficult to share all the specific details surrounding this relationship. I've received several questions regarding the breakup and why the characters acted the way they did but I am still holding back because I personally feel the specifics don't matter. One of the characters did something that hurt someone else. Those feelings are completely valid and whatever happened doesn't matter because the damage has already been done. What I will say to the readers is, the real Jalen has read this story and loved it. With that being said, this was not the end of Aubree and Jalen.

As a writer I've learned I can be vulnerable and honest. In the past I haven't been because I didn't receive many writing assignments that allowed me to. This semester I had a lot of freedom in my writing and I was able to use it to overcome personal issues. Completing my assignments for this class felt like I was writing in a journal which made it more enjoyable. I think I am able to make the readers feel the emotions I describe in my writing because it was so personal and because of my word choice. I've also learned that I prefer to write about things that I feel others would be able to relate to because it helps the reader to feel a connection between themselves and the writer.

As a reader I have learned to be more open to the many different ways a story can end. In the past I've received writing assignments that were very serious and left no room for creativity.

During this class we were given multiple chances to write about true stories or make them up. I enjoyed reading through stories by my peers that were fictionalized because it allowed me to understand them better. I think everyone was able to show off their creative side and some of the pieces I've read this semester were very funny. A tip I've learned that is very helpful as a reader is to ask questions and make suggestions to the writer. This has made it easier for me to comment on someone's work without possibly sounding harsh or critical.

I believe I will be able to use what I've learned this semester and transfer it to other writing situations because I feel I have developed a voice and style of writing. This will help me in future writing situations because I feel my writing is able to evoke emotions in the reader which is a good thing. I'm also glad I've learned how to kindly review another person's paper because it has made me better understand how others feel when they review my work. One of the things I've really taken away from this class is that writing is a process and you may never really be done with it. You're always able to go back and edit your work to be more clear but if you get caught up in trying to make something perfect it may lose its value over time. I've learned to let my work speak for itself and not get caught up in trying to make it perfect because at the end of the day I've always done the best I could.

I hope you enjoy reading through these pieces of writing and I hope that at any moment you are able to relate to my own personal experiences. Most importantly, I hope through each piece you are able to feel love for what it is, whether it be messy, heartbreaking, or confusing. Writing these pieces took a weight off my shoulder and with each piece I felt I was able to breathe again because I was no longer suffocated by my thoughts.

**Memoir:**

A friendship that has been significant to me is with my friend Debbie. We met in the 6th grade because we were in the same school but we didn't start to actually become friends until the 8th grade. In the 6th grade we didn't have any classes together and weren't in the same friend group so we never spoke to each other and didn't know anything about one another. I would say we really became inseparable starting in the 9th grade and all throughout high school. I remember one day in the summer of 2016 I asked her if she wanted to go to the movies together and I think we were both surprised by me asking this because it had kind of come out of nowhere. I'm not really sure why I asked her to go, I just knew that she lived close to me and thought why not invite her.

When I think back on high school all my memories involve her and she's the first person that comes to mind. Debbie wasn't just my friend or even my best friend, she was my sister. We were inseparable and even though we rarely ever had any classes together we managed to have such a strong friendship. As we got older we were in the same friend group so aside from hanging out alone with each other, we would also hangout with our group of friends. We're so different from each other and somehow we were always so in sync. In the 10th grade I asked her if she would like to come to my house in the morning and get a ride to school with me and my mom so that she wouldn't have to take the bus. From that point on my mom drove us to school everyday. We were together starting from 7:15AM until 6 or 7PM because she would come over to my house almost everyday after school.

I'm an only child and I always wanted a sister because I felt lonely growing up. With Debbie it felt like she was my sister and I never had to feel lonely again. We enjoyed each other's

company whether it be while we were out doing something fun, doing homework or even going over each other's houses just to take naps. Debbie was there for me through all the happy moments in my life and she was also there for me during my worst moments. The most significant moment of our friendship for me was when I was going through my first heartbreak. She was there when I needed her and I don't think I would have been able to get through that without her. In our freshman year of college we went to different schools but would still talk to each other all the time. She came with me and my family on a 7 hour drive to my school upstate and later on in the semester she endured that long drive 2 more times to come see me.

We thought we would be close friends forever because it had been that way all throughout high school but not only did we grow up as time went on, we grew apart. We each started to form separate lives because of jobs, boys and school and soon our facetime calls stopped happening, we weren't texting each other as much and we weren't hanging out with each other. I would say the moment when I realized we were no longer as close as we used to be was in the summer of 2020. We had a bad confrontation about a situation that was not true and in that moment I realized she was no longer my best friend because if she was then she would know I never would have done what she was accusing me of. At first this change was hard for me because I didn't want to accept losing my best friend so I kept trying to hold onto our friendship but it became exhausting when it felt one-sided.

Right now her and I don't really speak to each other and when we do it's just quick responses in a group chat. I think there are a lot of unsaid things between us and there are feelings that are hurt by situations in the past. When I was finally able to accept the changes in our friendship I felt relieved because I was constantly stressed about it and would think about it

all the time. I stopped looking at it as a negative and honestly just stopped thinking of where it started to go downhill. The way I see it is that a lot of people aren't able to say they had a best friend that they were close to for so many years and I'm grateful that I'm able to say I did. We're not the same people we were in high school because we've grown up so I don't think we will get back that friendship we had. I'm ok with that because I would rather leave things as they are then keep trying to force something and then potentially ruin it. Even though we're not close anymore I still love her and would be there for her if she ever needed me. I should probably tell her that but sometimes I would rather not say anything at all because I don't want to rehash things.

Writing this was difficult for me and I had to stop a couple times because I felt overwhelmed with my emotions. I wish I could go back to high school when everything was simple and I had my best friend with me at all times. I think about my friendship with Debbie a lot, especially when I see her because there's so many things I want to say to her but I don't know how. After writing this I kind of regret it a little because I had to read several questions about our friendship and some of them I didn't feel comfortable talking about because it makes me sad. Now that I have revised this piece and won't have to go over it for a while I feel a sense of relief because I don't want to keep living in the past and I felt like that's what has happened ever since writing this. I have not been able to create a similar friendship with another person and because of the pandemic, it has been hard to meet new people and make new friends. This isn't a very big deal to me because I've learned to be on my own but sometimes I do wish I had a bond like that with someone else because Debbie and I used to have a lot of fun together before we grew up.

## Short Story:

She could feel her heart beating out of her chest as the tears streamed down her face. It was dark and cold. She could feel his eyes on her but she couldn't bring herself to look into them. The tension in the car was so heavy she thought she might suffocate. He screamed at her to get out of the car and she begged him not to leave but it was too late. His eyes were no longer filled with love and tenderness, they were filled with hatred and anger. When she opened the door she could feel the wind hitting her face as the tears poured out of her eyes. Not a second had gone by before he drove off at full speed. She yelled after the car as she watched it get farther and farther away and in that moment she knew she had lost him. Forever...

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"I love you so much," Jalen said as he smothered her face in kisses.

It was barely audible but Aubree could make out those words no matter the situation. She pulled away from him and looked into his eyes. Aubree could feel how much Jalen loved her just by the way he looked at her. She knew that as lucky as he felt to have his first love in his arms, she would always be the truly lucky one. Jalen adored her, he would have done anything for and she knew that. He gave her security, love, happiness, everything a person wants in a relationship. After being hurt so many times, Aubree thought she would never be able to trust someone enough with her heart but Jalen made it all so easy. Sometimes it felt unreal to finally have the kind of boy she had only dreamt of, but there he was, looking into her eyes waiting for a response.

"I love you more bebesito" Aubree said as she leaned in and pressed her lips against his.

His lips were so plump and always so soft. She knew she sounded silly for thinking that his lips felt like clouds, that it was something that a person in a movie would say, but she couldn't think of anything else to describe the way his lips felt. He held her in his arms as they watched *Grown Ups 2*, she could feel his breathing slow down once the laughter between them died down, and then his heart rate would pick back up again when he would laugh at the movie scenes.

They had both already seen this movie but Adam Sandler was Jalen's favorite actor so she agreed to rewatch the movie for him. In all honesty, Aubree didn't care what movie they watched because she never really focused on the movie anyways. She always got distracted as she would run her fingers along his arms, make circles around his hands or even intertwine her fingers in his. While his eyes were fixated on the TV her eyes were fixated on his hands. She remembered all the times he would touch the side of her face so gently before leaning in to kiss her. She remembered the way the palm of his hands would feel against her back as he would hug her. She even remembered the way he would run his fingers through her hair and she would always yell out in pain because her hair would get tangled so easily because it was so long. Even when she would give him attitude or snap at him for small things, he still adored her and fell in love with her more and more each day.

"Don't go, just sleepover," Aubree said.

She spent so much time dwelling on the love she had for this one person that without even noticing, the movie had ended and it was 1AM.

"I can't baby, my mom is waiting for me" Jalen said as he leaned down and kissed her forehead.

After several failed attempts at preventing him from leaving her house, she walked him to the door and gave him a goodbye hug.

“I’ll be here tomorrow at 10 bebe,” he said.

But tomorrow never came. They would never have another tomorrow together...

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Her eyes felt swollen as she peeled them open. She could feel the dried up tear stains on her cheeks that made her face feel tight. Aubree grabbed her phone, squinting at the brightness of the screen. Jalen never answered her texts. How could he, he hadn’t received them anyways, he blocked her. Blocked. That word alone drove her crazy. The feeling of being shut off, muted. She deserved it though and she knew she did. Her dream had felt so real, she really believed it was. But it wasn’t. That would never happen again.

She got out of bed and walked up to her dresser. She stared at the reflection looking back at her, searching for something different this time. Maybe a person she recognized. But just like every other day, all she saw was eyebags and dried tear stains. Her eyes were dull and no longer bright the way they used to be. They were just dull and glossy. Aubree thought to herself how nice it would have been if her dream were a reality. If she could be in the arms of the boy she loves most in this world. And when she thought of this she realized her dream was a reality. She lived through those experiences, she felt the love between her and Jalen. And then she ruined it. By something so stupid. Her worst fear was losing Jalen. Now her nightmare was a reality and her dream was just that, a dream. Aubree closed her eyes and envisioned his car driving away the

night she told him the truth. It wasn't just the car driving away. It was his love, his trust, him. With that thought, she got back in bed and closed her eyes again.

Aubree couldn't handle living her life without Jalen. She couldn't deal with all the anger, hurt and confusion that all stemmed from one thing. Heartbreak. So she faded away into her dreams again, where Jalen was there waiting for her, because she preferred to spend her time in a dream than live through reality.

**Poem:**

love

if it's so beautiful then why does it hurt so much?

if he was the one then why did he leave?

or was it me?

please come back

this feels like an attack

i miss you

do you remember me?

**Dialogue:**

(Sitting on the bathroom floor, loud music playing in the background)

Stella: Why does it hurt so much, I don't want to be sad anymore

Ava: Because it has to hurt before you can get better but you won't be sad forever I promise

(Stella leans into Ava for a hug and buries her head in her chest as she cries into Ava)

(Ava strokes Stella's hair and kisses her head)

Ava: You're going to be ok, I love you

Stella: We can't even say hi to each other. He's in the same apartment as me and we can't say one word to each other. I love him so much why did he have to hurt me

(Ava sighs and pulls Stella away from her chest while grabbing her face)

Ava: You are more than enough for him or any boy in this world and if he can't see that then he doesn't deserve you. You deserve someone so much better than that I promise you.

(Stella wraps her arm around Ava, embracing her in a hug)

Stella: You're my best friend, I don't know how I would get through this without you.

## **Journals:**

**Journal 3:** I can't remember the last time I wrote a memoir but based on what we have done this semester I've found them to be difficult but enjoyable at the same time. It's nice to recount positive memories and remember fun things from the past but it's easy to get caught up in what I'm writing about. When writing about negative memories I often have to stop writing because I don't want to really talk about it but then again talking about things can help you feel better so it makes me feel conflicted. Sometimes the task for a memoir is a little difficult and I can't relate to it which leaves me feeling stuck. Overall I would say that I have had a positive experience with memoir writing because I'm able to share a little bit about myself through it and it allows others to get to know me a little better and what my life is like.

**Journal 5:** A moment in my past that changed me is when I started getting acne at a young age. This affected my self-esteem because it made me insecure, especially around my friends because they all had clear skin. I started developing acne in the 5th grade and as time went on it became worse. Over the years my doctor would prescribe me medicine for it but it never worked. I would go to the pharmacy all the time and buy several different products but those never worked either. Finally, in the 8th grade I went to a dermatologist and would have to get injections in my face in order to reduce the swelling. Even though that would work within 24 hours, it wasn't a permanent treatment so my dermatologist prescribed me my first bottle of pills. Throughout highschool I took 3 different types of pills in order to reduce my acne and I would also use topical creams that were prescribed to me. These medications would always make my skin worse before it ever got better but after about 3-6 months of using everything, my acne would flare up again. At one point during my senior year of high school my acne was so bad it would hurt to lay

my face on my pillow, wash my face and it would even hurt when I would cry. After taking so many medications and none of them working I gave up on the idea of having clear skin because the situation felt hopeless. Being that my acne remained persistent for years I had to learn to become confident because I didn't want to continue being sad and insecure. Even though this took a while, once I became confident I felt like I was a more positive person. It felt good not having to constantly worry what people think of my skin or wanting to put makeup on to cover anything up. In the beginning of my freshman year of college my acne started flaring again but it didn't affect my self-esteem very much because I knew that it didn't define me. After months of not using any treatments I decided to try curology because I had seen multiple ads about it. I began using curology in November of 2019 and noticed a difference in my skin right away. The inflammation went down almost immediately and as time went on the redness decreased also. I've been using curology for a little over a year now and I have clear skin and no longer breakout anymore. My skin is the clearest and smoothest it has ever been and my confidence has increased because of it.