A Picture Book
A Picture Book

Journal and Memoir Writings

THE CLASS

DULUTH, MINNESOTA
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Introduction

This book serves to expand our mosaic of stories, experiences, and emotions to be read, understood, related to, and enjoyed. The authors come from a humble memoir-writing class in Duluth, Minnesota, encapsulating a wide variety of students’ backgrounds and lived experiences. With this class and this book, we've been able to explore vulnerability and openness in our writing, within a safe space that has allowed us to overcome such obstacles without shame or abstinence. These pieces telescope themes of change, relationships, identity, and sense of place.

Bio written by Abby Hietala
Brought to you by

**Writings:**

The Class

Abby Hietala / Annie Foldenaur / Ava Gustafson / Greta Gottwalt / Hannah Eidem / Jada Wells

Katie Rowe / Lauren Garnett / Meredith Carrington / Riley Sallee / Valencia Ruprecht

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**Images:**

Cover Sketches – Class collaboration based on self representation

Anthony Bartnikm – Lift Bridge at Night

Abby Hietala – Word & Sketch Compilations (black & white) (section breaks)

Valencia Ruprecht

  - Baphomet Shrine, Baja Mexico, 2019-2020
  - Sitting with Kristan, Tijuana Mexico, 2019
  - Flying Back Home to Minneapolis, February 2020

Violet Hackbarth – Duluth collage
Anthony Bartnik
PART 1

YOU’VE GOT ME IN A KNOT, AND IT’S MY FAULT IT’S TIED

CAUSE STAYING IN TOUCH IS SUCH A BUNNER!

DAILY DOUBLE

WHY DO I EVEN OPEN MY MOUTH?

WE’RE DYING!

LEASE

IT’LL HIT ALL AT ONCE, LIKE SENSIS

BUT YOU CAN SPEAK, AND YOU CAN SAY IT

NO MATTER HOW I TRY

Abby Hietala
"Main Character"

GRETA GOTTWALT

My sister is the youngest, most creative child. Her bedroom is as cluttered as her personality.

Her closet, desk, bookshelf, and under-the-bed are perpetually full of just stuff. Journals, books, paints, pictures, paintings, candles, trash, baskets, blankets, plants, stuffed animals, and upwards of half of the kitchen’s cups and bowls.

Her personality is cheerful, strong-willed, friendly, kind, passionate, creative, hardworking, and she has a strong sense of aesthetics.

In her life she has played soccer and volleyball, participated in clubs, taken dance lessons and traveled locally with a group performing *The Nutcracker*, been in countless plays, volunteered at the local theatre, and has always had a thriving social life and gotten good grades.

And slowly but surely all of this is getting organized. Slowly but surely she focuses on what she loves. Her passions are being organized onto shelves, she shapes herself into who she wants to be. A rambunctious daughter, a cheerful friend, a nonjudgmental sister.
I have always been a person that believes in actions over words, showing your love not just stating your love, choosing your family, and earning respect. I believe that everyone needs to have a family to rely on whether it was the one you were born into or one you made for yourself. I have never had a good relationship with any of my family members but since I have chosen to lean into the idea of my chosen family as my family I have felt a lot more at ease. My closest family members are Taylor, Annie, Miah, Ada, and Amareah. I have collected these members starting in the fourth grade with the longest Miah and the newest as of freshman year of college, Amareah.

The one that led to another

In elementary school my best friend was Mulky. We met in our classroom, Mr. Durand. I walked up to her and asked her if she wanted to be best friends with all the courage and worry-free nature that four year olds have. She said yes. We were friends up until a typical immature middle school fall out, but she led me to Miah. Miah came into our school in third grade but I was not friends with her until the fourth grade because we were in different classes and I had a silly rift with her because she and Mulky shared a class together. At nine years old sharing a best friend was extremely taboo and so our childish jealousy kept us from one another until the following year when we were in the same class.
Miah liked me at first because I had “beautiful wavy hair” and she needs to be friends with anyone with beautiful hair, this is how she still explains it today. Miah is a woman after my own heart. She has high cheekbones, beautiful hair she works very hard to keep beautiful. She was attracted to my hair because I also have curly hair, but for a person of European descent, her curls are tighter, bouncier, and made of hair so dark brown it is almost black. While everyone is “short” in elementary school, it’s a funny sight to see us together as our eyelines don’t even come close to meeting, hers meets my chest where mine grazes above her head. We became close very quickly by bonding over our non-traditional family structures. Me having divorced parents since I was a one year old and her parents being young, unmarried, and not together. She invited me into her home and her family. She wasn’t the first sleepover that I attended but she was the first home I slept in that felt like family. I was shy whenever I met new people, especially when I was younger.

When we walked into her house after her mom had gathered up all of Miah’s friends for a birthday party and big outing at the notorious Grand Slam Family Fun Center we were going inside where her stepfather was.

Mike is the warmest man I have ever met. He greeted everyone with a hug and I made a comment about being sneaky like a ninja that I didn’t think he heard until he declared that I was going to be his ninja. I am nineteen years old and still everytime that I see Mike he asks how his ninja is. I’ve seen Mike age and grow almost just the same as he has seen me. He’s about five foot ten inches, so I’ve grown vertically closer to him as well as emotionally. He’s a very slim man, never really able to put on a lot of muscle. He had a little bit of facial hair when I was young, now he has a full beard and locs in his hair. He has a sharp jaw and tight chin that frame his welcoming smile. Having a hard home life when you’re young creates perspective, this perspective has made Mike want to be everything he didn’t
have. I have never said it, but I believe Mike knows he’s another father to me. Miah also has three younger sisters that I’ve had the privilege to see grow up as I’ve grown up with Miah. While I do have a sister, Miah and her sisters always make me feel like one of them. I love Miah because she is someone I can sit in silence with without tension, say anything to without worrying, and always feel at home with.

**Middle school isn’t so awful**

I met Taylor in the seventh grade. We had eighth grade math (in the seventh grade) and advanced science together. I didn’t talk to Taylor until we had a seating chart switch as we did with every unit in math and I was sat in a group of three of me, Taylor, and Cate Koltes. I had never been close friends with someone like Taylor before. An average height, long blonde hair, golf player, athleisure, PINK brand clothing, and still almost exclusively wears black leggings. Taylor has never been a social person, welcoming, or inviting, as I’ve grown to know her this is just a defense mechanism of her anti-social nature. So, I was pretty sure Taylor didn’t like me because she always had to help me with math problems, sometimes repeatedly explaining the same concept due to my own mental block. Taylor has always loved math and is pursuing a career in engineering to no one’s surprise. It was always a victorious day when she had to ask me for help in math. Eventually I broke her down, in between working on math problems I would crack jokes and she would laugh. She was the friend I turned to in science when the teacher said we could pick our lab partners, thankfully she matched my gaze. A common theme in my chosen family is the non traditional family structures we come from. Taylor’s parents are divorced too so she understood not being able to hangout because one of us was at our dads house.
Taylor used to make me so mad in freshman year of high school whenever I would joke about our weddings and being each other's bridesmaids. Taylor is not realistic but pessimistic and so she would always take the stance that “we don't know where we're going to be in ten years, if we're even going to be friends, or where we're going to be living.” I hate Taylor only in moments like these where she insinuates we may not always be friends together. I am proud to say that Taylor and I are still best friends, despite being eleven hours away at different colleges. Whenever Taylor and I see each other again we always fall back into our old tradition of watching Shark Tank and doing a puzzle together. I couldn't imagine and wouldn't dare to do that with anyone else.

High school sweethearts

Annie is the platonic love of my life. I became friends with Annie in freshman year of high school after I anxiously slid up on her Snapchat story and asked for a TBH (to be honest). We had a mutual friend, a couple classes together but because of her popular reputation for the middle school climate I was intimidated. I had nothing to be scared of. Annie, like Taylor, wore the on-brand clothing that the popular, and usually mean girls wore, so I was steered away from her because of this. Annie does exclusively wear black leggings, unless a special occasion arises, she wears her hair at a medium or long length, depending on when it was last cut, always her natural dark brown, almost black, straight hair. Annie wears sweatshirts and t-shirts, often for whatever school she or her siblings are attending at the time. After the infamous TBH on November ninth of 2018 I began to get to know the girl that would grow so close to me we almost became attached. From the moment I met Annie she has been nothing but the most genuine and beautiful soul I have ever met. Annie comes from a very
traditional and strict Hmong family and so it took a year of friendship before we could hangout outside of school. Our friendship started out very innocently, mainly complaining about APUSH (AP US History) and boys. Annie and I became very close during quarantine, right after schools closed our sophomore year. We were both going through terrible breakups at the same time and we leaned on each other. There were many nights that we stayed up late texting and calling and sending voice messages. During deeper Covid times my mom allowed my sister and I to have people over, in 2021, in our garage where she brought our Xbox and old TV. Just so I could see Annie in person I invited her and her younger-by-ten-years sister Sophia to play Just Dance together. I would have never thought that two sixteen year olds and a six year old could have that much fun together doing something so obscure.

Our friendship progressed once we started connecting on deeper issues, family issues. As I said Annie comes from a traditional family Hmong family. Today, I am the only friend that her mom truly trusts and will say yes to almost anything if she knows that I am going to be there. I have had Annie over at my house many times. However, the best of times were the worst of times. I have grown closest to Annie by talking on the captain’s-bed-converted-into-a-couch in my basement. From all that Annie has told me I may know more about her family than her two younger siblings. Just a month ago Annie came over to my house an hour earlier than our friends were coming over because she needed to talk to someone so badly and she needed to talk to me. Annie came over to my house barely holding herself together when my mother asked her upstairs how school was going and winter break and being home. Once we were safe in my room in the basement and I had cautiously closed all my doors she began to sob telling me how scared she was because of her unsure academic standing at her college. I value vulnerability so much and I love when I am
able to be the person people can be that “uncomfortable with.” I’ve ridden in the trunk of Annie’s sister’s boyfriend’s minivan on the way home from the drive-in, Annie has sat on my lap in her crammed Toyota Camry when her mom drove our friend group home. I’ve been in a days-long argument with one of her ex-boyfriends over Instagram direct messages. I’ve put an (unused) tampon under the windshield of a terrible guy’s car with her. I’ve attended a rainy baseball game with her just so she could see the guy she liked play. I’ve made gingerbread houses with her and her younger sister. I’ve had some of my best, and worst moments, with Annie.

Why I believe college was, and will be a great experience

Ada Mae is as beautiful of a person as her name sounds. I met Ada only last year because we were on the same dorm floor. I had a terrible experience with my roommate last year and she was one of the only reasons why I made it through. Ada and her roommate freshman year, Amareah, decided to ask my old roommate and I to sit next to us during our first RA floor meeting on the grass outside of Griggs PQ. I was overwhelmed with packing, my mother, and the heat, but Ada was so refreshing. Ada had blue-green short hair, clear glasses-frames as windows to her deep brown eyes and full eyebrows, and a way about her that made me want to know more. We went to dinner with them that same night. Within the first week of college, although I don’t even like pickles, Ada, Amareah, Elena, Emma, and I had a pickle hallway party. By that I mean we sat in the hallway talking, giggling, and eating pickles. As silly as it may sound, that is one of the moments that made me realize I wanted these people, especially Ada, in my life. We made “family traditions” such as our five o’clock family dinners, Ada and Amareah inviting girls from the floor to their room for tea time, study sunday, and occasional movie nights where
Ada would skillfully stack her ottoman on top of the provided dorm desk chair and we sat on her bed watching whatever, sometimes Survivor.

Ada and I have a tendency to make unconventional plans and have such a fun time doing them. Ada and I didn’t have an interest in going to frats so when our friends went out we would get into our pajamas, make tea, and sit in the lounge talking about whatever, without there ever being an awkward lull, and watching the late night intoxicated hallway activities of other residents. The best moments I’ve had with Ada are ones where we are sitting and talking and keep feeding off of one another. Ada and I have talked for hours and could continue to do so. Every time I came back from an excursion with the male species she stayed up to “debrief” with me. Doing this in public places became risky when the subject of conversation would walk by. Everytime after spending any amount of time apart we would each have a debrief. Gone for the weekend? Debrief. Winter Break? Debrief. Went on a date? Debrief. Family came up for the day? Debrief. Ada has a way of making even the smallest things fun. Almost every time she gets a package she announces her unboxing. Almost every time she goes thrifting or to Trader Joes or shopping in her moms kitchen there is a subsequent “haul.” I had my suspicions about what some will say that the friends you make in college are for life, my friendship with Ada feels this way.

I met Amareah at the same time and in the same way that I met Ada, they were roommates as I said. Our friendship is different though. We are a great trio but I love spending time individually with Ada or Amareah. Amareah has been through too much for someone that is only twenty years old. Amareah takes a bit more to open up to you, I’m honored to be one of the recipients. Like I said, Amareah and Ada were roommates so I usually hung out with them together. One of the first moments
we were hanging out together that made me feel like home, like I had met the people I was meant to meet was in the dorm bathroom, attempting to remove the black hair dye out of her hair in an attempt to dye it red. While this attempt failed and we ended up putting the red over the prominent black. Amareah has kept this up, the black dye growing out and redying red every so often, in the time I’ve known her the black has almost disappeared and been taken over by red. Amareah also had to work a lot so I spent more time in my freshman year alone with Ada than Amareah. Amareah is someone that won’t ask for someone to listen but she will want it and need it, you can tell by looking into her icy blue eyes, captivating, and very telling of what she cannot bring herself to say. I remember there was one day when Amareah and I were studying in one of the Griggs study lounges with the odd blue movable chairs next to a big window that overlooked Griggs “beach.”

Amareah was going through a tough time because she had recently found out she could not live at her mother’s over the summer so she was scrambling working a lot to build up her income to be able to sign a lease in time for the school year to end. Initially one of her close friends, Kaitlyn, who lived in Florida said that she would move back to Minnesota and live with Amareah. Very suddenly and abruptly Kaitlyn changed her mind and tried to convince Amareah to move down to Florida which was then posing a larger problem because then Amareah would have to apply to an entirely different campus/university instead of just applying to be a transfer student from Duluth to the Cities. As Amareah was explaining all of this to me she was becoming exhausted physically, emotionally, and mentally. She didn’t stop herself like she had in the past, she didn’t omit anything she was thinking, she didn’t keep a strong face, she let herself feel. Amareah has never been one to be vulnerable in any way, or really open up. In her opening up to me I was filled with both love and concern. I was there for her, I offered her
reassurance. I told her she had to do what was best for her and that if someone was really her friend they would want what is best for her not what is most convenient for them. Even though this moment only lasted about thirty minutes and she may not feel the same way about it as I do.

Any car ride I have even taken with Amareah has been a source of happiness and joy and closeness. We weren’t girls together, we were teenage girls together, driving around blasting music and screaming songs that only we would scream together. Every ride would begin with a disclaimer from Amareah about her driving and a pleading to Carol the Camry to keep us safe and not die on us now. These drives were always accompanied by the appropriately named playlist, “Carol the Camry.” I think part of the reason why Amareah and I connected so well is that we have such an obscure yet similar music taste. I have never met someone who listens to almost all the different artists and kinds of music that I do. I would get so excited everytime she would show me new music or I found music that she hadn’t heard before. I take great pride in introducing her to Liar by Paramore, the second after I heard that song off of the album “This Is Why,” I knew she would love it and I felt an unusual sense of achievement after she confirmed that she did in fact love it as much as I did. Every drive I would secretly wish for it to be longer to make those moments never end. I would mentally manifest for red lights and light traffic so I could have a few more minutes in the car with Amareah and Ada (or whoever else was out on an excursion with us that day). After the rides we came back to campus where Amareah fearlessly conquered the giant snow-ice-hill shortcut that I was never courageous enough to conquer after taking a not-so-elegant fall one time. It was a race everytime we got back to campus to see which route could get to the door first. If Amareah was ever busy for a whole day like having classes and then working after class or on weekends when she would work doubles I would hope that she
would be awake enough for Ada and Amareah to have tea time in their dorms. Even if the conversation was empty or just full of Amareah complaining about the customers it was the time and her presence that I valued.

My family

Some people have the privilege of being born with their families while others have the privilege of creating their own. I have known many people in my life, related by blood, and related by love. I love my family because they allow me to be myself, all versions and facets of myself. I think it is a beautiful thing that in only nineteen years of living I have been able to make five connections that I am confident can endure anything life offers as we have already been through so much together, I do not believe that anything could break our connections.
I am a woman. Walking down the street alone, I always look in every direction, searching for anyone I deem threatening. I search for the look in men’s eyes when they stare at me; they look ravenous. I am a woman. Men think it’s okay to take away what they deem fit for my body; I have no choice. I am a woman. I fear for myself every waking moment, wondering if the man next to me will end up like those staring at me on the streets. When will this constant fear stop? Will it ever stop? When can I stop fearing for my life?

When I was 11, I got the new iPod; I was excited to play games and text my friends. I had a tie-dye case ready to be touched and used with my little fingers. Holding it in my hand for the first time felt so big. I was in awe of it, how I could do almost anything on there. I felt like I was living in a whole new world.

I started downloading as many apps as possible and was ready to use them for hours. I couldn’t wait to text my friends on the Instagram app and share pictures of the most random things. All my friends friended me back, but there was another person who followed me that I didn’t know. I was super excited; I could have a new friend.

I remember sitting at the table eating waffles in the morning when I got a direct message from the person who added me the day before. It was a super friendly man who gave me the kindest compliments. He even had a dog with the same name as my dog, Chloe.

He and I talked for a while that day; he asked how old I was, and being young and not seeing the problem with any of it, I told
him the truth; that didn’t deter him, and he now wanted to be my best friend. I was so excited when he told me he wanted to hang out with me, a new friend; that’s all I thought. Looking back now, with the clarity of hindsight, I can’t help but recoil in disgust at how easily I allowed myself to be drawn into his web of deceit. What I had initially perceived as a harmless friendship now became something far more insidious – a calculated manipulation to prey upon my innocence and trust.

The realization sends a shiver down my spine as I face the harsh reality of how easily I fell victim to his charms. But even as I grapple with the discomfort of hindsight, I refuse to let shame and self-blame consume me.

Luckily, my dad started going through my new device to ensure everything was safe. When he saw the messages between me and my new friend, he took them away. I was sad and confused, not understanding what the problem was. The anger in his face drew to a slight sadness; he hugged me and cried. I never saw him cry before, but I only understood why once I got older.

At 12, I was a happy kid, playing on the swing set outside with no worries. What do you even have to worry about besides getting homework done the night before it’s due? I was doing cartwheels in my backyard, painting, and humming songs I loved. My brain was as clear as a blue sky on a sunny day until one night. A boy who slept across the hall took my innocence from me.

Every night from then, I was terrified, worried about what might happen if I closed my eyes. The purity of childhood shattered instantly, replaced by darkness that seemed to envelop every aspect of my being. The memories of that night haunted me relentlessly, casting a shadow over the carefree days I once knew. No longer was I able to lose myself in the simple joys of youth; instead, I found myself consumed by fear and mistrust.
Was it then I started to see how men are cruel? How my own family can hurt me without a second thought?

I was 15 when I got my first job; I was to be a hostess at the new restaurant downtown. I was thrilled to be able to work to buy makeup, fast food, and anything a teenage girl could ever want. Then, I could see the eyes that looked at me; they were hungry. Men would leave me their numbers at the host stand; they looked all over my body when I walked around. I was scared to be close to them. I looked at the men I worked with to protect me, but they all thought the same thing as those who scared me. I was just a kid still, terrified that one day one would try to hurt me. As I navigated through the challenges of my first job, I quickly realized that the workplace wasn’t the haven I had hoped for. Instead of feeling empowered by my newfound independence, I felt vulnerable and exposed. The hungry eyes that followed me wherever I went made me uneasy, constantly reminding me of my innocence in a world that seemed determined to prey upon it.

But being hurt was coming close, close to my heart. I got a boyfriend when I was 16. He was so perfect and dreamy. He would take me to places I’d never been, hold me while I cried, and make me feel loved. I fell in love, or at least what I thought was love. He was unloyal. I was hurt; I was too tired of being hurt. I was hurt by the men close to me. I feared being broken by loved ones more than those I didn’t know.

As a child, I always thought boys were supposed to protect and be our knights in shining armor like the princes in the movies, not the villains. I began to question whether what I felt was love or a desperate longing for validation and acceptance. Had I been so blinded by my desires that I had failed to see the warning signs? I started to question everything I once believed about love and relationships. Was it naive to expect loyalty and
protection from the men in my life? Was I simply living in a fantasy world created by fairy tales and romantic movies?

The more I pondered these questions, the more I realized that my experiences were not unique. Countless women around the world have faced similar betrayals and heartbreaks. It seemed as though the narrative of the perfect prince charming had been shattered, replaced by the harsh reality of human imperfection.

Is this what it’s like to be a woman? To live in constant fear of being hurt? Has it always been this way, and I just had to grow up to see it? As I reflected on my experiences, I couldn’t help but wonder if this was the harsh reality of womanhood – a perpetual state of vulnerability, constantly on guard against the threat of harm, whether from strangers or those closest to us. Was this the fate that awaited every girl as she journeyed into womanhood, or had I simply been blind to it until now?

Looking back, I realized that the seeds of fear and mistrust had been planted long before I could comprehend their significance. From the subtle messages ingrained in societal norms to the blatant displays of misogyny and violence that permeated our culture, the signs had always been there, lurking beneath the surface, waiting to reveal themselves in moments of crisis.

I was a child, I was a girl, and I am a woman.
There she was. Or there – it – was. The body of a lady left in the dust, a soul so lost with no hopes of being found.

She can function because the patterns of remembrance ring true; most of the time. You can chat her ear off and her response will always shine. She'll dance, even sing.

But you don’t know who you are talking to. She doesn’t know who you are talking to. Her soul is covered in gunk, her mind is in a never ending loop.

She fails to remember how simple everything was when she was clean. There is no sparkling message flowing about her mind reminding her to remember. Remember the feeling of paint in between your fingers, remember the glory of waking up in your bright sunny room, remember your energy, remember the way the trees dance with you.

Her eyes melt in the mirror.
Society’s crop is thriving amongst the soil in her brain. The absolute ethereal being facing her, is now labeled “less than.” She never questions what she’s comparing it to, all she knows is that is how she should be, and this is how she is.

Once again, there is no sparkling message swirling through her brain to remind her that her body is everything. There is nothing to compare it to, it’s simply everything. It does everything for her; it cleans her – it keeps her alive. And yet she stands there with a knife to its flesh, staring it down with not an ounce of gratitude beaming through her eyes. And what’s it left to think? The body stands there perfectly as perfect can get, and takes it because the body will do anything she desires. It can stand up, but not for itself.

So (she) walk(s) away from that wretched wall hanging, and find(s) solace in a chair. A chair in which she sinks. Sinking slowly. Spiraling quickly. Into a deep dark blackhole. The fear climbs higher and higher until her crown is soaked in deception. She sits and thinks. Thinks and sits. About none other than everything wrong.

At the foot of the chair lies her soul; suffocated by the occupant of fear that has taken over her body.

It goes on like this for months and then years, until one day she remembers. The day she reads that sparkling sign. It reminded her of everything. She listened and slowly slowly scraped away
the gunk (years upon years). She left her cluttered mind and found her soul.

To feel became her favorite thing to do. It felt like everything all at once. She was liberated and gained custody of her best friend; who was with her the whole time.

She felt sorry for her wickedness. The way she thought, the way she spoke to her own self, it repulsed her.

Ultimately leading to forgiveness and acceptance (months upon months), she soon realized– you can’t go back, only now.

Her eyes looked upon numerous flowers since, her favorite being the one behind her ear when she’d look in the mirror. The mirror became a work of art every time she walked by. What a relief it was. Everything was simpler, there was no dread in living because she remembered.

By recalling her self, she was welcomed into this land of love. They opened the doors, And…
Showed her the birds chirping,
Oh, how they sound like a symphony, she thought.
And- and
They showed her this waterfall
It was shouting to the trees, offering them a free ride to a new journey
How generous and sweet of that old waterfall

Infinite examples could display the feeling of admiring a moment as it is. These moments make up every reality. Not one person gets to leave this present moment, and yet it tends to be the moment everyone likes to escape from.

Xoxo,
Annie Rose Foldenaur
Amber said she was meant to give her bracelet away to someone, and she saw me walk back into the classroom after I left to use the bathroom and she knew I was the one god intended it for. “Don't sink, float” the bracelet said. I tried to accept it, like it was a present from her and from above.

She also said she had been possessed by a demon that was making her speak Greek. And that god told her to control the height of the waves in the ocean and that it worked, it really worked.

I wondered if she had ever listened to Greek before or tried to learn it. I didn’t doubt the waves, but I wasn’t big on demonic possession, especially one that just made someone say some spooky accent sounds.

I spent time in the moldy music room making fanfiction of Neopets stories with evil faeries and runaway kids on Lutari Island, and I kept wishing I could learn guitar. I wasn't ready for the type of school it was. I was in a concrete block with three girls, me the loser of the group slated to be the only person on the top bunk- unanimously. Everyone set up their stuff and made themselves comfortable, but I didn't know how to do that, and no one had taught me. I spent the school year hiding and avoiding my household, only asking for things when I really needed it like when I was freezing in the fall with no clothes. Danika lent me a hoodie for one week before saying I had to give it back, and I went back to freezing.

I had a bad feeling in my bones and in my stomach. I told my young mentor Rachel, my friend Julia, the trip leader Corrin
and her husband Josh, and some other adults in charge of our school, too. Everyone told me I was wrong, that this would be good for me and that I needed to go for god. I would just be disappointing everyone I wrote back to home about my trip. I promised them I would go, and I wouldn’t graduate if I didn’t go.

There was a home mission I asked to do. We were told that night we could do the home mission if we felt led to, but during that night in the tiny worship room I couldn’t feel what to do. I had heard and seen the word Nigeria, though I wasn’t sure what it meant. A girl younger than all of us was crying in the corner. It called my attention louder, and so I went to her and held her in my arms. Everyone else was sprawled out, cross legged on the floor with only christmas lights goldening their faces. By the time I had to give my response, I hadn’t been able to finish my prayers to get an answer. I walked to one side of the room.

I used the same tiny tote bag I had moved to school in for the airport journey. Four shirts, 3 skirts, 2 pants. Toothbrush and toothpaste, a phone charger I couldn’t use because of voltage differences, and a pack of vitamins and a box of protein bars. They fit inside the black canvas neatly. I kept an eye out during our van ride for the satanic shrine in the ocean cliffs, but somehow, I missed it. I could see the three long stone slabs balanced on top of the layers of concrete pillars covered in the goats and buddha-baphomet. Three layers of art jutting into the seaside cliffscape. The image lived in my mind as something strange and beautiful I had never seen before. A human creation silhouetted by ocean waves.

Homophobic. Styrofoam. I remember those two words from my rooftop friend. We’d sit on the kitchen rooftop and look at the ocean. It was the only time I helped break the school rules as he rolled up cigarettes and smoked them. I always wished I could share more closely those moments, but I sat and watched
as the softly rolled up nicotine was squeezed between his lips-breathing in and letting go to breathe out.

“It was homophobic bullshit at the party. Hundreds of people and styrofoam plates and plastic forks. They have so much money, but they fill bags and bags with waste and can’t even use real plates and wash them.”

Out in the soccer field the night before our flights, Kristian cried. The married Jonnathan and Julia and I held him, said we were his friends and that he’ll be okay. I wished and wished I was on the home mission. I felt it everywhere that was where I was meant to be, praying for all my classmates every moment and every day.

Chunks of rubber between the plasticky blades of grass of this artificial soccer field, reminding me of other strange things at my school. Bible-guitar teacher back-hand-slaps, a male mentor threatening my roommate he had a crush on, and me being so so cold everyday and everynight with no clothes. It was a month into fall that felt like a year and then someone finally unlocked the door to the donated clothes covered in dried paint for me. Thank god. However, this night we were waiting and waiting for the inevitable that was going to happen when we woke up the next morning- everyone happy besides me and Kristian who were crying and crying in the spotlights of the soccer field. Kristian needed me, but I couldn’t go with him to Mexico, and I needed him, but he couldn’t come with me to Uganda. Hugs and tears and the three of us reassured Kristian, and then the married couple reassured me. Last van ride to go in the morning.

The flight from San Diego to Newark was fine, but our connecting flight was canceled. That night we were trapped on the tarmac for 10 hours next to a doggy bathroom until we were finally able to get through the line. They sent us food vouchers
and then taxied us to a hotel they said we could eat at- but the restaurant within the hotel was closed for renovations. The next day at the airport they said the vouchers wouldn't work because they were for a different airport, so we just waited for our longest flight.

I loved flying from Newark to Brussels. They gave us these funny little European airplane meals in hot cardboard boxes. 16 hours in and for the last meal we got melted brie and cuts of bread loaf which felt homemade to me. My classmates hated the brie, and I loved it, so they gave me five extra wheels of brie to eat. I stuffed each one of them into my face before we got off the plane for our next layover. In the Brussels airport I bought an umbrella to protect me from the rain and sun with the print of the world map on it, and then I bought a book about forgetfulness and separation from loved ones. That book was called Buried Giant by Kazuo Ishiguro.

The first night in Uganda we went through customs and then took a bus to our school in Jinja. In the darkness of the night, I closed my eyes and listened to us bump along paved roads and dirt roads. When we arrived at the school, we started to slight downward on this muddy hill right outside of our boarding houses. I stepped out onto wet mud and followed the street lamp and the little outdoor lamp on the front of the house. I realized as soon as I got there, I didn’t have my umbrella, and I turned around and the bus had already left. I asked if it was possible to call the bus or if I could get it back, and I was told I was making a big deal out of nothing.

We had a kitchen with a static electrocuting outlet that would shock you if you reached your hand out or held a fork. A bathroom with cold water. A triple bunk bed like three caskets stacked on top of one another. I took the bottom bunk and tied up my mosquito net. I tried to knot the holes closed, and when
I slept, they would fall open and I would wake up to the buzzing in my ears and bites on my body.

Two weeks into Uganda and I regretted my decision to go. I wished and I wished to go home. My only friend in the group spoke to me the day before the trip, and then stopped because he had other closer friends who he was now spending everyday with.

I remember exploring the first mission location- a YWAM school in Jinja. I remember spying on lizards and spiders in different empty buildings, and strange cocoon tunnels that let long skinny winged bugs crawl between sealed doors in and outside of closed buildings. In Jinja, we had a lot of missionary work in dirty city places. I remember first the disabled children’s home with babies covered in flies all day and night, the orphan center where kids from the street came for tea and bible lessons (and slaps on top of their heads by the pastor). Kids were sick with malaria, and kids told us they wished they were white like us.

Three tiny bird eggs were smashed against the concrete. Hunted by lizards gulping up the nutrients. Abandoning the half-eaten children on the ground for me to find. I used a rock and a stick to pick up the one that had an entire baby bird inside of it intact with no feathers, and I brought it over to somewhere pretty and dug a hole with the rock and stick. After I buried it, I used a rectangular rock to make a grave. When I went to bed that night, I thought about the darkness over the school, the wet mud and dewy leaves, how I lost my umbrella. I slept and when I woke that morning, I went to check the grave. Unearthed I found the baby bird, ants digging it out of the ground. I thought about reburying it, but felt it would be better if I just left.

Everyday, we got a piece of white bread with margarine and sugar for breakfast. The good days were Friday when we got a
boiled egg and funky milk tea in the morning, and the extra good days were when we did missions in the city. We got to have rolex for lunch cooked over a fire in the street- eggs fried on chapati with green chillies. It was so good. Our other lunches were posho, (boiled corn meal) rice, brown beans, and meat macheted off with bone shards, fire ash and sand. I brought protein bars and vitamins because I knew I might have a hard time, but I really struggled with the food. The bonfire flavor was in every piece of meat we had and permeated into anything it touched. I thought I would be hungry enough to ignore it, but every time I tasted ashes from the fire or crunched down on a piece of bone I felt like puking and lost my appetite. It was crazy.

We got an opportunity to do prison outreach. They asked us if anyone felt led to go to women's ministry or men's ministry that didn't match their gender, and I knew I did. I raised my hand to go to men's prison ministry because I felt it inside of me that I wasn't meant to go to women's and that I had no place there. I didn't match women, and I wasn't going to be helpful or feel okay in that gendered space. I went with the guys up through the mountains to this men's prison. There were two layers of metal walls that reached high up in the air and guards with machine guns watching the perimeter. We were searched and then let in one at a time inside of the walls. Each of us was given a white plastic lawn chair which we propped against the wall. Then, a man came out and called the prisoners out to the courtyard. They came from three stories of prison cells in files, and they all sat in the grass and dirt and sun with only a sparse tree giving them shade. The young men from my school prayed and gave sermons. I stayed quiet except for on one occasion.

“God, help these men with their struggles, with their responsibilities,” one of our local guides prayed.

“God, I pray these men become strengthened in you,” I think my friend Jackson prayed.
“Give them wisdom, help guide them,” someone else said.

I thought that none of these people have ever been trapped like I have... They don’t understand what these men are going through having to live like this. Years in the same place. Years alone and doing nothing.

Right now, I have to relive the moment and rethink what I thought, to conjure up what I would’ve prayed with what I knew at that time. Whatever had brought them here, they were trapped in a tiny pen with nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to be with. That was what drove me to come to my school in the first place, and I was still experiencing it now.

“God, I pray you help these men through their struggles. Give them comfort, give them peace, help them to connect to one another and find hope for the future. Thank you for your kindness, thank you for them.”

It was something like that, and I felt the air change, I saw these men sit up straight, their stern faces uplifted just a little after I interrupted with my prayer. It felt like I did something that was true to me, that it was right, and that other people recognized it was right.

One day during outreach, we climbed down the hill outside of the school we were staying at through forest and mud paths. We found a small settlement of mud huts at this flat area full of streams. We stopped at each house and with each person to offer them our prayers.

I laid myself down at her feet to pray as hard as I could. I stayed on my knees for twenty minutes, far beyond when my legs went numb, and everything hurt. I knew something wasn’t right with her life, and I wanted to conjure up a happy future. I was in the dark of her hut in the mud, praying with my classmates around
us adding their prayers. We hugged her and left the forest huts that were outside of the walled school.

My favorite outreach was going into the marketplace of Jinja and talking to the Muslims there. The chaos and beauty were like static with loud labyrinths of sewing factories and four-story tall open markets full of fruit and meat and secondhand toys. Each of the Muslim store owners there always asked for the same prayer, “please let my business be successful.” My favorite person we spoke to was a man named Adam. We wandered down this brightly lit alleyway full of bars and just a few people. Adam was there and started talking to us. He was an Islamic refugee from the middle east living in Uganda as a drug dealer. He was kind and patient and tried to understand us. My classmates asked him if he should be selling drugs if it is bad for people, but he said that it was just them trying to survive in this place.

At some point Corrin asked me if I was okay. I had been searching for rocks shaped like Africa in the refugee camp of rocks and rocks. I think I said yes, or that it was hard, but I wasn’t sure what to say. She said to let her know if I needed anything.

Our guitarist became sick with malaria after not remembering to take his medicine. We were at a church in the refugee camp, and they had no one to put music on. I felt led, and I felt scared. I went to the front of the church and, with no music, I sang a modified version of “No Matter What” from Steven Universe. The church loved it and said they took a video of me and asked for the lyrics. I panicked and had to tell them it was by someone named Rebecca Sugar. I realized I might’ve gotten them into trouble with copyright infringement and didn't know how to explain it to them, and then I realized I might've gotten myself in trouble for singing a song from a cartoon they might not like.

We went on a sad safari towards the end of the trip. I was sitting
alone in the front. I heard this conversation after the morning fog had cleared.

“The lions have been turned homosexual by the white tourists teaching them how to have gay sex,” our guide from the YWAM school told us. “Homosexuality has been made illegal in Uganda so we can execute the gays now.” Our leader Josh tried to argue with him and said that even if being gay is wrong, isn’t it better to let gay people live in peace so they can have a chance to go to heaven one day?

Perhaps it was good he didn’t try to argue about white people teaching the lions gay sex.

The last days in Uganda we went to a tourist destination, but I was sick and stayed alone in the motel.

Covid 19 had started its approach immediately after Uganda. I had one month of volunteering in the kitchen before I flew home to Minnesota. During the flight I was between two missionary women. They gave me chocolate and raspberries, a sign from god I thought since those were the two things I missed the most the last days in Uganda. Then what we spoke hurled me out of the experience.

“I’ve always wondered about speaking in tongues. In my church, if you can’t speak tongues, you’re not a born-again Christian. I know I want to, and I know I’ve gotten close to it, but it’s always been too scary for me. It really scares me,” I told her.

“Speaking in tongues is something you just gotta do, it’s not hard. The bible says to ‘utter a noise.’”

She babbled like a baby, loudly, with everyone around us hearing her making up sounds. After a moment, I said, “Oh, you know I’m actually so tired from my trip, I think I’m just gonna lay my head down on the tray here.”
I was horrified, I was embarrassed, and I was betrayed. All of this time spent doing missionary work and doing what I was supposed to do. Speaking in tongues isn't supposed to be you pretending to speak like a bumbling baby, it is supposed to be the holy spirit itself possessing you and speaking through you in the language of angels. This was a scam. What was everyone else doing when they spoke in tongues? Were they lying to me?

Baphomet Shrine, Baja Mexico, 2019-2020
Sitting with Kristan, Tijuana Mexico, 2019
Flying Back Home to Minneapolis, February 2020
A worn out white canvas bag, cube shaped, dingy, lined and falsely protected by a layer of plastic. This is what held the belongings of my older sister and I as we were exchanged between our parents in the Brooklyn Park police station parking lot. While there were no criminals involved in these exchanges there were two toddlers and a couple previously married. A bag that was used every other weekend and every Tuesday night to hold the toddler sized clothes, my sisters baby blanket, and my blanket bunny originally named, “Bunny.” Much like the white plastic toddler bed that I slept in for far too long, beyond when I comfortably fit in it, this white bag was used to the point of no repair where the strap broke and the plastic bits were flaking off. This bag was replaced before my constraining bed with a beige canvas tote bag with a colorful logo of one of the companies my father’s workplace printed for, a free and otherwise useless bag to my father, but at least the bag was bigger…

That bag too became obsolete, not because it was worn out but because it was too small, and used less frequently. Amanda and I got older, our school started earlier, we started to build our own lives, we had our own bags we used every other weekend with the death of the Tuesdays. The death of Tuesdays that started because Amanda was going into highschool and school started too early for my Dad to drop us off in the morning before work. Tuesdays that became Tuesday dinners that were taken over by sports practices and homework, so much homework, so much homework that he never understood, and I don’t think he ever
will. Homework that involved the sewing of my navy blue duffle bag in eighth grade that became the bag I would take back and forth along with myself to my father’s house, a labor he would never understand.

The same bag that was used on my graduation day to hold my belongings, a change of clothes, water bottle, wallet, chapstick, all the things I needed for the senior overnight party I would be bussed off to following my graduation. The bag that my mom held for me the whole time and exchanged the belongings in it with me after graduation, where my father was not. Where my father was not because he decided, just like with every other event that he attended for my sister and I, that he had to leave early to beat the traffic because he had work the next day, or he didn’t want to go to bed too late, he had a long day. I knew my bag would be there for me, I knew my mother would be there for me, not because she had my bag but because she was there for me to see me graduate. I guess I should have given my father the bag because maybe then he would’ve had an obligation to stay. Sure, he stayed to see me walk across the stage to accept my empty diploma holder. He didn’t stay to see me ceremoniously move my tassel from one side to the other to signify my graduation, he didn’t stay to see me afterward, hug me, congratulate me, acknowledge me. Instead I was met with my bag, my mother, and my sister holding back tears because not only had he left me, he left my sister there, because she cared, she cared to see me fully graduate, she cared to see and congratulate me afterward.

The bag that I sewed in eighth grade, a handmade navy blue duffle bag, was there for me more than my father was at my graduation and otherwise. I owe this bag thanks for coming together for me, for not coming apart for me, for staying together for me, for being there for me, for being what protected my things, protected me every other weekend,
something my father will never understand. This bag wasn’t free, this bag wasn’t obsolete, I was proud of this bag and this bag was proud of me. A bag that has had more presence in my life since its creation in eighth grade than my father, a bag that I still use two years into college, a bag that doesn’t see the inside of my father’s truck or my father’s house anymore, a bag that sees the inside of my apartment, the inside of my boyfriend’s house, Annie’s freshman year dorm, a summer camping trip to Grand Marais last summer, a bag that will go everywhere with me. I have had many bags, starting from the one used when I was a toddler to go to my father’s. I believe I will always come back to my navy blue duffle bag, even when I don’t come back to my mother or my father.

A bag that I had to work for in order for it to work for me. A bag that I dedicated myself to at thirteen, a bag that I truly cared about. A bag that, while it was a school project, kept its place in my mind wherever I went until I finished it. A bag that I made a lot of mistakes when I was making it, but I never gave up and it will never give up on me. A bag that while the whole process of making it wasn’t easy, I don’t feel ashamed to look at it. A bag that doesn’t conjure up the most complicated emotions I have ever experienced. A bag that doesn’t make me feel guilty when I spend time away from it, because I will always return to it. A bag that I treat gently, even after all these years afraid that the threads holding it together could start to come apart at any moment if I am not careful enough. A harsh reality to admit that I treat a bag better than how some of the people in my life who should be closest to me treat me.

A bag that doesn’t make me think about the meaning of “bite the hand that feeds you,” the meaning of love, the meaning of family.

A dad that wants to be praised for the bare minimum. Parents that claimed they never wanted to talk about money around
their young children. A father that complained about child support to his children. A mother that accidentally raised children so aware of finance they still say thank you after everything, even the grocery store. A father that doesn’t know how to spend time with his children beyond watching movies and going through the same series of questions everytime they interact. “How are you?” “How is school?” “How was work?” A father that didn’t want to work at fatherhood, and could never work at sewing a bag himself.

A bag that was there to see it all. Although one bag wasn’t there the whole time, the whole life. Each bag understood what the last one had gone through, a new life already burdened by the past of another. A bag that wasn’t given the chance to be great, left at a predisposition for mediocrity and practicality. A bag that was the one guaranteed constant, source of assurance, the one to be relied upon. A bag that never relayed the feeling of second best, even if it was forced to accept that in its past. A bag that personifies so much that the being who should be its portrayal, role model, mirror image, could never accomplish. A bag that really isn’t a bag at all.

A bag that couldn’t have consented to being made. A child that couldn’t have consented to being made. Two separate entities that didn’t ask to be brought into this world that were united by that fact, among others.

A bag usually has two handles, mine all have except for the duffel I made with two handles and a long strap. Nevertheless, children usually have two parents, I do except for their never really being together in my lifetime and my stepmom. I find it funny. Bags have two handles, but they’re usually held by just one person, it would look a little silly if two people were holding one bag together, or would it look sweet? Two parents, each holding one hand of their child while walking all together, occasionally lifting their child up and swinging them a bit. I
wonder what my past would have been like if I had one parent holding one handle of my bag and one parent holding the other handle of my bag. I’ve always held the handles of my bag alone.

While they may not all be good memories, each bag has a story to tell. All of these bags have experienced the music my father would play on the car rides to his house whether it was Kool 108 or whatever cd he had gotten most recently. Because of my father my bag and I know all of the tracks to Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* and Zac Brown Band's *The Foundation*, more Johnny Cash songs than I can name, and more music by The Eagles than most in my parents generation. A bag that sat with me as I silently listened to the lyrics of the songs my father would play on repeat, wondering what my father thought of them, who he thought of while listening to them, or why he liked them. A bag that shared a silent discourse with me when my father would play “Highway 20 Ride” by Zac Brown Band. The same thoughts from when I was a single-digit aged child to now still remain in my mind, is that how my father felt about my sister and I, is that how he perceived himself? I’ll never ask my father about this just like I will never get a response from a bag, my bag.

Maybe I have fallen to the same fault my father has, I have not thought about the future. There are many reasons why people have kids. There are many reasons why people have bags. However, what no one thinks about when they’re thinking about having a kid, getting a bag, is what will happen when they're gone. Who will care for my bag, use but not abuse? What will be left when I am no longer here?
PART 2
If you have ever been to Chicago, then you know how beautiful it is. With the tall buildings and Chicago River running straight through the middle. The architecture is unique and carefully crafted oh so many years ago. I could stand and stare at the buildings alone for hours. But that is not the reason I traveled to Chicago in July of 2022. While seeing The Bean and shopping on Michigan Ave were perks of my trip, these were not the main pulls for the reason why 3 of my closest friends and I piled into a car for 6 hours and 14 minutes (if you don’t make any stop).

July 22, 2022 10:00am

I arrived at my good friend Greta’s house. My mom dropped me off. With me I had a suitcase, a backpack, and my pillow. As my mom helped me get all of my baggage out of the car, Greta and her mom emerged from their front door with wide grins across their faces. “Today is finally the day!” says Greta’s mom. Her name is Sara and I have known her since Greta and I became best friends in kindergarten. My mom lets out an excited “Woop Woop!” and Greta and I just laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. Greta and I loaded my bags into the trunk and backseat of the car, while behind us our friends Natalie (who Greta and I met in 8th grade) and Olivia (who Greta and I met in 5th grade) arrived. That’s 12, 4, and 7 years of friendship, as we are all 17 years old. Their moms also drove them over. We have a very similar interaction of greetings and the girls all chat about how excited we are for the next 4 days together. Greta then helps Natalie and Olivia load their bags into the car as well. We all say
a farewell to our moms with big hugs and promise to be well behaved. Then Greta, Natalie, Olivia, Sara and I all load into the car and back out of the driveway. Chicago awaits!

July 22, 2022 5:00pm

The car ride felt long and we sang along to our favorite songs for a majority of it. After driving for so many hours that my legs went numb and making only one stop for a lunch of Jimmy John’s subs, we arrived at our hotel in Hinsdale, Illinois. This is where Greta’s mom, Sara, was born and grew up, so she knows the area quite well and gave us a quick tour around the main town before arriving at the hotel (since she was the one driving). Hinsdale is about 30 minutes from the city of Chicago. We mustered up our last bit of energy and used it to unload the car and bring our bags to our room. All of the girls shared a room, and Sara had her own room across the hall. As we unpacked a little bit and settled in, Natalie began scouting Google for fun dinner restaurants we could try. We debated between 2 different options before deciding on one that was in downtown Hinsdale. Next was the fun part, getting ready! Even though it was nearing 6:00pm and it would be chilly soon, it was still warm enough for shorts and short-sleeves. I remember how much fun it was to pick out an outfit and do my makeup and hair with my best friends, while we listened to our shared playlist of course. We all still had the feeling of fresh excitement about where our Chicago weekend was going to take us.

July 22, 2022 10:00pm

After a fabulous dinner of pizza and salad, and loads of pictures during the sunset, we all headed back to the hotel we would call home until Sunday. Since we had experienced a busy travel and
July 23, 2022 7:00am

We woke up to the sound of our alarms blaring, and even though it was early we didn't care. We knew that we had a super fun day ahead of us. After getting ready for the day and eating a quick breakfast in the hotel lobby, we were ready to go into the city. At breakfast we had planned our itinerary for the day. It included driving into the city, visiting The Bean, stopping for a coffee, walking around, lunch by the river, a boat tour of all of the important buildings surrounding the Chicago River, more shopping, dinner, and then whatever else we had time for. Sara would be with us for the meals and the boat tour, but other than that she would be doing her own exploring and sightseeing in a city she once lived so close to. Knowing we had all of these activities to get through we set off around 9:00 am. All of these things went exactly as planned and it was an awesome day.

July 23, 2022 3:00pm

I would say that my favorite part was during the shopping portion of the day. A fun fact about me is that I love to wear rings. During this time in my life, I was still building my ring collection that I would wear every day. Luckily for me, my friends also love rings. While shopping we decided to go into Pandora to just look around. While looking at rings in a glass case, Olivia pointed out a cute one with a slight v shape. Natalie, Greta, and I all crowded around to admire the ring for ourselves. It was at this moment that we all knew we would be leaving with matching rings. After about 30 minutes of looking over our options, deciding to get a second ring with a vine pattern
wrapping around it that Natalie found, and then trying on lots of different sizes of both rings, we checked out and skipped out of the store with the widest smiles I’ve ever seen. Even though I’m not really friends with Olivia and Greta anymore, I wear my rings everyday as a reminder of how much fun I once had with them and how much love I have for them.

**July 24, 2022 9:00am**

By the time 9:00am rolled around Natalie, Greta, Olivia, and I were awake, ready for the day, and had a change of clothes packed for the event that was happening that evening. This event was the whole reason we traveled to Chicago in the first place. We could not wait. But before this event, we had a busy day. For our second day in Chicago we had an itinerary that consisted of breakfast in Hinsdale, a trip to the Lincoln Park Conservatory and the Chicago Zoo, then to The Art Institute of Chicago, then coffee of course, followed by some wandering, dinner, then the main spectacle of the trip. What a busy day!

**July 24, 2022 10:00am**

We had breakfast at the Egg Harbor Cafe, and I cannot recommend it enough. I kid you not, I still dream about the breakfast that I had here. It consisted of hash browns topped with green onions, a plain bagel with plain cream cheese, and an iced vanilla latte. The Egg Harbor Cafe is also where my best friend Natalie and I took our very favorite photo together. This photo has resurfaced as phone and computer backgrounds, appeared in social media posts, and also been the cover of the yearly calendar we make. Overall an 11/10 experience and a great start to the day!
July 24, 2022 11:00am

After parking the car and doing some walking, Natalie, Greta, Olivia, Sara, and I entered the Lincoln Park Conservatory. This was a super fun stop because there were all kinds of different plants and even palm trees! We enjoyed having Sara take pictures of us in front of every fascinating thing we saw. Once we had seen every plant and walked every trail, we left the conservatory and started to walk across a grassy field to the Chicago Zoo. One thing about my friends and I, we LOVE to go to the zoo. Now don't get me wrong it does make me super sad to see all of the animals encaged. But for some odd reason we have always loved trips to the zoo. We walked around for a while and spent the most time looking at the aquatic animals. There were huge tanks with fish of all colors, sharks, stingrays, otters, seals, and many more. This was unanimously our favorite area to explore.

July 24, 2022 1:30pm

After a stop for lunch, the group was ready to tackle The Art Institute of Chicago. I remember the building itself was so beautiful with large stained glass windows and elegant staircases. The building was also massive and it seemed that we walked around for hours and still didn't see every piece of art. What stood out to me the most were the Monet paintings. I could stare at the waterlily painting forever and notice new things and brush strokes after every blink. It was so surreal to be that close to such famous and world-known works. After we finished walking around the museum. We headed down the road to a cute coffee shop and all ordered the classic “iced vanilla latte please!” When we were refreshed and recharged,
we did more typical tourist wandering around. Then we were hungry again and it was time for dinner.

**July 24, 2022 4:00pm**

We arrived at a rooftop restaurant at around 4:00pm. Once we had an appetizer and an icy water, Natalie and I set out to find the bathroom for our outfit change. After walking down some rickety stairs and through a couple narrow hallways, we finally found it. After about 10 minutes, lots of chatting, laughing at the crazy setting around us, and debriefing pretty much our whole lives up until that moment, we were changed and event ready. We trekked back up to the table and were pleased to find that our food had arrived. Once clear plates covered the table, Greta and Olivia set out on the same outfit change adventure. All changed and ready, we all piled back into Sara’s car and set off in the direction of Soldier Field. It was time for the big event.

**July 24, 2022 6:30pm**

By this time we had parked the car, taken a million pictures, ventured to the bathroom, walked around, and browsed social media from our seats for a while. Natalie, Greta, Olivia, and I all sat in a row. Four peas in a pod. While Sara sat a couple rows upwards from us, she had a priority of letting us have a feeling of freedom but still keeping a watchful eye as we were still young girls. The first opener started to perform and honestly I don’t remember too much of it. What I do remember was watching the crew work together to set up the stage, how blue and clear the sky was, thinking how small the people on the floor looked and wondering when the concert was going to start. The second opener started and it was actually Mike Dean. For those of you who may not know, Mike Dean is a famous
producer and audio mixer who works with my all time favorite artist, Travis Scott. Mike Dean is extremely talented, but you would never be able to tell that from his opening act. It was horrendous. I remember it being so loud and just sounding like a bunch of random off-key noises. Greta and I talked about how this guy could have made Astroworld (a Grammy nominated album by Travis Scott), and somehow was also the cause of these horrid sounds. Nonetheless we sat through it all because at least it’s a funny story now.

July 24, 2022 9:00pm

Natalie, Greta, Olivia, I assume Sara, and I were getting restless as it became dark over Soldier Field. The sun was setting and the busy day was starting to catch up to us. Suddenly we heard the Dawn FM intro start to play over the loudspeakers. That’s right! We had come to Chicago for The Weeknd concert. This was the US leg of his Dawn FM tour. As the backdrop miniature city lit up and background dancers filled the stage, we waited for the moment we would see Abel (aka The Weeknd). Natalie, Greta, Olivia, Sara, and I were all huge fans of The Weeknd and listened to his music on a regular basis. This included almost the whole drive to Chicago, in concert preparation of course. As the anticipation grew, we jumped out of our seats. The concert consisted of strobe lights, crazy dance moves, and all of our favorite songs. The setlist contained lots of his Dawn FM album, but also a lot of his top hits from his previous albums. We laughed, sang, danced, and cried with no worries. This is what I believe true happiness feels like. I have few pictures and videos from the actual concert because I didn’t want to miss a second, and also my phone was at about 20% battery after our crazy sightseeing day. What a blessing in disguise. This was a moment that I never ever wanted to leave.
This was the best 3 minutes and 32 seconds of the whole Chicago weekend. If you've never listened to any song by The Weeknd, I suggest you listen to this one. “Less Than Zero” from the Dawn FM album. Truly I don’t think I've ever felt more bliss and peace than I did when this song began to play throughout Soldier Field. The strobe lights on and around the stage turned a beautiful light blue color that seemed to radiate throughout the whole stadium. Abel told everyone to turn their phone flashlights on, and of course we all listened. It was so crazy to see the wave of flashlights appearing from the crowd across the stadium from us. To see just how many people were packed into Soldier Field because of their love for The Weeknd was breathtaking and unifying. The sight is ingrained into my brain, and I pray that I never forget this moment. It is so absolutely bizarre to see how much this one song was bonding complete strangers. To look around the enormous stadium and see everyone singing, dancing, and being truly present in the moment gave me such a feeling of community with people I didn't even know. I couldn't do anything but try to remember everything about the environment around me. I think I somewhat successfully did that. We sang and danced our hearts out and Natalie, Greta, Olivia, and I were all in tears by the end of the song. With tear streaked faces and raspy voices, we group hugged and I made an internal promise to look out for these girls no matter where life took us. I don’t think I had ever experienced such a gratitude for anyone before in my life. I'll be forever thankful that I was given the opportunity to experience this within my lifetime and I will cherish these memories forever.
July 25, 2022 1:00am

By 1:00am we were safe in our room debriefing the events of the evening and watching the few videos we had. We were exhausted after our long day and then fighting our way through the crowds of people to get back to the car. Then we sat in traffic for a while before finally making it back to Hinsdale. We all fell asleep with big smiles and ringing ears. I know that I dreamt of the concert and I bet my friends did too.

July 26, 2022 9:00am

By 9:00am we had already gotten ready for the day, packed our bags up, loaded the car, and went 94 floors into the air. One last tourist stop before we left, 360 Chicago. Sara stayed in the car due to her fear of heights, but Natalie, Greta, Olivia, and I were up to the adventure. We traveled at what seemed like almost the speed of light in an elevator and arrived at the 94th floor before we knew it. After stopping to admire the views from all windows and directions and take lots of pictures, we looked at the souvenirs and then headed back down to ground level. Around 10am we were departing from the great city of Chicago. It was a pretty calm ride home filled with music, snacks, and of course naps.

July 26, 2022 5:00pm

I arrived home around 5:00pm and couldn't wait to share my tales and pictures with my family. As we sat down for a family dinner I talked their ear off and didn't stop for what seemed like hours. There was no space for questions or comments within my stream of consciousness. I was simply too excited by my
adventures and newfound feelings of freedom. I consider this Chicago trip very successful and I cannot wait to go back.
It is July. I am 7. I’m filling buckets with sand and calling out to my brother, “Cole!!! Will you please come play with me?” He is 10 and would rather be doing anything else than hanging out with his younger sister. Reluctantly he leaves his chair in the summer sun to engage in a round of filling the buckets with sand and then dumping them all out, just to start the process over again. He doesn’t say anything to me and we work alongside each other in comfortable silence.

It is July. I am 18. I’m sprawled out on the boat’s back seating area reading a book. It’s called “Every Summer After” by Carley Fortune. The perfect mid-summer read. The sun is directly overhead and beaming down on my shoulders and back. I feel warm and blissful. My dog is splashing around in the water nearby running after a tennis ball. I look up from my book to observe, I love to watch him swim. His brown fur reminds me of a sea otter when it is wet. The water looks dark from the shadows of nearby trees and I can tell it is cold to the touch. There is a green tint to the water due to mossy rocks and the fallen tree branches scattered all around. I glance around at the peaceful scene stretched out in front of me. I see the backside of the baby-blue painted cabin that has been in my family for generations. Large windows allow me to see into the living room and just a sliver of the kitchen. The cabin is wrapped with a trim of flowerbeds filled with pinks and oranges of all shades. Up close, there is no weed in sight. The old deck was destroyed in a storm a few years ago, the new deck extends farther out towards the lake. New furniture, picked with love and care, sits in the center of the deck. Yearning to be used for the first time. Later my family and I will eat dinner all together at this table.
I see the path of smooth stepping stones reaching from the shore to the deck. I slipped on these rocks many times as a little kid due to wet feet as I ran to the old rocking chairs on the deck, eager to show my parents my newest shell discovery. The once-sandy beach has been replaced with large rocks to sustain erosion. This makes me feel nostalgic because I remember the many summer days I spent with cousins on that patch of sand I claimed as my own. I can almost feel the texture of the dock that stretches out far into the lake. The plastic always leaves a bumpy imprint on the soles of my feet. My family is also on the boat, which is tied to the end of the dock. We love to tie the boat here because it gives the illusion that we are floating in the middle of the lake, but we have the convenience of being just a couple meters from the cabin. My parents are seated at the front of the boat in chairs facing towards the open lake, both focused on the magazines in front of them. My brother is napping on the couch-like bench in the middle of the boat. I know he will wake up soon and ask me to hangout. Our 3 year age gap doesn’t stop us from being friends anymore. I pick up my phone to skip the song that is blaring through my headphones. I’m in the midst of my summer country music kick, and today I can’t get enough of Morgan Wallen. I turn my phone off and focus my attention back onto my book. I’m beginning to feel ready for a midday nap, but I think I could get through another chapter first. I think to myself that life couldn’t possibly get any better. I have no work, sports, or life responsibilities here. The cabin is where I feel the most at peace. It is my favorite place in the whole world.

It is July. I am 5. Almost swallowed by my hot pink life jacket, I am showing my mom all of the different ways I can jump into the water. Each jump has a special name and limb placement. My mom smiles and claps after each one. She rates them all out of 10, though the numbers never dip below a 9.5. My brother watches this for a while before deciding that he has his own
jumps to showcase. He joins me at the edge of the dock with his matching blue life jacket.

It is January. I am 18. I am sitting in class. As I look out the windows at the falling snow, I can't help but to think about being at Half Moon Lake in 7 short months. The snow will be long gone and the hot sun will be shining. I grin as my heart feels full with anticipation. I simply cannot wait.

I love Half Moon Lake.
The Cabin

LAUREN GARNETT

If you know me, you’ll also know that I love spending summer days at the lake. On the cold days we experience here up in Duluth, I like to picture myself being back near the warm water. In the city of Menomonie, Wisconsin there sits a series of lakes through which the Red Cedar River flows. Just fifteen miles east, in the township of Wheaton lies my house. My cabin is not far from home, but the perfect distance to get away from everyday life. When the weather is warm and I’m not working, the chances are you’ll be able to find me at the lake. On the smaller part of Lake Tainter, you’ll find a small gray cabin. It is home to so many different memories from everyone in my dad’s family.

The cabin, which is owned by my great-grandma has two small bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, and a dining/living space. There isn’t a lot of room, but it’s a comfortable place for the family to gather. There’s a garage out back where we store all of our kayaks, paddle boards, and other things we take out into the water. In the cold months, we store our pontoon there as well as a fishing boat. One last thing on the property there is the guest house. It’s really just one room with a couch, some chairs, a table and a bed. Whenever the cabin itself is crowded, my cousins and I will all go hang out there to get away from all of the hustle and bustle of a family get-together.

On weekends that I go and stay there, I’m typically with my parents, sister, grandparents, and my cousin. My grandparents will take a bedroom, and so will my parents. The three of us that remain have to fight over our sleeping arrangements. Usually my cousin and I will argue over who has to share with my sister.
He’ll make an argument that because he’s the only “man” that he gets a couch to himself, and I get to share the tiny—and mildly uncomfortable—pullout couch with my sister. My argument is that I’m the oldest and obviously that means I get first pick. I always end up drawing the short end of the stick and have to share with my sister. No big deal I guess. None of that really matters though, especially when you wake up in the morning to the smell of fresh french toast, eggs, and bacon. It’s the moms that are up. A time for my mom to bond with her mother-in-law while also spilling the latest hot gossip from her job. My sister, cousin, and I have three things to do in the mornings. All of which allow us to avoid helping make breakfast. We’re either sleeping, listening to the gossip session while pretending to sleep, or silently playing games on our phones. Eventually, I’m the first to get up, and when I do I help set the table. My cousin will follow, and then my sister. After some time, the old guys get up from their slumbers and mosey out into the kitchen. Just in time for breakfast.

We all enjoy breakfast.

When we finish our meal, everyone either helps clean, or uses this time to change out of their pajamas for the day. On these mornings, I’ll usually help clean some dishes or clean the table from the sticky syrup, bacon grease, or spilled milk. Once that’s done, I’ll grab an outfit out of my thrown-together weekend bag and get ready for the day. I’ll then grab my hammock and a book before heading outside. There are two trees in particular between which I will always put my hammock. It gives me the perfect amount of shade, while also giving me the best look at the lake. I grab one strap and give the tree a big hug to wrap it around. I lift it up high enough to keep me off the ground before retreating to do it to the other tree. When I’m satisfied with my work, I grab the heavy-duty cloth of the hammock and clip it to each strap. Once I’m done with that, I’ll kick my sandals off and
pull myself up and into a sitting position before ultimately laying back down again. At this point, I’m able to take a deep breath in and begin reading. Unless there’s a bunch of little kids running around or other distractions, I won’t listen to any music while I’m reading. Instead, I’ll listen to the sounds of boats in the distance, waves crashing against each other, and birds flying through the air. I enjoy the silence, even if I only get a good twenty minutes of it. Now I’m not completely antisocial, obviously I love spending time with my family. We spend sunny days at the cabin on the lake. Usually things will start out super chill. My sister and I will typically take out the paddle boards, while my cousin will take a kayak… or fish off the dock. My sister and I will goof off out on the water. We’ll have our own yoga class, tan, and even jump in and swim. We would stay out on the lake like that all day if we could. It’s so calm and peaceful, that is until large waves come by. Eventually, we’ll decide that it’s probably time to head back. When we tie off the boards on the dock, we’ll look to my dad to see if we can take the boat out and go tubing. With some slight persuasion, he takes the boat down off the lift while we go and grab the tube. We attach the tow rope to the back of the boat before we decide who gets to go first. Before anyone can come to a consensus, my sister hops onto the back of the tube before giving us a smirk. My cousin and I just get onto the boat and take our places at the front. If you don’t know my dad, he shows no mercy when it comes to driving the boat with a tuber. My sister will get going and ask to slow down, does my dad slow down? Absolutely not.

After falling off a few times, I allow my cousin to go next so I can mentally and physically prepare for the hell that my dad is going to put me through. My dad once again whips his nephew all across the lake, although he doesn’t fall off as much because he’s able to hold on. Eventually it’s my turn to look death in the face and accept my fate. I slowly walk to the side of the boat before jumping onto the tube. I get comfortable as my dad adds
tension to the rope so he can begin my torture. I hold on tightly as he gasses it and goes flying across the lake. I don't even have time to scream before a laugh erupts out of me. Pure adrenaline rushes through me as I take in the surroundings that pass by me at a million miles per hour. One particular hard turn sends me outside of the boat's wake where the water is calm. Now this might sound like the best place to be, but let me tell you that if my dad is driving the boat it is the LAST place you want to be. He takes another quick turn which sends me back the other way across the wake where I inevitably flip over twice and off the tube. When I come up for air I can't do anything but laugh and chatter my teeth in the cold water. One of the spotters on the boat alerts my dad that I have fallen off and he turns around for me to go again for round two. He comes by and we chat for a moment before I swim back to the tube and climb on again. I take a moment to situate myself on the tube once again before giving a thumbs up to signal that I'm ready to go. My dad takes that as a sign and begins his wrath of terror on his oldest child. I grip the handles until my knuckles go white. My wet hair is flying all over the place and water is splashing in my face. I can't contain my smiles once again as I squint into the sunshine. Being at the lake is my favorite thing to do. I love it even more because I get to spend the time with my family. It's moments like that which seem to freeze my time on the tube in the middle of the lake. I snap back to reality when I go over a few large waves. I can feel my whole body bouncing off of the tube and into the air. My parents didn't raise a quitter so I hold on for dear life. I ultimately come out winning this battle over my dad. I don't fall off once after that and I get towed back to the dock reigning victorious. Weekend at the lake with my family are my favorite.
According to psychologists, the average adult has a brain capacity of about 2.5 million gigabytes. What that 2.5 million gigabytes is holding depends on the person. For all of us though, one thing remains constant. Everyone has memories, some good, some bad. How many memories do you think you could conjure up? It seems impossible to even begin because as students in college we have seen so much in our small amount of time on this Earth. We see so many things in our daily lives that become memories and we don’t even realize it. They may not be important or life-altering events, but they play a significant role in your day to the point where you’ll hold them in your memory. Now, these “memories” will probably last in your mind for less than a week, but think about the ones from years ago. As far back as you can remember. What is one memory that you hold in your mind, and cannot let go of? It can be as significant as seeing a sibling that was just born for the first time while in the hospital. It can also be a small memory that simply makes you smile, like walking down the sidewalk with a friend on a hot summer day. It could even be a memory about being in a car accident. Take this memory in your mind and create a vivid picture. What was the weather like? Who was there? Where were you? How did you feel? Think about all the important things to paint out the memory as you remember it. If you could go back in time to that very moment for five minutes only, would you? Could you? Memories can make you feel really good, but they can also make you feel quite the opposite.

If I could pick any memory to go back and time and relive, it would be seeing the ocean for the first time. The first time I
got to experience saltwater getting in my eyes and burning my nostrils, I was about six years old. In June of 2011 my family and I traveled to Orlando, Florida to celebrate my birthday, along with my cousin who had his birthday the same month as me. The drive to the beach from the condo we rented was about an hour and a half away. The reason we were so far was because we visited a few Disney Parks. That was a great time, although it required lots of walking. Even the six year-old me was a little bit lazy. Our family thought that a nice relaxing day at the beach would do us all some good. I remember spending most of the drive waiting impatiently for the sight of the ocean. As someone from Wisconsin, I was used to the freshwater lakes that turned green in July from upstream farming. I had never seen the ocean, but how different could it have been? Little six-year old me sitting packed in a van with her cousin, five, and sister, two, could not handle the rising anticipation. Thinking back on that trip now, I was probably one of the most annoying kids on the planet. Constantly asking if we were there yet, and probably creating hell on Earth for all six adults in the van.

When I was notified that we were almost to Cocoa Beach, I nearly burst out of my seat with excitement. I took my seatbelt off of my booster seat in the back of the van and stood up, only to be scolded by my grandmother who sat in the back with us kids. I promptly sat back down while looking out the windows at the underwhelming views of buildings passing by. After some time, the van was parked in a somewhat empty parking lot. An old looking playset along with some picnic tables sat not far from where the van sat. I was confused as to where we were because I saw no sand, and I definitely saw no ocean. Out of curiosity I asked what we were doing here. My dad told me we were at the beach of course. Now I may have been six, but I wasn’t stupid. I know what a beach was supposed to look like and this most certainly wasn’t it. My mom told me I needed to have a bit of patience as if I hadn’t known that
already. Apparently we were going to have a nice picnic lunch before we headed to the beach. My dad and uncle both moved two picnic tables together and we set up shop for a sandwich creating station. Thank goodness for the covered picnic space, because if I were in the sun my sandwich would become a grilled turkey-and-cheese in a matter of minutes.

My cousin and I nearly inhaled our food, and you’d think we hadn’t eaten in days. We made our way to the nearby playset to let out some pent up energy from the ride over. Still impatient as ever, I kept glancing around trying to make sense of how this could possibly be the right spot? At some point, I wandered a bit further away and found a small tree. It wasn’t very tall, but it had lots of branches that spread out. There were plenty of places that I could see that were perfect for climbing. I quickly analyzed my plan of attack and made my way to the top. That’s when I heard it. A continuous, rolling rumble. It sounded like a storm was brewing. I looked up through the canopy of the tree thinking there would be angry-looking clouds heading our way. I paused when my eyes met the clear blue sky. I was confused because surely I had just heard thunder? Right? I kept glancing everywhere trying to find the source of the thunderous noise, but to no avail, there was nothing that I could see making the noises. After making my way down and out of the tree, I ran to my family to ask if they heard the thunder. They all gave amused glances at each other before my grandpa told me what it was. He told me it was the ocean? Surely it wasn’t the water! The lakes back home didn’t sound like that, so I didn’t believe him. Not long after, all of the food from lunch had been put back into coolers and away in the van. My grandma grabbed the bag we took to the beaches back home, full of toys to play with in the sand. My mother had a bag full of towels and water. As a group, we made our way to a wooden planked path. I asked my family where this would take us because it looked a lot like the dock at our cabin. My aunt told me that it would take us right to the
beach. Still not convinced, I looked at my dad who was carrying my sister who just shrugged. At the front of the group with my cousin, we followed the path that led us through a line of trees and large bushes.

As we moved along, the sound only got louder and my excitement started to grow. After a turn around a corner, that’s when I saw it. It seemed like a vast expanse of nothingness, like the sky went on forever. As I got closer, I saw that it was water. The water rolled up onto shore before crashing onto the sand. That’s when I realized that the sound from before was the water. The thunderous roar was the ocean. I turned to my cousin and smiled at him before we took off our sandals and ran through the sand to the water. The only thing we could hear was the laughter coming from us before stopping just as the water crashed onto the sand. We simply got our feet wet at first, but not long after our family set their things down and we went to take off our clothes that covered our swimsuits. We were
promptly stopped for some “quick” pictures and sunscreen. Begrudgingly, we agreed and posed for a picture before making our way to the water again. We both cautiously got into the water before falling into a fit of laughter. We splashed each other without a care in the world, that was until we realized that the ocean did not taste very good. Our laughter was cut short by our faces contorting in disgust at the taste of the saltwater. After learning our lesson to not drink or look at the water too closely, we got some goggles and swam a bit deeper into the water, so a few extra yards before we were stopped by our parents. After acting like a couple of midwestern guppies for a while, we decided to get out of the water and make a sandcastle. Not understanding the concept of the tide, we quickly realized that the castle would have to be made much further away from the water. We stayed at that beach for hours, playing in the sand and rinsing off in the ocean. All that could be heard that day was the crashing of waves, laughter all over the beach, and the seagulls who weren’t afraid to get up close and personal. One moment that I can remember to this day was the breeze. I remember taking a minute on the beach just staring out at the water and closing my eyes. I felt the breeze glide across my skin and ever since, I long for that feeling every day. What I would give to go back in time and experience those happy moments for the first time again. The real question I should ask myself is about time. Would five minutes really suffice and allow me to truly experience the emotion of that day over again? I don’t think so. I don’t believe that any amount of time would truly make you feel the way you did in that moment, but if I ever got the chance to revisit that time in my life I would be extremely happy. That experience from over ten years ago has not only created an incredible memory, but an extreme love of the ocean.
Echeveria Lilacina

GRETA GOTTWALT

The little princess wants to grow up so fast but she still loves her pretty purple dresses. She is so skinny it is a marvel she can stand. She reaches up towards the violet sun, desperate to be in its light. Her dress gets shorter as she grows. She is dropping her leaves quickly, exposing her weak stem. I know this etiolation weakens her, drains her, tires her, but on she goes tall and proud. What else can I do in this dim cold winter?

She reminds me of a prince I once knew. Bold and resilient. He moved around, staying in new homes for brief times. He disappeared when she was young. Lost to time at the height of his glory.
Thoughts in an Art Museum

GRETA GOTTWALT

Silence

No, soft humming of a... heater? Occasional squeak of shoes, rustle of clothes, the soft scratch of my pencil, distant cheerful chatter

Quiet

The only light is on the paintings, I write from the residual of it

Thick, ornate, golden frames encompass, surround, protect grey and beige landscapes

Some frames are simple rectangles, others are almost as big as the painting they encompass

Does anyone give these frames a second thought?

The ornate swirls, leaves and flowers, someone crafted those too

I stand rooted in the center, surrounded by landscape, clear skies, rivers, oceans, humble houses

Worlds made up of mere brushstrokes

The silence holds me, comforts me, becomes a part of my being. It is almost reverent, respectful of each small window into a vast world, unwilling to disturb them
Each painting has a sky, peeking through clouds, trees or houses, or proudly on display in subtle ombres, or front and center in faintly different shades of blue.

Still I am rooted, too afraid to commit to examining one. I know that the moment I do I will be sucked into the world, the colors, the brushstrokes.

Examining, admiring, every little detail.

How much effort goes into a single tree, a single branch, a single leaf? How much thought went, goes, into each stroke, each line?

A single flick of a wrist could become a bird in flight, seemingly random splotches, when layered on top of each other, become a lush tree.

People come and go, slowly walking by the paintings, and I wonder how they can just walk by.

When I am rooted.

Can they take it all in?

My phone buzzes, still I am rooted, still I am in a trance, unwilling to go back to the real world.

I am in a world of golden frames and dull landscapes. I am sucked into a world that others just walk by, but someone 200 years ago decided to stop. They planted themselves for hours to take in the scenery, capture it, adapt it with their paints into the visual language of brush strokes. And now here I am, planted and growing roots, and watered by gold and paint and brush strokes, viewing distant worlds through a paintbrush, viewing seemingly mundane scenes with such intensity, engaged with a world in a way that I never experience otherwise.
The spell slowly slowly fades, I slowly slowly feel that I have drunk my fill, the comforting silence, the innocent paintings, have refreshed me

**French Coast Scene – Charles-Francois Daubigny**

And so I step closer to one

The intricate details become mere brushstrokes, dots of color

A swath of browns becomes distant buildings making up a town

The sky is elegant thick scribbles

A strip of blue is a vast ocean, with dots for ships

Careless strokes are careless blue flowers, tousled in the wind

My interest, my appreciation, my respect deepens

Blobs of color create a scene when under the masterful eye of a painter

I step even closer, the texture of the paint strokes stand out, the glossiness of it probably from preserving the painting

I notice subtle shades of pink in seemingly random spots

A stripe of teal suddenly stands out

I have drunk my fill

Onto the next

Yet I still linger
What's In My Pockets

GRETA GOTTWALT

What a person keeps with them says a lot about them, such as what they value or find important, and what they like or dislike. I am a maximalist when it comes to what I keep on my person. It feels wrong to leave the house without some sort of bag on my shoulder as I’ve been doing it since I was a child. I was a silly kid who refused to call my bag a purse almost until high school, even though that is what it was. What did a 9-year-old have to keep on their person at all times? Well, some string to play cat’s cradle of course, a pen and notepad, ChapStick, lip gloss, a hair clip that was never used as intended, probably a cool rock and a book.

What do I determine so important to always keep in my purse now? I still keep a pen or two and a notepad, ChapStick, lotion, gum, my phone and keys of course. Handy items like a nail file, nail clippers, band aids, wet wipes, Kleenex, a granola bar, a reusable straw or two. Things that earn you the title of “mom friend.”

And what have I determined so important that it must always be on my person? Every morning I wake up and get dressed for the day, as most of us do, and usually wear two necklaces, fit several items in my small lady-pockets, and always wear two bracelets that I even sleep with. One of my bracelets I made myself, another is a single-decade rosary bracelet. One of my necklaces was a gift from my friend, the other is a collection of saint medals. During school I clip my apartment keys, Ucard, and overabundance of keychains (including lotion) to my belt loop and sometimes fit it in my pocket and keep my rosary in the other pocket. It is these two items, my keys and my rosary,
that I pause in the doorway to check my pockets for before leaving the house.

The “Friendship Bracelet”

Saying I make friendship bracelets feels childish, cliché and camp-y, like saying I also enjoy singing kumbaya around campfires. I don’t think making friendship bracelets is what I do most of the time. Can I really call them friendship bracelets if I only sometimes make them for other people, and they only sometimes are actual, functional bracelets? I don’t think there is another word to describe the act of using multi-colored strings to create a flat, intricate repetitive pattern out of a long collection of forward-knots and backward-knots. However, my friend has dubbed it “hand weaving” and I sometimes just refer to the act as “crafting” and the result as “my craft.”

Years ago, it might have been 2017, when I first learned how to make something like this at summer camp, I wore the resulting bracelet daily until I returned to that same camp again a year later. That first time I don’t think I even knew what I was trying to make and as I wore it throughout the year it just devolved into a yellow and blue string.

In the summer of 2018, I really learned how to make the crafts I make today. I went on a 2-week mission trip to Indianapolis and some girls had some embroidery floss. So of course, we all learned how to make the stripe pattern, which I now despise, a tiki pattern that I did not learn until later, and the chevron pattern. The ones I made that summer still sit in a plastic baggie, along with the ones I made just last week. I remember one time all us girls on the trip went to some sort of music-in-the-park event and we had a little picnic, all sitting in a circle working on our bracelets. It was adorable. That same summer when I went back to camp I was better equipped with my own string and knowledge of a few new patterns. This time though,
my friend taught me a new pattern, I remember it as “the knitted pattern.” It is easy but takes a long time to make. I made that pattern at camp, with orange-to-red ombre string and blue-to-light blue ombre string and purple string, and wore it for another year, and the cycle repeated. For a few years I was wearing a “yearly bracelet” that I had made during my time at camp each year.

However, I haven’t been to that camp in a few years. Covid happened, I “grew out” of it and my younger siblings stopped going, so I haven’t made a yearly bracelet in a little while. A few weeks ago, though, in January 2024, I learned a new pattern and have been obsessed with it since then. It looks intricate, cute, and elegant, but is simple to make. That is when I realized this would be my bracelet of the year. The pattern looks like a chevron but has a small flower-like or heart-like design in the middle. Three flowers using two colors, and a third color surrounding them all. I chose green, blue, and white and whipped up the bracelet in just a few days, complete with an adjustable strap. I now wear it 24/7 and whenever someone asks about my hobbies or interests or I want to talk about it I can easily show them. This is also the closest I get to being creative when I am surrounded by creative people and creative friends.

A Pocket Rosary

The most meaningful item that I keep on me is a rosary. Any rosary will be meaningful to me, it is a reminder of my faith, of Mary, a “crutch” for prayer when I don’t know what to pray, but a few weeks ago I got a new one that I highly value.

I decided to start keeping a rosary in my pocket a few months ago, I don’t know exactly the date, but it was when I got a cheap plastic rosary from when Newman Catholic Campus Ministry was tabling at UMD one day. Before then, I had been
keeping a rosary in my backpack for a few weeks and prior to that I did not even know how to pray the rosary, so I just had a few in a box in my bedroom. I made a plastic one a few years ago, and my grandma gave me a nice-looking crystal one that feels too nice to use.

The first week of this past January, I attended SEEK, which I would describe as the big Catholic conference for college students. During the week, there was one hall with a lot of booths containing shops, different religious orders, volunteer organizations, some activities, and more. I was shopping around on Thursday, the second to last day, looking for something for my mom (since it was her birthday, and I was away) and maybe my sister (since I was her confirmation sponsor). My hands were full as I walked around the hall, with my big winter jacket, my bag for the day, and my provided box lunch. I had been wandering around shops each day until then, so I had an idea of the shops I wanted to look at. There were plenty of rosaries being sold, and many were gorgeous but a little out of my price range with my small college student budget. While looking for a different rosary I had been eyeing earlier in the week, I found the stretchy wooden rosary that I now keep in my pocket. Since it was basically the last day for most of the shops there was a two-for-one deal on these specific rosaries, so I got one for my mom and one for my pocket (an upgrade from the cheap plastic one). It was very crowded and very warm in that hall, so I only chatted with the nun at the shop for a minute then went about my way.

Later that day, my friend asked me for some details about the rosary, which the nun had told me, but I realized I had already forgotten. What wood was it made from? Is the dirt encased in the middle really from Jerusalem? Someone mentioned something about a relic? So later that day, I went back to the shop. So, the person working the second time I visited
explained everything to me, and this time I took notes. The beads are made from olive wood from Jerusalem, and yes there is soil in the middle from Jerusalem. The thread it is strung on is nylon, so it is super stretchy and durable, and yes, the rosaries are touched in bulk to a first-class relic, therefore making them a third-class relic. I was glad to have learned about all of this and went on my merry way. At another booth, some Carmelite monks were selling some books and had a few first-class relics on display too. Relics of St. Therese of Lisieux, her parents, and (I think) St John of the cross. So, I touched my two new rosaries (mine and my mom's) to all three of these relics, making the rosaries a third-class relic 4 times over now.

This wooden rosary is simple but elegant, which I think makes it perfect for a pocket rosary. The crucifix is relatively simple and made of a silver metal. The image of Mary in the middle (which has the soil displayed on the other side) depicts her with the baby Jesus, which is something that has always impacted me about my faith (that God would become a baby dependent on a mother). There is always an image of Mary in the middle of a rosary, but not always with baby Jesus. The wooden beads seem to be encased in resin, they are smooth and glossy, but some have small chips or ridges. The wooden beads make up the Hail Mary and Our Father beads, and separating each decade of Hail Marys from the Our Father bead are two smaller plastic silver beads. The silver color of these beads is already fading or flaking off revealing a yellowish color underneath. I like to wrap the rosary around my hand or wrist, thanks to the stretchiness of it, or just hold it or have it in my lap. Knowing that it is also a relic of the saints makes me feel more connected to them and protected by them.

**Summing Me Up**

These items don't define me, but they sum me up pretty well. The meaning of these symbols aren't obvious to everyone, but I
think that if someone knows about them, they can understand me a little bit more. One of my current necklaces shows I value my friend. With my bracelet I am easily able to show someone an example of my hobby. All over me are small symbols of my faith. My abundance of keychains and chaotic-looking phone all have some sort of story or explanation around them. Take a peek in my purse and maybe you’ll know I’m the oldest sister, or the mom friend. Take a peek in my backpack and maybe you’ll recognize my preference towards organization or physical materials as opposed to digital. Yes, of course these might not be obvious, no I do not always deliberately try to communicate through my possessions, but I think you can learn more, small things, about a person in these ways.
CAN'T LOSE WHAT YOU NEVER HAD

THINNING OUT

I'M

CAN'T LOSE WHAT YOU NEVER HAD

I'M

THINNING OUT

I SUPPORT

UMD Faculty

ANABAENA

Know I've been long enough to talk about it.

Given enough... when will enough be enough?

I think I'm having an existential crisis

The giant isopod will never know the concept of gerrymandering

is it okay if I leave early?

Sorry :(

Part 3
When I picture my childhood, little Meredith is almost always at her grandparent’s house on Blackwell Lake. That place has had the pleasure of a front row seat in the evolution of Meredith. Each year was highlighted by the finite days at the lake. My mom had to constantly fight the battle with me to apply sunscreen. I guess my logic that I’d be in the water all day anyways wasn’t enough of an excuse to avoid the freezing torture of sunscreen spray. To my own misfortune, no amount of sunscreen ever saved my pale skin from a painful sunburn. I also tried to use this as an argument point, but clearly there wasn’t much logic behind that one either. It was a constant battle every summer. Burn, apply aloe, peel, repeat. My mom wouldn’t fight to get me out of the water to reapply sunscreen, though. She went as far as “feeding the dolphins” when we weren’t ready to get out, but needed a snack break.

As I grew up, my siblings and I began having two-three day long sleepovers at our grandparents. It was a treat to wake up, throw on our swimsuits, and run down the hill straight to the lake everyday after being used to waiting all week until we could drive the 45 minutes again. One of our best moments as siblings was taking the canoe out to the middle of the lake, and then my brother, being like any older brother, purposefully tipped the canoe. Turns out tipping a canoe rightside up and getting back in is nearly impossible. My grandma still recalls her fear when she realized I was wearing my glasses. Thankfully, I kept my head above water and my glasses firmly stayed on my face the whole swim back.
The older I got the more I desired quality bonding time with my sister. Our routine became swimming fairly far off the dock with our “life jacket diapers” on so we could easily float while we talked. Out there we had the privacy to talk about whatever we could possibly imagine. We still do this every summer. When my cousins are around, we paddle the raft far enough out to avoid the weeds. Once we drop the anchor, chaos proceeds. Times on the raft could range from “King of the Raft” to practicing our dives to rating who has the best jumps. Every time it seemed as if we got even farther from shore, leading us to question the ability of the anchor.

Lake days are the best when there's an equal amount of chaos and leisure. Reading while lounging on a chair or flat on my stomach against the dock has produced some of the best midday naps. There's no better feeling than days in the sun on Blackwell Lake. Above all else, I have the fondest memories of when the sun begins to set. It's in those moments that my sister and I raid my grandma's closet for sweatpants and a sweatshirt for our group walk around the lake. After a few walks, you'd think my sister and I would plan ahead and pack our own sweatpants and sweatshirts, but the comfort of wearing our grandma's clothes is really what we are searching for. Minnesota summer evenings never really get that chilly anyways, especially with a fresh burn warming my skin. To this day, I have never left my grandparents’ house without them waving goodbye to us from the window.

**Boston**

I have been fortunate enough to visit Boston a surprising amount of times already. For two years, my sister went to college out east so I got to go on a lot of Boston trips. One vivid occurrence was the Wednesday of MEA, and we had quite literally no intention of flying to Boston to see my sister anytime soon. I was a senior in high school, and taking an online PSEO
college class. MEA and midterms aligned that year so I was busy working on an essay at my favorite coffee shop. I was already stressed with submitting this midterm on time considering I just began writing it that same day when my dad called me to come home. We were leaving in an hour to drive to the airport and fly to Boston tonight. To say I had a mental breakdown would not accurately describe my emotions at that moment. Looking back I can’t believe that I reacted that way to learning I was leaving for a spontaneous trip to Boston AND getting to see my sister. I did end up submitting my essay on time...I wrote it on the 2.5 hour drive to the airport and on the 2 hour flight, and once we landed I quickly logged onto the Boston Logan International Airport wifi and submitted my midterm. Crisis averted.

One of the coolest feelings about traveling to a city across the country is when certain landmarks start to become familiar. This trip was roughly my third time in Boston, and I could recognize Boston University now everytime we drove out of the city to go pick up my sister from Wellesley College. At the time, Boston University was my dream school. The reason for this trip was for my sister’s conference cross country meet. Another benefit of this trip was some of our hometown best friends were also visiting Boston as a family vacation. As a group, we watched my sister, Maddie, run at the meet and then proceeded to spend the rest of the evening together. We walked around the city looking for food to bring back and snack on at the hotel. We got to share our favorite Italian restaurant with them, and make even more Boston memories. This by far was one of my favorite Boston experiences, and to think I almost ruined it by letting a midterm determine my emotions.

The last time I was in Boston was when we road tripped out there to move my sister back home. This was equally special because our best friend, Malory, road tripped with us. We had
this joke of how many hours we could go before we argued, but surprisingly there wasn’t a single argument the whole way there and back. It was really special to get to show our best friend all of the places we have come to love about Boston over the last two years. Malory and I began the tradition of getting slushies in every state we stopped in. We still hold the highest praise to the man working at the Travel Plaza in Indiana who gave us our slushies for free. I definitely cannot recall the taste of the slushie, but it was by far the best for that reason alone. The biggest reward was when we were all reunited on the drive back home with my sister.

Boston holds the most memories with my family. My dad once got pulled over a mile away from Wellesley College at 1 a.m. when we were desperately trying to get to Maddie after a long travel day. We once got absolutely drenched in a downpour on the walk to our favorite Italian restaurant. We were definitely the most unpresentable and cold ones there that evening. My sister and I once bought stuffed penguins from the New England Aquarium, and walked around with them zipped into our jackets for the rest of the day. Don’t remind me about the 10 mile Freedom Trail walk… It was definitely really educational, but I shouldn’t have worn sandals. I relentlessly called my best friend a Loyalist the entire trip after she ordered tea in Boston of all places.

Boston holds such vivid and unique memories for me. All thanks to my sister for dreaming big and attending college 1,546 miles away from home. It has been almost three years since I’ve been back. Maddie, Malory, and I have been dreaming on a girls trip back to Boston after we all graduate. I know without a doubt, Boston will continue to produce exciting memories.

**Colorado**

The first time I went to Colorado was for my cousin’s wedding,
and by the second time I visited Colorado (two years later) they were already divorced. But that’s not necessarily important to my story. However, that first trip did spark something in me. Following getting back home, I broke up with my first boyfriend. My family still questions me about that decision since he was seemingly perfect, but I just knew. In a way, I guess I was predicting the outcome of my cousin’s marriage. Colorado sparked my most vivid memory of ever following my gut without any other true reason why. It’s one of those moments where it feels like something groundbreaking happened to you. I like to credit Colorado for this shift in me, but maybe I just happened to have this realization while I also happened to be in Colorado. Either way, Colorado became one of my favorite places. I realized how much beauty was in the world, and the feeling of being 100% present with nature.

On that first trip, I would wake up and immediately go sit on our porch. Wifi barely worked at the resort which was a blessing. I didn’t feel the urge to mindlessly scroll. At any moment an elk could be seen walking past the cabins, and I’d feel like a fool for missing that for something on my phone screen. Since it was my first time in Colorado, I was very determined to write it all down in my journal. I remember writing about how I wish I never had to leave. There was something special about Colorado that felt comforting like home. For a home body like myself, that was a huge deal. It was my first experience where I actually wanted to be somewhere else rather than be at home.

The second time I went to Colorado, my family stayed at the exact same resort as the first time. At this point, I felt like a regular at the YMCA of the Rockies. Almost immediately, my brain got to thinking about how much I have changed since the last time I was here. I had gone through two break ups, graduated from high school, and completed my first year of college since. My first trip symbolized a changing point in my life.
in regards to my emotions. This second trip symbolized all of the growth and challenges I’ve experienced to get to this point. It might seem dramatic to have all of these deep realizations over just a place, but there’s something really unique about staying at literally the exact same place a second time.

This second trip was a planned vacation with my family as well as with my aunt, uncle, and cousin. Every summer my family goes on a road trip, but this Colorado 2023 trip was by far my favorite vacation I’ve ever been on. For once, I had nothing occupying my mind except where I was. After years of distracted vacations due to various reasons (usually a silly high school boyfriend), I was fully submerged into my surroundings. I credit the mountains, the people I was with, and the people that were no longer in my life. Losing some of the biggest sources of anxiety can make any experience more enjoyable. Colorado was a breath of fresh air – literally. Once again I experienced that sense of home. At this point, I had already completed my first year at UMD, but Duluth has never given me the same feeling as my short visits to Colorado. I’m manifesting someday moving to Colorado, ideally Boulder.

**Duluth**

I want to say I love Duluth and how much I’ll miss this place in a few months, but that’s not entirely accurate. I will miss certain aspects about my time here like the endless people you could meet on any given day. The endless opportunities and people to meet are exciting, especially when you’re from a small town. I have had the normal amount of ups and downs during my college career, but to repeat another cliche: I have grown so much since going to college. College is usually only one chapter in someone’s life, and Duluth and the people here will forever be written in ink in my college chapter. Years down the road when someone asks me about my freshman roommate, there will only be each other in that story. There’s something niche
about dining hall meals that makes you miss it and never want to experience it again at the same time.

Duluth taught me I can pick myself back up. For once, I didn’t have people who knew me for years surrounding me everyday. I didn’t have the comfort of being completely known by these strangers I met on some random day. I used to describe my college experience as lonely. Now, I have the ability of being utterly content with being alone. Honestly, about 70% of the time I prefer it. Duluth taught me that you can be in a beautiful place, but truly it’s the people you surround yourself with that matter. Duluth brought me (illegally) cramped car rides filled with music and laughter. On one illegal adventure we even got pulled over, but the cop either didn’t see or didn’t comment on our very filled backseat. I couldn’t believe our luck. A bonfire night out on Park Point taught me the tradition of ‘smelting’ along the Lake Superior shore. One man even dared me to participate in the tradition of biting a smelt’s head off, a tradition I was fully okay to not participate in. Those same nights I felt the sharp thrill of jumping in Lake Superior. The bitter cold slightly paralyzes you upon first contact, but the adrenaline rush is always worth it. We always planned to jump in once we were ready to leave so we didn’t freeze the rest of the night. Usually that plan worked except one time we reached the car, and the driver realized he had lost his keys...that was a cold night searching every inch of the sand. By the time we located them and arrived back to campus, my leggings had literal frost frozen onto them. We never lost a pair of keys a second time.

Morris

No other place means as much to me as my hometown. I can travel to beautiful places, and move to an entire new city, but nothing gives me the peace and comfort of being home. Growing up in a small town requires you to get creative. Over the years, my friends and I have perfected growing up in a
small town. Our go-to hangout usually consisted of getting food at one spot, and then ice cream from another. Most evenings ended in us at someone’s house playing Mario Kart or watching a terrible movie we can laugh at. If it’s my lucky night then we will play a few rounds of Spoons. It has become a joke that no one wants to sit next to me during Spoons since I tend to get overly competitive. There may have been one too many snapped plastic spoons. On summer days we sometimes go play tennis, resulting in me with another horrible sunburn, of course. I like to think I'm fairly adequate at tennis, but my real tennis players best friends enjoy humbling me. I have two best friends that live on lakes so we try to fit in as many lake days as possible when we are all home at the same time. It has been an adjustment from spending 24/7 in high school together to texting the group chat about when each other's spring break is this year. However, once we are back together, we switch right back into the good old days when we all lived within minutes of each other.

I have had the privilege of growing up in the same town, same house, my whole life. My home has seen every stage of Meredith. Our family room has heard my angry wails after getting stuck on the water tunnel in a never-ending loop on the Koopa Cape course on Mario Kart while playing with my siblings. Followed by the polite recommendation by my dad that maybe it's time to be done for the night. It’s still my least favorite course... My sister's bedroom has clocked an infinite amount of hours of us playing with our Barbie's and American Girl dolls. My bedroom was once transformed into a classroom when I had my teacher phase. Our swingset was also once transformed into my horse stables when I went through that phase as well. We still have the chair where I hid my hair after I decided to cut my own hair after my sister called me ugly (so I claim, I don’t actually remember if that's true or if I just wanted an excuse). Our front yard holds my footprints after countless hours running routes while my dad
threw “long bombs” to me. As well, all of the volleyball practice (a sport I never even played) and softball pitching practice (a sport I did actually play). Our driveway holds every shot I made and missed during the 10,000 shot challenge every summer, and the cut throat 2v2 basketball games we played every night after supper. No place has had as much of an influence on me than my hometown. Every inch of Morris holds a memory.
First impressions are everything, which is exactly why I remember the most minute, miniscule details, instead of their first impressions. The first time I met up with Tyler I prepared myself alone in my room instead of like usual when Ada and Amareah were there and I could hangout with them before. I put my earbuds in, left my dorm, and walked down the hallway, nervous because I had decided to show up in my slippers and they sounded differently on the carpeted floor of the dorm hallway than my sneakers. I was listening to music but I was not listening, it was drowned out by the thumping of my heart that I felt in every limb of my body. I decided to take the stairs and with every step my anxiety and height grew. I reached the floor he lived on, pulled out my phone with a shaky hand, and texted him that I was here.

He opened the door to the dorm section and I followed behind him, looking all around me like I always do when I’m in a new place. Being a boys dorm there was a stale smell lingering, but it disappeared once we got to his dorm room. He took off his boots and immediately shoved them under the broken black futon against the wall, being held up by an unidentified black object. I made him give me a room tour, even though I had already made all my observations when I entered the room, I needed something to calm me down. He detailed everything in his room, including his roommate’s unmade bed, family size jar of peanut butter, and general unclean state that he did not associate with. He had a top bunk with the bed made so well it looked like it had never been slept in. His corner of the room was full of his instruments and records.
He spoke with an accent I was not expecting, southern but unsure of it. I let him do all the talking which his anxiety met by twiddling his thumbs the entire time and profusely apologizing for the unsupported state of the futon he had been gifted as a hand-me-down from his older sister who is also in college. I remember feeling myself ease, not freed of anxiety, but I realized this was a good kind of scared. I didn’t want this to be an experience that “at least I tried” and “if I don’t like it, I don’t have to see them again,” I wanted to see him again within the first five minutes of being around him. A comfortable, exciting nervousness, racing thoughts of “does he like me,” sneaking glances at him because neither would dare to make eye contact for longer than a second, Seinfeld on the TV with a plot wasted on me because that isn’t what I was paying attention to, distracted by the flickering street lamp outside of his window and the rowdy thumps and crashes of the teenage boys above. All of these distractions and details make up a day that I will never regret.
When people think of travel, they usually imagine getting on a plane to go to a foreign land halfway around the globe or piling into a car to road trip across the country. My family is partial to the latter. But during a week-long break from school, when the rest of your siblings are still in school, there is nothing better than taking an actual break and having the freedom of a car at your fingertips. This is spending spring break in your hometown, in a familiar place.

In the twin cities there are many bubble tea shops that I love, but there are not many tea cafes. By that I mean, not many that have both that same coffee-shop-vibe, and more than bubble tea. There is one though, my favorite, tucked away in Burnsville. Indigo Tea Co. The coziest place to study, chat, read, or just do crafts. It is just off highway 13, a road I am very familiar with, after taking it to and from school for nearly 2 years. It is just up the road from the dance studio my sister takes lessons at, and being the oldest sister it is my unspoken duty to drive my sister to and from her dance classes whenever I am able. I don’t mind of course; I like listening to music with her and coming up with silly acronyms for license plates. The drive is very straightforward as well, since I follow the same 2 roads almost the entire way there.

Then after I drop her off, I get to hang out at my favorite tea cafe.

The café is kind of divided into two sections by shelves full of mugs, kettles, water bottles, tea pots and bags of loose-leaf tea. When you enter you are greeted by a table displaying several different tea sets, and cubbies of elegant, adorable, simple
mugs. A small glass display case shows the bakery items they sell, scones and muffins, cake and cookies. There are also some snacks for purchase, like chips and cheese, at very reasonable low prices. The counter has several tea-gadgets such as a perfect tea scoop that I highly recommend, different tea steepers and single-use tea sachets for loose leaf tea, and small nick-nacks like card games and key chains. Tall wood shelves across from the counter are full of bags of loose-leaf tea, consisting of all sorts of different black, green, white, herbal, and yerba mate teas. The cherry on top is the sample containers of all the tea they have, for customers to see and smell before they purchase a bag of tea.

When I visited the shop for the first time two years ago, I fell in love with it the moment I walked in. One product that caught my eye then was a tea box to organize your tea bags into (and I had a lot of tea at that point). I never bought it, but I thought about it a lot for my next few visits. Most recently, I noticed different flavored sugars at the counter next to the register, like lemon sugar and maple sugar, which have been living rent free in my head for the past few weeks. Having them would allow me to give my scones an extra-special garnish. Occasionally I look at a small section where they have all of their matcha-making products: a bamboo whisk, a special wood scoop, and special little bowls and mugs. Since I have grown in my love for matcha I have started making it at home, although I know it is not very authentic when I just use an electric milk frother. Someday I want to get these products to make “authentic” matcha, but right now they are a little out of my price range. I also always notice the cat totes they have hanging at the ends of the shelves. I always think to myself that they are so adorable, but then I must tell myself “you have enough totes, you don’t need a new one for $15.” There are so many adorable mugs that I always see there, particularly one with a watercolor-style succulent
pattern on it. Recently I noticed a navy blue one that has a white outline image of a cat looking up at the stars.

Next to the café counter, to the right of the entrance, is a corner with some plants and two low tables. You have to take your shoes off and sit on floor cushions at these tables, but these are on raised platforms so they’re not directly on the floor. I recently learned that this table is called a “chabudai” and the flooring is tatami mats, both traditionally used in Japan. This is cozy sometimes, and at the very least is fun and different. The café noises are louder on this side, right next to where they are making drinks. You can hear the workers talking, mixing, and most particularly, you can hear the loud steamer.

On the other side of the café, to the left of the entrance and all the products is the main café seating. It is what you would imagine. Some square wooden tables with 4 wooden chairs surrounding each. A long booth is against one wall with tables and a chair opposite, so two people can sit. Cushions are scattered on the bench side, and I think there are outlets along the bottom of the long booth. My favorite spots are in the corner, right next to the window and in front of a large plant. A perfect table for two with a window view out to the parking lot. I feel tucked away and hidden there, even though it is still part of the open space. Next to the entrance is where you return your dishes (if you ordered your tea or food “for-here”) and a pitcher of water, honey, sugar and creamer, and a microwave. These amenities along with the plants, warm cushions, abundance of adorable teacups and tea sets, mugs and kettles, tea and totes and the sometimes-jazzy sometimes-beachy instrumental music all create a very comforting, relaxing environment. The café tells you: “come, stay for a while, I’ll take care of you.”

When I was finishing my associate of arts at a local community college and living at home (2022-23), I would drive to Burnsville twice a week for my sister’s dance lessons. I’d have an hour
and a half at Indigo Tea each Tuesday. The café is closed on Thursdays, so I would usually spend the hour at a Caribou Coffee. On Tuesdays I would get to Indigo Tea around 4:30, order my drink, ask for the Wi-Fi password, and sit down. It was very frequently the same man taking my order. A friendly man, probably in his 40s, grey hair, glasses, not any noticeable-to-me wrinkles. He seemed to do everything at the café; take orders, make drinks, and answer any questions. He must be a manager. We rarely chat much but if I recognized him, he must recognize me. I am a horrible regular though, and almost never order the same thing because I want to try everything on their menu. I have had almost all their original milk teas. My favorite drinks there are the iced fresh fruit tea (jasmine green tea with kumquat juice and simple syrup) or the royal (classic) milk tea. Sometimes I would get them less sweet, sometimes hot, sometimes with tapioca pearls. Sometimes they even had seasonal specialty drinks that I would try, like a valentine's rose-flavored milk tea. Some days I would order a second drink before leaving, for my sister. Hers was always a royal milk tea, with slightly different changes depending on how generous I was feeling that day. Whether I wanted to pay extra for her to have the larger size, or tapioca pearls, or almond milk. While I was there I would work on my schoolwork. I always brought my laptop, charger, pens, and sometimes my notebook. Other people would also be doing work on their laptops. At 5pm almost every week the same two women would come in and sit at one of the tables in the middle of the café, kind of close to me. They would be doing some sort of knitting craft and chatting. I never spoke to them but seeing them gave me a strange sense of community. I have also seen some women bring in coloring books and supplies, and I’ve also seen a different group of ladies knitting or crocheting. I only saw these groups once. Makes me think of sonder.

One Tuesday when I was sitting at the end of the long booth,
facing the whole store, a group of teenagers started to gather at the other end of the booth. One or two of them seemed to have birthday presents, and I think there might have been a cupcake at their table. I concluded that they were casually celebrating their friend’s birthday. I wasn’t sure whose. I’d love to celebrate my birthday at Indigo Tea. It’s not a great place for parties though.

I met one of my roommates there last summer, so that I wouldn’t be moving in with a complete stranger. I got there a little early and sat at the tables next to the café counter, at the chabudai. This is where there is the best view of the entrance, so I saw her the moment she came in. I ordered my favorite drink, the iced fresh fruit tea, while I think she got a cookie or cake. She doesn’t like tea very much. We chatted for a while, about ourselves and the upcoming semester, before parting ways. I felt much more comfortable living with her after that meeting. Luckily it wasn’t as awkward as I had feared.

Another time I saw a woman working with a young boy there. I don’t remember many of the specifics about the situation. I think this was another Tuesday, maybe I ordered their signature turmeric latte (which I wouldn’t recommend). I was sitting at the tables next to the café counter again. The two other customers were sitting at the second table (they are separated by a screen). The woman didn’t seem like the boy’s mom, maybe a nanny, and they were having a fun-sounding conversation. I didn’t want to be rude and listen in on their conversation too much, so I didn’t. Indigo Tea is the perfect place for people-watching, although I don’t participate in it much.

When I went back to Indigo Tea this past week, I left behind my school work and instead brought a craft—my string to make knotted “hand weaving” bracelets. I had recently purchased a bulk pack of different string colors, so I had a bag with all of those in it. I also kept a clipboard and some “spools” to wrap
the string on after I start to unravel it. Lastly in the bag are scissors, some keyrings, carabiners, and even a clothespin all to attach the string to something while I create the bracelet (or keychain or bookmark). On this occasion I first drove my sister to her dance class on Saturday morning and stayed at Indigo Tea for about 2 hours. I ordered a matcha latte that tasted more like a lightly toasted marshmallow than the earthy flavor I had grown to love. It was much more crowded than when I had been there on weekdays, even at 10am on a Saturday. I still got my favorite window seat though. Many people were chatting, and doing work, or just shopping. Even though I had brought some of my crafting supplies I did not know what to do when I first sat down. It would be strange to craft in a café, wouldn’t it? Then I remembered the two women I had seen every Tuesday doing their knitting craft, and realized it really wasn’t that strange. I resumed the project I had been working on, just practicing a new pattern I had learned. A miniscule part of me began to want someone to ask what I was doing, despite knowing it was unrealistic. I felt like I had then joined the ranks of all the other crafting women that I had seen on previous visits.

I also went with my friend on a weekday. Tuesday afternoon, around 1pm. We both love Indigo Tea and decided to share a pot of tea, we just weren’t sure what kind. We both love green tea. I wanted to buy a new bag of loose-leaf tea but wanted to try one or two teas first. That is another reason why I love Indigo Tea, you can order a cup of any of the teas they sell. I looked at all the different green teas they had. My friend and I spent some time looking at and smelling the sample jars of different dried tea leaves and herbs. That is how we decided on ordering peach green tea. It smelled sweet and fresh, balanced with the green tea. I ended up purchasing a bag of that tea. It was only after I left that I remembered I actually wanted to buy an herbal tea, without caffeine, but I have no regrets.
We sniffed even more tea samples as we waited for our tea to cool, and pointed out all the adorable tea sets, mugs and kettles. Their prices are reasonable for a good product, but still a little spendy for two adults with no disposable income. One item that piqued our interest was a white wicker picnic-basket-like product. It is in the shape of a half circle, with handles at the top of the rounded end. It was on display with an elegant tea set inside it. The tea set was white with pink flowers on it, probably porcelain. We couldn’t find a price on the ones that were for sale, but I guessed it was more than I could spend right now. Once again, I had brought my bracelet string because I wanted to teach her how to make one, and she was willing to learn. We didn’t touch the bag though, so preoccupied by our mutual love for the shop and tea in general. We chatted about tea for a few hours, then made our purchases and went home to do crafts.

So while my high school classmates that I haven’t spoken to in years are posting about their Europe trips on Instagram, I must be content with my peaceful visits and the peaceful drive to my favorite tea shop, with European and Asian style products. I don’t need to travel far to have a peaceful time and try new things.
I was one of four girls working as a lift operator at a ski resort. The issue itself does not stem from working in a male-dominated environment. I am not one to believe that women are less likely to succeed in male-dominated fields, but I will not deny the challenges that come with it. I enjoyed working at this ski resort, and most of my co-workers were very respectful, but I am not oblivious.

“Quit complaining. You sound like a woman.”

This is something I heard quite often during my first days at Giant’s Ridge, but it was not originally directed at me. It was rarely even directed at the women who work at the resort. This was used by the older men I worked with, and it was intended to be an insult when someone had a complaint or talked too much. At the time I did not take offense to this. I didn’t think it was a bad thing to “sound like a woman,” and it wasn’t being used against me anyway. Eventually, I caught on, and this was the first lesson I learned. I knew I did not want to “sound like a woman.”

I stayed quiet at work. I did not complain or talk out of turn. If someone asked me a question I was careful not to ramble. I forcibly shaped myself into a silent and compliant worker in order to fit in. I kept quiet when my paycheck was a month late because I knew if I brought it up too often I’d be labeled a termagant. I stayed silent when I’d overhear my coworkers
making rude remarks. I needed the job, and I knew I didn’t have much control.

“You’re too small to work on that lift. You aren’t strong enough.”

I am not a small girl. I am five-foot-eight, and I’ve got a lot of muscle. This was the second lesson I learned. I had to prove myself capable of handling bigger lifts, so I did. I stayed outside for most of my ten-hour-shifts while the other men I worked with talked amongst themselves in the shack. I came home exhausted and sore nearly everyday hoping I would be given a chance to work on the bigger lifts. I was never given that chance.

It was frustrating to see the new guys, who were much smaller than me, be given an opportunity to work on the bigger lifts the moment they were hired. I had already proven myself capable. I knew I was strong enough, and I put in significantly more effort than the majority of anyone else I worked with. When I did occasionally bring this up, I was given the same answer. “You’re too small.” “You wouldn’t be strong enough.”

“Just ignore them.”

Cat-calling was a serious issue at this resort. Not from the people I worked with, but from the customers. It was constant, and it was something every girl had to deal with at the resort. We were told that if someone was being disrespectful or misbehaving, we could deactivate their lift ticket, but this did not include cat-calling. Some of the guys I worked with found it funny, and they’d encourage absurd remarks and rude comments. This is the third lesson I learned. It was better to ignore them.

The majority of these remarks and comments came from middle school boys or teenagers. Every once in a while I’d hear
them from older men. Ignoring them didn’t stop them, but it did stop my coworkers from encouraging them. At one point we were told we could talk to a specific lead about these remarks, but this lead was already a registered sex offender, and we knew he wouldn’t be any help.

“You’ve got a tight butt.”

One of the older guys we worked with said this to a girl fresh out of high school. He was over twice her age, and when he was fired after confessing his love for this girl, he threw a massive fit. His son also worked at the resort after being dishonorably discharged from the military for sexual assault. It took weeks of complaints for him to be fired.

In the break room, there were cutouts from Playboy magazines lined up neatly on the wall. There were also photos showing the difference between “male skiers/snowboarders” and “female skiers/snowboarders.” The men shown in these photos were doing tricks or jumps, while the women shown in these photos had either fallen down or were seriously injured. I am not sure where they got these photos, but I always worried that they were taking these photos at our own resort without permission.

It’s important to note that there were many men I worked with that did not tolerate this behavior, but they were in the same boat as us. They needed money, and they didn’t want to be labeled as sensitive and high-maintenance. I couldn’t blame them. Most of them had children or grandchildren, and they already had a lot on their hands. The fourth lesson I learned was the most important lesson. I am allowed to complain in situations of injustice, I do not have to prove myself to anyone, and I will not ignore unwarranted behavior. It is okay to sound like a woman.
Recently I was offered the opportunity to write on a specific prompt along the lines of our “Last Day on Earth Plans.” Basically, how would I spend my last day on earth? It seems basic, an easy and silly prompt. For some reason though, the idea of this prompt inspired me. It inspired me to reflect on myself, and picture my life in a way I hadn’t before. It made me realize all of the important things I wanted to accomplish. I thought about things that are important to me, and things that I deemed unnecessary. At first I didn’t think the prompt was too serious, but as I started writing I was taken aback myself about how eye-opening this truly was.

Here is the actual journal entry I wrote that day:

If today was my last day on earth I would be stuck. I can’t even fathom what I would do. I’m 21, there is an impossible amount of things I still want to do. I wouldn’t know where to start. As for who I’d want to be with, I think I would choose to be alone. Of course I would say goodbye to my family and my friends, but it would be too much to be with them while experiencing this for myself. I would like to find a place that I love. Be alone with my thoughts. Try and relax and not think about what’s to come. Maybe I’d read my favorite book. Or a tragic one. I know I’d want to be outside in the sun. Somewhere warm, preferably by the ocean. A nice cafe, in a pretty dress. I would want to be at peace. And for that I would need to be alone.
peace

I strive to find peace within myself. I am a chronic overthinker and I deal with anxiety and depression daily. All I want for myself is to feel peace. Peace within my mind, my heart, my body. My mind is always running away from me.

There are few things in the world that I have discovered where I feel truly at peace. One of the truest ones being a book. I get lost in books. There are a handful of books that I have sat down and read in one sitting because I became consumed in their stories. I love the creation of mentally beautiful characters. Getting lost in a book is one of the only ways I feel fully free. I’m currently reading Prozac Nation. It’s a memoir written by Elizabeth Wurtzel where she opens up a window into her life of dealing with depression as a young woman. It’s an amazing book, she was able to write down her life in a way that is so raw and relatable. I’ve never felt more seen through someone else’s story. There are so many pieces of her life that I connect with and have never been able to put into my own words. Although her story is far from ‘peaceful,’ I feel at peace reading it, knowing that all of these struggles can be real, and I’m not just some crazy person making it up. This is probably one of the most important and influential books I’ll ever read because of how much of myself I see through her story.

I tend to achieve physical peace when I’m in the sun. It's true that they say sunshine cures anything. I am a different person in the summer. Or when I’m on the coast somewhere warm. I feel free from my mind when the sun seeps into my skin.

art

I dream of the romantic and artistic feel of southern european countries. I picture myself living there so easily. Life would feel simple. Easy. Something about that area draws me in so fiercely. The novel Call Me By Your Name was a huge factor of inspiration
for living in this part of the world. The connection of nature and the world to literature was profound in this writing. I loved every second of it. Literature has such strong ties to this area and I want to experience it in my life. I have always been drawn to literature. Reading a classic novel is such a comforting experience. I also have an interest in Shakespearean era literature. It feels more like art than words on a page.

I’ve always been so drawn to the architecture and landscape of this area as well. I’ve fallen in love with a place I’ve never been before. Movies and pictures are enough to convince me that I’m missing out. I dream of the gorgeous buildings and courtyards in Spain. I want to visit the rolling vineyards in the countryside. Living in these places is a dream that I hope to make a reality.

Physical art has a huge hold on my heart as well. I love surrounding myself and analyzing pieces of art, paintings specifically. I could get lost for days in a museum. They are incredibly peaceful, even magical. It’s so easy to get drawn in and lost in a piece of art, and that is what feels so real to me. I find myself wishing I was more of an artist. I envy the people that can create something so beautiful, so easily. I dream of having that innate ability to make art.

being alone

In the least depressive way possible, I thrive on being alone. When everything is quiet, and I have my thoughts all to myself, I feel comfortable. Even if I am unhappy with the constant thoughts swarming in my head, it’s familiar, and it’s something that doesn’t need an explanation. I love the people in my life, and I would miss them dearly, but I wouldn’t be able to fully lose myself if I spent my final day with them. I would be too worried about them, what they are thinking and feeling; and how it would affect me. It would all be too much.
I don’t need the burden of worrying about other people. I would send my love. I would say goodbye to the people that matter most. But I wouldn’t fully be able to let myself go if I wasn’t alone.

_I would want to be at peace. And for that I would need to be alone._