

## Excerpts from Life



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Iowa State University is located on the ancestral lands and territory of the Baxoje (bah-kho-dzhe), or Ioway Nation. The United States obtained the land from the Meskwaki and Sauk nations in the Treaty of 1842. We wish to recognize our obligations to this land and to the people who took care of it, as well as to the 17,000 Native people who live in Iowa today.

*For mom, dad, and Morgan, for helping me through all of the ups and downs that are written in this collection of poems, and for always encouraging me to chase my dreams. All the poems in the world can't describe how much your love and support means to me.*

*For G, the first person to hear any of my poems consecutively. Reading them to you helped me learn to be comfortable sharing my soul with the world. Thanks for always being in my corner, XOXO.*

*For Julie Cutshall, for showing me that my words have the power to move people, and encouraging me to publish them...*

*And for every one of my family members and friends that have always loved me for exactly who I am.*

*You mean more than the world.*



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# The Plague in the Wind

Even the sky seemed wary of the plague  
as the sun masked its face from the world  
behind the clouds that raced through the atmosphere  
in angry gray herds  
fleeing the cities.

The wind threw brittle, brown leaves into the air  
and sent them spinning into window panes.  
It roared as though it was threatening  
to breathe the plague into the peoples' nostrils with its whipping might.

The people retreated to their houses  
and cowered within their four walls  
as the wind knocked its fist at the doorstep  
and the clouds made their escape beyond the horizon.

With its mask torn away by the ominous wind,  
the sun receded from view below the treetops.  
And the people waited  
in disgruntled silence  
for it to reappear.

They sat in their tension-filled silence  
as the vicious wind tore on,  
threatening to keep blowing,  
tearing, beating, spiraling.

Until all the people were gone.

# Claustrophobia

Invisible walls grind in towards your body.  
Walls you can't see,  
but you feel them.

You can't see when they'll squeeze you,  
but every distant cough propels them closer,  
pushed inwards by the breeze of the disease.

Paranoia percolates  
with each new breath that you take  
as the oxygen evaporates.

You can't hold the walls apart.  
No matter how strong your shield  
or how forceful your shove,

the invisible enemy closes in.  
Steady as rain,  
ruthless as fire,

compressing you, body and soul.  
Suffocating, virus raging,  
your last breath its only goal.

# Snowflakes

People come and go through your life  
like snowflakes.

Some melt away once they touch ground,  
gracing your heart for an instant,  
their memory soft,  
their impact fleeting.

Some hit the ground,  
find an icicle to hold to  
and latch to the blizzard of your life.  
Their unique crystals make your own stronger.  
Their structure displays  
their purpose and passion.  
Their sparkle can teach you to shine.

As life's blizzard propels you  
and your path starts to change,  
heaping snow blurs and covers  
the plans you had made.  
And you fear that one snowflake  
might melt in its wake.

Oh, to freeze up in time  
the space that you shared,  
the weather you weathered,  
the hugs that you spared.

That small, glittering snowflake  
that means so much.  
If it flutters away,  
will you lose touch?

Will you just be left with the memories  
to make you smile  
while warm tears  
melt snow-filled reveries?

The snowflake once said;  
If you're comfortable where you lay,  
in the eye of the blizzard,  
then you've arrived at the day  
when you'll leave it.

And on that day,  
I want to say...

Your steady voice has made mine stronger.  
The sureness in your steps  
has made my own more confident.  
Your encouragement and trust  
helped me become more dedicated.  
The person I've become feels proud,  
Accomplished.

And I know as my blizzard moves out  
I'll find more snowflakes to latch on to.

But I hope that you are one  
that never melts.

# For Owen

I know you can't read  
the cause of it all.  
I wonder if you feel it,  
the terminality of the fall?

Will you know when it happens?  
Will I?  
Will it be a grand gesture,  
or one final sigh?

I can't bear to be there  
for that empty goodbye  
to the ears that won't hear  
all the tears that I'll cry.

So I'll write your last moments,  
the ones you deserve,  
and I'll know in my heart  
that's how your next life will start.

In the chocolate glass of your eyes  
I would see  
your soul drifting by  
all your best memories.

Your soft ears,  
they would flick,  
touched by ghosts  
of a kiss,

and your tail,  
it would hammer  
one final time  
as you think of the things that excite you.

When you close your eyes,  
may you see only love  
in all of the years  
we could give you.

I hope there's no pain  
when you turn towards the sky.  
You're a good boy, Owen.  
With the angels you'll fly.

# The Void In Between Past and Future

There's a hole in my heart  
where my world was.

It's like looking at land  
from under the water.  
The noise of the celebration,  
Dampened.  
Dense like a soaked sponge.

I don't think I fit there,  
out on their loud land,  
when my tears water down  
the sound of my voice.  
I don't understand their choice.

I'm crying for those  
who know how to move on.  
I don't know what to move to  
when my world is gone.

And I sit next to them  
and I watch their glee  
and I wish I were happy.

But what's left in the walls  
were those pieces of me.

The day my life built to  
is suddenly gone,  
along with the path  
I had been standing on.

And the next road ahead  
is not blank,  
it's barren.

There may be endless opportunity,  
but there is no place to just be.

When I look at tomorrow  
I don't know what it holds,  
and what should be exciting  
just scares me.



# Shadows of You

Shadows of you;  
the bowl stand empty,  
just two holes,  
a blue, plastic skeleton.

I lift my chair  
over a rug that isn't there.  
The fur already vacuumed  
from the floor.

When I sit at the bottom  
of the stairs  
I can tuck my legs in close,  
stick my feet into your aura  
that surrounds them.

Where the balls of my feet  
rest on the floor  
I expect to feel the warmth  
that you left there.  
The essence of you  
that soaked into the boards.

I can't look at my suitcase  
propped by the door.  
I know that you should be there,  
your nose in my blanket,  
your anxious panting  
filling the air,  
laying by the bags,  
telling us to pack you, too.

My duffel bag is a magnet  
for your fur  
in the trunk of the car.  
When I pick it up again  
you'll stick there,  
your creamy locks weaved  
into the fabric of my bag.

Shadows of you  
in the last place I said goodbye.  
The fibers of you  
following me on my next adventure.  
The only thing you ever wanted—  
to never be too far away.

# The Fine Line Into Overthinking

Engaging with thoughts  
trickling through my head  
is like balancing a thumb tack  
on a finger tip—

Impossible.

The fine line into overthinking  
is not a line at all.  
It's the jagged edge of a precipice  
over which I quickly

Fall.

I spiral myself in and out of my  
personal truths  
and familiar lies.  
The heart of my soul is stuck somewhere

Inside.

# The Head and the Heart

Hello from a heart  
that won't let go.

I just want you to know  
that I'm storing your sorrow  
in case you forget  
what made you frown.

I'm harboring hot anger;  
tending to your fire.  
It will burn down into smolders  
if I don't stoke it.

I'm gardening your grief;  
making sure to pack it tight.  
The best blooms come  
from constant attention.

I'm fostering your fears  
so you're prepared for everything  
that won't go right.  
But your chest is getting tight...

My condolences from a mind  
that refuses to hold.

I apologize for leaking  
all of the sadness  
you are seeping  
into my veins.

And expelling the anger  
that's welling, unchecked,  
for it lingers  
if allowed to stay.

I am sorry for plucking  
the grasses of grief  
you've been sowing;  
they just can't keep growing.

And the stress that will fester  
is shredding the sleeves  
I am not used  
to wearing you on...

# First Impressions

Although you're here with me  
you don't feel like mine.  
I want to know what you are thinking  
and to tell you you'll be fine.

But your animal instincts likely  
detect my uncertainty.

I know your old owner  
is feeling a pain  
I am still getting over.

It doesn't feel fair  
to be happy when I know  
I put the pain there.

Plunging her into sorrow  
took part of me down.  
Where I should be excited  
I'm hiding a frown.

I have only two weeks  
to learn how to love you.  
I don't know if I want to.

I have only two weeks  
before I leave you.  
I tell myself it's for your sake  
that I want to hold you at arm's length  
but it isn't.

When you look at me  
are you asking for company?  
I avoid eye contact,  
too afraid to become attached.  
  
And too bruised to love you back.

# The Night Before My Life Ended

In the light breeze  
of a perfect summer day  
even the trees wave  
their goodbyes.

It's too bright outside.  
I walk the halls of my house  
with the lights off.  
The better to match how I feel inside.

Packing my life into two-by-six boxes  
makes me question the significance  
of the structure I have built.  
How could something that felt so big  
pack up so small?

The devil of time ushers me away.  
I can sense every ounce of light  
lost in the day.  
Everyone says I will be okay.

Their words never fix me.

# A Clam by the Shore

Clamshell mouth clamped shut—  
choking on a pearl  
no one else can see.

Crusted outsides disregarded—  
there is no shine externally.

Passerby don't pick me up  
and pry me open  
or beg me to reveal surprises  
from deep inside my shell.

My appearance is acknowledged and ignored—  
the barnacled façade too fierce to approach—  
and I hide the pearl beneath  
for fear it will shatter from reproach.

Unpracticed muscles are too weak  
to lift the windowpane of salt.  
Beneath the weight of hidden,  
shining pride

I have sunk.



# New Friendship

In the beginning you find  
you don't mind  
sharing space.

Pretty soon  
you will also share smiles.

For every old memory you swapped  
you make new ones together.

Through sickness and stumbles,  
through tears and through pain,  
you add one more token  
to the trust that you've gained.

And one day you'll look back  
on your time,  
how you shared it,  
and you'll realize what grew,

though you never declared it.  
Your separate souls had intertwined  
into one friendship.

# Moving in Slow Motion

Mind is spinning,  
Spiraling.  
Trying to find the source

of the sagging weight  
that's tied around  
the heart.

Reaching sorrow's core  
it fogs,  
moving in slow motion.

Blurry eyes stop seeing outward.  
Looking in—  
in on the darkness,  
  
finding what was buried there  
camouflaged in life's distractions.

Weary ears hear only silence  
outside of the solemn hole—  
deafening is the mind's disquiet.

A mind that ventured  
now stuck inside,  
Naked,  
with no place to hide,  
  
waiting for the return  
of fallen tide.

# High Dive

Toes peeking over the edge  
of a puddled concrete slab.  
Wide eyes peering out  
at the crystalline water far below.

Apprehension lurches  
in your chest.

Close your eyes,  
take a breath,  
one step back,

and one leap forward.

The split second of floating  
before gravity takes its hold  
makes you wonder why  
you ever hesitated.

But you hit the water wrong  
and what was up is west.

Panic lurches  
in your chest.

Upside down and backward,  
four limbs thrashing  
without pattern  
or control.

Reaching out to find the surface  
you don't find air.

Instead you find a hand  
that steadies you and shows you  
how upside down and backward  
gives the surface  
a better view.

Slowing shaking breaths,  
clinging to the tiled wall,  
you reflect on how  
you survived the fall.

It wasn't clean,  
nor was it pretty,  
but while searching for help,  
you discovered clarity.

You discovered strength  
you had never seen.  
A blur of complications  
became pristine.

As you pull yourself out  
of the water that trapped you,  
you see it in a way  
that somehow looks brand new.

The platform that you leaped off  
now looks so small  
as if you should barely have felt the fall  
at all.

And you stride on past  
with your chin to the sky.  
Maybe the next jump  
will make you fly.

You climb up the steps  
of the next highest tower  
feeling something akin  
to power.

However you land  
you will do your best.

Excitement lurches  
in your chest.

Close your eyes,  
take a breath,  
one step back,  
and one leap forward.

# Hollow Night

The sensation of observing  
someone else's glimpse of joy  
is not always joyous.

Blindsided by your own emotions,  
jealousy creeps in  
and resentment lingers.

One shuddering breath the only signal,  
then come the tears  
followed by pain.

Streaking scars burned into cheeks  
by your nostalgia  
crust over like a freeze after the rain;

leaving evidence of the war within  
even though the will to feel  
has left your brain.

# Ant Farm

Tired muscles shuttle ants  
away from their plight.  
Wandering in the freedom  
of not having a place to call home  
for the night.

The stars are all masked  
by the brilliant light  
that blinds them  
from bigger hills  
outside their fight.

Heavy eyes that can't sleep—  
even with ears clamped tight,  
they can still hear the thud  
of ant feet  
to their right.

Tossing and turning  
with all of their might,  
the red hue of stress  
in the first streak of dawn  
is nearly in sight.

# Sing Out

Sing out—

Your voice holds depth to warm  
the whole world over.

Sing out—

Your voice holds light to glow  
against all darkness.

Sing out—

Your voice holds truth to melt  
away iron lies.

Sing out—

Your voice holds love to lift  
souls from solitude.

Sing out—

Your voice holds peace to ground  
fears into new calm.

Sing out—

Your voice holds hope to guide  
silence into song.





Brenna Akason is a first-year student at Iowa State University studying Industrial Design. Brenna has been writing short stories since she could read them and discovered her love of writing poetry in February of 2020. Her poetry is inspired by her own life experiences and the emotions they provoke. Some of her other passions are music, tinkering, and spending time outdoors. Her favorite place to relax is on a playground swing.