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(I'm)Possible: In a World That Pushes Back, Step Forward

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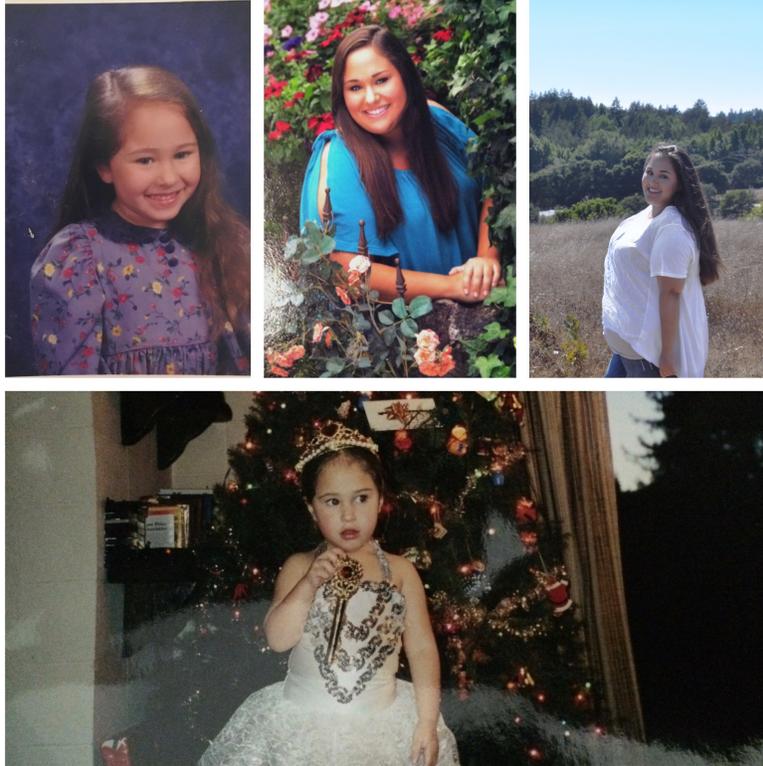
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(I'm)Possible: In a World That Pushes Back, Step Forward



(A collection of pictures throughout my life signifying substantial moments)

Rahni Jensen

Senior Capstone

Journalism and Media Studies

Creative Project

Professor Qun Wang

Division of Humanities and Communication

Fall 2016

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to all the people who helped shape and influence me into the person I am today. To my endlessly loving, supportive and encouraging parents, John and Debbie, who never told me I could not do something, who fostered any interest I had, and who let me be who I am without ever discouraging me. To my sister, Elizabeth, for guiding me through life's sticky situations, opening my eyes to the world, and giving me a worthy argument opponent. To my brother, Johnny, for teaching me about myself without ever trying and your amazing humor. To my Grammy, who helped me no matter what kind of project or problem I had, you bought me paints when I wanted to be an artist, a telescope when I began to look to the stars and words of encouragement when I wasn't sure what lay ahead. To my best friend, Michelle, I do not know where I would be in this world if it were not for you, you keep me grounded, optimistic for the future, and helped me discover confidence I never knew I had. And to my best friend Emma, you came into my life without warning or hesitation, but it feels like you have been there since day one, you keep me grateful of everything life has given me, and give me so much inspiration and peace.

Acknowledgments

Thank you Professor Wang and Professor Deb Busman for being so encouraging and lighthearted. You both are incredible teachers, and without you both this project would not be possible.

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SENIOR PROJECT PROPOSAL

1. *Name and Concentration*

Rahni Jensen - Journalism and Media Studies

2. *Working Title*

“(I’m)possible: Pushing Forward in a World That Pushes Back”

3. *Project Description*

My project will take a look at various creative writing pieces I’ve produced, and help tell the story of the journey on the path to finding my own self-identity. This will be done either chronologically or in some other theme that will provide a smooth and cohesive story line.

4. *Alignment and Common Theme*

Each of the pieces featured in this project will be a snapshot in my own person journey to discovering myself, and the ways in which I identify today. This will probably be done through a gender specific lens as I feel my identity as a girl or women is one that has been especially shaping.

5. *Expectations*

I expect that by completing this project I will be able to take a closer look within myself and analyze some of the choices I have made as well as the turns that I have taken. Analyze deeper the reasoning behind those choices, as well as how my formative years played a role in how I view myself today. I expect that this will be done on both a physical and emotional level. I hope that by exercising my creative writing skills and being able to actualize and verbalize many thoughts I’ve had I can both come to know myself more

deeply but also, perhaps, help others in looking into themselves more critically.

6. *Specific Skills Required*

Because I have chosen the creative project option, and I've specifically chosen to curate a collection of written works my skills in writing, especially creative writing, need to be both competent and developed. Through my years in community college and my time here at CSUMB I have exercised my skills in rhetorical, academic, and creative writing. I also enjoy writing creatively in my own free time, not prompted by a particular assignment. And so it is with these skills developed, that I will be able to accomplish this project.

7. *Next Steps*

Once my proposal has been accepted and approved, I will begin creating, editing and organizing my pieces to fill my portfolio. Once they have been completed and edited to my liking I will compile them into my portfolio for their final submission.

8. *Timeline*

Given that I enjoy writing creatively I do not anticipate there to be any delays in the completion of my project. I hope to have the rough draft completed or nearly completed by the end of October, the final draft complete by the end of November, whereby any time left in December will be spent working on the presentation and any other final adjustments or revisions to be completed.

BRAIDS
A CREATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am three years old, sitting crisscross-apple-sauce in front of the TV. Barney is on, singing and dancing with the kids in the park. My Momma sits behind me on the couch wrenching a comb through my long, wet, tangled hair. Each pull of the comb brings a fresh wave of pain sparking across my scalp in never ending cycles. Comb. Tug. Sting. Comb. Tug. Sting. “I know it hurts sweetie, I’m sorry. I’m almost done,” she says. I’m crying out loudly, nose stuffed, cheeks wet. It hurts, it hurts so much. I never want to wash my hair ever again. I hate baths – it makes my hair wet.

I love you, you love me

We’re a happy family

With a great big hug, and a kiss from me to you

Won’t you say you love me too?

Then suddenly it stops, my head still throbs, and my eyes are still wet – but the comb stops. My mommas fingers slip through my hair, and split it back into three sections. They lie across my back like three wet snakes, damp and heavy. She takes each piece through crooked fingers and begins winding them back, over and under each other. Over and under. The gentle tugging, and rhythmic binding is soothing. But I’m still mad and hurting. Baths are the worst. Wet hair is unbearable.

“Ok you’re all done now,” my Momma says, voice soft and apologetic. I don’t hear the apology though. Instead I get up and run to my Daddy. He sweeps me up in his arms – safe finally. “Look how pretty your long hair is,” he says, smiling encouragingly down at me. I reach back and touch the damp rope that is my hair, “Hmph”, and push my face to the crook of his neck.

I am six years old, standing outside Mrs. Poston's first grade classroom. The air smells like eucalyptus, cut grass and hot asphalt. The ground is cool, but the air is warm against my face. I'm second in line, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* tucked up under my arm, fingers gripping the edge to keep it from slipping away. My face is squarely behind another girl's head. Her amber hair is braided back straight down the middle of her back, curly ends sticking out like a popped can of biscuits.

"Single file line please. And remember, we are walking past classrooms right now, so please whisper!" Mrs. Poston tells us, finger to her lips.

We start walking to the library and the girl's braid begins to sway lightly back and forth between her shoulder blades. Back and forth. I walk behind her and try to feel if my braid sways as much as hers. But mine lies still across my back, ends reaching past my shoulder blades and brushing the waistband of my skirt. So I begin swaying my head, forcing my braid to swing heavily and reluctantly between my hips.

Her braid continues swinging and I focus in on it. Her braid looks fun and bouncy, mine is flat and boring. All of a sudden the line stops, and I'm so focused on the other girl's braid I walk right into the back of her.

I am seven years old. I'm waiting at the lunch tables after school with my class, waiting for my name to be called over the loud speaker – telling me my momma is here to pick me up. Other kids mill around, some of them with their mothers standing next to them. These are the mothers that always volunteer in class and drive for the field trips. I'm talking excitedly with my friends. We are planning

the best sleepover that ever was. We are making a list of all the movies we should watch, all the activities we should do, and who has stayed up the latest.

“I have a trampoline! And if it’s warm enough my mom might let us sleep out there! It’s like camping only better,” Nicole says excitedly. She also has a pool, it’s a really big one with pretty tiles. We have a pool too, but it’s a dough boy so it doesn’t have tile. It’s kind of an oval shape so if you get enough people all swimming in the same direction we can get a whirlpool going – then it’s like the endless river at Raging Waters.

“Oh and I have ‘Lilo and Stitch’ I can bring it and we can watch it!” Alicia says, scooting closer to us all.

“Oh my gosh I loved that movie, my parents say we might go to Hawaii for Christmas vacation this year!” Blaire smiles brightly, all her teeth on display – except of course the missing ones.

“I went to Maui last year – it was so much fun!” I add in flipping my long hair over one shoulder to keep it out of my face as I talk. It’s soft and warm and fans over my shoulder like a cape, draping over my back and resting lightly on my backpack behind me.

“Oh my gosh would you just look at all of your long, beautiful hair!” Nicole’s mom says, walking up to our group.

“Look at how thick your hair is!” Blaire’s mom runs her fingers through the length of my hair in a petting motion.

“See, now this is why I always wanted a girl.” Ian T’s mom says, smiling wistfully.

All the mothers seem to converge on me all at once. I blush up at them and mumble thank-yous through smiling lips. The girls all giggle up at their moms, touching their own shorter hair, pulling on the ends and looking at my hair in their mothers' grasps. If only they all knew how long it took to brush out. People always tell me my hair is beautiful, or how long it is, or how thick it is. And I guess it is pretty – and it is nice having people admire something about me. I'm not the best at sports, or the smartest kid in class, but I definitely have the longest hair.

I am fourteen years old, sitting at my desk in front of my mirror. I take a brush and begin combing through my brown and golden strands. I start at the ends and slowly work my way up towards my scalp. Somehow, I've learned over the years how to brush my hair so it's not quite the ordeal it always was when I was little. I've learned that my hair is fine, as in the individual strands are fine, but I have a lot of it – so it's also thick. It's straight naturally with just the tiniest bit of wave – just enough to make me want to straighten it.

I continue brushing, enjoying the slight tension of the brush making its way through my hair, the sound the brush makes like muffled clicking as the bristles work, and then the release as the brush makes it through to the end of it all, only to be brought back to the top at my scalp.

All my friends seem to be envious of my hair, they love how long it is, and how it's always straight. They tease me about how often I brush it – to keep the knots at bay. But I love it. I love how without doing anything at all my hair can be my main accessory, how I can style it any way I want, or sweep it up into a pony to keep it away from my face. I love that everywhere I go, someone compliments my hair,

either about the color or the length or the thickness. I didn't think brown was that big of a deal, but my hairdresser says a lot of people pay a lot of money to get this color. Brown, but bleached gold through the ends from summers spent in chlorine saturated pools and then laid out in the sun all day long. Plus if people want thicker or longer hair, they pay a lot of money to get extensions glued or sewn in.

I'm twenty, and I've let my hair grow longer than it has been since I was probably six or seven. It's annoying at this point. I use so much shampoo and so much conditioner I feel like I need gallon size bottles just to get through each month. Brushing and styling have become impossible at this point – it takes 30 minutes to straighten it and an hour to curl it – and the amount of time it takes to dry after I wash it isn't even funny. It's pretty and soft and I love it still, but it is just so much damn work to go through regular maintenance I just want to chop it all off, try something different and quite honestly get rid of it. Maybe if I didn't have enough hair on my head for three people, doing my hair wouldn't be such a chore.

So I cut it the shortest it has ever been in my life – just past my shoulders brushing about where a necklace falls. I feel naked and free and strange all at the same time. I can run my fingers through it so easily. It's so light and airy – I never had realized how heavy my hair had been! But part of me feels *off*, like I'm not quite myself, or something is missing. I sit in the car and look in the rearview mirror and almost don't recognize myself, like I am someone else for a moment.

I go home from the salon to show my parents, getting increasingly nervous about what my Daddy might say. He is not the biggest fan of short hair, but he's gotten better over the years. I guess it just comes from the time when he grew up

and all women had long hair, or at least all the women in his life. But my hair isn't *that* short, most people would probably call this medium length.

"So, um, what do you think of my hair?" I ask timidly, running my fingers through the length, and being quite shocked when my fingers quickly run out of hair to run through. It just feels so weird! Like I'm missing a limb I never realized I had.

"You cut it," he says looking it over skeptically. I can practically see the wheels turning in his head. It was a big change he wasn't expecting, and coming from a man who has been wearing the same jeans for 20 years and the same shoes for 30, change is not a welcome thing

"Yeah, but what do you think of it?" I ask prodding, I mean he can't dislike it that much.

"Hmm," he mulls it all over then sees the developing distress in my own face and gives me a reassuring smile, pulling me to his chest in a warm, enveloping hug. I relax against him and breath. It's just hair – it'll grow back.

But I can't help but thinking: should I have even cut my hair? Should I have gone with my standard trim with layers cut I've been rocking for years? I've had long hair my entire life. It has become a part of who I am, not only to myself but to other people in my life. Even still when my friends and I get together and get ready together, when I pull out my curling iron, straightener or other hair tool, my friends make their rounds looking over my hair, telling my how thick it is, how long it is. Usually accompanied by their own wishes for thicker or longer hair. I always brush away their comments, and begin the extensive process that is doing my hair. But was there more to their words than the habitual praise that friendship offers?

From the time I was a small child to just a couple of hours ago I was the girl with long brown hair with contrasting blue eyes, a striking combination apparently. It's one of the first things used to describe me, physically or otherwise. But who am I without all this hair? Am I a different person? Am I perceived as a different person to the outside world? Or is it all just a ruse – is all this length of dead protein attached to my scalp not nearly as compelling and influential as I've been made to believe.

I think to the times the people in my life had made drastic changes to their appearance. It takes a while to get used to surely, you begin to conjure an image of your friend in your head, what they look like, and it takes a while to change that image. But then what? Nothing really, I think, they are still who they are, just minus some hair or with the addition of some ink in their skin.

One week later, I ask my Dad the same question, what he thinks of my hair, he waits a moment, looking over my bouncy hair.

“You cut it,” he says still, “ but you know, I'm starting to get used to it. It suits you, very spunky,” he says smiling at me. I feel more contented knowing that even though I'm missing nearly a foot of my preverbal security blanket, I am still Spunky Monkey – a pet name, reminiscent of some kind of song sung to me as a child.

I continue walking into the bathroom and take a look at myself in the mirror. I hardly even notice the lack of length anymore. Though in thinking that by having less hair I would have less work in styling it – I was a bit mistaken. If anything my shorter lengths are more work than my waist length hair was. Now that it is so light and airy – it wants to curl up on itself, creating some kind of weird texture that is

neither straight nor wavy – but not in that effortless, slept in look I know some people can manage. My new hair in its natural state is more akin to a frizzy ball on top of my head. Before the cut a mixture of various potions and lotions could keep my hair tamed into submission – but now in addition to those potions and lotions I need the added kick of heat, whether by a flat iron or a blow dryer, to keep my hair looking presentable.

I sigh decidedly and pull my flat iron from the drawer and plug it in to heat up. And as I clip various sections of my hair up and out of the way I decide I am never cutting my hair this short – this cut looks great and really does suit me, and as my dad put it, is very spunky. However extra knots and longer drying time is far more favorable to the constant heat styling I've had to implement.

Running my hands through the lengths of my hair I still feel how soft and smooth it is. The color now an overall deeper brown than before since cutting off the ends. It still is remarkably thick, as I have to use multiple combs to keep one section of hair up. I smile at my reflection and swing my hair lightly letting it brush softly over my shoulders – and I wonder if I were to pull it back into a braid, it if would resemble a popped can of biscuits, curling ends sticking out. I laugh quietly at the image in my mind. Whether my braids are long enough to sit on or short enough to tickle my shoulders I would love them – my hair a part of me no matter the length.

Won't you say you love me too?

I AM FROM
A POEM

I am from . . .

Smooshed grey carpet
Sand at the door
The smell of incense and J'adore
Wood stove, warm love

I am from

Apple tree, tall and wide
Apples drop and rot, sweet and harsh
Crunchy leaves, gold and brown
Blue pool, cool and smooth
Rose bushes, thorns and all

I am from

Hot concrete, warm on my feet
Cool air on my face, flower petals
Dark nights, no street lights
Full moon, and dancing shadows

I am from

Sit up when you are eating
Shoes off at the door
Be nice, the golden rule
Say please and thank you

I am from

Turkey sandwiches and sourdough
Mayonnaise, scrapped off
Italian wedding cookies
Sugar sprinkled like fairy dust

LOVE POEM TO SCOTTS VALLEY
A POEM

My entire life
in one little town
a bubble of peace and order
a bubble of race and income

Once just a single light town
a truck stop at best
the sand plant
Santa's Village
The Lost World
an airport and golf course

If you can't afford to live in Saratoga
you move to Los Gatos
If you can't afford to live in Los Gatos
you move to Scotts Valley or
Cops Valley
entitled and reaching
keeping up with the Joneses

Summers that get so hot you can't move
"but it's a dry heat"
sun burned meadows
and chlorine saturated pools

Perfectly positioned
15 minutes to the beach
15 minutes to San Jose
an hour from San Francisco
an hour from Monterey
like Goldie Locks
it's just right

You may not be able to speed or even jay walk
but when you need them
the police are there
I could walk the streets at night
and never be afraid
- but do we really need a SWAT van?

It's my heart and my home
a soft worn blanket
perfect and familiar.

10 THINGS I WANT TO SAY TO LITTLE GIRLS
A POEM

1. Your smile and your laugh are enthralling
Like a prism of light or a picture perfect moment
That no single person dare turn their attention from
Like a trap so willingly enveloped in.
Keep doing it. Keep showing me and everyone else
Your pearly whites.
Smile at everyone you meet
Laugh until your sides feel like they will split open
Smile wide, all teeth until your cheeks crack
From the pressure of the joy you spread
2. Your body is perfect the way it is
Skinned knees and missing teeth
You can leap across ponds
Skid into home base
Or go up on tippy toes
To reach anything your heart desires
Your thighs can touch and still be beautiful
Don't listen to the magazines, the movies or the music videos
You aren't fat or ugly or wrong
You are six.
3. Enjoy this time.
Life is simple – tell me about DAPL
Tell me what any alphabet soup channel has to say
ABC, NBC, BBC, MSNBC, CNN.
I know you can't - I would never want you to try.
Instead, tell me
About your pet dragon, your bestest friend in whole widest world
About that one time you met Minnie and Mickey.
But then let me tell *you* something:
There will never be a time in your life after this
That will be more pure and wonderful
Breathe in the smells of crayons and non-toxic paint
It is the smell of heaven
And when you are grown
You'll smell these things again

And wish you would have
Breathed deeper.

4. Boys who are mean to you, are just mean
They are not your future husbands
They are not saviors to whisk you away
To save you from some kind of turmoil
You can do that on your own
Ignore boys – as long as you can
Ignore them when they say anything you can do
They can do better
Ignore them when they say
That girls go to Jupiter
To get more stupider
There will be plenty of time to worry about boys
And other things
Far more substantial than if
He loves you
Or loves you not
You are ten.

5. Play outside.
Let your imagination run as far as it can reach
That is not a picnic table – it is your castle
It has a moat filled with alligators
And inside this castle of yours
Holds the most precious of jewels ever to be conceived
Something that shines brighter than the sun
Is more valuable than gold
Or secrets
And it reaches high above
Past the clouds
Past the stars
And into another place
Someplace where
Rivers flow uphill
And are made of orange juice instead of water
And the sky is always the most
Perfect shade of purple
Where the clouds in the sky are made from

Cotton Candy

6. Wear pink.
Or green or blue or yellow or brown or black
Or stripes, or polka dots, or lightning bolts
Wear long skirts and short skirts
Wear pants and overalls and cargo shorts
Wear a cape and a dress and a tiara
Wear a tutu and ballet slippers.
Wear combat boots and your favorite dress
The one with the rip just above your left knee
The one with the stain
From the best tasting pizza you ever tried.
Wear anything you want.

7. Play with Barbies
And dolls and flowers
Tell me the story of the girl who lives in the forest
With the fairies and the troll across the bridge
Or GI Joes
Play with Legos and Hot Wheels
Show me how that one guy
Drove his car so fast and so high
He won every race
And managed to flip his car five kagillion times
Before his tires ever touched the ground
Play with it all
Play with sticks and stones
On carpet or in the mud, knee deep

8. When you grow up
Be a mother, a wife, and a caregiver
Give everything you have to the family you helped build
Be a doctor, an astronaut or the president
Give everything you've learned to world you want to help
And when you get up each morning
Wear the pants
Wear an apron
Wear both

9. People are going to call you names
Heartbreaker, Tease, Bitch, Slut
None of these are true – don't listen
These words are not
Words that define you
Who you are
Who you will be
Or who you have been
They are labels
And if given the right surface
Something that is strong
And confident, impenetrable
They will fall away
And never mark you
Until people forgot
They that ever even wanted to
Give you a label or a name
Apart from any you use
To describe yourself.

10. This world you are in isn't perfect
But you are.
In these small moments
Of pure blissful naiveté
You are untouched by places unknown
Places that hold fear and anxiety
Places that hold apprehension and stress
Stay that way.
Stay apart from these places
Hold onto the stars that shine in your eyes
To the most wonderful song
You hold within your heart
And share them
Show these pieces of awe inspiring moments
To each person that is graced by you
Until everyone else can see this world
That you see.
Until everyone else
Can see this
Wonder.

YESTERDAY IS GONE
A SHORT STORY

December had come to Chicago in fits and starts, like a visitor who wasn't sure he wanted to stay. Some days were dark and dreary, rain coming down from the sky in temperamental outbursts, one moment sprinkling lightly over clusters of neon colored umbrellas, and the next pouring so heavily that driving became a high risk activity. Other days the clouds became thin and wispy leaving hints of the cerulean sky above, days where the walk from work didn't leave me in need of a change of clothes. On these days if I sat for a moment in one of the rare points of uninterrupted sunlight, and the wind held its breath for just a moment, I could feel a warmth spreading over my head and shoulders that reminded me of months past when legs were bared and sleeves were short.

Today was not one of those days.

In the short time it had taken me to walk from the office building I worked in to the cross walk I could already feel the ankle of my pants beginning to plaster itself to my skin, and the squish of my boots that let me know that these were not actually waterproof as the sales lady in Nordstrom had promised me. My worn and tired umbrella tried tirelessly to hover over me, but the wind that swept through the city and its pathways created by tall, reaching silver buildings, whipped my umbrella about and seemed to do anything but keep its form.

As I continued walking through the surprisingly busy streets towards my apartment I tried to remember why I hadn't thought an Uber ride a necessary amenity to get me the six blocks home from work a mere five minutes ago. I looked up to the gridlocked Friday traffic and remembered instantly. With the city's

constant construction, bizarre one way roads and endless detours that sent even the most seasoned city driver in circles, the simple Uber ride would have taken twice as long as walking and cost me 20 bucks. I glanced down at my hand gripping the handle of my umbrella, saw how pale my fingers had grown in the cold wind and rain and thought that just this once the 20 bucks would have been totally worth it.

I eventually reached my small apartment, and climbed the two stories to it – my steps accompanied by the quiet squishing of my boots that seemed to waft softly in the empty stairwell. By the time I reached my door my head was filled with thoughts of warm tea, a hot bath and dry clothes. But as I stepped across my threshold the sound of my phone ringing somewhere deep under my multiple layers of clothes disrupted the calm evening I had conjured in my mind. I shed my messenger bag, rain coat and wool coat quickly and was able to fish the small device from my pocket before the call went to voice mail.

“Hello?” I asked, breath slightly heavy with effort from the quick disrobing of my outer gear.

“Oh hello Lilly, it’s me. Listen – where are you?” My mother very seldom bothered with introductions, but I knew who it was as soon as I heard her bright voice.

“Oh hey mom. I just got home from work, what’s up?” I said, using my foot to usher the pile of clothes and bags from my day towards my closet.

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news dear – but you know your friend Chelsea from school? Well I guess she got into some car accident last night and she passed away this afternoon” My mother said, her normal chipper voice low and serious. I

felt my legs drop out from under me and only realized when my butt hit the sofa with a start.

“Oh my gosh – what? How could this have happened? I just talked to her last week! She had started her new job at that PR firm” My mind was trying to process this new information, but like the December weather it was coming in a rhythm of fits and starts. Stopping in disbelief and racing with the idea that I was living in a disrupted world

“I know Lilly, I know. She had some major head trauma, they tried putting her into a coma, but I guess there was too much damage.” Memories were flashing in my mind, only being able to recognize snippets before my mind was racing to the next image of my friend. Graduation day, caps thrown into the air like confetti – except for Chelsea’s, she had spent hours decorating her cap and she didn’t want to ruin it. Second grade, lunch time, smiling at me with a mouth full of peanut butter and jelly sandwich, her front right tooth only half grown in. Seventh grade, our field trip to a local farm, Chelsea holding a chicken under each arm, not caring that she was getting dirt and who knows what else all over her. Three weeks ago, in Starbucks, she ran a hand through her hair, which was cut into a short asymmetrical look to suit her new corporate job.

“Lilly . . .?” My mothers voice was soft, but I could tell this wasn’t the first time she had said my name.

“Mhmm, yeah.” I said voice unsteady, feeling my eyes sting and my throat becoming sore as tears welled and cries built.

“I am so sorry, I know you two were close, should I let her mother know you’ll be coming to the funeral this Sunday?” She asked. I kicked the sodden pieces of leather from my feet before curling my legs to my chest tightly.

“Yes of course. Hey listen, Mom, I gotta go. I’ll talk to your later. Love you.” I gasped out. I barely heard her own ‘I love you too’ before I hung up and tossed my phone onto the pile of coats in front of me.

That night I couldn’t sleep, all I could think about was how short life could be. All the things people put off for tomorrow, traveling, pursuing a dream, getting that tattoo, whatever it was, there always seemed to be time to do that thing, tomorrow. Until there wasn’t. Until you step outside and get hit by a car, until someone else runs a red light and t-bones you, until you fall off a ladder trying to clean out your gutters. Until those moments, anything and everything is possible. You could quit your job, buy a plane ticket and never look back. You could take a wrong turn and end up somewhere or meeting someone who changes your life forever.

Chelsea always wanted to go skydiving. When we turned 18 we went to the only place in the area that did it. She signed all the papers, watched the safety video and was strapped into her gear before deciding that her day for skydiving was not that day. I had always wanted a tattoo, but I could never decide on one. Did I want words or a quote? Did I want some kind of symbol or an image? And where did I want it, somewhere on my arms where I could always see it, or on my back where it was easy to hide?

I rolled over onto my side again and stared at the clock. 3:49 AM. At this rate I wasn't sure I was ever going to sleep again. My mind just kept running and running. But my eyes and my heart were so tired. I wanted to slip into sleep, be somewhere else for a while and forget for a moment that I was living in a world that no longer included a dear friend. I rolled onto my back, stared at my ceiling for a moment and then closed my eyes. I forced my mind into counting sheep. By the time I reached 77, my tired body gave in and I slipped into sleep.

The next morning I woke up with a wild kind of purpose, and by 10 am my bank account was missing a couple thousand dollars and there was a confirmation email in my inbox with my travel itinerary for my trip to Bali come February. And as I stepped out into the street, feeling like some kind of rebel with plastic wrap strapped around my forearm to protect my new dime sized tattoo, I stopped for a moment in a rare point of uninterrupted sunlight, the wind in the city seemed to hold its breath for just a moment and I felt a warmth spread over my head and shoulders, settling there like a warm blanket fresh from the dryer.

Tomorrow may be another day, but today was my day.

REFLEXIVE ESSAY

Aesthetics

Whenever I am writing something of a creative nature, making sure that I am painting a picture with my words is the ultimate goal. When someone reads a poem or a short story of mine I want images as well as my words to fill their heads. So a part of my writing process is to ensure that any piece I write has a plethora of imagery and detailed description as a focal point. Reading a creative writing piece should invoke more to the reader than just the simple transfer of an idea or message, it should, in my opinion, conjure emotions, memories and deeper introspective thought. Additionally any dialogue or descriptions I used were implemented to produce more than a stated thought or observation – they are telling of the character’s personality, of a scene’s specific value or ideal. As another professor here at CSUMB implores her creative writing students: show, don’t tell.

The overarching voice I tried to convey with my writing was one of perseverance and reflection because I believe therein lays the heart of my project. With perseverance you can push past anything, be it physical, emotional or personal walls or obstacles that have been built up around us. The current state of our culture and society is one that both praises individuality – but also demands that that individuality can be fit into a series of peer approved categories. This contradictory nature gives a false sense of freedom for creative or alternative endeavors; perseverance allows for one to make way for any enterprise of their choosing – no matter it’s association or lack there of to any type of preapproved category. Additionally reflection gives great sense of self, who you are, who you want to be and how your past has shaped you. Truly knowing these things grants access to

more directed and productive efforts – which when aided by perseverance, yields potentially unsurpassed limits.

Audience and Purpose

The targeted audience of this project is, of course, primarily to my fellow Capstone peers, as well as any faculty reading this. Though moving past this developed project as a purely academic venture, as a secondary audience, I hope that his collection of works finds it's way to anyone unsure of their standing in this world. Our culture has become so obsessive with planning, ensuring, the future, and job success that graduates are often left feeling like an entity out floating in space – with no clear direction of destination. A feeling so common it's now being casually referred to as a quarter life crisis. In writing these various poems and short stories I found myself working through my own ideas and preconceived notions of my identity – and finding peace in knowing that where there is a past and a journey, there is also a future. So I hope that in my more expansive secondary audience as well as my primary audience that by reading this collection, echoes of past experiences, memories or thoughts are revealed and that anyone reading may be provoked to look inside themselves and perhaps inspire them to practice a moment of mindfulness and appreciate each point in time. For no matter how small an entity may be, such as the smell of fresh rain or the delight in a favorite song being on the radio, there can be gratitude found there.

Process

I was very fortunate that at the same time that I took my Capstone I was also enrolled in Deb Busman's Creative Writing HCOM class, so my mind was already primed to be flowing regularly through the creative writing process. Additionally, Busman's class spends quite a bit of time on personal reflection and thinking back to individual experiences, or finding moments in our lives that held a certain purpose or realization. This process is very helpful when also crafting a creative writing project that asks the student to relate said creative writing pieces to self-identity. Most of the works used in this final portfolio were direct products from her class either by direct assignment or inspired from some kind of in class activity such as a guided or prompted free writing exercise.

Thematic and Social or Historical Context

Many of my creative writing pieces directly relates to how females are expected to fit within the strict, and often near impossible, standards constructed by our culture and media. Being a female myself, but quite often not being able to conform to societal expectations of physical beauty, I find myself on the outside looking in – and promptly wondering why I must be set apart from what is considered acceptable. Why do these rigid standards exist? How do these standards influence people, women specifically, in how they find themselves fitting within the world? How do we define ourselves? More often than not it is by the place, physical or otherwise, we come from and how our developing self is responded to by the general voice of the society and culture within which we live or find ourselves throughout the different seasons of our life. For example if a person with blond hair

spends their formative years in a place where blond hair is prized, they will more than likely find themselves with a high esteem and positive association with themselves and their perception to the community, a sureness of who they are. However if a brown haired person grows up within the same community they will assuredly have a significantly lower esteem and a negative association with themselves and their perception to the community, left wondering who they are and how their personal identity relates to the community that surrounds them. Considering this then is either blond or brown hair inherently good or bad? And for that matter does either of these physical markers signify who someone is internally? No – their perceived goodness or lack there of are only quantifiable by the reception they receive by another person, or collection of other persons.

Artistic Tradition and History

I know that my story of accepting self, and it's relation to being a female in a society which hold females to a very high and restrictive standard is not a unique one. I did not find inspiration from any one particular artist. As stated in my description of the process used to write these creative pieces, many of them were formed from assignments or prompted free writing exercises in Professor Busman's class.

FINAL SYNTHESIS ESSAY

Within the second section of Human Communications 475, I have contributed to the class's ability to identify and describe major issues by coming to each class with an open heart and mind ready to accept any material, theories or ideas being presented in class. By partaking and observing any open discussion following a lecture from class I can say that I helped to further along conversations or provide meaningful insight that contributed to the goal of the class rather than taking away. Additionally each and every class I have taken here at CSUMB has been one comprised of great diversity and allows for a well-developed set of ideas and opinions to be shared and discussed. No class discussion was formed by a homogenous blend of single-minded thoughts but are instead continually added to and contain growth that is perpetuated by each passing semester. My own uniqueness accumulated from my past helped to aide in differentiating from others view points as well as raising critical questions about our sections shared theme of self identity. I grew up in a small town in Santa Cruz County, my "Love Poem to Scotts Valley" quite accurately paints a picture of the community and environment that I was surrounded by growing up. It very much is a bubble all its own, and as such I had a somewhat limited view and perception of the world until I began taking classes at my local community college. Taking those classes and being surrounded by people with varying views was like opening the floodgates. I began taking in information, ideas and theories and collecting them like trading cards. Trading cards taken out and used in conversations, arguments and speeches to help further progress my point. Experiencing these polar events allowed for my own perception

to gain access to both sides of a single coin – which in turn made for more critical question and analysis of our sections’ theme of self-identity.

Taking part in these types of discussions, as well as any similar discussions in my other classes can be viewed as a group endeavor. Specifically within this class I was able to demonstrate my ability to work collaboratively through our group discussions and decisions. For instance it was asked of our class to come to a consensus on various points regarding our capstone festival – such as the time and day of our capstone, what type of food should be served and who should be nominated as class representative. Additionally through any large scale project there must be multiple versions so as to attain the best version possible before submission. Each creative writing component produced for the express purpose of this project went through multiple revisions. I came to develop these multiple revisions through peer review and criticism – this required me to work collaboratively with their people, receive their feedback and suggestions and deciding whether or not their statements helped to further my poem or short creative piece, as well as whether those suggestions made the piece align more or less with my idea if its intended purpose. Quite obviously I was also able to work independently as everything written within this portfolio is my own work, I was able to make a plan of action complete with deadlines of my own choosing – all of which I was able to meet on my own without any external prompting or consequences for completion failure.

Our sections shared theme was based on self-identity as well as other sub categories which still tie into this overarching theme. Self-identity in my opinion is

the realization of personal ideals and contentment with however one stands in any avenue, whether that be personal beliefs, physical attributes or characteristic tendencies, regardless of how these various aspects are received by the community in which one inhabits. With each of my creative works I based them on the connection in some way to one's community or society through different stages of life, which in my opinion changes the way that one relates themselves and their attributes to the community and their expectations. As a young child one can be very impressionable and in many ways is a blank slate for a society to imprint pieces of value upon, and then as one grows older, learns more about themselves and the world, there can be the extremely valuable act of reflection to look back and realize various aspects of how development and ideas have been shaped and shifted in response to external forces as well as internal. Since most of my creative pieces are of an autobiographical nature and reflect actual personal experiences they help to tell the story of my own journey to self-identity and realization of who I am truly as a person. While my one fictional short story helps to provide an example of how that even through life's toughest moments that can be gratefulness and personal growth.

My project was able to meet the published criteria and standards for assessment in many ways. I turned in all required assignments in a timely manner and through the appropriate channels, I proposed my capstone idea to my professor and got it and my plan of action approved before beginning. I utilized various forms of written creative expression to convey a variety of ideas, meanings and purposes. Each contribution to the overall project can be directly tied to the overarching

theme of our specific capstone theme of self-identity and investigate multiple facets of said theme. Each written piece is reflective of my own personal voice, writing style and ideals. And lastly my reflexive essay clearly demonstrates my production process, methodology and it's relation to all other aspects of crafting this creative project.