

Ink & Liberation

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Introduction

Students in a WRS class were asked to write a personal narrative relating in some ways to their writing experience. Chesney Parchment takes the readers on an emotional writing journey, which first begins with personal struggles that eases into a place where writing can be a form of emotional healing.

Keywords: failure, self-expression, struggle



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² *Writing across the University of Alberta* (WAUA) publishes undergraduate student writing from writing studies courses and courses focused on writing studies practices and scholarship at the University of Alberta. You can find WAUA online at <https://writingacrossuofa.ca/>.

The night I fell in love with writing, I was trapped. Entombed, if you will, in the archives of my repressed emotions. Had you asked me anytime before then, I'd have said one of my greatest strengths was compartmentalizing.

I'd have said it without blinking.

I'd have been lying.

In truth, I had lived my life in abject terror. Afraid of being a failure, afraid of being a burden, afraid of talking to people about my feelings. That fear created a master in the art of emotional repression. Each time I felt something was too big to deal with alone, I squished it into a box and shelved it in a corner, to be dealt with at a later date. I then deluded myself into believing that date would never come.

The night I fell in love with writing was one of the worst of my life. I came to the realization on that fateful evening that, as much as I felt I had to, I could not exist all alone. I was under pressure from all sides: my parents, my school, and my own astronomical expectations.

When I was younger, I was unwilling to let myself feel anything outside of determination. As time passed, unwillingness developed into inability. I was a source of pride for my family—the youngest in my grade and top of my class. In my head, I was not a person, but a list of accomplishments for my parents to tell their friends about. A list of accomplishments. I couldn't have struggles, and I certainly couldn't need help. Depression, anxiety, and neurodivergence weren't words that smart girls, let alone smart Jamaican girls, worried about, and so depression, anxiety, and neurodivergence got filed away. I pushed so many things into what I had thought were the deep recesses of my mind. I had not realized that the archives had expanded and closed me in.

The night I fell in love with writing, I tried to shove one final grievance with myself into the archives, and it did not fit. There I sat, with a heavy head, legs stuck to the cold concrete of the basement floor, compartmentalizing as I was so good at, but there was no space left. Immediately, my eyes welled, my breathing quickened, and my hands began to tremble. A small tremor turned into body-wracking sobs while the plastic-covered pink insulation and concrete slabs dissolved. All of a sudden, there were feelings and concerns and thoughts and insecurity, and I was drowning. I had forced so much into this corner in my mind that, in the chaos, I could not find a way out.

The night I fell in love with writing, my hands shook as I clawed at the infallible walls I had built. They did not budge.

The night I fell in love with writing, I could see myself in two places at once; I watched as I sat in my little corner, taking shallow, unfulfilling breaths with nothing but a pen and a piece of

paper to anchor me, and I watched myself wade waist-deep in the nuclear fallout of my own mental creation. Without an ounce to lose and little capability of other coherent thought, I decided to try my hand at writing.

I ceased seeking a way out.

I wrote my way through.

I persisted, blinded by the current and aware solely of the torrent of emotion rushing onto my page. I wrote through years of anger, and sadness, and insecurity, and inadequacy. I wrote of frustration, I wrote of loneliness, of being unheard, and I wrote of *fernweh*. The hurricane in my mind took the escape with which I provided it, flooding the page through my frantic fingers.

Then the tide receded, and I was perched once more on the concrete, metal support beams ahead and thick plastic behind, but with a tear-stained page covered in barely legible print clutched in my hand and an unimaginable weight gone from my shoulders. My lungs expanded and took in my first full breath in almost half an hour. I reached into that same corner of my mind, familiar to me as my middle name, but I found it had changed.

Gone was the labyrinth of feelings. My archives were missing. In their place was a desk. On that desk, there was a laptop. On that laptop, a blank document. No longer were my sentiments to be put off for an undisclosed date.

On that fickle piece of paper, I held my soul. It was vulnerable, yes. It was imperfect, and it was sad, but it was also beautiful, and it was mine.

I return to that piece even now, in times of despair. I titled it “*Fernweh*”—to long for a far-off place that you’ve not yet been to. It reminds me of the wonders held within my own being. That, as long as I keep pushing, I will find somewhere to call home.

The night I fell in love with writing, I found a way to express myself, a way wherein I remained in my comfort zone, but I could create something beautiful. With the written word, no one would judge me, invalidate me, or force me to be perfect. I discovered that I could expel the thoughts that stifled me, say the things I want to say, but that no one needed to hear them. I was smearing ink on dead trees, or forcing a device to comprehend my zeroes and ones, and it was self-care. Nobody had to see me fall apart, and nobody had to help me stitch myself together. The English language became my companion, my therapist, my most trusted confidant, and my dearest friend.

The night I fell in love with writing, I was finally, *blissfully*, free.

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