

Something Natural

Grace C.



Something Natural

This large-scale poetry collection, *Something Natural*, expresses my understanding of a young girl living under the influences of past hardships, struggles in developmental growth, and the overall idea of child wellness. Throughout my research and creative process, I learned the importance of child-guardian relationships, and how they affect the mental growth of children in their developing stages. This topic is deeply personal, and I want my art to reflect my experiences.

Using marker, acrylic paint, and charcoal on canvas, I created a five foot tall book of eleven poem. The subtle illustrations and diverse colors give the poems a visual level of emotion, alongside the unlimited interpretations of the words. These poems are curated based upon the degree to which they empower and speak to me. Each page (front and back) represents someone important in my life. More specifically, each is a person crucial to my recovery from depression and anxiety, including my parents, friend Jason, and brother. My work demonstrates the gratitude I have towards my family and close friends, but most important, myself.

Throughout my experience at Oxbow, I undergone tremendous growth and this project is my way of taking pride in who I have become. I struggled as a child, and through that struggle, I affected those whom I love the most. I want to give back to my family and give back the pride and happiness I have taken from myself.

Grace C.

Massachusetts

Dear Reader,

You are not alone. Once, only a short while ago, I wouldn't be here, sharing my life of poetry with those who need it most. But it is for those who need it most that have inspired me to fight back. At one point or another, all of us have been to Hell and back. But so few of us know why we fight internal battles, know the powers of letting go of everything you know to be comfort, and the strength within "rock bottom".

I wanted to write poetry about the unsettling situations women and children in America face, because so many go untreated and underappreciated. As both a woman and a child, I write from experience, which occasionally I find upsetting. I have always had a passion for poetry, and now that I have matured, I want to share my provocative concerns with the rest of my community. Much of my book drew inspiration from two poets: Rupi Kaur, and Sana Abudeil, both beautifully spoken and written poets. I was originally drawn to Kaur for her short stanzas and phrases that shed light on subjects and situations society isn't comfortable discussing. I was inspired to share my uncomfortable thoughts in kind, and to keep a similar formatting style, because I believe it is important that people who don't appreciate poetry, can at least understand mine.

My book consists of two sections: *The Loathing* and *The Learning*. In the first section, the major themes consist of sexual abuse towards women, mental illness in children, and the denial of self-worth. All of these themes have featured heavily in my life, and I am upset to know that I am not the only one. My objective for this first section is to not shame anyone, or have someone feel degraded, but rather to have the viewer read and feel a sense of companionship in the words, a validation of their feelings. *The Learning* is the more important section, however, because the themes are more inspiring and encouraging, and they shed light on personal growth, feminism, and self-renewal. It was important for me to end my book on a note of hope and healing, because that is the direction I want to be heading in personally. For me, this book is less of a focus on where I was, and more of a focus on where I am headed, and who I want to be for myself. A poem that most directly describes my current feelings is one from *The Learning*, "I want my body to be a better place to live".

I wrote this book because I am hopeful for the future of myself, and of others struggling with their own interior battles. I cannot speak on behalf of any of my readers, but I have struggled deeply with depression for most of my life. I yearned for support from those I loved most and only received denial and unacceptance. My parents, who I love dearly and am most thankful for, never understood me as a child. I was ridden with anxiety one day and it turned into an intense depression. My family has been blessed with fortune, but it has made communication between the three of us distant and emotionless. To them, the scars on my body were a cry for attention, whereas I was fighting to stay alive, and to keep a smile on my face. Having a jagged relationship with my caregivers was extremely hard on me and was deteriorating at my values, which led to bad decisions. At age 13, I was too young to fully understand appropriate coping methods and I was too closed off to let anyone into a place I deemed very scary and unappealing. While reading this book, it is important to acknowledge our struggles and hardships, that way we are able to move on. Without acceptance, there is minimal chance of moving forward, and my objective is to continuously move forward..

This was the best decision I have made thus far in my life. I have learned more about the healing process and the power of the mind through writing than through any other methods I

have tried as a means to clear my head. Some of the poems in *The Loathing* were challenging to write, because I sometimes find myself in triggering thoughts, or processing situations I no longer wish to think deeply about. I have gained knowledge about what it means to feel oppressed and the power of communication. Communication is crucial in the recovery process, and something I wish I had the strength to do years past. I have changed for the better throughout the journey of this book, and I hope to give the reader the same sense of self-worth as they read too.

I can't say it was completely smooth sailing. I can't say that writing about past events that have hurt me was easy. It's hard for anyone to recount events or situations that make them feel uneasy, and it takes great strength to gain knowledge by reflecting on them. Whenever I came across insecurities, I tried to write in a frame of power- a mindset that made me feel as though I was writing from a stronger standpoint than my insecurities- to show self-worth through bad experiences.

Alongside personal experience, I researched thoroughly about child psychology, child development, and mental illness in children. Although many of these topics don't tie directly into the poems, I felt this was something that many of us are under-educated about. It interested me to think about what defines us, what it means to love yourself, what defines our characteristics. I found a multitude of child development theories, and among those found some of my favorites: Sigmund Freud and his psychosexual theory, John Watson and B.F. Skinner and their behaviorist theories, and Bowlby and his attachment theory. Freud's theory talks about general pleasure areas of the body, and how failure to progress through one stage of growth can result in a fixation in that point of development. This intrigued me, and made me think about the causes of illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and ADHD. Is it possible that failed progress leading to fixation is the root of any of these disorders? As a child, are we unaware of our failed progression? Even at an older age, when we aren't advancing, I think the result of fixation leads to anger and distress about who we are, leading to disorders such as depression and anxiety. Behaviorists, Watson and Skinner theorized something slightly different - development comes as a reaction to stimuli, in terms of reward, punishment, reinforcement, and environmental situations. However, there is no consideration of internal thoughts or feelings, which I don't agree with. But, I do associate with learning from how we are raised, and developing from interactions such as reward and punishment. In the simplest terms, when we are rewarded as children, we soon learn that what we did is an acceptable thing. Whereas when we get punished, it soon teaches us that we shouldn't be doing those things. Behaviorists also divided this stimuli into two categories, *classical conditioning* and *operant conditioning*. Classical conditioning is a naturally occurring mix of reward and reinforcement, whereas operant consists of only reinforcement and punishment. Which method is more dependable in terms of raising a child? Many would argue both sides, but as a child from harsh rules and stick reinforcement, all I wanted to do as a young teenager was rebel. When children aren't given freedom, they either rebel to find it, or when they finally get a taste for the first time 19 years into their life, they can't handle it. All parents want what's best for their children. The behaviorist theory states that parents ultimately are at the control of their child's developmental path. Although I believe that guardians play a dominant role in development, I also believe that there is a large factor of interior thoughts, experiences, feelings, and emotions. There is also Bowlby's attachment theory. In essence, it states the importance of the relationship between the child and the caregiver, and the innate need to form attachments. The world is a very new and scary place, especially for very young children, and having someone to trust to ensure your health and well-being is extremely

vital. Unfortunately, the other side of this is growing up in a home of little care and compassion, and being forced to take on the world primarily on your own. Situations like these bring about hard mental states, and in some cases lead to further misfortunes like substance abuse. It's hard to watch a child struggle through substance abuse and mental illnesses, but one of the best things to do as a friend or caregiver is to show support and compassion, to relieve the sense of loneliness. When I had fallen to addiction of self-mutilation, I know I felt extremely isolated and abnormal. Since my parents showed little compassion towards my symptoms. I looked for support from other people and found myself in a tired cycle of unhealthy relationships. I recall doing anything to feel a sense of love and tirelessly looked for someone to take care of me the way I wished my parents would. I believe sometimes parents just don't know any better than their own experiences growing up. I have nothing against the way they raised me, but I feel excluded from the family sometimes, because nobody seems to get me. I think having the proper relationship to parents is crucial in development and was a big part of my depression.

I couldn't have written this book without my parents and my closest friend. My parents are a fundamental part of my day-to-day success, and I love them dearly for it. They have learned more and more every day to support me through my bad days, while I simultaneously have learned to be more open about my feelings towards them. We are working towards a healthy relationship, and it has been a true blessing. I also wouldn't be where I am today without the constant support of my best friend, Jason Connors. Although the current love of my life, I refuse to label him as just a boyfriend, when he has been so much more than that for me. He has pushed me day in and day out to pursue my dreams, to go to art school, to write this book. He stays up late at night with me, rereading my work, so I can listen for mistakes and phrases that don't sound right. Without Jason, I would not be as far down the path to recovery as I currently am, and I can't thank him enough for that.