

*The entry to my house leads right into the stairwell, a space that floods with sun in the mornings. I can remember being no older than five or six and waking up in my mom's bed to find that she wasn't there but was, instead, downstairs. Antsy to find her, I'd run to the stairs and, as I reached the top platform, I'd see her beaming at the bottom. The light in my house lands right on the staircase so that no matter how cold the rest of the house is, those top few stairs are always slightly warmer than the rest. My mom called me her "starshine" and, accordingly, would sing me the song, "Good Morning Starshine" from the movie Hair as I came down the stairs.*

Mornings, to me, have always been a time of heightened connection and overall contentment. Reflecting on my childhood this past semester, I've found myself often thinking of a specific memory of a staircase in my house. This sculptural installation is intended to convey the feeling and essence of coming down the stairs each morning. I want to portray a very specific feeling of delicacy and light that these stairs contain, as well as honor how important specific mornings have been throughout the course of my life. I used images, such as the porch swings, to highlight specific parts of mornings that hold the most significance.

To convey the feeling of delicacy and translucency the above memory has, the installation is itself fragile. I used lightweight, translucent Japanese paper and the frame of the staircase was built using as little material as possible to assist the delicacy of the form. The metal pieces are used only to support the paper, rather than to complete the staircase. The paper and metal come together to form a sculpture that is intended to be viewed from all sides and perspectives.

Lily M.  
North Carolina

# Memories of Mornings

Lily M.



## Introduction:

My house is old, meaning unnecessarily large rooms and absolutely no space for storage. Aside from many negatives of living in a century old house, there are windows everywhere, allowing light to fill the front of my house, something that I've always felt fortunate to have. There are a few morning memories that carry more significant weight than others, in particular the memory of the stairs in my house that I've never let go of. The entry to my house leads right into the stairwell, a space that floods with sun in the mornings. I can remember being no older than five or six and waking up in my mom's bed to find that she wasn't there but was instead downstairs. Antsy to find her, I'd run to the stairs and as I reached the top platform I'd see her beaming at the bottom. The light in my house lands right on the staircase so that no matter how cold the rest of the house is, those top few stairs are always slightly warmer than the rest. My mom called me her starshine and accordingly would sing me the song, "Good Morning Starshine" from the movie *Hair* as I came down the stairs. I'm seventeen now and though I've grown out of this ritual, my mom has still carried it down to my little brother, who just turned three.

There's a piece of me that has never failed to feel swept away by how striking a morning can be. I never felt the need to sleep in, rather I've always been one to wake up before others. It's always been a time where I've felt most content. Sometimes it's a matter of getting work done, other times it's just enjoying peaceful time alone or with family and friends. Either way, I never dreaded early mornings. Reflecting back on how I've spent mornings, the ones that I hold closest to my heart are ones where I've woken up to a chaotic happiness. Mornings where there's laughter and noise throughout the house. I have two siblings now, Sadie who's twelve and Elis who just turned three. Without them, I don't think I would have such a strong attachment to the concept of getting up early. Mornings where I don't get up before them, Elis is always sure to run to my room and wake me up. Often through series of tickles, and almost always accompanied by a screeching "BUGGY!"<sup>1</sup> Sadie on the other hand could be considered more of an night owl, but still happily participates in any chance to wake me up. My house is the most euphoric in the morning. I have vivid memories of waking up to the sounds of my mom making breakfast downstairs: the coffee beans grinding or the waffle maker beeping. I've always carried these memories with me and reflected fondly on them as something that makes my life my own.

Mornings allow a new beginning, a fresh start to every day with unique identities and agendas as similar or different from one to the next. For me, mornings are a time that I've always considered myself to thrive in most. My productivity is higher, I feel lighter, and generally look forward to morning routines. Whether that means getting ready for school early, or mornings spent slower just for oneself. As I think of my own routine, I notice similarities between different people in my family and myself. Throughout my life, mornings have been a time of togetherness and joy that my family considers a time of heightened connection. It's a time to share food, sit by the fire, talk over coffee, watch the sunrise. With this paper, I'll reflect upon

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<sup>1</sup> Since I was little, my mom has called me Lily Bug. When my sister and brother were born, they couldn't say lily so caught on to calling me buggy instead.

my own experiences as well as my family members experiences and explore what it is that makes a morning together so special and what exactly is the perfect morning routine to me. Additionally, I will consider how it came to be that I have much more negative associations with nighttime and how at times a morning can still carry that same darkness and heavy feeling, depending on the situation.

### **The sun, music, and color:**

I believe there's a very specific feeling and impact that waking up naturally holds. Specifically when it aligns with how the sun plays a role in our body's circadian rhythms. Throughout history, humans have been naturally drawn to the sun. This makes sense as our lives revolve around the sun's movements, but how is it that the sun has the ability to affect our mental health? The sun activates a part of the brain known as the "pleasure center" which basically functions as a reward system. It includes almost every type of pleasure, ranging from sex to certain drug use. When humans spend time in the sun, your brain rewards you by activating this area of the brain (Alison, 2011). The brain releases four primary chemicals - dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins, all of which activate a feeling of happiness or euphoria. Primarily, the sun releases the chemical serotonin which is activated through certain retinas in our eyes (Nall, 2018). Essentially, the production of vitamin D caused by exposure ] to sunlight is known as a reward circuit and, in response to the production of vitamin D, our body releases chemicals that fuel happiness.

Like the sun, specific colors and music can aid in the production and release of serotonin. Interestingly, it is especially colors and music that are often times associated with the sun that cause this phenomenon. Warm-hued colors often evoke feelings of happiness, hunger, and excitement. As yellow is highly associated with the sun, its evokes feelings of excitement and optimism. Cooler colors are more likely to make you feel calm, serene and sometimes heighten creativity (Art Therapy, 2018). Music can also have big impacts on the release of chemicals and emotions in your brain. Throughout my life, music has played a big part of every morning and the way it affects my family. Since I was young, my siblings and I have had songs or artists that we've classified as "morning music." In particular, artists such as Jack Johnson were always prominent in mornings spent with my family. Although I don't necessarily listen to his music anymore, songs of his still have the capability to alter my emotions based on how they're associated with childhood memories.

### **Characteristics of owls and larks:**

Most people will associate with one chronotype, meaning the time of day they feel most alive and content. People who associate strongly with mornings are called larks and people who feel most comfortable at night are called owls. Chronotypes can be a way to identify and classify groups of people, as each type has different characteristics and associations. Although it is partially personality based, there is a gene that is responsible for people's chronotype. It's called

“period 3” and comes in two forms, the long and short variant. Studies showed that people with the long variant were represented as morning people and people with the short variant were classified as night people. Larks tend to be thought of as more productive, wiser, smart, etc. In actuality, each chronotype has its benefits and when forced to perform in the chronotype opposite hours, the person's quality of performance and mood will decrease. For instance people who associate most strongly with the night chronotype often have to work during the day. This is where the common stereotype that night people are less productive comes from. This is called *social jetlag*, which affects owls more so than larks. When owls are forced to perform at peak societal standards during the day, they can cause themselves sleep loss and emotional distress. This is where the common reference to grumpy morningness comes from, owls' brains are physically not equipped to feel emotionally happy on off hours. In contrast, some studies showed that when asked to perform creatively and logically, people scored better on their chronotypes off hours.

### **Owls' Association With Mental Illnesses and Substance Abuse:**

My mom's house has always been known as the designated morning house, while my dad's house seems to hold a darker nightlife sense. Waking up at my dad's house never held the lightness of my mom's house, there was a melancholy presence in the. Through research, I began to learn about morning people's characteristics vs those of a night person, otherwise known as larks and owls. Although each has its own benefits, the night chronotype holds a much more negative association than the morning chronotype, especially for me.

In my life, I feel most at home in the morning but have also had experiences with people who could be considered owls, specifically my dad. During my research I was able to draw connections between how “owls” work in a society and my dad's personal behaviors. Larks and owls both have characteristics or trends that are specific to their chronotype, one of which is that owls are prone to substance abuse and depression. Throughout my life, my dad has struggled with alcoholism and episodes of depression. Reflecting back on how my sister and I thought of my dad's house, we considered it to be a darker and heavier place compared to my mom's house, especially when he wasn't doing well. Knowing now how sun impacts chemicals in our brain that leads to happiness, it makes sense that my dad's depression was often associated with a certain darkness. Owls also tend to score higher on the novelty-seeking scale, meaning they seek thrill and often feel bored with life in general. This correlates with substance abuse in owls and the need to find something exciting often. Much like with how darkness leads to depression, many people are affected by seasonal depression, a condition where winter and months with less daytime lead to a drop in serotonin levels leading to feelings of depression and an imbalance of melatonin which can disrupt sleep patterns and mood. Often times, people are treated with light therapy, which essentially means spending time near light boxes to induce serotonin. Another reason that night chronotypes tend to be prone to depression is due to “social Jetlag.” When chronotypes are forced to participate in the opposite chronotype time, it can lead to emotional

distress and sleep loss. For owls, this happens frequently because our society is based off of an almost entirely daylight oriented schedule.

### **Personal memories of mornings - personal narrative based**

As I began to see how moments from my childhood have been carried down as a tradition in my family, I began to notice other moments of routine that are consistent within my family. What first comes to mind is Christmas mornings at my house, with what we used to call cinnamon rolls but has since turned into what we call monkey bread. My family grew up going to Michigan every summer, a place I've always considered to have a sense of home. Each summer, we would drive to a coffee shop called Trick Dog that's just outside of Frankfort, Michigan. The adults would all get coffee while my cousins and I would get monkey bread - essentially cinnamon and sugar covered sticky dough balls. Unfortunately the coffee shop has closed down but my family has taken to making our own monkey bread each Christmas rather than focusing on a dinner. Similar to how my immediate family spends Christmas morning, my extended family has cheesecake for breakfast. Something that even my grandmother did when she was a kid. I found myself interested in how a routine can stay in a family for such a long time and how not only do I have a fondness for mornings but so does my entire family. My mom has three siblings, all of which have kids, so I grew up with chaotic but happy reunions. When everybody is together, there's a sense of serenity and euphoria, especially in the morning. After speaking with a few members of my family I was able to get a sense of how each person perceived our family in the mornings and what they looked forward to. I also was able to learn about how specific traditions were started and why we still continue them.

### **Families/friends memories - interview based**

Below is a series of emails, personal writings, and poems.. After going over stories and memories from family members, I found parts that struck me the most and created new pieces of writing out of each one. Many are constructed out of the original words, though lightly edited. In an attempt to convey my experience with the night chronotype, a few poems are twisted to tell a different contrasting story.

### **Methodology:**

1. Sent initial email describing project, goals, and requesting stories from family members.
2. As I started to receive responses, I altered emails and crafted new pieces of writing to highlight and find the essential pieces of each memory.
3. Some emails were altered and twisted into new and contrasting stories that hold relevance in my life but continued to use the original words.
4. Note: not all the writings and emails are included in this paper but instead are documented on my final project. As I receive memories and stories, I will continue to create new pieces out of each email.

The original emails are included below, followed by my own pieces of writing organized with each family members story.

### **Initial Email: Lily's Final Project**

*Hi sweet family!*

*I've talked to a few of you about this but not everybody. I'm working on my final project for my program and part of it is documenting some memories and stories from you guys! The baseline of my project is about morning people and night people, family routine/traditions, and personal memories of mornings in my house, with you all, or just anything that's prominent regarding our family. I was wondering if you all would share some memories that you've had of our family in the morning, times that we've spent all together, or just anything that you heavily associate with our family. For the parents - any memories you have of your childhood or traditions that you've passed on to us is great too. It would be great if you could write it down in an email but if you'd rather do it over the phone I can do that too! It doesn't have to be anything big, any sort of story or words will work. miss all you guys! I love you and can't wait to see you.*

*Thank you all!*

*love,  
Lily*

*(also could somebody extend this to McKenna? I don't have her email)*

*Thank you again!*

### **Matisse Response:**

*Good Old Family Times*

*Hello you sweet child, I miss you w my whole heart and hope you are thriving on all your adventures.*

*Some memories I have from mornings are getting up and being dropped off at aunt tonyas. Me and sis would get there and climb into bed with kep or tia for just a few more minutes of sweet sleep lmao. Then we would get up and eat while we watched cartoons either upstairs in the living room or on the floor in the basement.*

*I remember dilly always doing my hair in crazy ways. Like braiding a flower with pedals on to the top of my head. That one took forever.*

*I remember walking to the bus stop down the street with them or scootering. Playing around on the dead end road waiting for the bus.*

*One time someone brought a pogo stick out and we all played with that... sis sucked at it though haha.*

*Once we moved schools I remember driving in aunt Tonya's station wagon I think, or Dilly's. It was brown. And we would get dropped off and kep and tia would be taken to their school.*

*I remember at your house, whenever someone was sad your mom would spray whip cream into their mouth to cheer them up.*

*Bedtime wise, I remember always taking baths with kep and tia. And when we were all at your house, taking baths w you guys in your cool tub.*

*I hope this helps!*

*Love you so much.*

**Revised 1:**

*Dilly, remember how you used to braid our hair into crazy things, like huge flowers that sat right on top of our heads each morning?*

*Or Tia, remember getting out of bed to sit on Dilly's lap while shed count each vertebrae on our backs. She never skipped a single one.*

*I remember so much*

**Revised 2:**

*Some mornings we would get up on the floor.*

*Walk down the street.*

*I remember we would get dropped off.*

*Your house was sad.*

*Remember when we were with you?*

*I hope this helps*

**Mom Response: A Morning Memory**



*Hi Bug. I have more to send later, but was remembering this today..*

*When I brought you home from the hospital I had to sleep downstairs because the doctor said I shouldn't walk up and down stairs until the C-section incision healed. I had a bed in the den where the sofa is now. I remember those first mornings when the sun was shining bright and I was lying in bed with you. It was like nothing else existed and I'd never felt so much love for anyone or anything in my life. I remember the sunlight, the smell of all the lilies that family sent filling the house, and having quiet alone time with you. And, I remember feeling so fulfilled, happy, peaceful, and in love with you.*

*Thanks for prompting me to remember sweet moments. Iloveyou*

**Revised 1:**

*Hi Bug,*

*When you were brought home from the hospital, I couldn't walk up and down stairs. So for the first couple weeks, I slept downstairs with you on a bed we'd made in the den.*

*I remember those first mornings laying in bed with you.*

*The sun was bright, it was like nothing else existed. I'd never felt so much love for anything in my life.*

*I remember the Sunlight and the smell of all the lilies filling the house.  
So fulfilled, happy, peaceful, and in love with you.*

*Thank you for the sweet moments, iloveyou.*

**Revised 2:**

*A Morning Memory*

*April 5th, 2001*

*I brought you home from the hospital, the doctor said I shouldn't walk up and down stairs until the c-section incision healed.*

*Laying in bed with you and I'd never felt so much love for the sun.*

*Lilies filling the house. So in love.*

*Thank you.*

### **Mckenna response (revised only)**

*On the subject of traditions and mornings:*

*Hope it's not too late,*

*On the subject of traditions: no one else gets to shove cars in my sisters ears.*

*Hope this helps!*

*Morning,*

*Mom finished her cup of coffee, that's a tradition. She works so hard and loves us even when i shove matchbox cars in ears to wake her up.*

*I hope*

*Hope you're loving.*

### **Aunt Dance Response - (original response only)**

*we would take our baskets to the rec room and eat off part of the marshmallow bunnies bodies (to mark whose was whose) and we would pretend with them. .... we also took the malted milk balls and would paint our cheeks with the colors ;-)*

### **Ending email:**

*Thank you for all the stories! They've been a tremendous help in my project and in return I'd like to share some of my favorite memories of you all.*

- 1. I don't think any of us will ever forget Kepler peeing on the twister mat at uncle keith's house.*
- 2. Dilly - I so vividly remember waking up and crawling into your lap with tia. Also waking up in your bed full of lavender pillows.*
- 3. Aunt tonya - Thank you for making me steamers each morning when we were younger, and for countless other morning routines.*
- 4. Matisse and Mckenna - I remember both you asleep in my old green twin beds and me and tia running upstairs to wake you up. Matisse was never as happy about being woken up as McKenna.*
- 5. I remember facetimeing you all on christmas mornings because we were never able to be there with you.*

6. *Tia - one of my all time favorite memories is waking up around noon with you. We'd sleep on my futon because it was next to the windows and make ourselves a big nest out of pillows.*

*Overall I remember waking up to everybody downstairs, and parents would drink their coffee, and all the cousins would fight over the spinach pies Dilly brought.*

*Thank you all for the countless memories you've given me throughout my life. I love you!!*

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, I don't find anything that necessarily states "larkness" as being superior to living as an owl. Simply a different sense of connection. I believe that each chronotype is best prepared and content in the time of day they associate strongest with. Forcing one to participate in the others time of day, simply leads to miserable aspects of life. Mornings are my time. I see so much life and newness that happens each morning but at the same time it's often the quietest part of the day. I love mornings spent alone in silence, but I'll always look forward to waking up surrounded by noise and people. I love waking up to noise, whether that means music from the night before or my family in the kitchen. Although I feel that my happiest mornings are at home with my family, I found that I can move from place to place and be happy as long as I have a time to make a morning my own.

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