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Drawstrings Lace Up My Words

Gregory Ross Gates

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Drawstrings Lace Up My Words

by

Gregory Ross Edmond Gates

An Honors Capstone

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Honors Diploma

to

The Honors College

of

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

April 22, 2020

Honors Capstone Director: Professor Anna Weber

Lecturer in the English department
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Abstract

For my Honors Capstone, I wrote a portfolio of poetry as well as a reflective essay about the revision process. The poems are about two important relationships that ended for me in 2019. Additionally, there are common themes that articulate the different stages of that year. I focused on the body as an image in many of the poems. Also, weird imagery is used to explain the more emotional pieces. The goal of the straight forward poems was to be give the feel of a journal entry. There is a balance between public and personal poetry. In other words, I tried to find a way to be poetic and personal at the same time. All in all, my Honors Capstone is poetry that came from a rough year.
Us: are you kidding me?

Are we liars?

    Hesitant,

in case of rejection.

So, we pretend something

isn’t there.

    Unsure how

but something needs

    to change.

Us…

Let’s talk about

Us.
Our walk in the rain

with hands locked,
collecting rainfall.

Condensation
weighed on
cuticles, cracked—
from nail
to creased wrists.

Fingerprints rest above the
joined ravines of our
sinking palms;
twitching as loose cells
wash away.

My fingers
were rigid the moment
that your warmth
left. Now, rain
drops through my empty
hands.
Under street lamps

Shaking shoulders
split
bumping elbows
unentwined.

Honesty stretches
insecurities apart
and ruins us
without warning.
The air around you

It takes the epiphanies from my eyes.
It causes blood to burst like broken glass.

It crawls across my neck.
It rests around your hands.

It has bones that lodge in my windpipe.
It buries your fingers into my open neck.

It leaves my voice box exposed.
It wretches and wrings your ring against speechless secrets.

You catch my breath.
You keep it.
Friendship

Consternation is all that I feel
for what comes next,
because I never thought that I would’ve
been the one to say
that I couldn’t do this anymore.
I am jealous.

I saw a picture of you.
My mind goes places.
It could be your brother.
Reality sinks into itself.
I thought we were together.
At least that’s what you said.
I don’t tell anyone.
I write about it—
keep it in a drawer.
I tell myself that
I can’t see myself with someone else
but you just were.
I won’t listen to “Peach” by The Front Bottoms anymore

but I keep it in my playlist

just so that I can think of you

when I skip it.

You said that you would get a tattoo with me.

Spoiled peaches and plums would have been

inked on my knees.

But now you think of someone that isn’t me,

when you hear that song.

And I still think of you.
Crying into my chest, after being told of my grandmother’s death

Lonely eyes
caved in
my sweater.

Its drawstrings inched up and into my throat,
lacing up words
again, and again.

Sleeves enweaved fibers
knitted to my skin.

Zippers stripped strands
of my identity.

Lacerated layers revealed
what is left—
vibrating nerves
overtaken by puddles.
Alone

Alone at the table
Alone in thought
Alone with no music to distract
Alone without keys to type
On the fridge in the back room

The pictures and newspaper clippings are now in an album.
The embroidered towels in boxes and hand written notes thrown away.

I got the to go orders alone this time.
Trout and turnip greens.

She is going to wear your suit.
I get one of his.

I sat in the golden salon chair.
I can taste the hairspray in the air.

They say that I’m a pallbearer.
I can hear the crying through the walls as I look at the fridge.
It swales inside me

It ducks around corners.
It bounces across my ribs.
It aimed for somewhere else.
It cracks bones in half.
It reaches inside my muscles.
And stretches them from the inside out.
It resounds through nerve endings.
It climbed up my neck.
It holds back my tongue.
It pushes up against a tight jaw.
It puts both hands on either side of my mouth and lifts.
It slides one piece at a time out of me.
It bruises the edges of my lips.
It sheds me.
Uproot

Wrinkles wretch and twist together
to take the epiphanies
from my eyes.

Their centers droop down
like stepped-on puddles of rain.

Color drips
as the almond shape
is crushed by opened lids.

They crawl with tension
when seeping scars
trace and outline
the white with red.

Requiem reveals
corneas pierced
like thread
by lashes.

My eyes consider leaving their roots.
Ibuprofen won’t fix this

My muscles curl into themselves
from the way I left things.

Knots want to uncoil,
but they are forced together
with each regret.

Impulses twist and loop
the threads of flesh.

Restless tossing
feeds the thoughts
that wrap and tighten
the skin like a ribbon.

Long hair covers the knot
on the back of my neck,
but not what caused it.
Undone

Like loose sweater threads
Like lost damp socks behind the dryer
Like when you throw a stone instead of skipping it
Like bricks through glass walls
Like umbrellas that open upward
Like the heels of old sneakers
Like crunchy beans in your coffee
Like finger prints on lenses of your glasses
I’m dry because this bar of soap doesn’t change

I want to wash you away,
but
Instead, I scratch away
    at who I was.

Flaking fragments vanish and

melancholy notions surface where
    dandruff disappears

because I can’t distract myself here.

Memories stick and fall like follicles
clinging to the shower wall.

Suds erase    the strands
loose grays    that clog the drain.

Pores are uneasy,
    they fill up and empty themselves.
    To shut off obsessions,
numb limbs reach for faucets.

Regrets rinse over me—nervous knuckles crack.

Dry skin gets drier,
each time I wash my hair with soap.
Reflection Essay

My Honors Capstone was not only an important milestone as a student, but it also caused me to think back to a year that changed a lot for me. Through the revising the poems, I was able to revisit scraps of paper that had been kept in a drawer or a notebook. The two main topics of the narratives in the poetry were cohesive and work together to show who I was at that time.

With the goal of being open like someone was reading my journal, I struggled to make my poetry more personal and not so private. The first drafts would often leave others unaware of what the speaker of the poem was saying. Also, the voice did not seem like it sounded like me. Therefore, I need to put the actual topic into the poem and not just write about rain or hands. In other words, to get my point across in my portfolio, I had to decide to be more open in my writing and not hold back as if I was the only one to read my poem. In addition, the revision process increased the readability and understandability of my portfolio. I was able to take out the unnecessary words and narrow my focus into the portfolio that it became. Many of the poems were reduced or added to substantially. The drafting process is the most rewarding aspect of my portfolio and my Honors Capstone. I saw two-word images or random lines jotted down in a journal that was left in a drawer turn into a project. Moreover, working with a project director on this capstone helped me to cut out entire poems that did not share the same quality as the others. Also, confusing aspects of punctuation or wording was changed and improved thanks to revision suggestions. All
in all, doing a poetry portfolio for my Honors Capstone was a rewarding and effective approach for me as an Honors student in the English department.
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Re: Honors Capstone

Anna Weber <alw0034@uah.edu>  
Wed, Apr 22, 2020 at 12:27 PM  
To: Gregory Gates <grg0009@uah.edu>, Alanna Frost <frosta@uah.edu>, William Wilkerson <wilkerw@uah.edu>, David Cook <dac0010@uah.edu>

Good work on this Honors Capstone, Ross. I'm emailing my approval back to you along with the necessary copies.

Thanks,

Anna Weber

On Wed, Apr 22, 2020 at 11:49 AM Gregory Gates <grg0009@uah.edu> wrote:
  
  Professor Weber,

  This is Gregory Gates. I attached my completed Honors Capstone manuscript to this email for your approval.

  Thank you for your time.

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