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Fireworks

by David Atwood
**Walk to a Box**

by Kenlie Hancock

Inside a box, inside a box, inside a box
I found the wear my toes required
With choral, brightly lit and loosely strapped
Worn on a floor with fancy dress
But on a mountain too
And to the local store
And maybe for employment once or twice

The dirt clang, and the grass stained
And my choral foot companions fade
To an indistinguishable shade of worn
So to the box and the box
To find another box.
And I did

The perfect match and great replacement
Then to the hills of dirt again
And to the church, and school, and work.
Another year or two went by
Again with the coverings I adore.
Until the rip and tear became too much for mom to bear
So to the box inside a box
To find a shoe that I could wear

But no more boxes could be found
None that match,
None to fit
None that dangle right when I sit.
But shoes can't not be worn these days
So I'll strap them to my feet and walk
It's time I found a new pair
Inside a new box, a new box, a new box.

---

**Left and Right**

by Kenlie Hancock

LEFT AND RIGHT

I wish that I were ambidextrous
I get to writing with my right,
And my left lay limp
The latter starts to cramp
While the former is unmoved.
I want to take my right
And put it to the side,
And try this something new.
Train my left to be my right
And then go back and forth.
And never be held back from writing
By my own pair
Which is small,
But terribly significant.
Blue Eyes
by Jaren Carlson

Blue eyes that mesmerize, crystal depths of light
Maze of walls, standing tall, spirals growing tight
Piercing deep, secrets keep, your soul your eyes do hide
Unchanging gleam, sparkling seem, bringing in the tide

Sky blue, always true, broken like clear glass
Fragile hope, trying to cope, silent tears they pass
Comforting stare, wishful prayer, dreams that are so vast
Helpless plea, stormy sea, memories forever do last

Stop Loving You
by Jaren Carlson

When in the morning no birds do sing,
At the moment that bells can no more ring,
The time fire has no heating powers,
The spring that contains no earthly flowers,
When two points won't form a line,
When the stars refuse to shine,
When dreams can no more fly,
When tears don't come when you cry,
When the sun doesn't rise at dawn,
When the point of life is gone,
When the sky is no longer blue,
That is the day, the day I'll stop loving you.
Memories of Old Home
by Katy Fong

It was a quiet neighborhood, says the
Rarely visited cul-de-sac.
A family of five grew from two, says the once new,
Now old and well-worn house.
The family grew older and changed
Year by year, day by day,
Says the porch light that watched them come and go each day.
Till one day the almost full grown family
Left the house for a new life, says the driveway
Speckled with cracks and potholes.

The three children grew from rough and tumbled
Little monkeys to well-mannered miniature versions
Of their parents, say the repainted walls
Once covered with their childhood memories,
And stained carpets now clean and fresh.
The eldest was quite the achiever,
Says the table-top filled with awards and achievements;
Though he had many contradictions with the parents,
Says the windows that shook with each angry outburst.
The middle child was the creative one, says the bedroom wall
Filled with little holes made by the tacks
That hung his beautiful works,
But he was a hard-to-handle child, say the creaking
Floors that have been through many tantrums.

There was a little girl, says the closet full of dresses.
The young girl soon became a young lady, say the
Stuffed animals and dolls tucked away in boxes.
She was a crybaby, says the flattened pillow, but
She truly loved to read, says her favorite reading chair.
Father was the fixer-upper, says the tool bench.
He tried to keep in shape but failed, says the exercise machine
Collecting dust from neglect.
Mother had a passion for gardening, say the once beautiful
Rows of ready-to-pick vegetables.
Her hard work to keep the family functioning
Could be seen as she cooked and cleaned, say
The pots and pans and towels ragged from use.

The family grew and changed as years passed by, say the
Closet full of shoes whose sizes kept growing larger.
They frequented the outside world less and became
More busy with their lives, say the shelves of souvenirs
Of summer adventures which grew slower as it got older.
The children became young adults, says the flattened balls,
And the neighborhood children also grew and left
Their homes, says the abandoned basketball court.
Homework became priority, say the toys and games
Being played with less and less.

The first to leave were the old
And things unused for years, say the
Old clothes in the donation pile.
Then food and other necessities were packed and shipped,
Say the bare pantries and drawers.
The next to leave was the furniture,
Says the left-behind refrigerator.
The place was given a last minute clean,
Says the once hidden dusty place turned spotless.
The family said their good-byes, says the closing
Garage door as they left for a bigger stage.
Till the day the new family comes to
Start a new story, says open sky filled with possibilities.

---

**Untitled**

by Destiny Patterson

I'm not ready to say goodbye to you.
I dedicated a large part of my life to you
But now I'm forced to live without you
I miss you
I love you
Two things I will never hear from you
I visit your grave all too often.
But it's all to keep your memory
I promise I'll try not to forget you
But my memory is already torn.
I'll say goodbye one last time
And keep you forever in my heart
Never again to stand by my side
It's my time to say goodbye to you
But instead of goodbye I'll say
I miss you
Shattered

by Isabella Parkinson
It was almost time for the show. 6:45 pm and cast meeting had just ended. I start going over my lines again in my head and checking my props.

“You’re going to do great, Ryan.”

“Thanks” I say to the random person backstage. Worry, grief, stress are the emotions bouncing around in my head. “It will be okay. It will be okay,” I think to myself. It had been long enough; the curse couldn’t still be in effect. As I pace back and forth, up and down the green carpet of A-hall behind the auditorium. Time seems to start moving slower; every second lengthening, each tick of the clock becoming more and more spaced. I thought quietly in my mind “We did everything we needed to do. We sent it away, and it can’t ask for more.”

Suddenly Hagen snapped me out of my stupor. “Hey, are you okay?” he asked. “You keep looking at the ceiling.”

“Ya, I’m fine,” I lied, “Are you ready for the show?”

“Not yet,” he replied.

“Why?”

“We haven’t done the thing!”

He looked at me for a second, expecting me to catch on, but my mind was completely blank. “The Brick?” he said quizzically to me.

“Oh ya, how could I forget?”

Hagen and I started down A-hall, towards the parking lot doors. Once we got to the doors, we faced the wall above the mounted, green heater. Hagen pulled out of his pocket a very crumpled, faded, old piece of paper, which had ripped edges and was browned from the years of passing from hand to hand. The cursive words on the page still stood out to me in the strangest way, as they had since the first time I saw them when I was a new sophomore.

He handed the paper to me. I took it in my right hand and focused on the eight lines.

“Which one is it again?” he asked me. “Tenth row up, in the middle; the one with the crack on top,” I said without taking my eyes off the page.

He counted the rows of bricks above the timeworn heater, and found the small chip in the top of the clay brown brick. He placed his pointer finger in the center of the brick, and then looked at me. I switched the paper to my left hand, and then took my eyes off the page. I placed my right pointer finger next to his on the brick, and held the worn script in front of us.

Hagen was still looking at me as he said “Ready?”

“Ready” I replied.

We both looked at the paper for a single beat, and then we started to speak together, in unison. “All our sadness, all our woe, all our worry, let it flow.” I began to imagine all of my dark feelings, all of my worry, turning into smoke in my body. I knew Hagen was doing the same. “We pray you keep, none may know, and keep it safe, far from our show.” The black smoke began to run down my right arm, towards where my finger was touching the brick. “Within this brick of hallowed bliss, we give to you to never miss.” The darkness flowed into the brick, filling it. My mind’s eye saw it happen. “And so we leave our sins at this, and seal you shut with a kiss.” We both took out fingers off the brick, and brought them to our mouth. We touched our lips, and began to motion back toward...
the brick, but before we could seal it shut, the darkness began to pour back out. This wasn’t in my imagination, or Hagen’s; we could both see a dark smoke falling from the brick.

“What’s happening?” Hagen said worried.

“I don’t know,” I said. “This has never happened before.”

The smoke fell to the floor, flowing almost like a river out of the brick. As it reached the ground, it began to fill what seemed to be a completely transparent glass figure. As the figure filled more and more with the smoke, we could see it began to shape itself into a kind of person shape. As it filled past the chest I finally noticed—it was a reflection of myself.

“What do you see?” I asked Hagen.

“A smoky reflection of myself” he said.

“Of you?”

“Ya.”

Finally the smoke figure filled and I saw a faded, grey pair of my own eyes looking at my face. “Why are you here?” I asked the figure. “Why are you here?” it replied back to me. The hallway around me started to darken, and a chill came over me.

“Why are you here?” I asked again. This time, no reply; just a blank stare, looking into my eyes. Then, I felt a piercing feeling, right between my eyes. The ghostly figure jerked closer to me. “You think I am the curse,” it said to me.

“No,” I said, “the curse is gone. I got rid of it myself.”

“You fear the curse. I am the curse. I am here to fulfill your punishment.”

That was impossible. I had gotten rid of the curse two months before. The chest was back in the bomb shelter, and every item was returned; the letter, the watch, even the thread.

“You can’t be the curse,” I said in defiance. “Your show will fail. You haven’t done enough, and the curse will haunt you forever.” The figure seemed so calm and matter-of-fact as it said these things.

It was completely dark around me, and I could see nothing but the ghost. “Hagen, do you hear me?” I yelled into the darkness.

“Ya, I’m right here.”

“What is it telling you?” I asked hurriedly.

“That I will never be good enough.”

“What?”

“I am telling myself my worst fear” Hagen yelled back. Of course; it was just my fears coming back out of the brick. We hadn’t sealed it yet.

“Hagen, we have to reseal the brick!” I put my hand forward, through the ghost. “I am the curse. Your show will fail. You haven’t done enough. The curse will haunt you forever.”

The ghost yelled back at me as I started to yell, “And so we leave our sins at this.”

Then I heard Hagen yelling with me, “And seal you shut with a kiss.”

I slammed my fingers back against the brick, and the light returned to the hall. Hagen was still standing next to me, his fingers next to mine against the brick. “I think that it why we seal the brick” I said, still bewildered.

“Who started this tradition?” he asked me.

“I don’t know. It was years and years ago. I bet that was just everybody’s fears. All the fears that have been put in there just came out.”

“Freaky man,” said Hagen. “Let’s go. We have a show to do.”

“Ya” I said as I put the paper back in my pocket, and walked back down the hall, away from the brick.
One Word
By Courtney Schantz

That warm night in May, when the stars lit up the sky…
That...that was the moment. The moment I will never forget.

If I remember correctly, she wore the lavender dress. The one with small little straps that fell so gently on her slender shoulders and that hugged her curves in all the right places.

There was a gentle breeze that coaxed the trees and flowers to dance around us, pushing us closer and closer to the little outlook over the lake. I could swear the wind was whispering to me, encouraging me forward when half of me wanted to flee in terror. Her delicate hand pulling mine was what kept me going, following her down the path both of us knew so well.

I remember passing all our ‘special places’ as we liked to call it back then. That old pine tree that we had studied countless hours under in high school. Around the bend the tire swing we had set up in college still sat empty, waiting until we hopped on again. The stretch of shore where we had our first kiss…

“It’s so lovely at night.” She had said, drawing me away from my wandering thoughts and back to the present. I discovered we had arrived on the little dock that jutted out into the lake, and she let go of my hand to rest her own against the railing. A content sigh escaped her perfect lips as she surveyed the crystal water and I mimicked her without realizing it, though the two sights we were admiring were very different. I couldn’t see her face, but the long brown locks I’d come to love so much coiled behind her as rays of moonlight shined atop her head. I think I responded with a word or two, but what had been spoken is lost on me.

I wanted to join her by the railing, but I stopped myself. Oh, how hard it had been to resist wrapping my arms around her slender waist that night. I was here for a reason, I told myself. Everything had to be perfect.

But could I do it? What if I messed up? What if I couldn’t get the words out and scared myself into failure? Would her in all of her perfection forgive me? Could she still love a coward like me? What if…

I could feel my heart hammering in my chest as I took shaky breaths. There was an endless stream of words in my head and I forced myself from the distracting thoughts. I knew what I wanted to say by heart. I had practiced it over and over until I was sure I could recite it backwards in my sleep. I was prepared. And so I withdrew the little black box from my coat pocket.

It took several attempts to simply say her name, my mouth dry with sudden nervous fright. I swallowed several times in a small effort to regain my senses.

“Maria.”

At the sound of her name, her beautiful name, she turned in curiosity. I was immediately captured by those deep emerald eyes and, for a brief moment, I forgot where I was. With a tiny shake of my head, I forced myself out of my trance.

“What is it, Henry?” Her silky voice asked. That voice I could only compare to the chorus of angels.

On shaky legs, I slowly sank to one knee on the deck and brought up my hands which held the little box. Opening it seemed to happen in slow motion, until the lid was fully extended and the ring inside shone in the moonlight.

“Maria.” I started again, and by this time her graceful hands had moved their way over her small mouth. The sight left me speechless, the immense beauty the whole scene exuded, and for an agonizing few seconds the practiced speech I had been painstakingly been reciting and memorizing for weeks disappeared from my mind. I berated myself mentally, willing myself to recall the words
that I was determined to remember. And in that instant, that glorious instant, I did. And I continued on.

“You are my everything. You are the sun, the moon, the stars, and every other beautiful thing that I have the privilege to lay eyes upon. But words would never be enough to express to you just how much I adore you, just how much I love you.” It was at this point a small snifflle sounded from behind her hands and my arms started to shake.

“I could never be as amazing or as deserving of happiness as you, Maria. Your kindness and spirit could bring the worst of men to the light. You have touched others with grace, and you have touched me by just existing. You give me hope when I never believed myself of deserving of it.

“And so I have to ask…” I took a breath, preparing for the most important of words in my entire speech. “Maria, would you give me the honor of being your husband? Will you marry me?”

A choked sob broke through her then evident tears and I panicked for a brief second that I had said something wrong. Half rising, however, I was almost knocked over by the force of her wrapping her thin arms around me and burying her face into my shoulder. Her sob turned into the cutest of laughs and hoped that I would be able to hear that laugh for the rest of my life.

But my observation of her beauty was interrupted by her voice. And never, before that time or any time afterwards, have I ever heard anything more joyous or beautiful or wonderful as her answer to me then. Never would I cherish anything more than that word to me.

“Yes.”

---

**Victoria**

By Courtney Schantz

The room he entered was average. That’s the only word to fully describe it. Office carpet, dark wood desk, with an office chair tucked under it. The walls were the creme color paint. An average window sat behind his desk.

The man who entered was just as average. Suit and tie with shiny black shoes. He held a square briefcase, wore a simple watch, and saw the world through glasses that were nothing but average. It was all very...normal.

A small, white envelope sat upon his desk. This was not strange to see as, being a businessman, he found these frequently waiting for his arrival in the morning. However, this one in particular sent a chill up his spine. From what, he did not know.

He set his briefcase down on the desk next to the envelope and eased into his chair. For a long moment he did nothing but stare at it. What made him so hesitant to open this small envelope before him? From all appearances it was a blank paper, indistinct and unimportant. Not even a name labeled its front. Nevertheless, his hands shook at the thought of reaching out and touching it. It was ridiculous.

Angrily shaking off his apprehension, he snatched it up and flipped it, revealing the backside. A dark red lipstick print was plastered on it. Peculiar, he thought.

He paused only for another moment, hanging onto a lingering worm of doubt, and then proceeded to rip it open. Seeing what was inside, he froze.

Money, and a lot of it. He gingerly took out the contents and stared at the stack. All in fifty dollar bills, he counted out $1000 in cash. He thought for a moment, but failed to think of any projects he was awaiting payment on. The addition of the lipstick mark had him all the more confused.
He set it all on the desk and leaned back in his chair. Running his hand through his hair, he suddenly craved a drink. He glanced at the clock on the wall.

Craving a drink and it was only 8:15. What a day.

His mind went back to a few nights ago, when he last went to the bar. He only remembered bits and pieces of that night. A run-down place, the usual drunken boasting of his prized rifle collection, a pretty girl.

That girl, she was most prominent in his mind. Though, he had to admit, he had been too drunk to remember her name and face. He also recalled that they had conversed for quite a while. And something about...promises. He promised her something. He couldn’t remember that wither. Guiltily, he hoped he had kept his promise. Such was the man he was.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. He quickly hid the money under his briefcase a second before Victoria, the secretary, stepped halfway through the door.

“Mr. Hoover, your appointment for 8:30 is here.” She stated. He casually noted her long, fair hair flowed well past her shoulders, giving her an almost angelic look.

“Excellent. Please send him in.” By this time he had regained his composure, and now took the time to arrange his desk neatly.

Victoria nodded but did not move. When she spoke, her voice was so quiet, he had to really pay attention in order to hear her.

“The funeral is tomorrow at nine at White Oak Cemetery. Just in case you wanted to attend.” She paused. “Oh, and Mr. Hoover? Thank you. You have no idea what your kindness has done for me.” She smiled brightly, her dark red lips twitched upwards in happiness. She looked much younger, just then. So innocent.

When she left and closed the door behind her, Mr. Hoover couldn’t breathe. He sat in his very normal little office chair, gripping his very normal desk tightly. Slowly letting go, he looked down at his hands in horror.

Her words brought back images of that night at the bar. The words he’d said. The things he’d done. But, his thoughts always seemed to return to the absence of Victoria’s wedding ring and her dark red lips.
There is a lone figure standing on the banks of a deep river and a mob a fair distance away. You are the lone figure by the river. The mob behind you has given you five minutes to come to terms with your death. The reason? You are capable of magic, which is why the mob took you from your house in the middle of the night.

You stare at the reflection of the torches in the fast-moving water. You can escape; you know that you can. You can destroy the mob behind you and return to your house. You can go home and pretend like none of this ever happened.

However, that would just make all their accusations true. Everything that they said about you, the names that they called you, the lies that they had said. They called you a monster, a demon. Killing them would only make them right and you wrong. Not only wrong, but a murderer. That wouldn’t be fair, at least, not to you.

You could also stay and let them kill you. That would definitely prove that you aren’t the monster that they say you are. On the other hand, they might interpret that as weakness, an inability to defend yourself. That would not accomplish anything, well, anything except your untimely demise.

Perhaps you should run; you could do that. That would not only prove them wrong, but it would also enable you to survive. You risk a glance behind you. The mob did bring the dogs. You’ve been chased by those dogs before. It definitely isn’t something worth repeating.

The river gently laps the soles of your feet. You almost smile as you realize that it is slowly rising in response to your feelings.

A member from the mob behind you calls out that your time is up. You know that it’s not, but you don’t say a word. One thought crystallizes in your mind: you are going to escape. You slowly turn towards the mob, a sly grin on your face. None of them want to touch you, let alone get near you.

The water begins to curl over the tops of your feet as you bow to them. "You’ve got me all wrong," you say as you take a step back. The water is now up to your calves and steadily rising.

Then, you fall backwards, allowing yourself to sink to the bottom before you begin to swim. You won’t drown, but you’ve got a long way to go. You can hear the watery sounds of dogs barking and men shouting as you swim with the current. The dogs dive in above you. The water will drown them, though. You use the water above you to push them back onto the banks above. There is no way that you’re going to swim with dead dogs.

The water is roaring around you now; you are almost free. You push off the rocks beneath you, the waterfall right in front of you. Right before the water sends you over the edge, you leap into the air, turning and giving the mob a parting salute before falling to the waters below. You’ve done it. You’re free.
Excerpt from “Mokari” by Jessica Wright

THE END
The chant of thunder cracks, 
yet its beauty is but mere demise. 
The howl of its ferocious barrage racks 
as a resounding cloud burst of rain cries. 
The showers of condensation roar purpose, 
as the harmonized overcast hums and purrs. 
The discharge of the tune sounds worthless, 
but its subtle whisper is a sob that cures. 
The spray of dew drizzles its weep, 
but the monsoon torrent leaves us life. 
The flood bleeds a puddle of water deep, 
and cleanses it amid a cannonade of strife. 
The sun chirps a hymn over the mountain, 
with the buzzing tone of cloud tears sent. 
Its sorrow clatters a hemorrhaging fountain. 
Till the sun returns continues The Storms' Lament.

Haikus

by Quinn Li

Winter
White falls from the clouds
Crystals looking for a place
Here for a season

Spring
The flowers have bloomed
The hedgehog saw his shadow
It will end early

Fall
The green is fading
The Great Oak tree has gone bare
Life is on the ground

Summer
The sun is alone
Now is the time to run away
Run away and hide
Scars
by Brooke Hays

Scars are pieces of an already broken heart falling into place
Scars are an old drunk who lost everything he ever held dear
Scars are the words spoken to the teenage girl saying, “Sorry we did everything we could”
Scars are an old woman letting go of life and leaving this existence forever
Scars are the tears cried when you swear your soul will be broken forever
Scars are all that’s left when you’ve lost everything
That’s what scars are

Iron Butterfly
by Brooke Hays

Isn’t time cruel
Never stable or forgiving
When you’d forfeit everything
Just to feel something

When it’s all broken
And you have no more tears to cry
When all you have is false hope
And it seems you might survive
You’re fooling yourself
You’re nothing more than an iron butterfly
Rant One
by Farrah Siler

Don’t joke about rape EVER
It’s not even clever,
And if you call me a feminist
It’s like, whatever.
Because if feminism is standing up for what’s right
Then I’d take that title any night,
Or day,
Because there are women in pain
But that’s okay
As long as she knows her place,
As long as she covers her face
With burqas
Or makeup
Just so you can tell her genetic make up
Because God forbid she look like a guy
So every morning she put a line over her eye
Because just being human isn’t enough
Stereotypes:
Men are tough,
Women weak,
Men rough,
Women sleek
Body hair isn’t natural?
Then why does it grow there,
I have to shave it so my underarms can be bare
Wait,
No,
Think I have it switched
Because when I look at my pits
I have hair,
But I’ll still throw my hands up in the air like I just don’t care,
Because I don’t
It’s not about men being evil,
Or ruling the world,
It’s about the world being equal and fair,
But this can’t happen until people decide
To become a part of gay pride
Or put racism aside,
I’m not trying to change anyone’s mind
But I have to let it out,
It’s been building up inside,
So it’s time for me to shout out
Everything that goes on in my mind
So I put it into a rhyme
That tells you how I feel
Because when I go to bed at night
These thoughts reel
And I just can’t believe that this ignorance is real.
Wishing, waiting, wondering.
Will I win or will I lose?
The battlefield beckons me,
Questions me…
She offers privilege;
A place of belonging—
Comfort.
Yet repels with the backlash of stress
And missed opportunities.

I fight to feed my cravings;
Power to rule, but oh to be free
From the fish bowl—
A place of prying eyes judging me.
Crammed. Stifling.
The cost of fame reeks
Of self-indulgent dishonesty.

It takes courage to leave
Like birds take flight.
Does it make me uncourageous to raise the white flag?
No, it is courage I took with me.

My picture is,
Colorful, Creative
Loving, Laughable, Leading
—Different—
But still
Me.

Pressure
From it,
Her,
Them,
And
You.

Cutting pictures,
Cracking glass,
Chipping frame.

Trying to glue my thousand pieces
Into a different pane.

I can’t fix the pieces to fit
It’s not my original frame.

Gathering my
Shredded pictures,
Shattered glass,
Smashed frame…

I take the stand
And raise it high.
My picture is not perfect,
But it is NOT a lie.
American Rain

by Hunter Nance
Anthony's Duality

By Quinn Li

Being the avid summer hiker of a non-athletic family, it sometimes proves difficult to find times for prime hiking trips. But despite the hindrance of lazy family members, I made time for it.

There was one day during mid-summer when I asked my cousin Anthony to come hiking with me. His mother, she always had a hard time with him, whether that be forcing him to go to school, or even something as menial as enjoying the fresh air. He had a number of unwanted disorders, one being the sudden shifts in mood, and another on crossing the lines of limited human sympathy. So in short, he was absolutely unpredictable, which could make some moments around him rather... Unnerving.

His mother had tried many forms of relief, but simple distractions proved to be the most effective treatment. So I obliged her plea for a break.

A familiar steep calf-burning incline lay ahead of us, along with a flat bike trail mid-summit. It was on this part of the journey where things got... questionable. You see, Anthony is smarter than you may think. His intelligence made up for his impulsive decisions, which always stirred unquestionable doubts in me.

He looked happy when occupied with strenuous tasks. And I can say I thoroughly enjoyed walking and conversing with him, but as soon as we saw it. As soon as that brown serpent came into view, Anthony wasn’t himself anymore.

My comfortability had left as soon as I looked at him. The relaxed youthful expression I loved to see on his face was replaced with something more sinister. As if a fresh possession had taken place. He grabbed the nearest stone, paying no heed to future obstacles. He sprinted to that snake with one goal in mind, and it didn’t take knowing him personally to figure that out.

Blood, I can see it so vividly. The way the sand rejected the red tint until it was finally forced to absorb its essence. Ending the reptile’s linear lifestyle was already bad enough, but the gut wrenching display of anatomy threw up a barrier I didn’t dare cross.

Spectating this travesty is something I’ll never forget. Every time he picked that stone up it seemed a little more crimson. And every time I see his face, it gets a little darker.
Jamie Tworkowski

By Natalie Taylor

“14-24 percent of youth and young adults have self-injured at least once” (Learn). Jamie Tworkowski is the founder of the non-profit organization To Write Love on Her Arms (TWLOHA). This organization gives hope to people struggling with suicide, depression, addiction, and self-harm. Part of what they do is informing people of mental illnesses. They try to get rid of all stereotypes and rumors (It Started with a Story). Jamie started this when he had a friend who was struggling with all of those elements and he wanted to help her. Jamie has made a huge difference in so many people’s lives and has had an influence on everybody dealing with something.

Jamie Tworkowski believes that we all live in a broken world with pain. He knows we know mystery and beauty and tragedy and loss (It Started with a Story). He knows that everyone has pain. He is trying to offer hope to people through an organization called To Write Love On Her Arms. Jamie grew up surfing and fell in love with music and writing (Jamie Tworkowski). He now spends time sharing To Write Love on Her Arms’ message. He goes to colleges, high school campuses, festivals and conferences to spread this message. He loves having a creative side to his job (Jamie Tworkowski). Jamie has said, “You need to know rescue is possible, freedom is possible…” (It Started With a Story). Jamie is not an expert on depression, self-harm, addiction, suicide, and more, but he deals with all those concepts on a daily basis. He wants to address what he calls “the elephant in the room.” He understands just how much of your life these things can consume and wants to help people deal with it. He wants people to understand that their pain matters (Bolack, Jade). This is the purpose of To Write Love on Her Arms.

To Write Love on Her Arms started with a story. This story includes drugs, depression, suicide attempts, and razor blades. It includes a girl who never knew how wonderful the world could be until Jamie walked into her life and decided to show her. He helped her out of her addiction and depression. From then on, he has been trying to help as many people as he can through TWLOHA. This is a non-profit organization that was started when Jamie found his friend with self-inflicted cuts on her arm and found she was dealing with an addiction. He wanted to get her help, but didn’t have the money. He started a Myspace blog spreading his message and selling t-shirts to raise money to support his friend’s rehabilitation. This all happened after a coworker of his had committed suicide. Now, he is helping people all over the world (It Started with a Story).

“The vision is that we actually believe these things: You were created to love and be loved. You were meant to live life in relationship with other people, to know and be known. You need to know your story is important, and you’re part of a bigger story. You need to know your life matters.” This was stated in his arti-
article entitled “It Started with a Story” on TWLOHA’s website. Even though Jamie is not an expert on any of these, he has seen how it affects so many people’s lives and wants to be able to be the help that most people won’t get. Jamie has had many sad and happy experiences while working with To Write Love on Her Arms. He has said that one day he can talk to someone who decided not to end their life and the next he can be speaking or attending a memorial service of someone who did end up killing themselves, even after getting help. TWLOHA has helped more than 150,000 people and has donated over 700,000 dollars to recovery and treatment centers.

“The big picture is how we cope with pain. We’re talking about issues that affect male and female, young and old, rich and poor, black and white, the world over” (Question and Answer). Jamie did an interview with the magazine Christianity Today and in the article “Question and Answer,” he was asked why he stuck with the title To Write Love on Her Arms since it is so long. He responded by saying, “Our title causes people to wonder what it means. It opens up a conversation and invites people to learn more. Our title says a lot about who we are and how we approach what we do.”

In other words, the main purpose of To Write Love on Her Arms is that community and hope and getting help will replace being secretive and silent about this. That people will put down the guns, and blades, and bottles, and drugs. That the number of suicides will go down in America. That people will get the help they need and learn what it means to love themselves and their friends. That there will be better endings for everyone. That we will realize that we can get better and our best days are still ahead of us and that we need to have hope because this is not the end of your story and you are not ALONE (It Started With a Story).

“Depression is a mood disorder that manifests in symptoms including feelings of sadness or emptiness, lack of interest in activities, change in weight or appetite, irritability, loss of energy, and recurring thoughts of death or suicide.” Depression is a worldwide issue that occurs in most people. One in ten Americans is affected by a mood disorder such as depression (Learn). A lot of depression is biological and the chances of you having slight depression if someone in your family (including extended family) has it are very high. The positive spin to this is that four out of every five people with depression can be treated and go about their normal lives. However, two-thirds of people with depression will not look for help (Learn). Most people with one mood disorder are more likely to have another. Over twenty five percent of adults with a mental illness depend on two types of substances at the same time. “Addiction is a chronic brain disorder. People facing an addiction cannot control their need for a given drug or alcohol; this lack of control is the result of changes in the brain, which in turn cause behavioral changes” (Learn). Some symptoms of addiction can include developing a tolerance to the effects of that certain substance and/or withdrawal when the person has not used the substance recently (Learn).

Self-harm is another major problem. “In a time defined by ever more social progress and astounding innovations, we have never been more burdened by sadness or more consumed by self-harm” (Dokupil, Tony). “Self-injury is the deliberate harming of one’s body without the intent of suicide. Common self-injury behaviors include scratching, cutting, burning, hitting, biting, ingesting or embedding foreign objects into the body, hair pulling, and interfering with the healing of wounds.” Research shows this can be a form of coping with intense emotions (Learn). People also do it because they believe they deserve it. When self-harm is brought up, not enough questions are asked. People tend to ask why and other generic questions, but the important questions like how and other deep questions are not asked. Most instances of self-injury are reported in teens (Learn).
“Every year since 1999, more Americans have killed themselves than the year before, making suicide the nation’s greatest untamed cause of death.” (Dokoupil, Tony) That’s not including the people who have attempted taking their lives and failed, or the people who wanted to, but one thing—one little thing that may seem insignificant to everyone else—saved that person’s life. What a lot of people don’t understand is that talking about suicide is not going to cause someone to become suicidal (Learn). Rather, it could save someone’s life. However, suicide is not funny and if you joke about it, that can cause people to become more suicidal. Suicide is becoming an even bigger problem, yet it is not getting the attention it deserves. I will say it again; joking about suicide is not okay. Some warning signs of suicide are talking about death a great deal, withdrawal from friends and loved ones, giving away prized possessions, becoming reckless and/or impulsive or expressing hopelessness (Learn). Please, reach out to someone if you see they are showing any one of these signs. Some aspects that can influence suicide are psychological, social, biological, cultural and environmental factors. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Every story has a happy ending and if you’re not happy, it is not the end.

Jamie has been working for a very long time to help people dealing with depression, addiction, self-injury, and thoughts of suicide. He has had a huge influence on so many people and made such a great change in these people’s lives.

“I was thinking today… And I was thinking of all the things that I take for granted… And I just wanted to say that if you’re ever feeling down, truly take a moment out of your day to think of everything that you cherish go squeeze someone you love put your heart and soul into that hug and don’t let go until you both can’t breathe. Go make a friend with someone completely random. Hold the door open for someone and if they don’t even acknowledge you just smile. Never stop smiling…. Dance and sing like no one’s watching. If you like someone tell them. Laugh at the stupid jokes only you and your best friend find funny. Laugh until your stomach hurts… And if people are mean to you for no reason screw ‘em. Be yourself because nobody else can be. And if you want to cry, cry. Let it out… The best thing to do is to stop thinking and to just let things happen. And if the world ever makes you feel small look up at the stars and know someone, somewhere is doing the same thing and just because today might’ve been a terrible day doesn’t mean tomorrow won’t be the best day of your entire life you just have to wake up and get there. We learn from experience that we never really learn anything from experience. We never know what’s gonna happen and that’s the thing about life. You just have to breathe every moment in like it’s your last. And never look back. And never regret. And always stay happy” (Stay Happy).

Works Cited


Secrets

by Bailey Hebdon