

# **LOST: A COLLECTION OF POETRY**

**Honors Thesis**

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By

Cheyenne Hidden

Professor Kevin Carey  
Faculty Advisor  
Department of English

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## **Abstract**

Loss is something we often try to forget, or at the very least, something that we keep deeply private. I began this chapbook with a very specific idea of loss; I wanted to base my poetry on people who had disappeared without a trace. I imagined what could have happened to them. I also wanted to give them the homecomings they deserved. Soon after beginning, I realized that I needed to broaden the theme of loss to include more of a spectrum, from great to small, from personal to abstract, while still allowing room for my own imagination. In this way, I found the freedom to explore the theme of loss in a few different forms with a variety of poems and subjects.

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## **An Introduction: Process Information**

When I first started this chapbook, I had a very specific theme in mind. I was planning on basing all of my poems on real life disappearances, of people that had been abducted or had simply decided one day to pick up and leave everyone and everything behind. It really bothered me that many people go missing and they are never seen or heard from again. I thought that I could possibly add another chapter to their lives as a way of exploring what happened to them or where they ended up. As I began to write, I didn't really foresee a problem with my theme; I thought that it would be easy to create a different angle for every single poem so that the chapbook would remain interesting from cover to cover. I thought about changing the perspective of each poem, from the victim to the captor to the loved ones so that each poem would have its own voice. I did a lot of research before I did any writing and I had found a lot of stories that interested me. I drew my inspiration from many different stories, including the abduction of Madeleine McCann (a three-year-old girl who was taken from her parents' hotel at night while the family was on vacation in Portugal), the disappearance of Connie Converse (a singer/songwriter who packed up her Volkswagen Beetle in 1974 and left town, never to be heard from again), the suspected abduction of Trudie Adams (a young girl who disappeared while walking home from a school dance), and the abduction of Mary Agnes (a little girl taken from her teenage mother by a mysterious woman claiming the name Julia Otis in 1930). All of these real life disappearances and abductions were extremely inspiring at first; I wondered what had really happened to all of them. I imagined their fates and drew from that to create poetry based on what could have happened. I also set out to give some of these real life people the homecomings that they never were given. I

thought that, in some way, it would provide some closure to some of these cases. Even though these homecomings never happened, it would at least be a nice sentiment.

After I had written a few poems, my advisor Professor Carey, who knew my work from previous classes, told me that the pieces I had submitted to him didn't really seem like I was really getting across what I was trying to get across. I agreed with him that they didn't really achieve what I wanted so he suggested that I expand my theme to different types of loss on each side of the spectrum. I was a little frustrated because I had been so excited about my theme and I was so sure I was going to stick with it, but when I sat down to write about different types of loss, I was amazed. I felt like I had more room, room to create stories from my own imagination and that really opened me up to many more possibilities. I realized that by drawing ideas from all different types of loss, from everyday lost items to the visceral loss of loved ones, I could create poetry that would have the potential to reach my wide-ranging audience. My goal of this chapbook had never been to provoke shock and awe; it had been about creating pieces that would allow my audience to relate. I wanted them to be able to draw from their own lives while reading my poetry and I wanted to possibly even evoke a memory similar to what they were reading in my chapbook. It is really important for my audience to find some type of connection so that at least one of these stories that I have written might stick with them. That was the most important goal that I set out to achieve while I was in the process of writing this collection. I have found that ever since I began sharing my writing with an audience, the most effective stories are those that readers or listeners can imagine themselves in. The best way to relate to my audience was to add a piece of myself into some of my poems. I found that it kept my poems honest. By doing this, I am able to

speaking through my characters and explore many different types of loss in order to create a collection of stories that all deal with loss in a variety of ways.

## **Dedication**

To my dad,  
I love and miss you.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Michelle Gibbons for lending me her photography skills and taking the picture for my chapbook's cover art.

I would also like to thank my mom Alicia and my boyfriend Jerry for listening to me practice my poetry over and over, for encouraging me, and for tolerating my bouts of madness.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor Kevin Carey for working with me and guiding me through the entire journey. The completion of this work is in no small part a testament to the support you have given me not only this semester but throughout my academic career. I truly could not have completed this chapbook without you.

## Notes

*arguidos?* is inspired by the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, a 3-year-old girl who went missing in 2007 while on vacation in Portugal with her parents.

*A Dream* is inspired by the 1974 disappearance of singer/songwriter Elizabeth Eaton “Connie” Converse. It explores her brother Phil’s wish to speak to her one more time.

**arguidos?**

*Inspired by the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, a 3-year-old girl who went missing in 2007 while on vacation in Portugal with her parents.*

Evidence.

I peel

the stuffed

animal

from his hot

wet hands.

Cuddle Cat,

he says.

The mother

fixates

on the pool.

Emotionless.

Her eyes

blue-green

like the

small

ripples,

but without

the tears  
I would  
expect to see.  
The father  
begins to  
cry. We  
finish  
with the  
questions,  
parting  
ways.  
I flip to a  
fresh clean  
piece of paper  
and write  
one word:  
arguidos?

## **For Abby**

I have a routine.

Every time I solve a case,

I tell Abby about it.

The little girl who sits on my desk

in the tiny gilded frame

watching a purple balloon

ascending into the clouds.

I tell her I did it for her.

Today, a young boy was taken

from a toy store in the mall.

We found him and brought him

back to his mother.

She called me

a hero.

I apologize to Abby, again

like I do every time we save

someone else.

## **Dinner Date**

As he devoured the tortilla bowl  
that I had considered to be  
only a container for the cobb salad,  
I instantly fell back into love with him.

In that moment, it didn't matter  
how long he had been gone.  
I laughed without holding back.  
He looked up, smiling  
and continued to munch loudly,  
floury crumbs falling every which way,  
only pausing to ask me  
one question:  
are you finished with yours?

## **A Dream**

*Inspired by the 1974 disappearance of singer/songwriter Elizabeth Eaton*

*“Connie” Converse.*

*Hello?*

Sis? It’s Phil.

*How did you find me?*

I don’t know. I can’t believe it’s actually you. Are you happy?

*I think so. Happi-er.*

That’s good. We miss you.

*I’m sorry. That I left you.*

Don’t apologize.

*I have to, at least once.*

You don’t. Really.

*Did you all get my letters?*

Yeah, we got ‘em.

*Did they help?*

I don’t know, Sis.

*Phil?*

Yeah?

*I have to go.*

Okay.

*Wait, Phil? Gimme a call tomorrow?*

Okay. That'd be nice.

*Yeah, it would.*

I'm glad you're happier.

*Me too. Goodnight, Phil.*

Goodnight, Sis. Wait, what's the num—

## **Cigarette Smoke**

My brother lights a cigarette,  
I close my eyes and it takes me back  
to the time when we were kids riding  
around with our dad in his '62 Chevy  
tossing his cigarettes out the window  
one-by-one to help him quit.

As mad as he would get, he never yelled  
at us. He'd pull out a can of tobacco  
from his secret hiding place and I'd watch  
as he clumsily rolled one in between  
his legs on the seat.

My brother grinds his cigarette  
into the pavement.

The smell of smoke lingers.

A breeze comes by

and takes it away.

## **Jingles**

There's not much  
Charlie will play with  
in his old age.

Fingers and toes  
occasionally, and his favorite toy  
Jingles.

Jingles is old too. Blue  
fur frayed, discolored and  
his eyes are missing but Charlie loves him.

When I sucked Jingles up  
with the vacuum cleaner,  
I panicked.

After half an hour  
of disassembling parts  
and slit-eyed looks, I finally  
freed Jingles from the hose,  
filthier than ever.

I sat there covered in dust  
and debris and watched  
Charlie play.

## **Box**

My best friend Kayla never  
showed up to the first day of  
second grade.

My mother told me that she had  
gone to Heaven because of  
something called cancer.

I told my mother that Kayla and I  
had buried a box in the recess yard  
at school.

She told me that we could dig it  
up if I wanted to, but  
I told her Kayla said we had to wait ten years.

I forgot about the box, and the  
elementary school closed when I was on  
the other side of the country.

I only remembered it years later when

I took a drive with my fiancé  
while visiting my parents for Thanksgiving.

The school had long since been leveled,  
and a Walmart in its place.

I stood silent in the parking lot.

## **Growing**

My grandmother lets  
down the hem on my  
school pants for the  
second time.

She tells my mother that I will  
need new ones soon, there is  
almost no hem left.

Most nights the growing pains  
keep me awake.

I try my best to sleep.  
When I can't, I call out  
for my mother.

With the mirror in my bedroom, I  
survey the marks on  
my hips and thighs  
tracing them with my finger.

I am ashamed

to wear a bathing suit.

I hide my flawed skin

with baggy shirts.

I cover myself in soothing

oils and scar creams I find

in the medicine cabinet.

But they linger, along

with the pain that

comes at night.

Will there ever be a day when I

can feel beautiful?

## **The Wait**

I bit his finger.

The skin tore more easily  
than I had anticipated. I  
held his blood at the front  
of my mouth. And then I  
wiped it on my sleeve.

Next, I pulled at the  
hem of my skirt until  
the lace gave way and  
fell into my hand. I hid  
it under the passenger  
side seat for them to  
find.

The last thing I did was  
rip out a tuft of my own hair  
and sprinkled it throughout the  
back of the van.

It was up to them now.

I just had to wait.

## **Thumbs Up**

I found an old polaroid of you, dad  
that mom doesn't know about.

It's a picture of you coming in the front door  
smiling at the camera  
and giving the thumbs up.

I sit in the hallway  
holding it up to that door, wishing.

It's funny to me that I have a  
photo of you coming in  
when my most vivid memory  
is of the day you walked out.

## **The Valentine's Day Balloon**

He lost

The Valentine's Day balloon

I bought him

On a whim

He went out

Into the icy February night

The balloon trailing behind

Dancing on the frigid air

I watched him

From the doorway of my apartment

He fumbled with his keys

Wrestled with the string

He pulled the balloon down

And it suddenly broke free

We both watched it disappear

Into the black starless sky

He looked back at me

His face twisted in anguish

An unspoken expression

That said *I'm sorry*

I cracked a smile

And started to laugh

Then beckoned him to come

And stay the night

## Swing My Dad Built

I ran my fingers down the weathered  
rope and watched the dust particles  
escape into the air, dancing around in  
the rays of scattered sunlight.

I can still remember the day  
my dad put this swing together.  
He heaved the yellow rope over  
the tall branch, tying it tight through a  
plank of painted wood. He burnt  
the ends with a lighter  
so they would not fray.

The plank was wide enough to fit both my  
sister and I. We used to hold on tight to  
each other and beg him to push us higher  
and higher. *More under-doggies daddy!*

I tied the two ropes together,  
the peeling plank tilted on its side.  
The tree was sick; it would be cut down soon.

Pieces of bark lay all around it, it was much too weak to hold anything anymore.

## **B15 on Wednesdays**

He comes in alone, flashes me

an enormous smile

his tiny eyes squint behind his almost opaque glasses

*Table for two?* I say

*That's right, Susanna! Hoping you can get us a cozy booth  
in the back somewhere.*

My name is Renee but I always let it slide.

*How about this one?* I say

*We'll both have the steak with the baked potato;  
it's our 60th anniversary.*

*Cuts like butter the way they've been making it tonight,* I say

He smiles again and gazes across the table.

The cook warns *I'm not wasting a perfectly good steak Renee.*

That's what he always says until he looks past the doors  
at the old man in B15.

I bring two plates.

*Let me cut it up for you sweetheart,* the old man says

Usually I just walk away

but tonight I sit down across from him,

pick up the fork,

and place a piece of steak in my mouth.

*Cuts like butter like Susanna said, doesn't it?*

*Yes, I say, cuts like butter,*

and I clean my plate.

## **Christmas Is Truly for the Children**

Her final present, wrapped up pretty with a blue ribbon. For the past five years this beloved holiday had failed to live up to her expectations. Maybe now that she was older it was just time to wake up and realize Christmas was less sleigh rides and holiday crafts and more long lines and maxed out credit cards.

The magic was gone. It reminded her of what her mother used to say every year around this time:

*Christmas is truly for the children.*

## **The Puzzle Piece**

There is a puzzle sitting on the  
dining room table.

My mother has been working on it for  
about a month now.

Yesterday, I caught my dog eating  
one of the pieces.

I chased him into the living room but  
he swallowed it.

My mother told me today how  
excited she is to finish it.

I don't have the heart to tell her that  
she'll never see it done.

## Since

It's been a week since your husband died.

You are sprawled out on the couch, watching reruns of Veronica Mars in the same clothes you had on yesterday.

*Did you eat?*

I make you a peanut butter sandwich.

(It's all I can find in your cupboards.)

It's been six months since he died.

I turn the key in the lock and find you sitting on the balcony. You are looking at the hills in the distance, watching the sun set.

I make you a turkey and Swiss.

It's been one year since he died.

I try my key for your door  
but it won't open.

The landlord says your lease was up yesterday.

You've left a lot of things behind, including a note for me:

*Tracey,*

*Thank you. I'm sorry, I had to go.*

*But don't worry, I ate.*

*Love, Nina*

## Virginia

On a rainy June day,  
my neighbor Virginia  
moved away forever.

She was eighteen. I was twelve.

She told me she was moving  
across the country  
for a guy.

Before she left,  
we spent the day  
lying in the tall grass.

I twirled my fingers  
in her strawberry blonde hair  
while she finished my gimp bracelet.

Later we stood under an umbrella  
while the rain fell around us.

I tried not to cry in front of her.

She told me not to worry  
and put the bracelet around  
my wrist, saying she'd be back  
one day.

Today, I pack my last bag  
and put it in the car,  
taking one final look at my house.

I run my fingertips across  
a small patch of wildflowers.

I think about Virginia  
in the tall grass,  
about how she left me  
for a guy.

If I ever do see her again,  
it will not be here.

## **We're Okay**

Not again.

You don't have it, right?

It's here somewhere.

*I must have misplaced it.*

Not that I need it.

I don't need it.

Honey, did you take  
mommy's inhaler?

You know mommy  
needs her inhaler, right?

*The one in the glove box is empty.*

*I should've refilled it.*

*Damn.*

But I'm okay.

It's gonna be okay.

*Don't make it worse.*

Don't cry.

Don't cry.

Let's pick you up, okay?

You're okay. I'm okay, right?.

We're okay.

*Where is it?*

## **Mannequin**

My darling love  
greet me each time  
I enter the store. Her  
smile is soft. Her  
gaze is inviting.  
Even the small  
imperfection on her  
cheek is endearing.  
She always wears the  
latest fashion. Yesterday,  
it was blue gingham  
shorts with a chambray  
top. She changes her  
outfit on Saturdays. I  
wonder what she'll be  
wearing today. It's almost  
ten o'clock and I sneak a  
peek through the sliders  
but she is not there.  
An employee opens the  
door.

*Where is she?* I ask

*Where is who?*

*Patricia, I demand.*

*No one with that name*

*works here, she says and*

*walks away. I stare*

*at the empty spot.*

## Reflection

This whole experience has been a lot of fun and it was also a lot of hard work. I am so thankful to my thesis advisor Professor Kevin Carey for guiding me and showing me that a theme should not be something that constricts your writing. I had a much better time writing when I decided to treat the theme as a broad guideline instead of a firm category for every single one of my poems. The most important thing I learned throughout the process was how to adapt. I spent time trying to take different approaches to poems that I was having a hard time with and in some cases, it worked pretty well. My favorite poem out of the entire chapbook is *The Valentine's Day Balloon*, and looking back to the beginning when I completed my first draft of it, I could never have imagined myself liking that one the most. The first draft of it, and the second, and the third, kept falling flat and there was a point where I thought I should just scrap it completely, but I kept working with it and it finally became something that I was extremely proud of. I even read it last at my reading at the Walnut Street Coffee Café. I thought it was a great piece to finish with and I really wanted to leave my listeners with it so it would be the freshest in my audiences' minds.

Besides my reluctance to budge from my original theme, I wouldn't really change anything about how I created this chapbook. I had a vision for the front cover, which I relayed to Michelle Gibbons, my friend and photography major, and we made it happen. I remember telling her something like: "Okay, I want snow, I want a path, I want trees and I want a person walking in the background." It came out even better than I had expected and it is one of my favorite parts of the chapbook. As for the writing aspect of it, I did a lot of my writing while I was at work because work was so slow. I took a journal with me

every time and jotted down certain words or phrases that I thought I could explore. Usually, by the end of my shift, I would be left with a clumsily-written, partial poem that I would then take home and clean up/finish to send to Professor Carey. I liked that method because it allowed me to try different things without being afraid of making a mess. I didn't mind crossing stuff out or completely ripping out a page because I knew that I was just trying something new and it obviously wouldn't work out every single time. To look in my journal now and compare it to my final chapbook, I am so happy with how everything turned out. Professor Carey encouraged me to keep going; he said that I could write 15-20 more pieces and have a real collection to think about publishing. I really like that idea because that would allow me to keep working with the poems I have now and create even more. For now, I think it would be a good idea to leave them how they are because I think I could improve on them in the future as I continue to mature as a writer. The best thing for me is to read things I have written in the past and immediately having an idea as to how I can make them better. Even in a small span of time, we all can become different writers, from our diction to our structure, and it is really important that is reflected in the work.

All in all, I would really like to thank all of my listeners and my readers. My boyfriend Jerry and my mom Alicia have been really great support systems as well as Professor Carey who was nice enough to suffer through some absolutely terrible first drafts, but I would also like to thank my audience at the Walnut Street Coffee Café when I did my reading at their weekly "Speak Up" open mic. Reading my work aloud to a crowd of people seemed like it was going to be the hardest obstacle to overcome when I first started my thesis. Even before I had written anything, I was already worried about

presenting, or really performing, it. The audience I had made me feel so welcome and after I was done, I can honestly say that was my favorite part of the entire journey of finishing my thesis. I was so happy with the reception of the audience and I truly feel like my words connected with them. That was a completely new and amazing feeling, something that I was immensely proud of. Overall, I feel that I have grown as a writer in many different ways. I am so grateful for everyone that has supported me throughout this process and I definitely will continue on as both a poet and a prose writer.