

**BETWEEN THE LINES OF LIFE:
A COLLECTION OF POETRY**

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

As a prospective English teacher, I worked to create a project that encourages my readers to speak their truth. Teachers, like poetry, awaken their students to vital lessons. It is my hope that these poems will help readers develop their powerful voices. Similar to a teacher, I want to instill confidence and inspiration in my readers. However, there exists a thin line between lecturing your readers on what they “should” think or feel and allowing readers to develop their own experiences and understandings of the content you are providing within your poems. With this in mind, I set out to create a collection of poetry that guides readers towards establishing an understanding of my poems yet does not instruct them how to digest any singular one. Again, the theme of this collection is authenticity; I hope that each and every reader will experience their own unique emotions and ideas. What better way to accomplish this than writing poetry?

I sincerely hope that my readers develop their voice, remain unwavering in their confidence and courage, and understand that the ability to be vulnerable is one of the most useful skills humans can develop. The purpose of the following collection of original poems (titled “Between the Lines of Life”) is to empower my readers; my poems will allow my readers to see the value in authenticity and encourage readers to tap into their most authentic selves. This collection of poetry was a rigorous challenge, but one that I was determined to accomplish.

Process Notes

When I set out to create this thesis, there were certain goals that I wished to achieve; however, there was ultimately one goal that was of the utmost importance: to create an authentic poetry collection that not only refines my knowledge regarding poetic devices and structure (aesthetics), but that distinctly captures the essence of myself. I was keenly aware that I wanted to create an authentic poetry collection that enabled me to find my voice. Finding one's voice can be difficult, but creating this collection enabled me to reflect on a variety of life's moments and speak my truth. While it can be intimidating to put your thoughts and ideas out into the world, self-empowerment is, ultimately, one of the best attainments one can achieve. Writing is powerful and poetry allowed me to develop my voice in a unique way; I became devoted to writing lines that were not one-dimensional; rather, I intently designed each line with the hope that the poems would transcend and, like a friendly conversation, I could converse with my readers. With a certain understanding of what I wanted to achieve, I first had to seek a thesis advisor that could help me accomplish such a collection of poetry.

Choosing a thesis advisor is not a light-decision; this faculty advisor will be integral in terms of guiding you towards achieving the vision you have for your thesis. This decision is not to be made overnight. It was crucial, for me, to find a highly-experienced advisor but one that would respect my decisions and let me make this collection my own. With this in mind, I chose Professor Ann Taylor; I could not have chosen better. Ann Taylor has published a variety of poems and is currently concluding her most recent manuscript. In addition, Ann Taylor was my professor for multiple classes at Salem State University and over the course of multiple semesters, Professor

Taylor became familiar with my writing and I knew that she was someone I could trust with this substantial project. Professor Taylor and I established weekly writer's workshops (of course I was the only writer whose work was getting workshopped) during which we addressed areas of improvement regarding writing, grammar, and the best methods of conveying the information that I was determined to provide in a way that was most impactful. It was a slow process; each week I would bring a draft(s) of my poems and for weeks the same poems would be analyzed and adjustments made to get them to where Professor Taylor and I expected them to be. Certain word choices, grammatical decisions, and punctuation were certainly focused; however, the overarching issue was that, like any teacher (established or prospective), I would naturally tend to explain and provide my readers' with clear understandings. However, I had to overpower my academic mindset and travel into the abstract; I had to realize that not only was it okay if I simply put forth my notions without perfectly connecting them to my readers, but that it is one of the greatest achievements in poetry. Professor Taylor helped me realize that readers' will make the connections—if they want to. It is not my job to have every aspect connect perfectly or be presented in a way that allows readers to easily digest my writings; rather, (as I initially desired) I could motivate my readers to think— to challenge their perceptions. Once I processed this distinction, it was certainly freeing. It directly connected to my overall wish to find/develop my voice; we do not always have to conform to expectations and we can make others think instead of directing them right to our conclusions.

In addition to eliminating over-explaining, I also worked particularly hard to achieve lower-rung detail; what this refers to is that, like a ladder, you want to get as low

on the ladder as you can. The higher on the ladder, ultimately the blander the writing; however, as the edits amount, one can travel deeper and develop the ability to efficiently and effectively use words to convey the emotions and experiences without directly stating them. Specificity and intentionality are key. Okay, now for the actual poems; find a comfy spot and enjoy!

#1: A Plea for Authenticity

Remember when we lived without filters?

Our beauty not based on virtual “likes”?

We talked, not texted.

We listened without restriction.

We connected, not rejected.

We protested for change;

we were not limited by Wifi range.

We lived for ourselves, not for the pleasure of others.

Being different was exciting, not just intriguing in writing.

Conformity has reached a new level;

the essence of our humanity, stripped without the slightest recollection.

Relationships were for better or for worse,

not temporary, like an appetite.

#2- “Instant Romance”

People love the idea of instant love,
not a lasting love built on a solid foundation.

Relationships begin and end faster
than the change of New England seasons.

Our obsession with filters prevents us from vulnerability.

We would rather skip the labels, the time, the feelings.

But, for what?

What are we left with?

A void,

a void that no filter or app will ever fill or make “pretty”.

#3- “Snugz–A Family Nickname”

She takes my stuff. We fight. We scream:

“Those are my clothes, get out of my room, I’m busy”.

Growing up sharing friends and memories.

For, a sister is a best friend and sibling all in one.

Protector, motivator, and supporter.

She is a listening ear when a vent session is absolutely vital;

although, as my sister, she might be a bit biased.

Together for life, not just at the end.

A wonderful blessing a sister is.

#4- “America”

We used to be the land of the brave--the free.

A country that invested, but better yet protected.

Now our country is distracted, divided, practically captured,
not by a foreign country, a force, nor a rule.

But, stuck we are nonetheless.

No military action or master plan can help.

It will take something much greater to eliminate this invader.

We have become America the connected;

but not to or with each other.

Our phones rule us,

social media capturing our attention, taking our time.

We care more about the Kardashians

than about our nation's homeless, sick, and even Veterans.

People who have died fighting for our country's well-being receive a simple “like”
or a retweet.

Or, if we are lucky, a brief moment of recollection and remembrance.

We are so busy living in a world of false praise;

we have forgotten how to love, to think, to act.

A foreign invader need not attack our country;

we currently surpass their capabilities.

We care more about money, fame, and even validation;

while brave men and women fight to protect us.

We have not the slightest idea who or what they are fighting with or for.

Fake news is not the only virus rampant in this country.

Corruption, hate, and addiction certainly compete.

Yet, all hope is not lost. We have the power to return to reality.

But we must put down our phones and our tablets.

We must open our eyes to the world without a false filter.

America: our country, our home, our life requires our help.

We must not lose our humanity but use our hearts and our minds,

we can unify this altered nation.

The world's problems have not disappeared.

But, we are at risk of losing our hearts and providing our care.

America, with God's grace and goodwill, we must reignite our passion;

we must keep this country the land of the free and the home of the brave.

#5- “Growing up Tettoni”

These little moments.

These irrelevant moments are the ones I cherish most.

Simply sitting on the couch binge-watching NCIS, Chicago PD/Fire/Med, FBI.

Sitting down for “that Sunday sauce”, ordinarily referred to as pasta and meatballs.

Swimming in the lake

or soaking up some sun on our boat “Triple Play”;

you may be wondering the source of the name;

I am one of three, a triplet, with a sister and brother the same age as me.

These moments I will forever be grateful for.

The laughter, the jokes, the love, the comfort.

We may argue. We may yell,

but, we are all we have and we are enough.

This family is everything to me.

One day I hope to add to this small yet amazing family.

We are the Tettoni’s: strength, love, passion for life, and comfort--

it’s who we are. Or, who I think we are.

We may be loud and we may be opinionated.

But, I wouldn’t change growing up Tettoni.

#6- "Love & Gratitude"

Growing up, I was always shy, worried, sensitive,
constantly lost in thought.

My mind overpowered my soul and body.

I got lost in the people's expectations and tried to please others.

"Am I good, smart, strong enough?"

I have begun to grow, to heal, to forgive;

I have begun to accept imperfection yet fight self-doubt.

I have learned to not simply cope but to live.

My mind was my own worst enemy.

But, I must learn to accept my shortcomings.

I must not let self-doubt, regret, or anxiety
prevent me from living a life of love and happiness.

All we can do is be the best we can be.

I have learned that it is hard to be anxious or wander a little too far
into the desolation of self-doubt and fear,
when we are grateful for the best parts of our lives.

I am developing strength, love, and compassion that I may never have known.

Understand the limitations of the mind but feed and nourish your soul.

I have already accomplished more than I know.

I want to continue to grow, learn, laugh, and love.

I must appreciate the beauty within the chaos--

Trust, love, and soar.

#7- “While You Were Walking”

Red light. Stop. He begins walking.

His clothes dirtied and ripped from living on the streets,

Where's his home?

He smiles as he crosses the intersection;

I sit in my car in traffic.

What's on his mind creates a soft smile.

He continues smiling and walks away.

The light turns green; I drive away.

#8- “Death and Decay-2019/2020”

Headlines flash across the television--

“melting ice, another species classified as endangered, biodiversity decreased”;

“Increasing CO2 levels, forest fires blazing, garbage polluting our oceans”,

We do nothing.

We go about our day trying to ignore the headlines.

But, now, there’s COVID-19;

quarantine birthdays and anticipated celebrations are postponed

or shut-down altogether.

But then,

doing nothing might actually be the key to saving our planet.

If we slow-down our lives, bring back the family-unit,

we also slow the decay of our planet.

In a matter of weeks,

species repopulate, emissions decrease, and skies clear.

Humanity is monetarily sick; Earth is prospering.

Maybe, when this is all over,

we realize that this momentary collective pause,

gave Earth some room to breathe.

#9- "Sunday Afternoon"

Unscrew the drain.

Shimmy and wiggle the snake.

Victory.

The water flows once again.

#10- “For my Sister- An Aspiring Nurse”

Struggling girl,

why can't you see,

why can't you see what you are meant to be?

Forget the sadness,

dry those tears,

fight those fears.

#11- “Seen from the Train to Boston”

A brown house with a porch and a wooden swing.

Freshly mown grass waits for tiny feet--

a world of possibilities.

#12- “Backshore Thoughts”

The clouds paint the sky a smokey gray,

as the waves undulate and crash onto the shore.

Like the first time you kissed him after that long wait.

And as the gulls fly towards the horizon,

so does our love soar.

#13- “Senior Year, 4+1”

I'm so tired.

Need an iced coffee.

Or, motivation.

#14- “Beach Wisdom”

The white-topped waves carry the surfer towards the shore.

He glides across the surface as if the water is as smooth as glass.

Yet the stormy skies create turbulent ebbs and flows.

Through it all the surfer persists;

learns to love the fall.

#15- “The Change of Fall”

An October evening,

the leaves are an array of colors:

red, orange, yellow, brown.

These leaves paint the beauty of change,

teach us it's okay to let go.

#16- “Due North”

Like the glow of the lighthouses, so does your love guide me home.

In stormy seas, you are my serenity.

You let my light shine.

#17- “Self-love”

Fighting doubts, uncertainty, and fear.

But, isn't that the process?

Grow...learn...achieve.

Don't let change suffocate my essence.

Rather, find my voice.

Change the world.

#18- “Home”

A city of community, grit, and strength;
a people that bleed determination,
is home.

These beaches, a connection to the past,
but also a glimpse into the future.

These roads walked upon by my ancestors.

The fish reeled-in by generations of family.

As the tides turn, so does life.

This city, my home, connects me to my grandparents.

Of which I barely knew.

All taken from me so young.

The wind on my face as I walk by the water,

the smell of salt filling my nose,

you all are here with me as I watch the ocean welcome the sun home.

This sunset, a reminder of all your beauty--

your love.

#19- “Water Droplets”

Tiny water droplets hug the window.

The sky becomes a grey whisper.

People heading home.

Why don't we learn to stay in the rain?

#20- “Changing Tides”

Feeling helpless in a world of prosperity.

Self-doubt creeping closer.

Frustration mounting;

creativity diminishing.

Searching for the light in this passing storm of tides,

the sun will shine again.

#21- “Erin”

I'm not perfect.

But, then again, who is?

And wouldn't it be boring if we were?

It's the mess-ups, the mistakes, the misguided decisions
that make each day worth living.

We appear to strive for perfection;

in reality, we want to only be good enough.

To be accepted.

To have an impact.

To mean something.

But, what we sometimes forget,

it's overcoming adversity and acquiring life's lessons,
that make being human interesting.

#22- “To the Hook-up Generation”

My closest friends prioritize sex over love,

they say, “because it’s easier”.

“We’re together, just without the labels”.

I wonder,

how did that work last week

when he cancelled your plans

for the fourth time in two weeks?

I say,

an excuse to avoid insignificance.

I ask,

what exactly are these benefits?

The nights spent alone obsessing why you aren’t good enough?

You in love, only an “option” to him?

The “Netflix and chill” generation;

the “hey, you up?” texters.

But what happens when the movie ends?

When you leave without him by your side

or love in your heart--

or in his.

#23- “Student-teaching”

I’m here in Dunkin Donuts;

class about to begin.

I’m Erin; she is me.

Except for when I am Ms. T.

My last semester as an Undergrad.

Three months to graduation.

Not yet a teacher, nor just a student either.

At the high school,

I wear the neon orange “visitors pass”,

sign-in at the front office.

The teachers’ lounge is awkward,

with discussions about students and parents I don’t know.

Yet, I follow them (and my host teacher) hoping to belong.

Am I Erin or Ms. T.?

Right now, I’m just order number 309,

calling me back to grab my caramel iced coffee.

I am not at BHS.

I am here in Meier Hall,

I’m sitting in Dunkin Donuts reflecting on what was,

anticipating what’s to come--

I’m in-between.

#24- “Second Semester, Senior Year”

Endless notes from dense readings that I do not understand,
lesson plans for classes I don't actually have authority over,
fake simulations to practice theoretical classroom management techniques.

An altered reality that I am forced to accept--
senior year, second semester.

This Spring Break will be spent in the oasis of my bedroom,
no spontaneous flights to a tropical island,
nor sightseeing in Italy.

Seven weeks until I walk across the stage,
when my loved ones will celebrate my accomplishments.

#25- “A Hard Truth”

I'm a people pleaser,

putting everyone else before me.

I'm an avoider of conflict;

an embracer of opportunities to make others happy--

like driving a friend back to campus and getting home an hour late

from being stuck in traffic.

Why can't I voice my opinion?

I don't want to go to that bar or that house.

Why's it so bad if I disagree?

I don't like Greek yogurt and that's okay.

Why do I protect others, never protect myself?

It's time to put myself first,

to put my feelings and needs above most others,

to call people out on their B.S.

To be loud.

To take up space.

To say what I want to say,

To learn to say “no”.

It's time for me to grow up.

Reflection

I figured that this project would be rigorous but could be accomplished with determination and becoming keenly confident, remaining authentic, and trusting the process. I was correct, but the extent to which this became true was shocking. I was determined to challenge myself and learn something relatively new; after completing this thesis, I have a newfound respect and appreciation for poetry. Creating the final versions of the twenty-five poems that comprise this collection was a substantial challenge but I can honestly say I am exceptionally proud of the final product that now exists. I first started writing poems (some of the final versions of which are included in this collection) two years ago; what I was not aware of was that I would undertake the challenge of writing poetry and creating a collection for my Honors' Thesis. To be honest, I had been intimidated by this form of writing; between the complex/ abstract nature of certain poetry that I had studied academically and the poetic devices that I associated with poetry, I never thought that I would actually say that I thoroughly enjoyed creating poems of my own to this extent.

While Professor Taylor helped me refine these poems to the versions that are presented before you, these poems and the inspiration to write them came from me. I can honestly say that the final product, with the countless edits/revisions made, never strayed from me. I think, like most people, it can be intimidating to work with another person (in this case advisor) to create a product of which you have a specific vision for. However, the right advisor will support and assist you bringing the project to fruition while allowing you to retain possession. I had to keep in mind that this was my thesis and that certain suggestions were just that—suggestions. Ultimately, I had to decide what I would

integrate and what might not be exactly what I was going for. However, I am truly grateful for all of the time, energy, and editing/revising suggestions that Professor Taylor provided.

The poetry collection that now is available for readers is a reflection of aspects of life and several moments of distinct importance to me. Not one poem was written just for completion; I had something to say in each poem. It is essential that you have something to say/a purpose for creating; without experiencing these inspirations, you risk passively producing a project. I was adamant that I would not create this collection just as any ordinary academic requirement; I actively and mindfully spent hours writing, reflecting, editing, revising, and perfecting this collection that is one hundred percent authentic.

We all have something to say, but it can be difficult to get “out of your own head” and we can wrongfully perceive “writer’s block” as having nothing to say. Instead, it is an opportunity for confronting what is holding us back. This could be (a literal person whose expectations you are perceiving as intimidating, the process itself, or fear of voicing your ideas/opinions that may be different from those surrounding you). However, once you address these preventions, you will find that your words and ideas will naturally flow onto the page. Personally, I had to address the excess pressure that I was putting on myself to create the perfect collection of poetry; I knew if I could just write, the rest would come together over time. Stressing eliminates creativity; mindfulness allows for creativity.

I was set to present this thesis at the Northeast Regional Honors Conference. Due to COVID-19, this unfortunately did not happen. While I was nervous to present my

work at this event, with other Honor's Program students, I was excited for the opportunity to truly come full circle and find my voice. I was excited to speak my truth, in-person, to a room full of new acquaintances. However, in hindsight, it was never about speaking to one group, for one purpose; this project did exactly what I hoped it would do. I have created a collection that is available for anyone who wants to explore what I have poured my energy and heart into and that helped me find my voice and speak my truth.

