

Pisces

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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By

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Abstract

Pisces is a collection of poems that give glimpses into my childhood, adolescent, and adulthood. They are also about learning how to heal, places that gave me serenity, and people that have inspired and molded me into who I am today. The title *Pisces* is a term that comes from astrology, and what happens to be my astrology sign. There are no poems that include or discuss my astrological sign. However, all my poems represent who I am, where I've come from, what inspires me, and events in my life that resonated with me the most.

This collection is heavily influenced by some modern poets and their works, making use of some of their techniques to tell personal stories. Wallace Stevens and his selected poems in *Sleeping on A Wing* made me think about where writers get their inspiration from, and how we can see the world in a different way. In Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird," he takes an object and looks at it from a variety perspective, exploring how one might encounter or see blackbirds. This collection uses this technique to write about objects that have sentimental value to me, such as my father's military dog tags. These inspirations and themes represented within my collection not only represent my growth overtime, but my love for dance, my friends, and my family. I hope that my poems can shed light onto topics that are not talked about, and to send a message that you are never alone.

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*To my loving family and friends
That have molded me into who I am today.
To anyone who is willing to dive into a stranger's life
To find out who I've become, and who I am still evolving to be.
To learn how to heal, to find yourself in a world of commotion,
And learn how to dance in the rain,
I invite you to take this journey with me.*

The beginning is
Learning how to grow up by
Dancing in the rain.

Nine Truths and One Lie

I have nine truths and one lie.
Swimming with dolphins, seeing them glide.
May the truth be told, and the lie slip by.

I've auditioned for Disney Channel, letting my "acting" career fly.
I've finished a burrito bowl in one sitting with pride.
I have nine truths and one lie.

I studied abroad in Spain, saying my hardest goodbyes.
When you read this poem, will you catch the lie?
May the truth be told, and the lie slip by.

Dancing for eighteen years of my life, with the same spark in my eye.
I still don't know how to cook; God knows how many times I've tried.
I have nine truths and one lie.

I can say the alphabet backwards, sometimes getting tongue-tied.
I am a Pisces—brown hair and blue-eyed.
May the truth be told, and the lie slip by.

I like my steaks well done, overcooked, and fried.
The only thing I've known my whole life was the countryside.
I have nine truths and one lie.
May the truth be told, and the lie slip by.

Things I've Gotten for Christmas

1. Fisher Price Telephone in white, blue, and black. Limited edition
2. The Talking Farm
3. Dora the Explorer House: Interactive Guide to Speaking Spanish
4. Royal Blue AMFM radio cassette player
5. CD Walkman
6. Pretty, Pretty Princess game
7. Barbie Doll Nails: Hot Pink Digital Nail Printer
8. Blues Clues Inflatable Ball Pit
9. Midnight, a cocker spaniel
10. Yamaha YFL-222 Standard Flute Offset G C-Foot
11. Nintendo Game Cube
12. "Meet the Future Teacher" sweatshirt
13. "Teacher Off Duty" socks
14. Nintendo Wii
15. iPod Nano in Hot Pink, Second Generation
16. Alex and Ani UMass Amherst Bracelet
17. Swiffer Sweeper
18. Sterling silver Pandora Princess Ring
19. Rose gold Apple Watch Series 5
20. Two Pioneer Women crockpots with floral design
21. iPhone 12 Max Pro in sterling silver

Definitions of a Dog Tag

/'dɒg ' ,tag/

1.

Among the wounded,
The fighting, and the healing
Lies the dog tag.

2.

The dog tag clinks in the subtle
winds.
It was soon camouflaged by the siege.

3.

I don't know what causes fear.
The pop smoke lingering
In the barracks,
The battle cry itself,
Or the dog tag that breaks away from
A soldier's heart.

4.

The barbed wire protects the boundaries of Camp Phoenix.
The soldier protects the children, the village.
The dog tag protects the identities of the injured, and the fallen.

5.

When the dog tag decides to let go,
The soldier will fall with it,
Crying for help, becoming the vulnerable.

6.

April 11, 2011,
Some of my father's brothers sinking into the scorching sand.
Falling, looking at the heavenly white skies.
The dog tag identified
The wounded—2,355.

7.

The dog tag hugged my father's neck.
He thought one day, there would be peace.
He prayed, he cried,
And started thinking about home, our countryside.

8.

The soldiers are fleeing.
The dog tags are swaying.

9.

When the sun begins to shine over the ominous haze
The dog tag streaks the battlefield.

10.

The world was silently crumbling.
The sky was dehydrated
And the soldiers would be dehydrated.
The dog tag lay in the
Merciless sun.

Father Come Home

I pray one day you'll come home.
The day you'd call my name and say,
"Sweetheart, I'm home, I'm safe."

I remember your battle beaten hands
Healed each time you'd braid my hair.
You kissed my forehead and embraced me,
Just like you did when you first came home from Iraq.
God, I pray one day you come home.

I hope I can stroll along the cobblestone sidewalks
Of Gareau Ave with you.
We'd gaze at the same skies that you'd see there,
But without the fear and the gingered flames.
Or hearing the sounds of war that screamed "FIRE!" and "AIM!"

You are my father, but also my guardian angel.
You fight for those who never had someone to protect them.
I'm lucky to have you, 10,000 or 10 miles away.
You watch your brethren stand tall,
Or seeing them fall for their final cry.

I cry for you, dad.
And pray for the day
I can tell you, "Welcome home."

Dear Mom,

When I look at you, I see your complexion.
 It tells me your stories,
 Your hardships, your memories, and your pain.
 Your wrinkles stemmed from your aquamarine eyes
 That shows your warm smile and affection.
 Your cheeks blushed with happiness and rosacea.

March fifth, 1999.
 The heat from your hands warmed my newborn skin.
 Your eyes smiled at me.
 A single tear traced down your cheeks
 and made its mark on my cerulean blue blanket.

I will never get over of your baggy t-shirts with
 Inappropriate sayings on them.
 “Big Peckers”—that’s not even the worst one either.
 Not to mention, that is just a restaurant in Western Massachusetts.
 Or when it’s your favorite holiday, Superbowl Sunday
 You put on your “TB12” t-shirt, cuddled with Gizmo.
 You can never forget the Cors Light; it never left your hand.

I will always admire how strong you are.
 Being a wife of a husband who is constantly on-call
 To fight for freedom.
 You were always on call for me. Sometimes you’d miss
 That one phone call, the call that could’ve been the last time.
 When I needed a shoulder to cry on, whether it was middle school boys, breakups with
 friends,
 Or stupid “men” I found on college dating apps
 You’d be there.

I know I never told you this, but I loved being called “Boomer.”
 I made you stop because it wasn’t “cool” to be called that at daycare.
 I never told you how much I appreciate your cooking, and that
 One day I can find our recipe box filled with recipes passed from generation to
 generation.
 I wish I’d thank you more for the High School Musical themed birthday parties,
 Or the time you bought Monster energy drinks,
 For my friends and I to make us feel like celebrities.
 I’d make your day when I’d finally let you braid my hair.

I cherish every moment I have with you now.
 To our daily FaceTime calls,
 To our hugs when I finally come home from college,

To the tears I'll get to see you shed on graduation day,
To all the cries, prayers, and arguments we lived through together,
I will never be able to repay how much you've done for me.

I love you.

Love,

Kaitlyn

6th Grade

Each homeroom had a class color.
I was on team cobalt, AKA
The silent ball champions.
The MVP was Jeff, our home room teacher's favorite.
He had some skill because he was on the baseball team,
But I think he could've gotten away with breaking
Any rules, or any game.

Our biggest rival was crimson led by our history teacher.
Every year we had a can tab competition.
Whoever brought the most tabs won a pizza party.
It got competitive between us, and to the point where
The history teacher had a hidden box,
Where students would drop plastic bags
filled with buried treasure.

We lost our battle to crimson, but I didn't lose my cobalt pride.
I was just jealous that I couldn't skip out our school lunch food.
PB and J with cold canned carrots.
How delightful.

Emerald and tangerine were irrelevant at the time, and their time here was a blur.
The only time I remember seeing them was at the annual Scholastic book fair.
Hardly anyone got novels to read, instead
Most of us bought Smencils and cotton candy scented erasers.

Our most memorable field trip together was to Boston.
I felt like a celebrity taking the peter pan bus,
especially when we were allowed to take our flip phones,
Or play Mario Kart on our Nintendo D.S.'s
During the 2-hour bus ride.

Upon arrival, we were placed into groups.
Luckily, I was with my mom anyways.
I remember her complexion turned fire engine red
When she realized we had the girl that
Smelt like middle school locker room from 10 feet away.

My moms' group and I
Went everywhere in Boston,
But most of my memories are now a blur.

All I have now is a five by seven photo
 Of our entire 6th grade class in front of the U.S.S. constitution, and
 The three musketeers (The English, Math, and History teacher)
 Posed in front of the Boston oyster house.
 I will never forget the history teacher's shirt he wore that day.
 The white blouse.
 The one shirt where his buttons would scream to let go.
 It peaked his beer belly,
 Knowing this was because he had to deal with over sixty rambunctious
 Thirteen-year-olds on a field trip.
 The last button finally popped,
 And showed the belly button that had
 Hair as long as eyelashes.
 Yes, it's that disgusting, and I'm unapologetic for being so explicit.

No one could ever forget the dress your best dance either,
 When I was one of the tallest students in our grade,
 Which is not at all the case now.
 I wore a sparkly dress, painted in crimson
 With a cream laced shawl that covered my shoulders
 And somewhat abided by the school's dress code.
 I will never forget the leathered flats I wore with it,
 But the shoes were a darker shade of red.
 "Dress your best" is taken in two different directions.
 Either you wore a dress on the night that gives you an excuse to break dress code,
 Or you wore a plaid shirt in some type of dark jeans with cow boots.
 There was no in between.

All of this, now a memory.
 All it took was one post,
 Some conversations, and some old pictures
 That still hung from the history teachers wall in June of 2020, just before he retired
 To relieve some of the best memories
 And a life that lived carefree.

Horseshoe Bay

I stand still.

 Sand seeps between my feet,
 The crevasses of my toes,
 which cured the aches and pains of my soles.
 I fell deeper, deeper, and deeper into the sand.
 My feet,
 And that blush pink sand,
 Soft as cotton,
 Hugging my feet like fuzzy socks on an arctic evening.

I stand still.

 The sea air being inhaled into my lungs,
 Stinging my airways with its salty aura.
 I think of what
 Would bring such a smell.
 Of what calls the water their home.

I stand still.

The world around me,
 Alive with sounds.
 Seagulls searching for food,
 Tourists drinking Shark Bites,
 With the accompaniment of a robin red umbrella inside.
 And that clear blue sea, crashing onto the rocks,
 Creating memories, smiles, and laughter for children.

I stand still,

Treasuring this moment,
 My only moment left in Horseshoe Bay.
 My last moments to cherish my surroundings,
 To take in the humid rays of sunshine.
 My last moment
 To seep my feet into the blush pink sand
 Hugging my feet like fuzzy socks on an arctic evening.

The Pine-Arched Bridge

You and I aligned our bodies
 Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.
 Our hands interlocked.

I matched your emerald eyes with mine,
 While I placed my hands on your bruised blue sweater.
 I brushed my fingers along the embroidered seagull
 And admired your earthy cologne.
 The same cologne you wore when we first met.

While the brisk breeze greeted us,
 The sun continued to kiss your rosy cheeks,
 Glisten over the lake,
 And shine on the lily pads.

Our eyes fixated on the autumn leaves
 They continued to whirl and waltz, as if
 Putting on a performance for only us.
 The leaves were our carpet, and covered the ground
 In shades of mango, crimson, and sage.

The seasons change, but our bridge stays the same.
 The water underneath it breathed in a subtle rhythm,
 As the baby blush buds bloomed and floated
 In the shallows.

Our pine-arched bridge lay across the pond, and
 Its shadow fell across the waters
 We once swam in...

You are not here with me now,
 My eyes fixate on the bridge.
 The bridge we once lay beside together.
 I remember

Your bruised blue sweater and the earthy aroma
 That clung to your clothes, that now I miss dearly.

I remember
 You took off your sweater and handed it to me.
 It will always remind me of you,
 It will always be our pine-arched bridge.

Early October

Today I sit here
On a rotten old oak bench,
Breathing in an earthy aroma.
Closing my eyes,
Chickadees singing their versions of
Peace and bliss.

Engines from cars are revving, echoing
Along Loring Ave.

I opened my eyes slowly,
Squinting at the rays of sun
Kissing my oiled cheeks.

The baby blue sky greets me
With marshmallow white clouds.
Leaves swaying in the brisk wind
And fall gently to the concrete,
I sit here.

93 Linden Street

I released the smoke trapped in my lungs,
Stinging the back of my throat.
A single white cloud spills from my mouth.
“Want another hit?”
My eyes,
Dilated and glazed over,
Creating blood moons on a blank canvas.

My thumb pressed down on the lighter,
Striking the flint,
Gearing the gas,
Sparkling the light that eventually warms my hands
On a New England winter’s night.

Staring at me are those pistachio green walls, that I now call my home.
Walls that are decorated with memories frozen in time.
Binge watching *Hell’s Kitchen*,
Empty beer bottles and wine glasses decorate the once open
Oak wood floor.
The endless amounts of Uber Eats, pasta, and shrimp scampi,
The endless amounts of laughter,
The endless amounts of overnights,
I am from these moments at 93 Linden Street.

My thumb presses down on the lighter, striking the flint.
My eyes.... Dilated and glazed over.
“Want another hit?”
I exhale...
And allow the sensation to sting the back of my throat.

Happiness Begins

Adrenaline transcends into night.
The audience crescendos
With roars, cheers, and chants
As they and I wait impatiently for the Jonas Brothers to arrive.

The crowd grew more as the night went on.
It seemed nearly impossible to count everyone
pouring into the TD Garden.

I got a text from my friend that night.
“I see you! look up! Can you see me?”
I scan through the boisterously loud crowd.
“I’m the fourth row up!”
She waved her hands vigorously
like an aircraft marshall.
I pulled out my phone to snap a picture of her,
But I was too late...
As the lights began to flicker.

The speakers thundered under the concrete floor.
The barricade beside me kept pressing against my shoulder, like I was on the scrambler
or Something.

I looked up from my seat, sparks of gold
Trickled down the catwalk.
It sizzled like grilling chicken on a frying pan.
I screamed as if we were going on a Rollercoaster.
Sure enough that was their opening song.
Tears started rolling down my rosy cheeks
as my eyes meet the orange, blue, and green tuxedos.

The crowd roars, and my ears ring.
The sounds of “Happiness Begins” takes over,
And it lasts for hours for hours.
Kevin plays *Burning Up* on the bass
While signing an album for that one lucky fan
Who will carry it like its buried treasure.

It was too short to my liking.
The flashlights from cellphones lit the entire stadium
In hopes of capturing the memories, tears, passions shared for music
We all got to enjoy together.

224

I walk past 224
Empty.
Once filled with laughter,
Passion, movement, and art.
Now a ghost town due to the pandemic.

My mind flutters with emotions.
I want to be happy because I'm in the space.
I want to cry because it is no longer what it used to be.
A place I used to call home.

I pivot my feet to face the narrow hallway
And approach Olympic blue doors of 224.
The hinges scream as if they want to break free.
The metal door frame becomes my support
While I kick off my shoes.
Just like I did everyday.

I walk on the worn charcoal-colored marley for the first time since quarantine.
I remember when Dan tried to kick his legs
but slipped and fell onto his back.
He'd forgotten his socks were still on.
My teammates and I chuckled as he popped back up to his feet, smiling.
I wish I had the video.

I move towards the center of the room,
Marked now with eight six-foot squares for social distancing.
I tried to ignore the bright yellow lines that surrounded me.
I remember when I had to wait until the music started.
I internally panicked because I never knew if I could remember the choreography
From the week before.

224 reeks of mildew with hints of sanitizer.
It isn't a familiar smell, so I try to look past it.

The smell of hairspray takes over my mind.
I remember when it used to create a white cloud.
Each spritz painted the off-white ceiling tiles
And left marks on the oblong mirror.

I touch my hair
And recall what it felt like to have
Three pounds of gel in it.
I felt weighed down not only from the gel, but from

The six textbooks I carried when
I worked on homework during the hour-long breaks.

I finally met the mirror.
The same azure eyes smiled back at me
From the past.
I sat in the upper right-hand corner, getting ready for our shows.
Call time was at five, but
Everyone got there fifteen minutes late.
Dancers rushed into 224
faster than a quick change.
Veterans looked for “their spot” to sit,
To get ready, to do their makeup, and
To place their stuff down to save room for their freshman besties to sit there too.

Everyone added their last touch of glitter,
Lasts spritz of hair spray,
And a sweep of powder across their faces until somebody yelled
“T-Ten ‘til show time!”

Time slips away, and 224 is emptied.
Caboodles, makeup brushes, unwanted costumes
The show line up, and the programs lay on the charcoal-colored Marley.

I stand here now and look over my right shoulder
To the oak wooden cabinet. I’ll open it one more time,
To play the music of routines I never got to perform or rehearse.
I let the music play, the sounds echo.
My mind finally runs free, and my body takes over.

Devereux Beach

“Your destination is on the right.”
I turned the wheel vigorously to the right and left
In attempts to avoid the cinerous craters in front of me.

Devereux greets me with its sun.
It brushes a bronzy haze across his masterpiece.
Time slips away, and the haze stretched further and further
As it made its silhouette of Boston.
The sun falls, and the stars eventually gather.
I soon met the lunar moon that bathed in the light of the sun.

I open my car door and listen to the sounds of the Atlantic
And its rhythmic percussion.
The soles of my feet touch the gravel and are soon covered in pebbles,
Digging into my feet with each step.
My feet were soon cured by the golden sand, and the smell of brine
Heightened my sense of smell.

I encountered the abandoned swing
Who was ready to support whoever came to it.
I'd forgotten what it was like to sit, relax, and let the
Waves subside any worries, stressors, or doubts.
The swing began to make their own tune too
When it creaked in a slow but steady rhythm, picking up
Each time I would swing.
I couldn't stop myself because I was too short...and I didn't want to.

I paid attention to the melody of the waves,
Complimented by the mysterious creaks of the swing.
I opened my eyes once more and saw the flash of white sliver in the dark Atlantic skies.
A seagull eager to meet me
And to soar across the coastal sky
Claiming it as their own.

My life is like a video game.

Starting in

3....

2....

1...

I am the main character.

My hair could change every two weeks, but I would have to pray it wouldn't fall out.

I can wear any makeup I wanted, and in any color.

I tend to lean towards the ballet pinks or neutral shades with a signature mauve lip.

I can choose between tight and tiny crop tops, or sweatpants and overalls.

The baggier the clothing, the slimmer the character would look.

There are goals and objectives to the game.

I need to make millions of dollars in less than an hour to be able to afford a room to rent.

I need to get across the parking lot to make it to my car without being

Cat called or gawked at by men.

I need to squeeze myself into smaller size jeans in order to be valued by everyone else.

Sometimes I keep walking into a wall and falling down, just for fun.

Sometimes I do this because I want to break the wall, but I'm not strong enough to do so.

Each level gets more difficult, with more obstacles to face.

The father leaves, not knowing if he would say his final goodbye to his family.

Phone calls last for about thirty seconds, and I'm challenged what to say, how to say it,

And when to give daily reminders to be safe.

The character faces an entire new environment, 10,000 miles away from what I called home.

I must learn new ways of living.

On top of learning a new language, I must live with a host family who is far from knowing

My versions of "normal."

Completing level by level,

She's greeted by two-faced, a character who was only interested in helping her

If it helped themselves.

When two-faced couldn't complete her challenges, or face them on their own,

She dropped her, leaving the main character to pick up the pieces

Of a broken friendship, or what it seemed to be.

The thing that sucks about the game

Is that she cannot control the challenges she's faced with.

It can be as minimal as fall damage, or something that takes some life out of you.

Unfortunately, she can't control this.

What she can control, is how she deals with it.

She can accept defeat or push through these challenges.

In the video game, you have one life. Don't waste it.
The outcome of the game is determined by you.
Your choices,
Your actions,
Others you surround yourself by.
You control only some of the outcomes,
But you can control your storyline.

Life Lessons

How the table turned.
Learning you were just people pleasing,
My lesson learned.

I was never concerned
About my best friend leaving.
How the table turned.

I thought you had earned
All of my trust, but that was deceiving.
My lesson learned.

I helped pack your dishes when your heart was burned.
I was there for you, not believing
How the table turned.

And then you spurned
When I had COVID. You, fleeing.
My lesson Learned.

Although all of this, I am now discerned
I stay civil, keeping my smile beaming.
How the table turned.
My lesson learned.

How to Heal

I slammed the car door,
And my car shook like an earthquake.
Rivers pouring from my weather-beaten cheeks,
Freezing from the arctic temps that had plunged, like my emotions.
I sat in silence—complete silence.

I turned the keys,
And the car began to light up like a Christmas tree.
The sound—pinged,
Ricocheted through my ears.
My head thumped in an irregular pattern
And with the constant sighs
I let the depths of winter
Soothe my throat, after sounding like a teapot ready to boil.

I pressed the gas,
I drove around Ware, my mind blurring
The scenes around me.
All I could see was the crystalized gravel
And the butterscotch parallels that would lead me to where I had to go.

I searched the glovebox,
Looking for a Newport and my lighter.
Putting the poison between my chapped lips
I took my first drag, not expecting the air resistance from the filter.
The smoke poured from my mouth, seeping into my pitch-black car seats.
I flicked the ends of the cigarette out the window with irritation
And let the ash disintegrate along with my anger.

I gradually released the tensions held in my shoulders.
Blasting *Marvin's Room*,
Belting *Rolling in the Deep*
Listening to *Calling My Phone*,
Mumbling the lyrics between my teeth.
Hours later, the neglected
Texts, missed phone calls, and worries
I found my way back home
And acted as if nothing had ever happened.

Past does not define
Who you are, or what you'll be.
You'll dance through the rain.

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About the Author

Kaitlyn Munsell

Received a BA in English and Secondary Education at Salem State University. She is continuing her education through the 4+1 program at SSU, and will obtain her Master's degree by 2022. This is her debut of some of the many poems she's written in her time at Salem State, and she hopes to continue writing poetry more frequently in the future. Aside from writing, Kaitlyn is also a part of the Commonwealth Honors Program, Sigma Tau Delta, the National Society of Leadership and Success, and is an executive board member and choreographer for Repertory Dance Theatre. Originally from Western Massachusetts, she lives in Salem, Massachusetts to further her career as a paraprofessional and future English teacher at Melrose High School.