



eudæmonic.

Hannah Preisinger

eudæmonic.

(adjective): pertaining or conducive to happiness

Hannah Preisinger

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author's statement

I came to the unexpected and uncomfortable realization this term that, as things currently stand, I'm better at writing nonfiction memoir than any other genre. This realization came as something of a disappointment to me at first, given that my preferred reading material has often been anything *but* nonfiction memoir. I struggled heavily with the notion that this was something I seemed to be good at.

I've always hated sharing things about myself. My friends and family have noted this and pointed it out to me. I believe this preference originated during a time in my life when things around me were changing so constantly and so rapidly that I would wind up giving earth-shattering news to friends at least a few times a week. It got to the point where I couldn't keep up, so I just stopped trying. Interestingly, this is a practice I've been consciously working on lately, since my life has settled down a great deal and I'm trying to feel less... skittish, I guess. Like things could upend at any moment. So I've asked several people close to me to help me remember to share things about what's going on in my world. Evidently, it's working better than I thought – because here I am, compiling a book made of nothing but shards of my life.

I think I like it. I hope you do too.

I must acknowledge authors Joan Fiset and Christopher Frizzelle as further influencing forces on this whole issue. Speaking with them – and specifically addressing my "crisis of genre," if you will – gave me some potent and useful insights. And, of course, a further thank you to Rebecca Brown for the feedback and support.

home

There was a pasture in the backyard; Lita trotted through the rain and tossed her mane there. There was a stretch of lawn leading up to the fence; Dilly bounded towards me like a bottle rocket there. There was a stand of trees and ivy off to one side of the yard; quail and spiders and the last threads of sunset lived there. There was a separate apartment above the garage; Nicholas stayed there before things went wrong, and my father stayed there *after* things went wrong. There was a set of wooden steps leading up to the porch; the defiant crush of a high school freshman took root there and abashedly grew, for a time.

There was a room; I was there, for a while.

There was a house; it was my home, once.

reptile woman

My first day of school I was in the car half an hour early, unable to contain my excitement. By the second week, I was crying and clinging to furniture in an attempt to stay away. My teacher had decided to take the school's rigid curriculum a bit too seriously. According to this grand plan, the children were not supposed to be able to read yet. I had come to preschool already reading books to myself. The teacher, upon discovering this, told me to sit in a corner, and made no effort to discourage the other children from mocking me. Her eyes were cold and opaque and three-quarters empty, like a lizard's. Or a snake's.

first drive

The first time I drove, I was much younger than I should have been. I was on my way to kindergarten, I believe – my second one, the good one, not the first one where my teacher Ms. Lorinda thought I was an alien messiah and wanted to train me to fight the lizard-people.

No, this was the good kindergarten – the little blue building among the forests and fields outside the small town in northern Idaho where I grew up. It was raining that day, but not aggressively; just the occasional little drop on the windshield, brief reminders from the overhanging clouds that they could get really cranky if they wished to.

We were in my father's truck. It was an ancient, dirt-covered thing, older than me by many years. A peeling, faded black color on the outside, and a collage of browns and tans and crackling maroon on the inside. The foam stuck out of one part of the bench seat, and an aged mustard-yellow blanket had been brought in to make it a more suitable vehicle for those occasional passengers who were not a landscape designer.

It always smelled like soil, but not unpleasantly. I always had the impulse to brush off my clothes when I got out of it, but that just made me feel somehow capable and rustically confident. A large collection of feathers were stuck into small holes in the dashboard, which my father and I had both been gathering from all over for as long as I could remember.

I'm sure there must have been some moment, some conversation that brought about the change in steering power, but I don't remember that. I just remember being the one holding the wheel and making minute adjustments to our trajectory along the pleasant, overcast road in the early morning. I wanted to get at the pedals too – and now that I think about it, maybe I did? Could my tiny legs have reached down far enough? I think perhaps I had my feet on top of my father's, pressing down on his toes instead to elicit speed and slowness.

I think I made some kind of quiet giggle of delight as we scooped down into a hill and then began to ascend the other side using mostly momentum, but I might be imagining that noise. I can just as easily imagine myself staying quiet and focused – apparently everyone called me "the professor" when I was a little kid, since I tended to be rather earnest and matter-of-fact about things.

Anyway, then the moment was over – we crested the hill, I returned to my proper side of the cab, and soon enough the trip concluded.

It was just a quick thing. I can only properly remember a split-second mental video clip of the incident. But hey, I guess that was from a time when I still respected my father.

So I suppose that makes it interesting.

around the table

A dream I had when I was young. We're in the Ponder Point house, and the entire extended family is over for Christmas dinner. It's warm and happy, everyone is getting along. They've all gathered in the dining room and are beginning to say grace before eating.

But I'm in the living room. I'm not part of it. I yell for them to stop, to wait for me. They don't. I start running for the dining room. I never get there. And then I wake up.

I hate that dream.

I was given the number when I was seven years old, in Colorado. It was given to my brain. Or my mind. Or both. I remember building starships out of Legos while my parents and the researcher talked earnestly in small plastic chairs. There is a file on me somewhere with all the details. Sometimes I hate the number, but I can never, ever forget it. It's one in ten million. Years later, I found out it was probably even higher.

return

When I was in my first years of elementary school, my best friend was a wonderfully strange boy named Elias. He knew everything about tanks and guns but was an incredibly gentle person. He sang and danced without a care in the world, earnest in his delightful little grooves. He was also my steadfast champion; I think he would've done anything for me. We were young enough that when we both left that school there was no real way for us to stay in contact.

Then, years later, I was at another school. For fourth grade, I think, but it may have been fifth. (I moved around and switched schools a lot.) I was sitting off to one side of the classroom in my little desk-with-a-chair-attached, listening to the teacher give his introductory speech to the class of about thirty kids. I turned my head, already bored, just as the boy a few seats away turned his head too. Elias and I immediately recognized each other and had a silent, furiously joyful reunion through the air across the desks of several strangers who all looked really confused. And for that year, too, we were fast friends.

I hope he's doing alright.

inward

There is a dangerous draw of sadness here.

last

"Last Spring": the name of a piece we played in orchestra. It took me a long time to realize that the title was meant to be interpreted as "the previous spring." I always heard it as THE Last Spring. The last one on Earth. The final time things would be born before they died forever in fire and metal and space. I nearly cried every time we played it. Hell, I'm tearing up right now just thinking about it, hearing it in my head.

I worry every spring that it's the last one. Not for me. That's not important. But for *all of it*.

past/passed

I think I was the second person to see my grandmother's corpse. Definitely not the first; that was my uncle Greg, who found her in the kitchen, flat on her back. But it wasn't *her* lying there, not really. Just the leftover part. It was so obvious she was gone that I wasn't even particularly sad. It just seemed like she had left a decaying, unpleasant old house and headed off to a new one. The new one was located in a very distant country, though, so none of us would be hearing from her much anymore. I crouched beside the body and touched its forehead. I whispered a phrase in Latin, to honor that old house's long years of effort. *Requiescat in pace.* At the funeral, I was the strong one.

contentment

I try to define what I want. If I can define it, then I can obtain it. I also do my best to keep the definition nebulous. If you make it too specific, the puzzle pieces of life and time don't have the opportunity to surprise you with something even better than you'd first conceived of.

So rather than specific people or places or things, I do my best to wish for feelings. States of mind. General senses of being. And even though I wish for all those other, noun-based things sometimes (I'm still human), what I really want is something more akin to an adjective. Just a specific state: the state of un-worry.

I want un-worry.

Not placid, mind-numbing simplicity. But the knowledge that, in terms of basic needs, everything is fine. Everything is fine. *Everything is fine.*

won and lost

We were – by an enormous margin – the smallest orchestra in this national competition. We didn't even have a bass player; other competitors brought along full brass, wind, and percussive sections. I was incredibly proud of my third chair position in the cello section, even though there were only six people total with our instrument. We played our damn hearts out for the adjudicators, but were still not very hopeful when we attended the final party/announcement ceremony (which was held, for some reason, at Medieval Times). When we were announced the overall winner of the entire event, our cheers were barely loud enough to be heard above the triumphant music, but it was one of the happiest nights of my life.

I haven't played my cello in many years now. I worry that I've forgotten how to read the notes.

the play's the thing

In high school, I was in the theater. I was the captain of the theater. If something needed to be done there, I would do it. Each performance became a personal responsibility, and it was the most wonderful thing in the world. It was also a little alarming. During my senior year, I was in rehearsal for the show in which I had been cast as the lead character. I was also designing the sound for the show. I had also helped write the script. The director said that someone needed to design the posters; from the back of the theater, waiting offstage, I raised my hand. The director, only half-joking, told my fellow actors to hold my arm down so that I couldn't pile yet another duty on my already overflowing plate. They did their best. But they couldn't stop me.

The posters were beautiful.

midsummer

I don't remember saying it, but it happened during rehearsal and got written down on the quote sheet: "The real reason I enjoy wearing swords – to make flirting difficult." Summer, 2014 – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

coping mechanisms

I was once told that I use sarcasm and dry humor as a way to mask my discomfort with my own emotions. To the individual who was kind enough to inform a room full of strangers of that theory, I say a firm and healthy "fuck you." However, I will admit she had a point.

It's fine, really.

the crows

I found my potentially final place of learning by following the crows. The beautiful wetlands around the university are home to tens of thousands of them; the flock – *the murder, I mentally correct myself* – swoops in from miles and miles around every evening at sundown. They fly silently until they find their friends – their family – and then they hold lengthy conversations that no one else can understand. Most people are unnerved by them, but I love them and give them respectful nods whenever we cross paths. I call them my death children and hope that one day I can know what they're saying to each other.

imposter

Why the hell is she letting me join the research group? Why is she letting me T.A. for her cosmology class? Why am I teaching middle-schoolers about gravitational waves? Why am I attending professional conferences? Why is NASA paying me money? How long can this last? I don't even know calculus!

abrupt

I was at Evan's when I got the email.

Toby Faber, who had been a freshman in high school when I was a senior, had hung himself. He was the younger brother of Katie Faber, our department's wonderful stage manager, so the theater welcomed him with open arms. He became *everyone's* younger brother. He and I had acted together in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was Nick Bottom and he was Francis Flute, which meant that towards the end of the show we both starred in the hilarious play-within-a-play that *Midsummer* is famous for. In that play, Pyramus (me) mistakenly believes that his love Thisbe (Toby) has been killed. He stabs himself. Then Thisbe finds his body and kills herself as well. The characters are so utterly inept that the scene becomes a raucous comedy; the audience laughed uproariously.

At Evan's, I went into the bathroom and cried for a long time.

unspoken

This is not for the words. It's for the mind, and for the hopeful heart. I will not pour concrete on something so warm and sacred and fragile.

other kinds of intelligence

I'm graduating soon. I'll be leaving the crows' nesting-place behind, but I know I'll still see them everywhere. I hope that they'll remember me, somehow. I'm graduating with honors (but not top honors). My two papers (on cosmic strings and the history of ghosts in Western society, respectively) was published in the school's research journal, and my piece of erasure poetry was published in the school's literary journal. Over the summer I'm conducting astrophysics research, writing about my time investigating the paranormal at a big old hotel in Colorado, and directing a Shakespeare play in ten days. After that, I'm going to enroll in a coding bootcamp and get a "day job" in the tech industry that will keep my financially stable the rest of my life.

It's all very promising.

There might be something missing, though.

colophon

IM FELL DW Pica and Constantia on what I assume to be regular printer paper; assembled with a thrill of wonder on a Thursday night as I realized that this is, in all likelihood, the last piece of homework I will ever complete.

Hell yeah.

about the author

Hannah Preisinger is a student of UW Bothell, graduating in 2019 with a BA in Culture, Literature and the Arts and a minor in Consciousness Studies. She is also actively involved with the gravitational wave astronomy research group, works as a Student Web Assistant with the school's Marketing and Communications team, and owns and operates a small theatrical production company. She is an avid investigator of all things strange and unexplained. After graduation, she plans to continue practicing theater and attend a local coding bootcamp. She also might sleep sometime.