

Luminous Arc
(A Poetry Collection)

By Allison Bernhard

Below are several poems that I have written over the past few years. I feel that they are diverse and interesting (of course it's because I wrote them!), and I think they show the growth and development of my thinking and writing over the years. Each poem is followed by a descriptive paragraph either talking about the process of the poem or the meaning of the poem. I thought it was important to have a paragraph to talk about how I came to write the poem, what I meant when I wrote it, and how it was to write the poem, in order for the reader to better understand my writing process. I chose to have the paragraph follow the poem so that the reader could read the poem first and reflect before reading what I have written about the poem or the process of the poem. That way they can form their own opinions first.

The first poems are from a poetry class I took several years ago at my community college. They include *Thinking* and *Farm Life*. The next poem, *In Memory of Bubba*, is one that I wrote for a poetry class at Illinois State, and it's in the form of a sonnet. The next four poems are ones that I wrote for a creative writing class, also at Illinois State. They are entitled, *My Graveyard*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Horizons*, and finally *Mending*. After all the old poems come a few new revisions and some new poems, *Sink or Swim*, *Pressure* and *Slowly*, that I have recently written. They are also accompanied by a descriptive paragraph. Each poem could be revised even further as the revision process is never finished. I hope that they are fun to read, and that people can relate to them. Enjoy!

Thinking

A thought trickled to the back
of my mind
and there it stayed.
It was just a silly little thought
One of no importance
till one day
I came across
that very same thought
and suddenly...
everything changed.

I grabbed hold of that thought
until it couldn't breathe
until I understood it completely.
It made perfect sense now
It just took Time to

change a silly little thought into something.

Thinking is a poem that I wrote a couple of years ago. I used to write poetry as a hobby, and this was one of the poems that I had written. It has gone through several revisions, and I think the line breaks still need work. It just talks about the little ideas we have that take time to really develop into good ideas with substance. This is a poem that I really liked when I wrote it and still enjoy it. I think many different meanings can be taken from this poem.

Farm Life

The mist enshrouding the silver moon
and the cadence of the crickets
lend an air of mystery to the night.

Between the intermittent howling of a dog
comes the erratic beat of a hammer,
driven by a farmer finishing by flashlight.

No silence creeping here
Instead, a steady hum beating with life.
The darkness breathes.

Enveloping the night and
blocking the ever twinkling stars,
the Mist floats eternally,
pushed back only by dawn of morrow.

This poem, *Farm Life*, reminds me of my uncle's farm. I wrote it recalling the feeling and images of visiting the farm. Sometimes my uncle would be out in a shed next to my Grandmother's house late into the night as he finished up some project. I always liked visiting the farm and seeing everything humming with life. I wrote this poem a couple of years ago also. It has gone through a lot of revision too and will continue to do so. Reading it always transports me back in time to visiting the farm as a little girl. This poem has gone through several revisions, and even as I've typed it here I've made a few adjustments.

In Memory of Bubba

A shriek in the hall alerted us all,
Dry and still, he was found on the carpet.
Alone and quiet, he curled in a ball,
Suicide or murder, we don't know yet.
Hair was found wrapped around his puffy neck,
The color and length pointed to Kelly.

Stench of death in the room made me a wreck,
 My knees and legs were turned into jelly;
 We stood in wonder of what had happened.
 Did Kelly kill Bubba and deny it?
 She told us her story and would not bend,
 We did not believe, not even a bit.
 Into his resting-place, down he went swish,
 Never to know the truth about our fish.

Bubba was a beta fish that my roommates and I had bought and kept. I wrote this poem in the fall of 2001 for a poetry class. It was supposed to be in the form of a sonnet, and since sonnets can be so very heavy, I thought it would be better to lighten it up and write about a fish. My roommate had changed the water in the fish bowl, and when she went over later to check on Bubba, she noticed he was missing. She found him on the other side of the room lying on the carpet. To this day, we don't know how he got there. He lived overnight, but was dead the next morning. So it became a joke that my roommate had killed the fish. The sonnet was hard to write, and the rhythm still isn't correct. But I like it the way it is.

My Graveyard

Cotton clouds float down a clear, blue river of sky,
 Bright, yellow dandelions stroke the lightly scented wind,
 Senses feel the firm ground beneath unsteady feet,
 Subtle smell of littered pine cones wafts upward.
 Earthy mushrooms tilt precariously on thin stalks
 While mourners delicately balance shaky emotions.
 Sensuous weeping willows droop
 In companionship with teardrops falling to the earth.
 Patches of vibrant red tulips tenuously overpower
 Dusty, granite monuments to the dead.

I wrote *My Graveyard* in the spring of 2002 for a creative writing class. It reminded me of growing up in my old neighborhood, the contrast of a painful place with the beauty of nature. My neighborhood backed up to a large cemetery, so I didn't have a lot of negative connotations when it came to graveyards. I practically grew up in one, and in the winter time we'd go sledding in the large hills. In the spring, summer, and fall we'd walk around the cemetery for exercise or play hide and seek. So the feelings normally associated with a graveyard are not ones that I grew up with. However, for this poem, I combined the peacefulness of a cemetery with the grief of mourners at a gravesite. Every now and then we'd see a blue tent in the cemetery and know that someone had recently passed away. In a way, I hope that when I'm buried it will be in a peaceful place such as the one I grew up near. Re-reading this poem reminds me of my youth, as scary as that sounds!

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

Unknown—unwanted,
 Silent invader sneaks into being
 Each new day brings new development-
 Five months, too large to hide
 From outside world.

This alien feeds off the
 Organism it inhabits,
 Food, milk, meat and nutrients taken
 Secretively from within
 To further substantial growth.

The host, no longer able to sustain this parasite
 Expels the intruder by a massive explosion,
 Now a bloody mess of goo
 And secretion from Herculean effort.

This poem, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, was also written in spring of 2002 for a creative writing class. It was supposed to be a defamiliarization poem, but I already think that being pregnant is a weird concept (kind of freaks me out). Therefore it wasn't that hard to put my thoughts into words. Putting some of the stanzas together was tough work, and I think there is still some work to be done here. The sister of my boyfriend at the time was pregnant, and seeing the changes she went through was some of the inspiration for this poem.

Horizons

The princess waits eternally for her fabled knight.
 Parched dirt longing for a cool summer rain,
 Sunlight filtered through a dusty, blackened window
 Shadowing the corners and wood floor.
 'There is no Arizona' they told her
 And she swallowed the lies.
 Time marched on; she remained in solitude,
 Contemplating the world's revolution.
 Seasons changed. Still the princess lingered alone.
 The nights beckon, the phone taunts, and she holds on.
 A white horse far in the distance carrying a lone rider
 Never coming closer, always beyond reach.

For *Horizons*, the line "There is no Arizona" came from a country song, and really stood out in my mind. The song and the line were the inspiration for this poem. Some women really wait around for their prince charming, the one who never shows.

And instead of getting out into the world, this princess waited and may still be waiting. I wanted to leave the ending the way it was because there is someone in the distance, maybe never coming closer but still there. The hope of a white knight coming to sweep a girl off of her feet is many young women's fantasies. It actually happening is another matter, but that hope is what sometimes keeps people alive.

Mending

The sky winked at me today
 And then it smiled. A smile
 So wide my vision
 Blurred
 And then cracked
 Into a million tiny fragments.
 The pieces of which
 Refracted tears the sky shed
 Because of my blindness.

I collected those scraps,
 And pieced them together
 Into a luminous arc
 In which the sky could smile again,
 And I could lose my vision.

For *Mending*, I was at U-High school waiting during a passing period to go observe when the idea of the sky winking came to me. It was quickly scribbled down, at least parts of it were. It has gone through several revisions and still needs more. I just thought the image of the sky winking was such a cool idea, and something if one saw, their vision would be kind of screwed up. Just thinking about the sky winking is an awesome mental picture. I'm not completely happy with where the poem is right now, but no poem is ever truly finished.

REVISIONS / NEW POEMS

Here is where I will have revisions, and following my revised poems will be any new poems that I create. The first poem is a revision, and the next three are original poems.

My Graveyard

Dainty cotton clouds meander down a changing sapphire river of sky,
 Bright, earthy dandelions playfully stroke the lightly scented wind,
 Senses test the firm ground beneath unsteady feet, uncertain,
 Subtle smell of littered pine cones gently wafts upward.

Tender mushrooms tilt and sway precariously on thin stalks
 While silent mourners delicately balance tenuous emotions.
 Sensuous weeping willows droop
 In companionship with crystal teardrops cascading to the earth.
 Patches of vibrant, crimson tulips struggle to overpower
 Dusty, granite monuments to the ever-present departed.

In this version, I went through each line and tried to imagine it in my head. Then looking at the words I originally had, I tried to see if another word would better describe it. I tried to make each line a picture, a snapshot. In the first line, I changed several words, but the one I like the most, is changing blue to sapphire. I think that sapphire describes a different kind of blue, a deeper color with more change to it. With some of the changes, I think it adds more substance to the poem.

Sink or Swim

Sent off alone
 but not completely.
 Guided with suggestions,
 A word here, an idea placed there.
 Sometimes more by directions,
 Step-by-step standards.
 Control a big issue.
 Eighteen pairs of eyes
 Waiting, watching, judging.
 One false move or action-
 The pack knowingly attacks
 Chaos ensues.
 A scramble to piece
 The plan back together.

This poem is in its early stages, so there hasn't been a lot of revision yet. I had the ending with 'control a big issue' to help with the continuity but decided to put the last two lines there instead. I wanted to write a poem about my feelings on student teaching. Some of my fears and opinions are written here. I do feel that control is a big issue, and it's been on that has been discussed over and over. I feel that we are kind of pushed into a sink or swim situation. I don't think it's as dire as this poem may make it out to be, but it's still somewhat frightening. There are a lot more images that can be described but having all eyes on you can be intimidating.

Sink or Swim

I feel sent off alone
 But not completely.

I'm guided by suggestions,
 A word spoken here, an idea placed there.
 Sometimes more by directions
 Followed with step-by-step standards.
 Control is a big issue.
 Eighteen pairs of eyes on me
 Waiting, watching, judging.
 One false move or action-
 The pack attacks
 Chaos ensues.
 I scramble to piece
 The plan back together,
 To gain a sense of control.

I had written *Sink or Swim* earlier, but it was still lacking something. So I decided to write it from a first person perspective. I think it adds more depth to the poem and a new element to it. There are still a lot of things that need to be worked on, but I thought it would be interesting to see a couple different versions of the same poem as they are a work in progress.

Pressure

The intricate delicacy of life
 grabs at the throat with thin
 measured embraces,
 tentacles reaching deep.

A firm grip by the shoulders,
 love agitates, trying to un-fog the mind.
 Patches of memories fly, swirling
 out through the ears.

I think with this one, I tried for something too big. In my creative writing class, my instructor always said to write about something concrete. Compare something concrete to something else that is concrete or something abstract. This poem talks about the tenacity of life and all the decisions we make, but I think it might be too abstract. It's in the process of being finished, but I'm just not sure where I want to take this poem. At the same time, I like the images that are presented in the poem. I think that life does choke us at times, and sometimes we lose things that are dear to us.

Slowly

In my being, a soul blooms
 one petal at a time.
 A slow journey with a destination in mind.

Knowledge, wisdom, understanding,
 With each milestone, another petal
 opens to reveal character.
 Patience leads to fruition.

This is another poem that is far from being finished. I have an idea of what I want to express, but I am having a hard time of seeing it all come together. This is a poem that I have worked on before, but I'm only using the first two lines from the original idea. With more time to work and think on this, I think that it could be something.

Slowly

In my being, a soul blooms
 One petal at a time.

A slow journey, a destination in mind.
 Knowledge, wisdom, understanding,
 Each milestone reached, another petal
 Unfurls to reveal character.

Patience leads to fruition.

This poem is another one that is reaching for the abstract. At the same time, I'm trying to compare a blooming rose to different aspects of character. So there is a comparison of something abstract to something concrete. It's slowly, nice pun, taking shape, but I'm still far from where I want it to be. It's interesting to see how the different line breaks take the poem in a different direction.

These are just a few examples of my writing and the process that it takes as I continue to work and shape my writing. I think poetry is a wonderful writing outlet for thoughts and emotions. Poetry can open the mind in ways that other forms of writing can not. And poetry can mean different things to different people. Everyone brings something different to the interpretations of a poem, and that part of the fun that poetry creates. I hope you've enjoyed reading my poetry and seeing part of the process that it's taken. Thanks for reading!