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My Longest Friend

Mikelyn G. Britt
Gettysburg College

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My Longest Friend

Author Bio

Mikelyn Britt is native to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Britt is a member of the Gettysburg College's class of 2023 where she is majoring in English with a creative writing concentration and a peace and justice minor. She is also the opinions section editor of the school newspaper, The Gettysburgian.

My Longest Friend

MIKELYN G. BRITT

The first story I wrote was about a little eight-year-old boy, not much older than me at the time, who was taken on a spaceship to the Moon in the middle of the night. That is where he found a new friend, a green alien with a round belly, soft features, and three snail-like eyes. The pair played all sorts of games, some from Earth and some from the Moon. By the time the little boy made it back to his home on Earth, the sun was starting to rise. His mom came in to get him ready for school. The boy jumped at the chance to tell her about his new alien friend and all the new games he learned. His mother was pleased that her little boy had such an active imagination and that his dreams were filled with such wonder. That is when the young boy learned that not everyone has the gift of seeing.

When I wrote the story about a little boy and his alien friend, I wasn't too different from them. I was a little girl living in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in a working-class family with six siblings. To say that sometimes I felt unseen was an understatement. Aside from my family, I did not have many friends. I wasn't very good at getting out of my shell just yet. So, I turned to storytelling. I could have as many friends as I wanted in my imagination—just like the alien.

Dad loved to read. Mom loved to write. I felt comforted those mornings on the porch on our wooden rocking chairs. *The Magic Tree House* sprawled on my lap, a notepad nearby with some hurried ideas written in orange crayon. Dad would put on his glasses, which he only wore for reading and driving despite his terrible vision, and page through a WWII book. Mom was seated to his right, engrossed in the newest John Grisham novel. I wrote through the love I felt.

As I grew older into elementary school, I found expressing myself got more difficult. Mom and Dad had overlapping battles with cancer. I lost myself in the grief of their absence. I craved being the one doted over and worried about. It was me that stayed up all night with nightmares and anxiety over the state of my parents. I wrote get well soon cards in the waiting rooms of chemotherapy centers and by hospital beds. I lost my imagination.

I was moved to a new school. My family could no longer afford the tuition of my private schooling, so I transferred to the neighborhood public school. Friends were much harder to come by as the new kid, so I went back to my stories. I tried to find the happiness I was lacking. I wrote a story about a small princess. She lived in a magnificent castle with her family and had hundreds of friends. She liked to draw, read, and write just like me. Her family was together. Her parents were healthy. She went to bed with a full stomach and dreamed of cotton candy. There were no hospitals in her kingdom. No need when everyone is safe and healthy. I wrote and wrote, but nothing ever came true.

Then we moved to a new town the next year. The landlord of our house was getting tired of renting and wanted someone to buy the property. Well, we certainly didn't have the funds to pay for it. Not when red overdue envelopes took up most of our countertop. Dad was in the height of his cancer treatment and they threw us out. The only place we could afford to live was out of my hometown. So we packed everything up and left. I wrote stories about a great big mansion with dozens of bedrooms, a movie theater, a bowling alley, and a pool. The fridge was stocked with lemonade and pop. The freezer was full of ice cream. And every night the family sat down for dinner, together. Our new home looked a little different. It had holes in the floors and leaky ceilings. There were only two bedrooms so Mom and Dad converted the garage downstairs into the master. Dinner happened when it could, with one or two chairs being empty. Dad promised it was just a transition house until he got better.

Dad passed away soon after we moved. We donated a book in his honor to our local library. The same library I would drag him to on the weekends begging for the newest copy of *Dork Diaries* and maybe a new kid's cooking book to try out some recipes. My brain was too filled with grief to have room for creativity. I put down my pen, threw away my notebook, and walked away from writing. I spent five years without so much as writing in my diary.

High school is when I tried again. I bought a pretty journal, a whole packet of gel pens, and made a new playlist to get the creative juices flowing. Everything I wrote was filled with hatred, loss, and grief. I wrote about self-hatred and depression in sparkly pink ink. A white notebook tainted with the stories of absolute misery. I understand that as writers, we always leave a piece of ourselves in our writing. I did not want to feel this hurt anymore.

College is when I returned to the stories of love. It was the first time that I would ever be away from my family. The 201 miles did come with

the tug of some heartstrings (or the existing umbilical cord as my friends like to joke about for Mom's and my close bond), but I also felt my first taste of freedom. I was learning what it was like to finally not be in a town where every corner has a painful memory. I took my first breath and felt my heart start to beat again.

The floodgates had opened and it was all I could do to find some paper, be it a receipt or a napkin, and start writing. I wrote poems in the margins of my astronomy notes. I wrote about a group of friends navigating the ins and outs of Greek life. I wrote about what love might feel like when reciprocated. I wrote and I wrote and I wrote until my fingers were numb.

March 2020: the start of armageddon. At least that's what it felt like. The creeping feeling of hypochondria crawled up my spine, whispering in my ear that this was the end. Paranoid cleaning and regular testing for fevers became my routine. I watched over my mother—who did not seem to match my sentiments on the outbreak—praying for her protection. I could not lose another.

Quarantine gave me a lot of time to myself, which wasn't always easy. The immediate healing that I thought came over me when coming to college seemed to be a glimpse into the future rather than a complete transition. Anxiety, as I learned, lives in you, the treatment is what matters. In collaboration with my therapist, I started to write about the hard times again. The memories that were so painful that I repressed them for a decade started to resurface. Tears mixed with ink over the pages of my journal. Working through emotions instead of repressing them is when healing actually begins. My story is still being edited.

My semester abroad, I am reminded of the feeling of freedom from my freshman year of college. I never thought that I would be given the opportunity to travel, let alone come to a whole new country across an ocean. I never left the east coast before coming to Bath. My first flight was on January 23, 2022, when I came 3661 miles to have the experience of a lifetime. And not just my lifetime. My family and friends eagerly wait by their phones, knowing I should be coming back from a trip, excited to see the pictures and hear the stories. Gratefulness radiated through my bones every morning.

Creative writing with a fresh group of faces, rather than zoom boxes or my own reflection, felt new. Different, but not in a bad way. Insecurity filled my lungs until I could not speak during workshops. The cure was in the very room. It was knowing that all of my peers were just like me. We all started writing for one reason or another, found it encouraging or comfort-

ing, and wanted to share it with others. It's beautiful to have such an innocent craft presented in humble settings. Students from all over America come together with a British tutor to hone the craft, at least to a degree of improvement. I have learned a great deal from those Tuesday meetings and will cherish the stories I have read from kids filled with so much potential.

I write poetry to my Mom to let her know I miss her. I write stories about love. I write letters to my Dad. I write for myself.