

Alphabet Therapy

There was a time when my eyes bounced over bubblegum painted sidewalks, dancing in shades of Pepto pink, when my voice projected from center stage like church bells signaling five o'clock. Those moments challenged my inner Woolf as I, pen in hand, imbued pages and pages of prose. There was a time when a lump in my throat was a temporary discomfort, quickly dissolving itself in the nooks of my gullet. Something as simple as a deep breath or a sip of water would silence the feeling, making it nothing but a passing malaise.

But, in those paralyzing moments of assault, the lump presided like an iniquitous kingpin. It lurked, evading teeth and jaw, disarming the tonsil guards as it chewed into my larynx like a feral dog. And, in its great reign, the lump dominated, marking me a serf for him. His sandpaper hands grated my arms down to bone and my mind to dust. Each time I lay there cemented under his weight, motionless and still, the lump prevailed. His force paralyzed my face and limbs, while I, in my dimly lit bedroom, stared at the ceiling and the ceiling only.

As weeks passed, pastel colors and intrusive thoughts muted my creativity. My once joyous optimism crumbled under the burden of agony, trapping me in a self-inflicted prison. I existed numbly, beaten down to flat expressions and soulless smiles. Like a lamb led to slaughter, I hurtled in colorless grasses of sorrow and silence, incarcerated and besmirched, with only myself to blame. This cell controlled me, just as he had.

Even after my physical abuses ceased, memory's soldiers seized my once enjoyable activities. Warring with relentless thoughts, I became incapable of resuscitation, until a single bedtime visit from my mother. She stared at the small downturn of my lips, noticing the way my eyes seemed to jolt from point to point. Lacking her typical warmth, she exuded only fear. It was a fear I knew all too well, a fear I associated with endless anguish. It was at that moment that I broke my silence, exposing the details while quieting the pain. Despite her alarm, my mother welcomed me with tender arms, sculpting my fragility into courage.

Marina Puno

As I gazed at her bellflower-blue eyes, she expounded on the therapeutic role of self-expression. My mother, an avid writer herself, exhumed the prose of my youth, filled with aimless adjectives, vanilla verbs, and whimsical wanderings. Sifting through her own writing- Monet-covered poetry journals and comedic narratives- she modeled for me the power of the pen. And, in her passion-filled explanations, a bright, almost superhuman ring emerged around her, illuminating her eyes and encircling her in a haze of inspiration. In that instance, my shackles rusted to old-penny-green and my hands broke free. That night, I wrote for hours on end, cathartically extricating my pain, finally molding torment into triumph.

There was a time when the hazel of my eyes spoiled to black, when my ideations twisted into mazes of indignity and self-deprecation. There was a time when I felt nothing. Yet, as seasons faded, fall's amber hues filtered through my bedroom window awakening my muted gray. My desire to evince the alphabet of thought, to erase my twilight, conquered. I am consumed again by the written word. My fingers sashay over the click-clack of my keyboard, as I speak through my own print. Once beaten, raw and shaved to bone, I morphed despondency into passion and emptiness into closure. I am no longer imprisoned under his weight; I am in control. Grabbing weakness by the throat and asserting my voice through verbs and nouns has enabled me to breathe again. I know now, regardless of storm or shift, I am grounded in type and ink.