**Music Tonight?**
by Stephen Policoff

“Music today?”  Anna asks me.
It is only the second time this morning she has asked, so I do not sigh as I occasionally do, after a fourth or fifth time of asking.
“Not today, Sweets, this is Tuesday. Music is Wednesday. Tomorrow.”
“Tomorrow,” she murmurs.  But she is not convinced and somewhere between the huge fistful of pills she must consume every morning and our anxious ritual of staring out the window at Bleecker St., willing her school bus to appear, she is almost certain to ask again, “Music today?”
It is not that she doesn’t remember my previous answer nor that she does not believe what I say.  It is that, in the blur of Anna’s life, music is the single distant star by which she steers.  Her school, her sister Jane, her cat Ruby Bridges, her beloved Mom (Kate), her beloved Dad (me) – these are the parameters of her constricted life.  But music alone seems to lift her over the wall.  In her mind, music should be every day…so why isn’t it today?
Anna, now 16, was adopted from China, the loveliest and sweetest 6-month old anyone had ever seen.  Though she was slow to walk and talk, she was always beguiled by music. She could sing along with Beatle songs before she could speak sentences.  At 5, after a fluke accident landed her in the emergency room (followed by seven stressful visits to seven doctors in seven months), she was diagnosed with Niemann-Pick C, an extremely rare, extremely terrible, progressive neurogenetic disorder.  More than a decade later, there is still no cure for NPC, and no real treatment.  It will almost certainly snuff out her little light before she reaches adulthood.
Even at the Mayo Clinic, where we dragged her in 2001, hoping her diagnosis might be proved wrong, Anna’s love of music ameliorated the overwhelming sadness my wife and I felt.  On the bus from the hotel to the neurology center, Anna belted out one of her favorite songs. “Oh, Susanna! Susanna don’t you cry!” she sang, unselfconsciously, over and over.  Even the stricken men and women who rode the bus with us smiled that morning.
Though she struggled in school – and with simple, everyday tasks – Anna never struggled to sing.  She would make up little songs about her life – “My hands are soap, my hands are soap, I don’t know what to do because my hands are soap” – and once, on a visit to Florida, she amused and amazed her grandmother and aunts by picking up a ukulele, strumming and blaring a collage of song lyrics and nonsense words for over an hour.
When she was 7, we signed her up for the Children’s Chorus at NYU, where I teach.  For 4 years, she proudly performed in their annual Winter Concert, even if the intricate words to “Sleigh Ride” occasionally slurred into nonsensicality. As her walking and standing became increasingly shaky, she still managed to teeter onto the stage and sing her beautiful heart out, causing her little sister to bounce up and down in her seat, shouting, “Yay! Anna!”
But when Anna turned 12, as in some disturbing fairytale, the black cloud of seizures descended on her, pushing her already precarious life closer to the edge.  We decided she could not perform that December, shuddering at the imagined image of her seizure-stiff body toppling off the stage.  The following spring she went down like a tree in our apartment hallway, her face skidding on the floor, giving her 2 black eyes and rug burns on one porcelain cheek.
She was supposed to be the lead in a “Singing in the Rain” ensemble in her special ed school’s end-of-the-year talent show.  Did she feel embarrassed by looking like a piece of bruised meat? Hesitate to show her wounds to the audience? No way.  Her adored theater teacher simply pulled a yellow rain hat down over one of Anna’s swollen eyes to minimize the impact. Anna sat in a chair while her classmates did their dance, and she was singing, just singing in the rain.
But once she began having seizures, Anna’s school – which, in theory, welcomed children with neurological conditions – could barely contain its eagerness for Anna to be gone.  We spent much of that dismal year slogging around New York trying to find an appropriate school for Anna.
At the Hebrew Academy for Special Children in Brooklyn – a school I was pretty sure was inappropriate for my Chinese Catholic daughter – I watched a woman distribute bells, drums, and horns to a class of severely impacted special needs students.
“Music therapy,” she told me, when she saw me staring.  “Our children love it. You know the old saying, music has charms …”
Anna did end up attending HASC (she triples their diversity just by showing up), where she is content and appreciated. And the idea of music therapy stuck with me.  Anna, once a giggling, happy child, often was quiet and sad now. Was this merely a side-effect of her many meds? A recognition that the busy social life she had always savored – after school Girls’ Club, play dates and sleepovers with her more neurotypical buddies – was slipping away?  She seemed to crave a companion, or an activity that would lift her spirits and act as a doorway into more hopeful possibilities.
So, when a neighbor noted that his autistic son was doing music therapy “right here at NYU,” I flinched, as if he had just transmitted an electric shock.
“Why didn’t I know about this?” I demanded.
“It’s a big place,” he shrugged.
At NYU’s Nordoff-Robbins Center, Anna was given an assessment session, where she banged on gongs and a keyboard, strummed a guitar and a harp, blew a horn, responded to questions and mimicked the therapist’s movements.  “We think she’s a natural,” the therapist told us.  “We think we can help her.”
For the past 3 years, Anna has gone once a week to the Nordoff-Robbins Center, a few blocks from our apartment.  For the past 3 years, she has looked forward every day to that one day.  There, nudged and nurtured by one therapist on the piano and one who sits next to her to facilitate therapy, Anna listens,  moves her often immovable body, plays and sings, and lights up like a firefly.
If, as Walter Pater once observed, all art aspires to the state of music, perhaps all therapy should aspire to the state of music therapy. Although her therapists are trained educators, and make use of skills akin to those of psychologists and MSWs, music therapy embraces an improvisational component which allies the therapists more closely with jazz musicians and artists.  It is, in every sense, action therapy, in which both therapist and client respond to the mood, emotion, and ambience to create a musical moment, a collaboration which enables the client to express emotions or transcend a difficult experience.
Considerable research exists to suggest that music therapy is especially effective in helping autistic and emotionally troubled children push their way out of the cell of the imprisoned self, and touch upon feelings and thoughts they may not have been aware they had.  “Each child is urged through music to become an active partner in a musical relationship,” observes Michele Ritholz, who works with Anna and is one of the directors of the Nordoff-Robbins Center. “Because of this relationship, developmental goals emerge, and are worked through over the course of many months. In my experience, it is a therapy that clients love to be involved with, even as they are working hard.”
For Anna, working hard at something has often led to frustration and discouragement. Music therapy allows her to accomplish, to create, to complete simple experiences which most of us take for granted, but which the cruelty of her enervated condition often does not allow her.
Watching her sessions, I have been struck by how strongly Anna responds to musical suggestions.  This is a kid whose disease makes her speech clumsy, at times all but inaudible.  Provide her with a song to sing and suddenly she is belting it out like a nightclub chanteuse.  When she enters the studio, and her therapist begins to sing and play the piano, Anna will join right in, even if she was nodding out seconds before.  She picks up the beat, she bobs along, sometimes rhythmically moving her body in the wheelchair where she is often slumped for most of the day.  Despite the serious weakness of all her muscles, she will even try pounding the piano keys, banging a drum, shaking bells.  She nearly always senses the next note and approximates it.
Anna loves to sing. I should be clear here that her voice is downright weird.  Sometimes, she sounds like she has smoked too many cigarettes (her whiskey voice, Kate calls it).  Sometimes she sounds like she’s deaf, has never heard normal speech; other times, she lapses into an almost falsetto chant.  Yet there are few sweeter sounds to us – especially if we have spent the past half hour trying to extract from her even a single phrase about her day.
Ask her a direct question and you will get a stammered word or two at most.  Play a song and she’ll begin to shout out the words – even if she has never heard them before.
Occasionally, this creates a cognitively dissonant moment, as when I put on Amy Winehouse for background music while I assembled dinner, only to hear Anna bellowing, “I told you I was trouble / You know that I’m no good!”  Sometimes, I even have to ask her to stop singing – when she’s taking her many pills, for instance, or desultorily trying to chew her dinner (which can take an hour).  If it’s a song she especially loves, she gives me such a look; she is a teenager, after all.
Surreal and occasionally disconcerting, Anna’s passion for singing is also clearly therapeutic in a variety of ways. “She becomes motivated to use her intact physical skills, to use her voice more dynamically, and to push past challenges,” her therapist points out.
And sometimes when she sings, it is so clear to me that music is the one true balm to the sorrow of her life, a way to express that which she cannot express – has never been able to express – in any other way.  Not once in all of her life has Anna said she didn’t feel good; rarely has she even said that she felt upset or angry.  Is this just her stoic personality? An inability to find the right words?  A neurological deficit which keeps her from feeling pain?  We have never been sure.  Now that her disease is nibbling away at all of her functioning and she is less able to speak at length, we will probably never know. Yet music therapy sometimes acts as a slender bridge into Anna’s inner life.
A few months ago, I met her school bus as I do most days, and pushed her wheelchair the few blocks to the NYU building which houses the Nordoff-Robbins Center.  She seemed grumpy, though, and did not say Yay! as she often does when I tell her we’re heading to music.
It was a day on which her mother was away. Kate travels on business and has since Anna was a baby. Anna is used to this.  When her sister Jane was younger and whimpered for Mommy, it gave Anna a big sister thrill to say, “Don’t cry, Jane, Mommy is just in Minneapolis.” But something about her mood that day made me wonder.  As we rode up in the elevator, I offhandedly asked, “Are you sad about Mommy not being home tonight? ”
Suddenly, just as we arrived at the Center, Anna’s face contorted, turned red; tears began streaming down her lovely face. “She misses her Mom,” I sighed, as she was wheeled off to the studio for her session.
Taking her cue from Anna’s tears, her therapist played a few mournful notes. “Are you sad today?” she sang.
Anna nodded, bobbing her head to the music.  “Sad. I miss my Mom,” she said, voice rising a little in song.
 “I miss my Mom,” the therapist played, “I miss my Mom.”  As she played the simple but melancholy notes on the piano, she sang the words that Anna had just spoken.  Anna replied in song too, “I miss my Mom, I miss my Mom,” she sang out, louder, fuller, more passionately.
And then – and this is one of those musical moments it is so hard to put into words – the therapist ever so slightly altered the tune.  The chords changed from minor to major.  She sang, “But it’s OK, she’ll be back soon, she’ll be back soon …”
Anna lifted her head.  The faint suggestion of a smile seemed to cross her face. As the song continued to build, she sang, clearly, strongly: “She’ll be back soon, it’s OK, it’s OK.”
When she came out of the studio, the tears were gone, and she was still singing, “It’s OK, it’s OK.”
Later that evening, I put on a cd; it was a Beach Boys compilation, one of Anna’s old favorites.  “Music / When you’re alone / is like a companion / to your lonely soul,” the Beach Boys warbled.
“That’s true, isn’t it?” I said.  “Is music your friend?”
She nodded.  “My buddy and pal,” she managed.
So, for now, as long as we can, as long as she can, the answer to Anna’s question is:  music today.

It’s Hard to Be Me

<http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/568841/Its-Hard-to-Be-Me/>

Eleanor, with the perfectly flattened, no frizz, clipped back hair, stood up to address the class. I ran my hand across the top of my hair, being ever so careful to put just enough pressure to detect the rebels, but not too hard, or I would provoke an attack. Next, putting all four fingers together, I swept the length of my forehead, triple checking that the territory was all clear of trespassing baby hairs. Smooth, smooth, smooth… the tip of my ring finger lagged behind by a fraction of a second, detoured by….a hill?! At my cry the rest of my fingers rushed to the crime scene, double checking, triple checking, quadruple checking, that Mount Everest had indeed grown on my skin. The crime, the zit had stolen the little chance I had at being beautiful.

Staring at my Uggs, I walked through the hallway. When my friends greeted me, I glanced up with the edge of my peripheral vision to see who was waving. “Hi”, I would say hurriedly, not making eye contact. I would not embarrass them by being seen with the girl with Mount Everest on her forehead. One of those kids that the first thing you did when you saw her acne was cringe and wonder if she smelled bad too. When the Rocky Mountains went away, then, only then, would I lift my head. I would pass off my withdrawal as being due to some sickness. Maybe a long term migraine, yeah, that would work. And if I was lucky, if God loved me, nobody would know this ever happened. I passed the time with my feet, the pages of the textbooks, the stained surface of the lunch table; all the while occupying myself by summing up all of my knowledge on break outs. If I popped it tonight, I’m pretty sure that it would take like 8-16 days to heal. I reached down to grab my agenda. Shoot! My face burned hot red as I worried that Chris had seen my zit in the carelessness of my scurry. The heat began to subside though as I continued to flood myself with my thought process. So if today is March 15th then that would mean by March 23rd, it could potentially be gone. Or March 29th! Burning.

Left foot, right foot, left foot. In my peripheral vision, I saw a cute boy. My face flashed red again, but this time in anger as I stormed over all of the hours I had wasted in front of the mirror- picking out my clothes, doing my hair, perfecting my appearance. And for what?! Stupid zit had ruined everything! Now, any boy who thought to look at me would just look past my clothes and my hair. No, he wouldn’t even see them! All he would see is… my face scrunched up so that the outline of my $150 shoes blurred in my vision.

All day I had resisted the urge to duck into a girl’s bathroom and take a good look at the terrorist for myself. It was not worth appearing vain - the ugly girl that must think she’s pretty cuz she can’t stop looking at herself - no way! So, when I got home, I headed straight for the bathroom mirror. Visualizing a red mound of pussing goo planted squarely in the center of my forehead, probably surrounded by a rash of irritated skin too, I forced myself to take a look at the enemy I’d be fighting for the next month and a half - my plague from hell. I stepped through the doorway, and saw a girl with neatly combed back blond hair. And, under that hair, was a dot, that could have been a freckle if it did not have a pink tinge and a slight raise to it. And under that dot, was a smile broader than Mount Everest.

**Today Is Different**

[**http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/474479/Today-Is-Different/**](http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/474479/Today-Is-Different/)

By Anonymous, Princeton, NJ



Image Credit: Amanda T, Marblehead, MA

Today is different. There are new people in the group. And a new counselor. She's a change of pace; she's young and still excited about what she does. I like that. Her optimism fills the room. Not that I care any more than usual. I just don't feel like making problems for anyone today.

“Draw a mask. It can be how you think people perceive you, or how you want to be perceived. Take about ten minutes.”

I grab the markers and search for the blue and purple. My hand brushes the arm of the new girl. She's short and pretty, with headphones hanging from her neck. I don't know why, but I smile at her. She smiles back and then quickly looks down at her paper.

I draw a face and write, “I don't care” across the forehead. I'm done. The new girl's not, though. She's taking this seriously. Drawing a bare tree. She lets the marker fall with deliberation, making black spots surrounding the tree. It's a lone tree in a snowstorm. I like it. It has balance.

We share our feelings about our drawings. I catch the new girl's name: Cameron. I like Cameron. She doesn't take too long to say what she means. Unlike the kid to my left. He's been in my group for two weeks and I still haven't bothered to learn his name. He makes it a point to say he gets in fights frequently, as if we should all be impressed with the fact that he can't control himself. He keeps talking, and I keep making eye contact with Cameron and laughing for some reason. I can tell she thinks he's ridiculous too. I smile and start to doodle on the back of the mask I made. I can feel her watching me. Every once in a while I look up and we smile at each other. It's not awkward, just friendly.

We start to play Hangman. I finish up my doodle. I take my turn at the whiteboard and nobody can guess my favorite movie. When I spell out “A Clockwork Orange,” the therapist seems impressed for some reason. I tell the rest of the group that their lack of film knowledge disturbs me. When I get back to my seat, my doodle is gone. Cameron smiles at me as she folds it up and puts it in her pocket. “Thanks,” she says.

We get a short break before Process where anybody can talk about anything. I leave and make a cup of coffee. I don't rush, but don't waste time ­either. I'm back before break is over. Cameron has shifted her seat slightly closer to mine. We start Process and the idiot to my left starts talking about fighting again. I tune him out and drink my coffee. Cameron slides her picture to me. I smile again and put it on my lap. I flip it over, hoping maybe she wrote her number or her last name on it so I can look her up later. Nope. It's just this quiet picture.

There's a knock on the door. Laurie, the head of the program, gestures to me. I look at the clock. 5:30. If this is an individual meeting, I probably won't be back. I bring Cameron's picture with me.

“I just got off the phone with your mom. Your parents are going to come tomorrow and have a referral for a new place if you want to try it out. Legally I have to tell you that, but it's not a requirement for you. But yeah. Today's your last day.”

“Wow. Well, thank you.”

“No problem. I'm sorry to see you go. I hope you got something out of this.” She pauses, waiting for me to tell her that they've saved me from myself. I'm silent. “Anyway. You can go back to group now. Maybe let everybody know.” Okay.

Group ends at six. Usually the minutes are hours. Tonight, though, they won't slow down. I try not to look troubled and pocket one of the purple markers. I look at Cameron. There's five minutes left. I'm not going to tell them I'm leaving.

I think I'm going to ask Cameron for her number when we get to the elevator. I don't believe in love at first sight, but I do believe that you can tell when you'll get along with someone. I get that feeling from Cameron. There are two minutes left.

It's over. We walk to the elevator. I kind of regret not saying good-bye. I wouldn't consider these people my friends, but we are something to each other.

That's the problem with group therapy. Whether we like each other or not, we hear things that best friends wouldn't tell each other. Even after one session I know more about Cameron than most of my girlfriends. She's played guitar since she was five. She suffers from depression and anxiety. Her father killed himself. She self-medicates. This kid I'm walking with, Igor, is high, just like every other meeting. He cheats on his girlfriend with the black-haired girl walking behind us. I forget her name.

A woman by the elevator gets up and takes Cameron's headphones. It's obviously her mom. I tell myself that I'll still get the number from her.

We all pile into the elevator: Cameron, me, Igor, the black-haired girl, the kid who was sitting to my left. And Cameron's mom. I cradle the purple marker in my pocket. We get to the lobby and everyone walks out ahead of me. We walk out the front door; it's a little cold. I don't have a jacket. This is my last chance. “Hey, Cameron.”

She turns around and waves her mom on to the car.

“Hey, you're gonna keep coming here, right?”

“Yeah, I think so. My mom's making me for a little bit,” she answers.

“Okay. Well, I'm glad you're here. I feel like we're the only sane ones.”

She laughs. “Yeah, I get that same feeling.”

“Okay. Well. I'll see you tomorrow.” Smile. “Unfortunately.” We both laugh. She walks away.

I wait there. Alone. Everybody's ride is waiting for them except mine. I sit down on the bench and ponder the picture. I think about my last day. It's weird: I'll probably never see any of these people again.

**Lost and Found**

**http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/51898/Lost-and-Found/**

By Anonymous, Westport, CT



Image Credit: Cassandra Y., Williamsport, PA

I liked being a mess. The desk that should have been clear so I could do my homework was always besieged with bowls of cereal and spoiled milk, old magazines, and Post-it notes I had forgotten to remember. My floor was a vacuum in itself, eating anything entering my room. It consumed sweaters, stuffed animals, socks, shoes. When I occasionally did laundry, I would dig up clothes I couldn't even recall purchasing. My shelves overflowed with containers of little odds and ends: hair bands, chapstick, matches, loose mints, coins, earring backings. I couldn't always see these things, but I knew that they were safe, nestled somewhere on a shelf. Like old friends in a phone book, I figured that someday I would find all the loose strings and tie them together.

One lonely day in August when all of my friends had yet to return from camp, visiting family, or some community-service trip, something inside me began to itch. I tried taking a shower, scrubbing myself with every bodywash and bar of soap I could find. I brushed my hair and my teeth, but didn't feel any cleaner. I checked my e-mail, which was empty. I checked the DVR to see if any new shows had been recorded, but I had already seen everything.

I went downstairs and found my brother playing video games, my mom on the phone, and my dad in his office – everyone in their right place. I told my mom that something didn't feel right, and she suggested that for once I should clean my room. The thought itself made me nauseous. I went upstairs to sulk, feeling so overwhelmed that I might as well have been floundering without a boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

When I opened the door to my bedroom, everything was in its usual cluttered arrangement. A plate of half-eaten pancakes sat on my desk, soggy with syrup from the morning. My bikini hung lifelessly from my doorknob, dripping pool water. My heavy covers lay crumpled and cold across my bed, molded by the twists and turns of the previous night. Piles of dirty clothes sat unsorted, collecting dust.

I stood in the middle of the cluttered room, breathing in the filthy air that I had become so used to. In the silence of that moment, I began to hear the clock ticking. I became aware of the moldy smell. I noticed that a spider had spun a shimmering line from my lamp to the top of my mirror. I shivered in disgust. I remembered that winter how my stuffed animal, Vanilla, had fallen behind my dresser and I hadn't noticed until I caught the repulsive scent of her fur burning against the heater, until it was too late and she was permanently covered in brown spots.

I suddenly felt sympathy for everything in my room that I had buried, never to be seen again. Lost items I had blocked out for years made their way back into my consciousness: my favorite yellow tank top, the picture of my mom and me on that boat in Jamaica, my baseball card collection.

I had an urge to dive under my bed and uncover everything lurking in the murky depths of dust, and to climb up into the highest corners of my closet and rescue items that had been mingling with the spiders. The innocent piles were growing higher and higher until they were looming monsters before my eyes. They were threatening to swallow me whole. I had to get rid of them. And so I started to clean.

In a box buried under old textbooks, I found a letter that my Poppy had written me at camp. I hadn't thought of him since his funeral. I suddenly remembered the thrill of running naked through cold sprinklers with my cousins, the spicy smell of barbecue mixing with the salty air at his beach house, and the distinct feel of his soft sweater rubbing warmly against my cheek each time he enveloped me in a hug. I remembered my dad rocking me to sleep the night Poppy died, and how the tears wouldn't stop.

I sat with his picture, blocking out the rest of the mess around me. I was in the middle of a storm, but I sat there and studied him until I had memorized every line in his face. Tears began to roll down my cheeks again, and the relief was like the sound of heavy rain pounding on a roof at the end of a drought.

In the drawer next to my bed, I found a friendship bracelet my childhood best friend, Aubrey, had given to me before she moved to California. I traced the green and purple pattern with my thumb, realizing that I hadn't spoken to her in years. The next day I called her, and we talked all night, laughing about memories like dressing up as the Spice Girls for Halloween. She reminded me of the time we built a family of snowmen in my backyard and had a funeral for them when they'd melted. I had lost so many precious childhood memories over time, letting them slip away into the tide like grains of sand. It was the kind of conversation you never want to end because for each moment we talked, it felt like a bucket collecting droplets of water from a leak.

Under my bed I even found that picture of my mom and me in Jamaica. I had forgotten how turquoise the water had looked from our ship, but what really caught my attention, though, was my image. I had buck teeth, short hair, and pimples covering my face. I stared at that girl, barely able to recognize this person who had drowned in the mess of my room so many years before. I decided to completely re­organize and revamp my room so that all the books, belts, and baskets were in their right place. It was like finding the missing pieces of the puzzle.

The finishing touch was framing that photo and hanging it high up on my wall. After all, it was me I had been searching for.

# Life at Eastside

# <http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/568991/Life-at-Eastside/>

The classroom was like a jail. White desk, white floor, white wall, white everything. Every day, I walked into that class, I felt like I didn’t even exist. Back at Eastside Memorial, the teachers didn’t care about the students. I think that the teachers only cared about the money. My math teacher, Ms. Crenshaw was the worst teacher that I ever had at Eastside Memorial. I mean, I know I was talkative and not the best student, but everyone needs help and every time I asked for help, she told me, “I’ll be there in a minute.” Every time she told me that, she never got to me until the last couple minutes of class, therefore I couldn’t do the schoolwork. I couldn’t tell whether she purposely ignored me or not.

I tried my best to do what I could. Sitting in that class was hard enough because of all the distractions, let alone listening to this mean lady speak in front of us. I felt helpless and unloved, just like all my other classes. I sat right in front of her desk next to my girlfriend. Most of the time, I asked her if I could go work somewhere quieter. The reason I asked her that was because I had my girlfriend in the same class, and it was hard to focus; we talked too much. Ms. Crenshaw never let me go to the library or the hallway. I think she had something against me. She didn’t really care about me, I know that for a fact.

She always loud mouthed me about anything I told her. “Charles! I’ll be there in a minute, chill out.” She always told me that 24/7 everyday. I get distracted really easily and it’s so hard to stay focused on the task that is in front of me. I even tried talking to my teacher one-on-one when no one was there. I asked her nicely if I could go somewhere else when I do my work so that I could get my work done, and she still told me “no.”

Then, I was in the hospital for two weeks because I had to have knee surgery and when I came back, she told me all I had to do was six papers and she would pass me. When I finished the work, I ended up doing eight papers, and she still failed me. I was so angry because she lied to my face. I hope in the near future that they get rid of teachers like her because no one learns that way.

# Dusk

# http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/memoir/article/63667/Dusk/

My feet are stained a surprisingly vivid shade of yellow. I do not know where my shoes are, and I do not care. Nothing is happening, and I am altogether separate from the world, isolated. People have been passing me by all day, and I do not feel like I am a part of their world of goals and directions.

The grass here is an irresistible invitation. This entirely unnatural cross weave of near fluorescent astroturf and dying grass allows me the luxury of a warm dry bed, while my feet rest in the amazing coolness of a perfectly square patch of damp astroturf.

The whole field is most likely covered in dog s\*\*\*, and filth of all kinds, from birds, children, and addicts. Right now I do not care. I have a field to myself. A huge, enormous, sunny field that positively dances with possibility. Everything here is at a turning point, a last moment, and it is all the better for it. I will go home soon. The sun will set soon. Summer will be over soon. It is the moment before the roller coaster goes crashing down, it is the last meal that you savor, it is your last trip before you die. I am going to say goodbye to the peace, and the calm, the serenity, and the pleasure of this place, and soon I will rejoin the crowds, and will have no thoughts but of my obligations, and I am content enough that I do not care. My emotional state is divorced from my thoughts- I have no choice but to be serene here, and even my most fiery thoughts cannot provoke anger or sadness. This should be the goal of every walk.

The sky is a regal and very American shade of purple, the grass is living its last. The air vaguely recalls barbecues and Little League, but most of all it feels like the end of a party, as people drift away, and the air becomes cold. The air here is that of summer, but the heat wavers like a candle's flame, punctuated as it is by gusts of Autumn air. But for now, and only for a few more minutes, everything is okay. Everything.

The sea roars not far away, and the winds off of it battle with the lazy warmth of the field, and the air is in constant turmoil above me, and the sudden cold forces me into the inviting Earth. I melt into the inviting grass and hold on like a housefly.

The Earth holds a warmth, and I close my eyes and sink into it, and feel like my mother is there.

The needles of the starchy grass that should hurt sharply on my bare arms, the chill of the gathering wind, the itch of the stains and scratches I have gathered today that should torment me are numbed beneath my calm, and the Earth seems to sway beneath me.