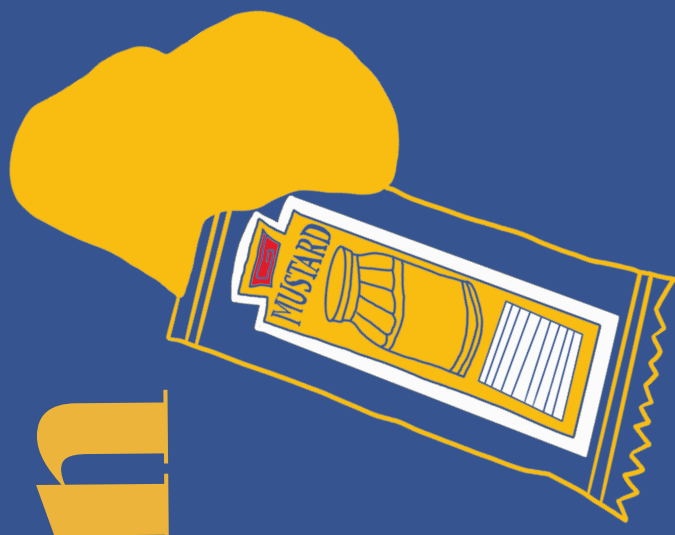


Creative Nonfiction



Self Dissection

Hannah Wise

Editors' note: This piece contains descriptions of self-harm.

Sometimes I wish I smoked cigarettes. I'd like the rattle of a box in my pocket, the slight outline of rebellion daring to show through my clothes. I'd like the satisfaction of flipping the box top open to reveal a clean array of cigarettes waiting for me inside. I'd like the shape of a lighter, the orange glow on my face as I tilt my head towards the flame. Actually, I think I'd like a whole collection of lighters. One for good days. That one would be red. One for quiet days. Lavender. One for sharing with friends. That one would need a pattern of some kind. And one for just flipping open, simply to stare at that fragile little flame. That one would be antique, a heavy brass lighter with detailed engravings. I'd like the feel of it all, of emulating one of those movie scenes with a teenager leaning against a brick building to light up a smoke in the dark.

But I have to admit, I haven't been completely honest. There is one small detail I've left out, one main reason why I wished I smoked cigarettes.

I'd like to put them out on my skin.

Let me paint a picture for you. A family of five crowds around a computer screen, scrolling through years' worth of photos and home videos dating back to 2004. They laugh as one, howling at close-ups of a child's teary face after her first bee sting, or the sight of a blonde-haired boy

sandwiched between two red circles of construction paper, his homemade m&m Halloween costume. Dinner is cooking in the kitchen. The smell of homegrown rotisserie chicken fills the family's noses and the sound of crackling asparagus on the stove makes its way into the living room.

The mouse clicks. The family lets out a collective "aawww" in response to a photo of two girls swinging their younger brother between them through a pumpkin patch. Click. Gasp. A teenager with braces grins, showing off her cuts and scrapes after sliding 50 feet down a steep rock face. Click. A proud seven-year old boasts her catch, dangling a rainbow trout from a stick. Click. The family is mesmerized by a trio of siblings giving their best performance to Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger," complete with eccentric air guitars. Click. A boy's wide-eyed smile as he holds up his "Mr. Sunshine Award" trophy from preschool graduation.

"Okay, dinner's almost ready," interrupts the fun. The computer screen goes black. The family separates from their tight huddle only to see one of the five's bodies shaking with quiet tears, her face red from stifling her sobs. Nobody had noticed when the laughter of five became the laughter of just four, her giggle slowly fading and smile deepening into a frown. That's me. I'm the girl who can't help but cry looking at old albums. Who can't stand to see her old self, the little girl without a care in the world, the girl who smiled because she wanted to. It's confusing—how did the girl with confidence for

days, the girl in the pictures, turn into the girl who drags razor blades across her skin?

Call me sensitive, call me nostalgic, call me what you want, but before you do, consider what I'm about to say. Then you might understand why I long for the times shown in those photographs.

One. Two. Three. Go. It's like a countdown before the gunshot signaling the start of a race, but with a couple key differences: it's just me, and there is no race. "One" does not mean taking my place on the track. "Two" does not mean putting my foot on the starting block. "Three" does not mean placing my hands on the ground in front of me. "Go" does not mean launching myself forward and powering through to the finish line, riding on a wave of adrenaline. No, for the entirety of my senior year of high school, "one, two, three, go" meant something entirely different. One: tug my clothes to reveal bare skin. Two: rest a piece of cold, thin, sharp metal on that skin. Three: inhale. Go: swipe the blade across the skin. Bask in the surge of adrenaline that follows.

Exhale. Much better. Then I tuck the open gash in my skin back beneath my clothing, relishing the sting of my body begging that I take better care of it.

My phone buzzes, I pick it up. Olivia's wondering if I want to eat lunch outside today! I do, I tell her. I put my notebooks and papers for the afternoon's classes into my backpack and slip into shoes. My roommate Margot comes in just as I swing my backpack on. "Lunch outside with Olivia?" I invite her. She happily joins. We walk down the dorm hallway painted a questionable salmon color, chatting about our days. Margot got a package in the mail, I dissected the digestive system of a shark, Margot was paired with a questionable partner in math, I saw Dr. Kelly's fly down for the third time. We wave at the freshman girls walking back to their rooms and nag them about keeping

their masks on, there's a Covid case on campus. Down the stairs, Olivia waits for us outside. She had a free period first thing in the morning, aced a computer science quiz, and yelled at the sophomore couples to just get off of each other for once. At the dining hall, we discover that lunch today is subpar. It's "healthy chicken" (whatever that means) with rice and broccoli. At least dessert is good. We stock up on Cheryl's famous chocolate chip cookies that only come around once every couple weeks. The grass outside is dry and we're all wearing pants. What's there to complain about? We sit in a small circle that slowly grows as others join us, they're also excited about Cheryl's baking today. The sun is warm but not too warm, bright but not hurting our eyes, and all is well. I laugh. I smile. I'm a good friend. I do my homework. I call my parents. I text my siblings. I am fine.

Life resumes for me. Not a single splash, not even a ripple on the surface.

It's 12:45 on a Tuesday. The room reeks of fish, accompanied by the faint scent of latex. My hair is tied back, my lab coat hangs by my knees, and my class ring bulges beneath my blue elastic gloves. The air buzzes with chatter, filled with both disgusted and excited voices as we begin dissection #6: The brain. Our sharks lie flat on the lab benches, an array of tools lined up beside them. An arsenal of backup probes, pins, scissors, and scalpels sit in a tray just behind my shark. How convenient for me and my lab partner, Selah.

Selah holds our scalpel and makes the first incision, a deep one. We both grin. She switches to scissors to snip through the soft cartilage of the skull. It crunches between the blades, and Selah turns to see my reaction, curious if I am also eager about the grand reveal of the brain. But I'm no longer watching our shark. My attention has shifted eighteen inches forward to the tool tray. More specifically, the scalpel section. My refusal to look at

the shark strikes Selah as queasiness. After all, this class does follow lunch. “I can finish this part,” she volunteers. I nod, barely registering her words. She continues, only to be interrupted by Nathaniel, who wants to see if we can show him how to get started. Selah follows him to his bench, leaving me alone with the shark. And the scalpels.

And now there’s one in my hand. The cool, clean metal is dense. It feels good in my grasp. I run my fingernail through the cross-hatched lines etched into its handle. I look for a spare alcohol swab to sterilize it before bringing it with me out of the classroom and into the bathroom. Found one. I flip the scalpel in my hand to slide it up into my sleeve. “Yeah, you should do the next cut,” Selah says. She’s returned from helping Nathaniel. The scalpel falls back into my palm, lying horizontally like it’s supposed to.

My previously calm surface had started to ripple. I used to be able to sway in the surf, jumping over waves and landing with my toes in the sand, safe on the other side. I could keep myself afloat, my head bobbing in the water without going under. But it didn’t take long for the sky to darken and the water to turn choppy. Waves rose on the surface, high enough that I could no longer ignore them. They were too tall to jump over and too big to dive through. They left me paralyzed, standing in place as the tide pulled the water out from beneath me. My toes remained in the sand, burrowing down while I braced for impact and stared straight into the heart of the wave that towered over me. My staredown was short-lived. The water crashed on top of me, directly on top of me, pinning me down against the ocean floor, helpless against its weight. I tumbled blindly, waiting for the tumultuous ride to end so I could have a breath.

But I was breathing! To everyone else, I was sunbathing on the beach, dry on a towel with a book in my hand. It was as if there were two of me. One was drowning in sandy water, screaming only to

realize that she hadn’t made a sound, only bubbles. The other was with everyone else on the beach, raving about Cheryl’s chocolate chip cookies. She had held up a billboard saying, “I’m fine!” in front of their faces, effectively blocking everyone’s view of the disaster happening in the ocean.

Selah had unknowingly plucked me from the water and given me a birds-eye view of my battle against the waves. The battle I was destined to lose. Then I knew that life could not resume as usual. Selah is the one who told me that I wasn’t fine. I put the billboard away and showed my friends and family the other girl, the one in the waves. The day after dissection #6 marks the day I asked for help.

I don’t think about cigarettes as often anymore, and I no longer keep a set of razor blades stashed in my closet. But catch me looking at photos of my younger self, and you can bet I’ll be blinking back tears. I can’t help but feel like I’ve let down the little girl in the pictures. I let her down, I disappointed her, I failed her. Then I remember that growing up is painful. The scars that decorate my skin are growing pains, simple as stretch marks. Sure, they’ll stick with me for the rest of my life, but they serve as a reminder of what I can endure. And that’s something my younger self should be proud of.

Midnight Rain: The Paradox of Eating Disorder Recovery and Type-1 Diabetes Management

Claire McFadden

Editors' note: This piece contains description of disordered eating and mentions self-harm.

3:33AM blinked the boxy red numbers of the CD player clock sitting on the shelf above my head. I'm hunched over, squatting on my bedroom carpet in my soft pink pajama set, pricking my pinky finger and squeezing out a tiny drop of blood onto the test strip of my glucose testing meter. As I wait for the five seconds it takes for the meter to read my blood sugar to pass, I anxiously look beside me at my bookshelf and see the tattered spine of my copy of "The Doll People." I'm 11, and this is my favorite book.

The pitter patter of rain trickled out of the CD player's speaker. An hour before when I'd woken up from the sweat of a low blood sugar, I'd pressed play to start a CD called "Midnight Rain." The recorded rainshower was an hour long, and birds chirped in the last 10 minutes of the track. The birds were chirping, and it was time to test my blood sugar.

55 mg/dl read my glucose meter. The soothing sound of the rain fell short of my ear as it was blocked by the umbrella of my anguish.

I wrung my hands and squeezed out silent tears so as not to wake anyone else in the house up. I knew it was dangerous to sleep with a blood sugar below 70 mg/dl for you could slip into a diabetic coma and never wake up. Yet I also knew to raise my blood sugar I had to eat.

I can't eat it isn't fair my body doesn't need it my stupid blood sugar is just low because I'm diabetic it's out of my control I messed up I took too much insulin its my fault I will punish myself I will not eat I'll get fat if I eat I'm so angry I'm so tired I just want to go back to sleep I can't eat then I won't feel perfect and safe and in control I will sit here all night if I have to I will not give in I will not be weak I will not eat I'm in control.

After a few nights of being awoken by a low blood sugar I'd figured out that if I made myself upset enough the stress hormones released in my body would raise my blood sugar, and enable me to go back to sleep without eating. Sometimes it took hours of multiple panic episodes, and I'd learned to use "Midnight Rain" to keep track of when it was long enough for the adrenaline to have flooded my body and to test my blood sugar.

If we step away from this moment on a Tuesday night in 2013 into the present, I can now tell you how desperately I grasped for a sense of control for eight long years of disordered eating and self harm. I can tell you what it feels like to have an A1C of 12%, or an average blood sugar of 298, for years straight. (Not good.) I can tell you how I never felt more controlled by my T1D than when I chose to control what I ate rather than manage my blood sugars.

I can now define the difference between control and

management, and how these two words entangle themselves into a hefty knot of the paradox of eating disorder recovery and type 1 diabetes management, which begs the question, how can you stop obsessing over what you eat when you still have to count the carbs you eat and calculate your insulin doses? How do you let go of control while staying in control? Where's the line between control and management?

Today I can tell you how I wish someone had guided me to ask myself why I found comfort in an eating disorder as it destroyed my physical and mental health. Now I can tell you how I ended up in an ER psych ward three days into my first semester of college because I couldn't take care of myself, and how this rock bottom experience made me realize maybe I didn't have perfect control of my life.

Miriam Webster defines the verb "to control" as "to exercise restraining or directing influence over; to have power over or to rule," while "to manage" is defined as "to handle or direct with a degree of skill, such as to treat with care." I can now tell you how managing my T1D is hard, but not nearly as hard as it was to value controlling myself over respecting myself. Now I can tell you how therapy and positive connections saved my life, but only because I chose to let go of the shame and guilt that came with the initial sense of letting go of control of what I ate.

But back on my bedroom floor in 2013, I couldn't tell you any of that.

After one or two rounds of Midnight Rain my blood sugar finally rose above 70 mg/dl, and I was able to sleep, in control.

The Mustard Sandwich

Claire McFadden

If you think you know who your best friend, significant other, mother, father, uncle, boss, barber, doctor, barista, accountant, side bitch, pimp, or priest really is, you don't until you ask them if they'd eat a mustard sandwich.

My obsession with the mustard sandwich began one fateful day over four months ago, in the middle of a story my friend Bryce was regaling about his old job at a Cinemark. Bryce is a film major, so it didn't surprise me that he held fond memories of his time working at the movie theater. However, it caught my attention when Bryce mentioned casually in passing how he used to indulge in a mustard sandwich at the end of his shift with the day's leftover ingredients.

I now realize I don't remember the context of the story he was telling, but that I couldn't believe the mustard sandwich wasn't the focal point of his tale.

The classic mustard sandwich is constructed as thus: open a hot dog bun, nix the dog, and slather on a mustard of your choosing. (The original Cinemark mustard sandwich was erected on a hamburger bun, but Bryce assured me there's no wrong way to do a mustard sandwich except to not.) Yellow mustard works well for an informal snack, but spread some dijon if you're feeling frisky, 'scuse me, fancy.

Right off the bat, let me make it clear I'm not fulfilling an endorsement deal for the mustard

sandwich commission. If mustard sandwichism was a religion, I'd be yet to be baptized. True to this day I place pencil upon paper, I've never tried one. However, like all new, somewhat frightening things, I'd be open to trying one, if, as my friend Isa put it, "there was a gun to my head, or I was triple dawg dared."

It quickly became an addiction of mine to ask people whether they'd eat a mustard sandwich. It's like I had an itch I couldn't quite reach, or an appetite I just couldn't satisfy to see people's reactions.

It's always fascinating to watch how passionately cantankerous a person can get over something that really doesn't matter at all. It's safe to say that if you want to see what kind of spouse someone would make, see how they respond when you disagree with them over whether to eat a mustard sandwich.

It's the most innocent way to peek into the depths of the human psyche.

So like a good host, I popped the question at the table of my 21st birthday dinner, and leaned back out of fist's reach.

"Yeah, I'd eat it. Doesn't sound that bad, and why not," said Sneha, who's known to go with the flow. Across the table, Bryce nodded in almost paternal like approval while Ryan's eyes practically burst out of his head in revulsion.

"Accepting defeat and eating it is like

spitting in the face of all the better food society offers,” he snarled. “Eating a mustard sandwich is declaring war against civilization.” He crossed his arms over his chest as Tanja dove into the range of fire.

“I don’t know, I mean it could be alright with some dijon,” she mused.

“Yeah, like if I was hungry and didn’t have anything else to eat, I don’t think I’d mind,” Spencer agreed as Ryan drooped with devastation.

“The army is growing!” Bryce rejoiced.

“That shit is stupid,” piped up Brad, sitting physically and metaphorically next to Ryan. I’ve tried to psychoanalyze why this conversation piece erupts so intensely. What makes the mustard sandwich appealing to some, and so abhorrent to others? Does it all come down to disliking people who’re different from us? Or is it simply a condiment issue? Could finding common ground on the mustard sandwich lead to us to compromise on larger matters? Here I’ll start, if you eat a mustard sandwich, then I’ll teach my conservative grandfather to be less racist. “Peace and love and mustard,” I think I once heard Ringo Starr say.

When I returned home for Thanksgiving break I got lunch with my friend Eddie and his roommate Ian. Racing through a marathon of Eddie’s mysterious habits, Ian seemed quite distraught when he described Eddie’s extreme nocturnal consumption of milk.

“He’ll go through a carton like every two nights!” he cried, wringing his hands with the helplessness of a friend who’s just about run out of patience and empathy. “I’ll hear him rummaging around, clinking glasses, and sloshing dairy at 1 AM!”

“Oh, that’s me making my Pilk,” Eddie informed me, his head high on his shoulders.

“Pilk?” I said inquisitively, leaning in as if to hear something extremely shameful.

“Yeah, Pepsi and milk mixed,” he explained.

“The key is to put in about 60 percent milk, and add Pepsi to taste.”

“Would you eat a mustard sandwich?” I blurted out urgently, feeling I was on the cusp of a monumental discovery in human psycho-analytics.

“Oh sure, for a snack,” Eddie responded without missing a beat as Ian closed his eyes and brought his hands together in front of his forehead, as if in futile prayer. I, for one, nodded in satisfaction.

Most people who agree to eat a mustard sandwich usually give a laconic shrug and respond with some form of “why not?”

“Isn’t it just like a pretzel with mustard?” my cousin Emily texted back. “it’s kinda the same concept so people shouldn’t be grossed out.” She then admitted she was hangry to the point of eating almost anything.

For fun, and research, but mainly amusement, I posted a poll on my instagram account which showed 77% of responders wouldn’t eat a mustard sandwich, while 23% chose the option “I’m eating one right now.” In addition, one of my friends from my old college messaged me to tell me my poll was concerning, but she hoped I was enjoying living in Colorado.

“Why do you enjoy a mustard sandwich?” I asked Bryce, 4 months after my obsession began.

“I [expletive] made it one day, and that [expletive]’s good.” he philosophised.

After a week of extensive research and spending hours scribbling away in my notebook, while downing countless cups of coffee over a few lines of cocaine and no mustard sandwiches, I thought perhaps I could finally put this project to rest.

I was just settling in for a desperately needed night of sleep when a thought suddenly knocked me right back into consciousness.

Is a hotdog a sandwich?

Dentro e Fuori: Inside and Out

Sarah Dodge

My family and I stood before the gate as we waited in line for tickets. As we got closer to the entrance, I noticed the sign posted on the ticket window to my left. The sun was beating down on me, and the huge leaves of the trees above only provided minimal coverage. Still trying to catch my breath from the hike to the site, I tried to focus on the words on the sign: “VILLA DEL BALBIANELLO: One of the most beautiful and romantic villas of Lake Como, a green promontory rich in vegetation, the remains of a medieval Franciscan monastery and a beautiful eighteenth-century lodge surrounded by a park of rare beauty” (Fondo Ambiente Italiano). I struggled to grasp the meaning of these words. My feet hurt. I could feel the start of a headache pressing against my skull.

As my family and I trucked through the gravel path between the gates of the entrance, I took in the foliage, the sky, the people. I heard a guided tour in Italian starting behind us. I felt lost. We kept walking. It was a short walk to reach the main site of the villa, and we finally saw it as we walked over a small hill and were greeted by statues that took longful gazes across the site. We made our way down, admiring the crystal clear blue waters of the lake and the incredible shapes and sizes of plants above and below us. I was still exhausted, hungry, trying to stay in the moment but finding myself jumping ahead to later that day, or behind to whether or not I took a good enough picture of the

entrance.

A typical Italian summer day on Lake Como, and people from all over were sharing this space. Breaking from the crowd, I landed near the most picturesque point of the villa, a banister overlooking the left “leg” of the lake, onto the nearby towns of Casate and Vergonese. It was in this spot that Anakin and Padmé had traveled to celebrate their honeymoon in *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*. Pretty cool to stand where they stood. I pushed away the intrusion. I remembered the sign from the entrance, “...the remains of a medieval Franciscan monastery...” and imagined this site hundreds of years earlier. I would assume that the foundations would be similar, with differing styles and materials used to build the exterior walls and archways, depending on the time period and its inevitable influences.

Standing in this spot called forth from my mind the movie *Call Me By Your Name*, which was filmed mostly in a town south of Lake Como called Moscazzano. The movie, based on the novel by André Aciman, follows 17-year-old Elio Perlman during the summer of 1983, in which he develops a close relationship with his father’s summer student, Oliver. Aciman, the author of a number of other works, including *Enigma Variations*, *Out of Egypt*, and *Eight White Nights*, studied at Harvard University and is a professor of literary theory at the Graduate Center of City University

of New York. In *Call Me By Your Name*, Elio deals with the feelings around growing up and seeking independence, while also fighting against a never before experienced longing for his father's guest. Eventually the two give in to their feelings for each other, and experience a sense of connectedness and unity incapable of being replaced. The name of the story, *Call Me By Your Name*, comes from Oliver telling Elio: "Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine" (Aciman 134). One's name represents the culmination of one's identities. To achieve the level of intimacy that Elio and Oliver had, to the point where they would call each other by the other's name, merged the gap between them, effectively fusing their separate "buildings" into one.

The beauty of this story, both the cinematography of the movie and the intriguing language of the novel, left me pondering the ideas it contained for months. Being in Northern Italy in the summer, with the sound of insects buzzing, people lounging and chatting in groups, faint Italian music drifting from a nearby radio, brought forth from the depths of my conscience a metaphor from the novel called the "San Clemente Syndrome."

The Basilica of San Clemente in Rome was once a refuge for persecuted Christians, then was the home of the Roman consul Titus Flavius Clemens before being burned down, then became an underground pagan temple, on top of which two Christian churches were built, one being today's basilica (Aciman 192). Aciman states, "Like the subconscious, like love, like memory, like time itself, like every single one of us, the [Basilica of San Clemente] is built on the ruins of subsequent restorations, there is no rock bottom, there is no first anything, no last anything, just layers and secret passageways and interlocking chambers..." (Aciman 192). We as humans are just as complex as the oldest and most historical buildings. Buildings are burned, destroyed, laid to rest, as it is determined what should belong there. As architecture is a

construct created for and by humans, it reveals parts of ourselves that we often ignore. The parts that lie within us are the parts that Aciman compares to the unseen passageways and chambers that are hidden deep beneath even the most recognizable landmarks.

Rarely do we grasp the little things. As humans we are programmed by nature to search for the big details, possible threats, overall view, and fail to look deeper into the crevices of life. Our lives often feel in fast-motion, trying to balance school, jobs, hobbies, friends, and practically everything in between. We rush from place to place, from person to person, often only approaching the exterior, for we do not have the time nor patience to explore beneath.

Self-reflection may seem to be most convenient during the minutes spent wasting away under a hot shower, but it's surprising how much one can find when time is dedicated to it elsewhere. Judging from the disorganized nature of my brain as I entered Villa del Balbianello, I expected the whole day to go that way. There haven't been many times where I've felt fully immersed in where I am. This moment, surprisingly, turned out to be one of them. As I reflect on this moment in time, this tiny "chamber" within my memories, I remember feeling my feet on the ground, my hands on the banister looking out on the lake, my eyes straining against the sunlight that reflected off the water. The air smelled of moss, freshwater, and faint limoncello that drifted from the soda bottle in my dad's hands. There was no other time that I had felt more myself, and more grounded in nature. It was like all aspects were coming together, everything was making sense. I was making sense. Paying attention to the small details of the villa, trying to fathom how it's changed over time, was like looking into myself.

I had struggled more the past year than I had in my life. I had missed over a month of school

during a time when I thought my anxiety would never get better. Just six months prior, I remember feeling myself slowly slipping deeper and deeper, clawing at the floor as it was pulled from under me. During semester one of my senior year, I went from missing one class a week to missing over 20 consecutive days of school after just a couple of months. I would wake up and have panic attacks just by the thought of leaving—my life had been upended, and even the simplest things, like eating breakfast, had become stressors. I could feel myself losing sight of my own foundations, including who I was and the things that were most important to me.

It took months of persistence, but I finally felt myself feeling more like me: I returned to school after the new year, played a season of varsity tennis, graduated. Now, standing at Villa del Balbianello in Italy, feeling the ground and the warm air as it filled my lungs, everything made sense and was finally feeling like my life, rather than one I was watching through a film camera. All the work I had done to better myself and my life—the restorations of my own site, like this Italian peninsula, like the Basilica of San Clemente—was finally seeming to be worth it.

When you visit a place like this, you rarely know what to expect. I had come to the villa for the views, the pictures, the opportunity to say that I stood where Anakin and Padmé stood. “Object-related authenticity focuses on the viewpoint that authenticity is related primarily to toured objects... the arts, crafts, cuisine, and cultural activities that tourists encounter during travel can all be described as either authentic or inauthentic” (Lin & Liu 2136-2137). My family’s somewhat “shallow” reasons for paying to visit the villa was centered on the exterior—what the site physically holds. So in some senses, this experience was authentic, for the reason that we saw what we had taken a boat across the lake to see. Yet, for me, “authentic” Villa del Balbianello extended beyond the object-related exterior, deeper

into the meaningful connections this site helped to foster within myself. It was in this place that I finally realized how far I have come, but also how much more I have yet to discover.

From the outside, object-related view of authenticity, the Basilica of San Clemente or Villa del Balbianello, would both appear to outsiders as being uniform, almost two-dimensional. We see what is in front of us. That’s how we’ve learned. Only with effort and changing our gaze like the lenses of glasses can we see what truly lies within—a narrative that can also be used when viewing other people and their identities, or ourselves and our own.

Jillian Rickly-Boyd, who works under the Department of Geography at Indiana University, states, “Such a perspective on place also considers how and why our bodies are put into motion, emotion, and the context of embodiment, which can, therefore, often further insight into notions of existential authenticity” (Rickly-Boyd 681). Existential authenticity, a focus on the self and greater being over time or place, takes the concept of authenticity to a more intrapersonal level—the level which I was able to reach on that Italian summer day. Judging a place or person based only on the exterior walls is a shortcoming that many of us succumb to. Only through looking into history and its depths can true authenticity be achieved, and the things that we can learn when we do so extend beyond time and place.

As we undergo restorations to ourselves, getting rid of things that don’t work, adding ones that do, we begin to see the formations of our most important identities. “Who Am I?”—a question that we often ask when finding our place in the world, trying to figure out where we fit in as we struggle to feel seen. “Here that self of childhood, derived from significant identifications with important others, must, during adolescence, give way to a self,

based upon, yet transcending those foundations, to create a new whole greater than the sum of its parts” (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger 8).

The main quest that fills much of our lives, and in some cases, all of them, is the discovery of the layers that lie within, and the pursuit to build upon them. Overlooking Lake Como, reflecting on its history as well as my own, feeling whole and warm and a part of the world, I could only just begin to see myself coming forward—the sum of my parts fusing as one, after learning to build upwards from my past struggles instead of demolishing them. The pillars of my building are my roles as a daughter, sister, friend, student, piano player, and tennis player. Everyone’s list—everyone’s building and its subsequent restorations—will look different. Adolescence is the golden era for self-discovery, and “Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot” (Aciman 224). All of our experiences are there to help us grow in one way or another.

As I’m writing this, I’m sitting in the Center for Community Dining Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. The wind is drifting through the trees as my gaze wanders out the window to people walking below. The cafeteria is full of conversation. I hear people talking in another language behind me—could it be Arabic? I push away the intrusions. Part of Hallett Hall is framed in the window to my right, so I start to analyze its elements: red-tiled roof, even windows, jagged bricks. The same as every other building on campus. CU Boulder is idolized for its architectural uniformity, after all. As I finish my hibiscus tea and return my mug to the dish rack, I head out the doors back to Smith Hall. Walking under the bridge, I notice Kittredge Central Hall straight ahead of me, and can see more details of the building as I approach closer. I realize that these structures, made to look uniform, are anything but so. Each brick laid to form the walls is slightly different—varying in width, length, color,

and texture. From afar, it all looks consistent. Only looking close was I able to realize the individuality of the building and the separate parts that sum to its whole.

Is the most authentic view of campus seen from above (the one we all see in pictures), or from close enough to the buildings to see every detail? Like looking into ourselves, like me from the recent past at Villa del Balbianello, or me from the not so recent past reading about the Basilica of San Clemente, only from a close-up, interior gaze can authentic understandings be reached. An eagle’s eye view of CU’s campus simply does not provide a full account of what it’s like to live and work here, as the classes (at least the ones I’ve taken so far) have not been held in the sky. One can only see from close up that no two buildings are identical, nor, comparatively, are two people identical. After all, architecture is made for humans, by humans. We can see reflections of ourselves throughout all eras of architectural history. CU Boulder’s students and faculty, like the buildings we call home, all appear to be uniform, but are actually mosaics of unrelated elements, joined together to become one. The people at CU come from all over the world, bringing with them their own identities and foundations, and their own answers to the question “Who Am I?”. The sandstone used for buildings is harvested from across Boulder County, different slabs and rocks first untouched, then later part of one whole. Only when I opened my eyes to it did I realize that complexity is all around us.