

Throughout Life: An Exploration of Contemporary Love
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I began my summer project by jumping headfirst into writing. Ever since my first fiction class at Bowdoin, I have been gathering a list of ideas, descriptions, and overheard quotes as inspiration from my writing. Using this compilation as a jumping-off point, I started writing the beginnings of stories. I typically use outlines after the fact, when I determine where I want a story to go and how I want the characters to interact. But for the first few weeks of my fellowship, I allowed myself the freedom of letting plot ideas and character descriptions flow directly onto the page, unstructured and uninhibited.

During this initial period, I read the work of other authors who have explored similar themes in their novels or short stories. My initial idea for this project was to create character-centered, fictional short stories. I aimed to focus on interpersonal relationships, to put a magnifying glass up to the ordinary elements of human life and parse out the nuance of these everyday moments. I chose settings for my stories that felt particularly humdrum, places that normally fail to grasp our attention—laundromats, airports, assisted living homes. Against the backdrop of these settings, I built my characters. My writing process remained relatively freeform, and I drew loosely from my own experiences to render detailed descriptions of character and place. With suggestions from my advisor, I read books and stories that were also hyper-focused on character rather than plot. For example, as research for a story about two estranged siblings, I read *Dual Citizens* by Alix Ohlin. This novel follows the relationship between two half-sisters, from childhood to adulthood, from closeness to estrangement. Reading the work of other authors allowed me to examine elements of their writing that succeeded in drawing me in as a reader, in making me empathize deeply with certain characters. I could then apply this knowledge to my own writing, and in doing so, create three-dimensional characters that jump off the page.

Throughout the summer, I juggled drafts of multiple different stories. As needed, I would dedicate my attention entirely to one story for a week in order to complete a draft and receive feedback from my advisor. The ultimate goal of this project is to continue working over the course of my senior year, culminating in a collection of five short stories that will make up my Honors Project in the English Department. Thematically, my collection will explore loneliness, estrangement, friendship, and most of all, love in its many forms. I set a challenge for myself to have the protagonist of each story be in a different stage of life, in order to create both depth and breadth in my collection. It has always been easier for me to write about characters who are similar to me, whose experiences are similar to my own. However, I wanted to break from this pattern and create a wide array of characters in a variety of situations. Furthermore, I will use different forms of narration and explore how the first person and the third person affect the reader's perception of the characters, and even the characters themselves.

I gather much of my writing inspiration simply from people-watching. The mundane interactions of strangers often hold stories, or the potential for stories. The goal of my summer research, and thus the goal of my Honors Project, is to examine the mundane on a deep level and draw my own stories from it.

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