

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

12-2020

When Ice Isn't Slippery

Alyssa Witbeck Alexander
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alexander, Alyssa Witbeck, "When Ice Isn't Slippery" (2020). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 7945.
<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/7945>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



WHEN ICE ISN'T SLIPPERY

by

Alyssa Witbeck Alexander

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

ENGLISH

Approved:

Jennifer Sinor, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Keri Holt, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Michael Sowder, Ph.D.
Committee Member

D. Richard Cutler, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost
of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2020

Copyright © Alyssa Alexander 2020

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

When Ice Isn't Slippery

by

Alyssa Witbeck Alexander, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Jennifer Sinor
Department: English

This thesis is the start of what I envision to be a full-length memoir. I address multiple themes, specifically perfectionism and sacrifice, and I explore these themes linearly, primarily through scenes of how these elements have shaped my life. I begin with an introduction and then move into a chapter that explores my childhood desire to become good. This goodness comes when I dedicate myself to the Mormon religion, to figure skating, and to my first romantic relationship. Scenes show my desire for wholeness, but how I am too anxious to ever achieve the goodness I strive for. In the next chapter, I begin college, and my desire for perfectionism and sacrifice quickly lead to a severe eating disorder—thus I lose the goodness I ache for in the previous chapter. I lose my ability to skate, which demonstrates that through my loyalty to anorexia, I lose much of myself. After being pulled out of school, this chapter ends with my mother and I clinging to a small space of safety among the chaos and metaphorically worshipping it.

In the final chapter, just as I begin recovering from the eating disorder, I meet and marry a man who abuses me sexually and emotionally. This chapter chronologically outlines the marriage and divorce. It also shows my faith in Mormonism begin to crack, as much of the abuse is based on Mormon doctrine. This chapter ends when I returned to

the ice, symbolic of returning to myself and embracing the impermeable and the imperfect.

(132 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

When Ice Isn't Slippery
Alyssa Witbeck Alexander

This thesis is the start of what I envision to be a full-length memoir that addresses themes of perfectionism and sacrifice. I begin with an introductory chapter, then move into three chapters that highlight different elements of my life that are affected by these themes. I begin exploring childhood, passion for figure skating, perfectionism, Mormonism, and my first romantic relationship. The next chapter shows ways in which this commitment to perfectionism and sacrifice results in a severe eating disorder, and the ways in which that affects me, my family, and my relationship with figure skating. The final chapter chronologically covers an abusive marriage. This last chapter concludes with my divorce and returning to the ice, which symbolizes coming home and embracing the imperfect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Sinor for her continual mentorship and encouragement of me as a writer, even when I haven't felt like one. Thank you also to my committee members, Dr. Michael Sowder and Dr. Keri Holt for their support throughout this process.

I would especially like to thank my parents and my sister, Kendal, for living and breathing with me throughout the stories that are in this thesis. I give special thanks to my partner, Kade, for reading and rereading many, many drafts, and for being a part of the rest of my story. I am also thankful to my writing group and colleagues for their consistent feedback and support. Thank you all for being part of my journey.

Alyssa Witbeck Alexander

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
PUBLIC ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BECOMING GOOD	17
III. LOSING GOODNESS	54
IV. REDEFINING GOOD	86

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My eyelashes felt sticky. Not ten minutes into our return flight home, Luke and I had already started arguing. I'd turned my face away from him and against the plane's window, sobbing. During those first few days of our marriage, I had hid my face a lot. I looked away whenever I walked past the bed, hoping he wouldn't push me onto it. I looked away during sex, grimacing when he pressed into my dry vagina. I looked away to hide that I cried when he slammed doors.

"Come on, let's go *do it* in the airport bathroom!" Luke said when we stepped off the plane and into Salt Lake City International Airport. He winked at me. He winked a lot. I used to like it. I tried to smile. During the last week, I learned that Luke loved having sex in public places—gyms, bathrooms, arcades. Once, when Luke "felt it," he snuck me into a men's restroom with multiple stalls and urinals. Hidden in a stall with my pants down, I crouched next to the toilet while Luke hovered over me. Not wanting the man urinating next to me to know I was there, I covered my mouth with my hands. I hated sex in public. Pain sprang through my body every time, and I disliked the mess. The first few days of our honeymoon, I tried to slow Luke down. He wanted sex five or six times a day, and my vagina constantly ached with no time to recover before Luke's hormones raged again. When I asked him to wait, he ignored me, saying he "needed it," and that he wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything until he got off. Clenching my teeth until he finished was an easier and faster way to get through the inevitable than

crying and saying “no.” No matter what I said, I knew every conversation resulted in him unbuttoning his jeans.

I followed Luke into the airport’s handicapped restroom stall. The large stall had plenty of room to move around.

“You never know when you’re gonna need one of these!” Luke grinned and pulled a condom out of his pocket. He’d kept it there during the flight, hoping to sneak us into the tiny airplane bathroom. Our fight lasted longer than the flight did, so his condom went unused on the plane. Now in the stall, he glanced at me and ripped open the package. The tear seemed louder than usual. I hated that sound. I heard it a lot.

“Whew!” Luke said, a few minutes later, zipping up his pants. He laughed—a proud laugh, one that revealed most of his teeth. I pulled my pants up over my thighs, grateful that he let me keep my pants partially on in the dirty bathroom. I wore new, white underwear, the garments I promised to wear since taking out my endowments in the temple for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The underwear was sacred. I wanted to keep the garments from touching the ground. Still, when I pulled the white underwear over my legs, it felt soiled. The underwear touched the body of someone who didn’t want to be touched but was touched, someone who didn’t want to be touched but, this time, didn’t say “no.” It was only day four of being married to Luke, and I’d already said “no” dozens of times. I said nothing an equal number of times—out of fear of seeming like a prude, an ungrateful wife, a “regular girl” who, according to Luke, avoided sex.

“I’m so glad you’re not like one of *them*,” Luke told me, referring to the “regular girls.” “I’m so glad you like sex.” He reasoned that it was normal for girls to not

experience pleasure during sex—men can't control their hormones, and young girls just go along with the ride. Still, did he truly believe I wanted sex? Did I even have a *right* to say no in marriage? I wasn't sure. I only knew that my vagina hurt, I hated how Luke ignored me when he orgasmed, and I worried about disappointing my husband or God.

We left the bathroom one at a time, so that nobody found it suspicious for a couple to walk out of a public restroom together. He left first, and I waited an extra minute before I followed. When I found Luke a few yards outside the restroom, he grinned. But his smile looked different than the proud smile I had seen a moment before. He beamed like a teenage boy who had seen his favorite celebrity in person. I guess, in a way, Luke had.

"Elder Bednar is over there!" he squealed. "He changed my life! Let's go say hi!" Elder Bednar was one of twelve apostles of the Mormon church. Apostles have the highest authority in the church, apart from the three men in the first presidency. Luke and I often watched the apostles speak at a semi-annual televised conference, and we'd both read plenty of articles by them in the church's magazines. We both looked up to the apostles but had never actually met any in real life. To meet one in person was, according to Luke, divine intervention.

We stopped Elder Bednar and his wife—I had no idea what her name was since she rarely spoke on TV—in the airport and shook their hands. Elder Bednar seemed shorter than he appeared from the televised pulpit, and his hair, grayer. Luke walked a few steps ahead of me, so I missed what he first said to the apostle.

"And this," Luke said, turning to me, "is my new wife, Alyssa. We're on our honeymoon!"

“Congratulations!” Elder Bednar said, shaking my hand and smiling at us. His wife nodded her head and smiled, too.

“We were married in the Salt Lake Temple!” Luke explained. Elder Bednar and his wife looked at us proudly. I glanced at Elder Bednar’s eyes, eyes that I had always been told held the Light of God.

The Mormon church teaches that men in positions of power within the church have metaphorical keys that allow them to speak with God. These keys provide them with “the power of discernment,” meaning that they can discern if a person is honest and what they needed the Lord’s help with. They also have a heightened ability to connect with God’s spirit because of the priesthood. Shaking Elder Bednar’s hand, I wondered if he knew what had transpired in the bathroom less than a minute before. I resented what happened. I hadn’t wanted to have sex. And now, we stood with an apostle. A dirty girl and her dirty husband who wore matching sacred underwear. Elder Bednar said nothing about our deed, which made me wonder if, perhaps, what had happened in the bathroom wasn’t dirty after all. If it was bad for a man to have sex with his tear-stained wife in a public restroom when she didn’t want it, I expected Elder Bednar to say something to condemn the behavior. Smiling next to my ecstatic husband and an apostle of God who smiled right back at Luke, I saw two options: either Elder Bednar was an apostle of God, discerned what happened in the bathroom and didn’t think there was anything wrong or worth mentioning, or Elder Bednar didn’t know what happened, because he didn’t have the power of God that gave him discernment. I could choose to be assaulted and perfect in the eyes of the church, or I could leave both religion and husband and be doomed, I thought, to failure. I wanted the apostle to save me. I wanted him to tell Luke that sex

needed to be consensual. I believed Luke would listen to Elder Bednar. We waved goodbye to the apostle and his wife, Luke grabbed my hand, and we strolled through the airport. I realized I was alone.

While I didn't know it, my marriage, even on its eve, was coming to an end. Standing in the airport, four days into my marriage, I was a girl working on recovering from anorexia, suddenly in a new—and already abusive—marriage, and about to come head-to-head with the religion I'd fully and completely devoted my life to.

This thesis is a memoir exploring how I entered into that moment and how I moved beyond it. It describes how, through a hungering drive to become perfected, I developed anorexia and how the skills that pulled me into an eating disorder (such as willpower and determination) ultimately guided me out of abuse. In exploring the roots of perfection and sacrifice, I focus on how my desire for perfection arose from other people validating me, and how in order for me to leave what was harmful, I had to validate myself.

I've struggled with perfectionism since I was a child, and it's intriguing to me how each of the three main traumas I have suffered: anorexia, an abusive marriage, and a misogynistic religion are all built on the promise of perfection. These stories seem different, but they are all the same story of a girl who measured herself by external yardsticks. To be imperfect anywhere means to be imperfect everywhere. I could never be thin enough, good enough, worthy enough. The moment after the airport bathroom, when I stood in a circle with Luke and an apostle of God, the image of perfection—what I'd always relied on—became cloudy. As a figure skater, the ice becomes a barometer for my health in this thesis, as well as a surface upon which I learn to stand. As I deepen my

edges in the ice, I find stability on a space that is impermeable and, for many, unstable. I learn to pick and jump and spin as the world slides beneath me. Ultimately, I start the path to finding joy in the imperfect and in myself.

My thesis is the first three chapters of what I envision to be a full-length memoir. When I was a nineteen-year-old anorexic, sitting in a hospital bed, my parents told me to fight to recover so that I could one day write a memoir about it and change the world. I don't believe that my story will necessarily change the world—there are many stories more inspirational than mine—but memoir is not wholly a didactic genre, meant to instruct or inform. Rather, memoir is a powerful art form that relies on emotional truth to connect with readers and offers healing for both the memoirist and those who read her story.

Annie Dillard in her essay “To Fashion a Text” says, “The best memoirs, I think, forge their own form” (286). I separated my thesis into three distinct chapters that are thematically bound and around thirty pages in length. The first chapter explores my complete orthodoxy to the church and my desire for goodness and perfection in all areas of my life. In this chapter I also set up relationships with my family, with my first boyfriend, and with figure skating. In the second chapter, I fall from perfection when I develop an eating disorder during my freshman year of college. As an anorexic, I try to perfect and sacrifice my body. Instead, my menstrual cycle collapses and I am told that I will never be able to have children. I am pulled out of school after striving to be an ideal student. Because of my broken body, I am unable to skate and participate in a sport that once fueled me. I try to be perfect but fail. In the third and final chapter, I chronologically tell the story of my abusive marriage—a marriage that, I thought, promised my soul's

salvation. Yet, the marriage becomes toxic and unhealthy, not measuring up to the standard of beauty and wholeness I expect. At the end of this chapter, I leave the marriage and return to the ice—a space that I set up to represent personal healing apart from perfection. Although by the end of this chapter I have not yet left the Mormon religion, I give clues that I am headed out.

While I move chronologically through my past, I'm not trying to document my life. Nor is my goal to deface my ex-husband or convince people to leave the Mormon church. Instead I am interested in revealing the emotional truth of my life and create art. Dillard speaks to the importance of shaping your past when she tells memoirists to “embark upon a memoir for the same reason that you would embark on any other book: to fashion a text” (289). Our past is not waiting to be retrieved like a book from a library. Versions of the past exist for all of us, especially when trauma is involved. When I read through journal entries I wrote during my marriage, I see myself justifying why the abuse was my fault, then one page later I express my undying devotion for my lover, and the next page grappling with divorce. It's not that any of these accounts are truer than the others—each of them speaks to my lived experience. Memoir is not only concerned with the “literal truth” but rather pursues the “emotional truth,” according to Mimi Schwartz in her essay “Memoir? Fiction? Where's the Line?” Emotional truth cares less about fact and more about how the experience felt. Because it moves toward the feelings generated by an experience, it provides a gateway for the reader. Other readers won't share the facts of my life, but they will share the emotional truth of it.

Schwartz quotes V.S. Pritchett who says, “It's all in the art” (399). I agree. Language is the art that connects ideas and experience with concrete words. I view

creating art as a generous act—both for the artist and the reader. Schwartz tells writers to “use that imagination ... in memoir to find the language and complexity of real lives, not imagined ones” (404). Schwartz explains that we all use the experiences of our lives to tell stories to the people around us. Because we want our stories that we tell to last “more than one minute,” we must “color [them] in.” Colorful stories embed themselves in readers. Schwartz shares how stories that are wedded only to fact make our past, “skeletal as black-and-white line drawings in a coloring book” (400). We must move past what happened and find the metaphors our lives suggest as a way to deepen that connection between reader and writer.

In this thesis, a scene where I’m sitting with my mother on a heating vent showed me what filling in our stories looks like. Much of my eating disorder recovery happened while eating meals with my mother over a vent. In first drafts, this moment remained skeletal—one sentence dedicated to the experience. However, through revision, I pulled a scene out of the event, showing the turning point this played in my recovery and the connection I built with my mother. With even further revision, I saw this experience as almost sacred. Although I was still literally worshipping within Mormonism, this time with my mother became a metaphorical prayer to a different God. It became a sacred space of pleading and a new form of sacrifice, a holy routine that held our days together. Coloring in this story adds power to the memoir, and it is also healing for me to look into my past and recognize that the small moments are so much of what my story is built on.

Art is a form of self-care; it heals people from the inside out. I want to turn my pain into art, reconstruct it and find beauty in my story as a way to heal myself. In finding the beauty, I can then share it with others. Mary Clearman Blew, in her essay “The Art of

Memoir” suggests that by writing the past, “I will write my present and transform myself ... through the endless interlocking connections between storyteller and story” (283).

Memoir allows a writer to take her story and transform it into art. There is power in reckoning with the pain. There is power in taking the painful moments and, rather than covering them up, revealing how messiness and suffering produce the art of the imperfect.

My memoir addresses anorexia, a conflict with religion, and domestic abuse. With this in mind, I have consulted memoirs and other works of literary nonfiction to observe and learn from others who are writing about these topics. I chose to read abuse memoirs and memoirs from writers who have struggled with Mormonism. I decided against analyzing texts from writers focusing on anorexia, as that is still triggering in my current stage in recovery. I also learned from works of nonfiction where I am inspired by, and appreciate, the form and writing voice.

Terese Marie Mailhot’s memoir *Heart Berries* is a stunning piece of literary nonfiction. Much of the memoir is written in the second person, directed toward Casey, her lover. Through her poetic language, Mailhot does an excellent job of expressing the abusive and unhealthy elements of her relationship, as well as the beautiful parts. In the end, Mailhot and Casey stay together—this is not a memoir about escape. Rather, this memoir explores Mailhot’s relationship with Casey (a white man), Mailhot’s own societal abuse as an Indigenous woman, as well as Mailhot’s mental illness that creeps into her life and her writing. *Heart Berries* includes poetic language, but it is not a soft read. She is unafraid of showing her own toxic traits. Mailhot intentionally gives all characters multiple dimensions—as readers we do not immediately label Mailhot as

“good” or Casey as “bad.” Instead, the memoir weaves a complicated and honest narrative. She writes, “we were both ill and alone and intelligent” (Mailhout 51). She shows the toxicity of both partners without judgment. In my own memoir, I write my own brokenness as well as Luke’s.

Another poetic memoir, *A Bestiary*, by Lily Hoang, looks into abuse from another angle. Hoang’s memoir blurs the line between fact and fiction, a compelling read that requires the reader to determine which elements are fiction, which are nonfiction, and if it matters. While I follow “truth” as much as possible, rather than fable as Hoang does, I am fascinated by Hoang’s ability to turn trauma into metaphor as a way to reach what can’t be explained. At this point, I am unaware if her abusive husband or cheating boyfriend are part of her lived experience, but it doesn’t matter. She’s up to something else. Hoang’s cleave to emotion is powerful and real, regardless of how she employs fable. I want my readers to connect to the emotional truth in my thesis, particularly through the figure skating metaphor I utilize, much in the way Hoang’s readers connect to her emotion.

Kelly Sundberg’s memoir, *Goodbye, Sweet Girl*, recounts a story of domestic marital violence. Sundberg fell in love with a gentle fiction writer, a man named Caleb who wanted a family. A few months into their relationship, Sundberg gets pregnant with Caleb’s baby. Against her family’s wishes, and while ignoring red flags about Caleb, the two marry in an attempt to legitimize the child. Sundberg then recounts the story of abuse and how she and her son escaped. Sundberg focuses heavily on scene, sliding flashbacks into the chronology to help the reader understand what compelled her to stay with her husband. In between scenes of abuse, Sundberg reflects on the first time she and Caleb

had sex and how enjoyable and safe it was. After readers know how dangerous Caleb is, she reminds them about how excited he was to become a father, and how he told Sundberg how their son looked like her. She writes scenes of apologies and promises and love songs. In my memoir, I don't only paint Luke as a monster—I want him to be a believable character. I show why I fell in love with him in the first place, which I feel gives me authority in the narrative. Sundberg doesn't excuse Caleb's behavior, but she shows him as a real character. Although my thesis doesn't include flashbacks like Sundberg's writing does, similar to her work, mine includes moments of humanizing my abuser.

In addition to abuse memoirs, I read memoirs about individuals who left Mormonism. Tara Westover's memoir, *Educated*, is a fascinating read. Westover grew up in southern Idaho in a fundamentalist Mormon household. Westover relays her experience with her eccentric father, a man who doesn't allow his children to attend school out of fear of the socialist teachers. Instead, he believes God instructed his family to spend their time preparing for the end of the world and working in a dangerous junkyard. Eventually, Westover teaches herself well enough to pass the ACT and flees home to attend college at Brigham Young University. There, she is appalled at the whorish Mormon girls who wear sleeveless pajama tops. As Westover becomes educated, she steps away from Mormonism, which causes her to be disowned from her family.

Westover handles her childhood with grace. She also demonstrates her fervor to her faith in the first half of the memoir, before she loses her religion. During the first portion of my memoir when I am still an active church member, I write from the frame of mind I owned then, rather than my current perspective. Although Westover is blunt about

the effects a relentless “modesty” mantra left on her and the damage her family suffered from relying on God rather than doctors, she is careful to avoid blatant judgments of those who practice religion. Instead, she lets the events speak to her own experience in religion and why it was toxic to her specifically. By utilizing specific scenes and events from BYU and her childhood home, it’s clear that Westover’s goal is to share her experience, not to dissect Mormon theology. I follow Westover’s lead, as my goal in writing is not to make a generalized statement about Mormonism, but to tell my personal story.

Denice Turner, in her memoir *Worthy* writes about her experience in Mormonism while living in Cache Valley, Utah—my childhood home. Turner’s is a story about her mother’s death, as well as her own loss of religion. The memoir follows the chronological line of life after her mother’s passing and uses backstory to explain her relationship with Mormonism. Much of her account of Mormonism is told in summary, and she does a great job of sliding in detail about Mormon doctrine for readers who may not be familiar with religion. Turner explains that “to be female in the Mormon church was to know yourself to be worthwhile only insofar as you were flawless and circumspect and pure; ageless and thin and virginal looking—no matter how many babies you were required to pop out” (97). She delicately includes the Mormon expectations around chastity and virtue in brief sentences or paragraphs that flow into the rest of the narrative. Still, some of the memoir spends pages summarizing Mormon theology or certain years of her life. The story of my experience with Mormonism is more scene-based, to keep the narrative clean, while still offering religious explanations for a non-Mormon audience.

There are many writers whose work inspires me, but their writing may or may not fall into leaving religion or abuse. Instead, I look to these writers and admire their ability to control their form and sentences. Cheryl Strayed is a writer of beautiful prose. In her memoir *Wild*, Strayed recounts a chronological line her trek through the Pacific Crest Trail, then weaves the story of her mother's death, her own drug problem, and failed relationships in between paragraphs about her heavy backpack and obliterated toenails. She grapples with her identity throughout *Wild* by bringing in powerful and frank lines about her inner mind. Strayed suggests that "Alone had always felt like an actual place to me, as if it weren't a state of being, but rather a room where I could retreat to be who I really was" (119). In between full scenes that are heavy with dialogue, she pauses to reflect, and, through her crisp writing, she takes the reader with her. As much of my memoir discusses my own identity and traumas, I follow Strayed's style and find power at the sentence level to express my ideas in between scenes.

I also fell in love with Strayed's book *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar*. The book is set up as an advice column with real answers Strayed gives to those who write in asking for advice. Each chapter begins with "Dear Sugar," where people write to the anonymous advice columnist "Sugar" (who is Strayed) in hopes that she'll solve their problems. Following the dilemma, the book then responds with the answers Strayed gave these advice seekers. Answering hundreds of "Dear Sugar" requests, *Tiny Beautiful Things* is a collection of the most powerful questions and answers. Strayed's answers often include anecdotes from her own life. As in *Wild*, Strayed's writing is punchy. She interrupts long paragraphs with short, one-line

sentences. One particular moment shows her ability to bring in scene and interrupt with precise language:

One hot afternoon during the era in which you've gotten yourself ridiculously tangled up with heroin, you will be riding the bus and thinking what a worthless piece of crap you are when a little girl will get on the bus holding the strings of two purple balloons. She'll offer you one of the balloons, but you won't take it because you believe you no longer have a right to such tiny beautiful things. You're wrong. You do. (Strayed 353)

Strayed pays particular attention to detail, breaking down moments and giving the reader images to cling to. In my thesis, I mimic her attention to detail as she proves to readers the power of naming the color of balloons, whether that is naming specific foods, the style of skating costumes I wear, or the show that's on the TV in another room.

The final book I reviewed for my thesis is *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine. This is the only book that is not memoir. Instead, it is a book-length lyric essay. Although *Citizen* is not the same genre as my thesis, it is a beautiful book with fantastic sentence control. Rankine writes about race, specifically racism against African-Americans in the United States. Similar to Strayed, Rankine uses short, punchy sentences to achieve more power. Rankine takes advantage of figurative language and imagery throughout the book. She often relies on metaphor to address the deeper purpose of her words. I looked to Rankine's work and her ability to subtly incorporate metaphor and figurative language and brought those craft skills into my own writing. I also looked to the way much of the book is scene based, with each page recounting a new scene from an unrelated day but propels a coherent theme. In my thesis, I travel between scenes that

sometimes appear unrelated, but the work moves chronologically, and each scene contributes to the themes of perfection and sacrifice that I'm working with.

When writing this thesis, I was surprised by the extent to which figure skating acted as metaphor and thread through my life. Skating was such a fundamental part of my childhood, but I initially planned to leave it out of this thesis for sake of space. However, I noticed that whenever my life was at a crossroads, skating was there. Figure skating consistently acted as a metaphor for strength and a way for me to choose myself. During the times I lost my safety and my identity, I also lost connection to skating. Through multiple rounds of revision, scenes on the ice repeatedly symbolized moments of passion and liberation, as well as brokenness and submission. Years ago, I believed skating had left my life, yet it keeps coming back, even if only through writing. In writing, I've created a web—connecting seemingly separate life experiences and tying them together through metaphor and language. In a lot of ways, there's significant growth between the eight-year-old girl on her baptism day and the twenty-year-old who leaves her husband. In between those years I begin to trust myself and the imperfect. Yet at the same time, the Alyssa on the first and the last pages are fundamentally the same—a person with passion and willpower who pushes through the uncomfortable. Through this thesis, I've connected language to pain, art to trauma.

Now that I've written the first 100 pages of my memoir, I'd like to take this thesis to an MFA program to complete it. There, I can expand on the themes of perfection and sacrifice that I've already established. I will also explore my journey leaving Mormonism and the consequences and benefits of exiting an orthodox religion in regard to these themes. I look forward to the writing I will create in the future.

Works Cited

- Blew, Mary Clearman. "The Art of Memoir." *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Robert L. Root, Jr. and Michael Steinberg. Pearson Education, Inc, 2005, pp. 282-285.
- Dillard, Annie. "To Fashion a Text." *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Robert L. Root, Jr. and Michael Steinberg. Pearson Education, Inc, 2005, pp. 286-295.
- Hoang, Lily. *A Bestiary*. Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2016.
- Mailhout, Terese Marie. *Heart Berries: A Memoir*. Counterpoint Press, 2018.
- Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2014.
- Schwarz, Mimi. "Memoir? Fiction? Where's the Line?" *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Robert L. Root, Jr. and Michael Steinberg. Pearson Education, Inc, 2005, pp. 399-404.
- Strayed, Cheryl. *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar*. Vintage Books, 2012.
- Strayed, Cheryl. *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*. Vintage Books, 2012.
- Sundberg, Kelly. *Goodbye, Sweet Girl*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2018.
- Turner, Denice. *Worthy: A Memoir*. Nevada Press, 2015.
- Westover, Tara. *Educated: A Memoir*. Random House, 2018.