

One year ago (March 2020), I went through one of the greatest heartbreaks of my life. Obviously, I was not alone in this. But I could only feel the pain in my own chest. Each day my peers and I woke up to a new email from faculty or admin updating us on the fate of the Senior Theatre Festival (and our Commencement ceremony but that wasn't as important to me), which we all had been working on for almost six months already, and which I had been preparing for, and looking forward to since I applied to the University of Puget Sound. I wish I could say "we knew what was going to happen", and that we were able to take the time to prepare ourselves for what we knew was the inevitable, but we didn't know, there was no time, and the "inevitable" at the time was the worst-case scenario. Suddenly the last time I sat in a classroom, the last time I sat at the Chekov table, the last time I performed on stage in Norton Clapp, the last time I saw my friends/classmates/professors, was truly the last time. Not only were we robbed of celebrating ourselves and each other through theatre and ceremony, we were robbed of closure and what we desperately needed was catharsis. I am a collaborator first, and an actor/artist second, which is why I couldn't imagine doing my thesis on my own, let alone, creating a new project from scratch that could never compare to what would have been (especially since so much work and deep deep love had already gone into STF). And my sadness and anger was so overwhelming, I couldn't even see past the moment I was living in. But as we know as theatre makers, where there is great heartbreak (or great joy), there is great inspiration, no matter how deep it is buried in your own tears.

I had a few distinct points of inspiration; this is what they were in the order they occurred:

1. At the end of my Junior year, I was sitting on the floor of my dear friend Molly Mclean's bedroom, which was covered in papers of all shapes and sizes, notes, drawings, programs, scraps etc. In a very Molly way, she was gluing these little mementoes into a random big hard back book that was no longer meant to be read. A true genuine scrapbook, documenting her time at Puget Sound with already existing records of memories she had kept and collected over 4 years. I too had kept every single journal, play text, assignment, card, poster, even every email I had received over my 4 years, my floor looked just like hers, so I decided to make it into an archive, like she did, just a little different.
2. In Wind Woods Dramaturgy class, we had spent the semester centering our studies around Toni Morrison's concept of "Rememory". I became infatuated by the idea that our bodies leave physical trails and if you are intentional enough with your actions, you can retrace your steps. I started imagining Rememory as a real tangible thing that exists for only our eyes to see, if you can find it. It both guides us forward, and tells us where we've been. Maybe my Rememory can help me say goodbye.
3. My way into text has always been through the movement of my body. This is how I read, act, direct, and imagine. In Quill Camps acting class, we had been doing a lot of work

around words and gestures. It was great to have the way I had always felt to be affirmed in that way, and to be able to explore it in the classroom with such a great instructor.

*The reason why I am spending so much time on my mental process is because that is what was most difficult for me. Once I was ready, I was able to put my visual material together in two weeks.

After a Facetime call with Jess K. Smith, I was able to conceptualize what it was I wanted to do with this project, what my goals were, and what my intention was. This is what I wanted to create:

A movement based “re-performance”, that uses my body as a vessel to re-tell my/our story through an archival poem using words that have already been said by people I love in the past 4 years, set in places I have already been, to try and encapsulate the way we/I was feeling at the time of immense communal loss and hopefully provide some human made closure and self-inflicted catharsis. (I know that’s a lot, but that it to be expected)

I suffer from memory loss induced by my severe anxiety and also struggle with a learning disability so all my life I have kept every paper, book, or journal I have either used, read or written in school out of fear of forgetting. I also learned to take extensive (sometimes gratuitous) notes which often included direct quotes from professors that I wanted to remember and I avidly annotated everything I ever read. And, if you have ever written me a message on a sticky note, left me a voicemail, given me a card, lent me a used book, or even handed me a flyer, I have kept it. So, by the end of my four years, I had my own personal archive that I hadn’t even realized I had created, and I turned my bedroom into a mini museum. For the next few weeks, I would spend all of the time I *would* have spent in rehearsal, doing an archaeological dig inside my room. I scanned through journals, scripts, emails, programs, syllabi, tech notes, textbooks, calendars, plays etc. and created a document for all of my “quotes”. I pulled anything that jumped out to me, made me laugh, made me cry, things that brought back sweet moments I had forgotten about, anything that evoked any kind of emotion or held any amount of significance to me. This document is 10 pages, 11 font, single spaced. Like I said that took me a few weeks, partially because I had a lot of material to go through and partially because it was really fucking hard, and my heart was tired. As I read through this document over, and over, and over again, I identified a few overarching themes that I could use to inform my next step. Those were: Love, Time, and Nature/Human Kind. I knew this had to be a poem, and I knew that it had already written itself. I also knew that I still did not want to do this alone, one of the most devastating parts of this all was not being able to collaborate with my peers whose hearts were also breaking and whom I never even got the chance to say goodbye to. Although our faculty fought hard on our behalf, the University did not seem to understand the impositions of shutting the campus down on the arts departments. Of course this was what was best for everyone’s health but it was still very frustrating that the admin obviously did not consider us at all when making this decision, in fact, it seemed as though they did not care. So, I wanted to make sure the other thesis members were seen and heard in my project. So, I sent them this prompt:

“Please provide me with a word or short phrase that you feel describes the overall way you have been feeling and processing during this time of great communal loss in relationship to STF/graduation/etc. Then do your best to embody that word/phrase in a physical gesture, big or

small, that brings that emotion to life inside of you. Please reach out to me for any clarifications but really I want it to be up to your interpretation.”

Next, I had to put the poem together, which was hard because none of these words and phrases were ever meant to be together, I had to choose quotes that were meaningful to me, that also represented my themes, and also made sense. Luckily, I have lovely friends who are English Majors and were willing to help me edit. Something I had known from the beginning was that I wanted this to be an opportunity for me to thank those who had been integral to getting me to where I was then, and where I am today. I had quotes from plays I had been in, things I had directed, and notes I had gotten from peers and professors, so I thought, how lovely would it be if those people who once, wrote, said or performed these words, got to say them again? So I called up alumni, underclassmen, and professors (active and retired) and asked them for a huge favor; as you can tell, they all obliged. For example, you will hear the voice of Allie Lawrence say “you belong on stage”, which she wrote in a card she gave to me opening night of *The Seagull*. “We’re at the end. We’re at the very beginning”, is a quote from *The Maids* in which I directed earlier that year, recited by my actors Lauren and Hannah. Towards the end you hear Julian’s voice say “to slip out of your skin”, which was a line said by his character Jim in what would have been my STF play *Narvik* by Lizzie Nunnery.

For filming, I made a list of locations on campus and around Tacoma that were important to me and my story, most of which were outdoors, except one. I don’t know when was the last time I had been in the Norton Clapp Theatre, it was probably the same as the last time I sat in Jones 203, campus closed so fast, they didn’t even get to fully strike the set from the spring mainstage, so all that was left was ruins. I thought admin would be sympathetic to my case as I am one individual, I already know how to let myself in and out, and that this would be in place of the full fucking length play I had been working on all year. Shout out to Sara for advocating for me even though they said no (well yes and then they changed their minds). As soon as I found out I officially could never return to Norton Clapp, I called Kurt Walls absolutely fuming and crying. I know it sounds dramatic (surprise), but Norton Clapp was the first and only place I had ever felt I could safely be authentically myself, so this was very important to me. He said to me “if I have to drive down there, put you in a trash bag, and carry you inside myself, I will”; this is not far from what actually took place... When I finally got to return to the theatre for the shortest hour of my life, I could barely hold it together long enough to do what I came there to do. The anger and sadness came flooding back and all I wanted to do was sit with her and cry, which is basically what I did, she was the only thing I really got to say goodbye to, and I am so grateful for that. I wanted to return to places where I could try and trace my Rememory and bring it back to life. My main filming locations were my backyard, Ruston waterfront, and Jones steps, other various shots were taken around campus, at Point Ruston, and Titlow beach. For some reason water as an element is something that I am very connected to, both in body and soul, and it played a large role in my time as a theatre major which is evident in my poem. What I did was go to the location, play the recording of my voice out loud, improvise the movements, refine, improvise again, refine, again, then decide on which gestures felt right, and string them together, all while incorporating the gestures provided to me by my classmates. I actually caught a cold from spending so much time standing in the rain or the ocean, or standing in the ocean while it was raining. The last thing I shot was after I had quite literally chased the sunset across north Tacoma, on an empty tank, yelling at my housemates “WHEN I RUN YOU RUN AND DON'T

FORGET TO PRESS RECORD” as I jumped into the freezing cold sound in a short dress and my Teva sandals.

My ideas for the sound were very complex and unrealistic as are all of my aspirations but there were a few things that I knew I had to have. I wish I started doing this earlier but for the past few years, I have recorded the sounds of rain and water when I’m in places that are important to me so I can listen when I miss those places or when I miss myself. While I was abroad, I discovered an artist and a song that absolutely saved me, that is what I wanted playing underneath the spoken words (I’m not going to say what the song was because it is for sure copyrighted), along with the intro to another song that played during one of the transitions during *The Seagull*. I don’t know why I was going through all my old voicemails but I came across one from my dad that he left me while driving in his car I think the week after he saw *The Seagull* which was the first time my parents, or anyone for that matter, had seen me really act; I knew this would be the perfect way for me to end this.

*At this point I had only a week or two before what was supposed to be the end of the semester. At this point is when I realized I don’t know how to edit a video on my decade old Windows laptop. But again, I am a very lucky girl with very smart and cool friends who were willing to help me with this.

Finals came and went. We had our “thesis presentations” where we all shared what we had been working on instead of STF, and at this time I did not have the final video, so I played the audio for everyone and shared some shots I had taken and not yet edited. Then we “graduated” (watched a slideshow and got drunk on cheap champagne with my housemates while dressed in our caps and gowns). Then I had to move back in with my parents. Then I mourned. Then I had to get a job. Then I moved to Los Angeles. Cut to March 2021, the one-year anniversary of what felt like my life and the world falling apart. I was talking to my therapist about how I was struggling to fathom the fact that it had been a year since I was told it was over, and how I still didn’t feel like I had any closure. I said this as I was looking a tiny box in the corner of my room that had traveled from Tacoma, to Seattle, to LA with me. It was the package that Jess Smith sent to the class of 2020 for us to open on what would have been the day of our department celebration. Inside were notes from every faculty member addressed to me; I had still not read them. I knew what I had to do. After I read the letters I downloaded a video editing software that will probably end up making my laptop explode and opened back up a project that I desperately needed to close. *(As of this moment it has been another month since I wrote this... my self-doubt game is just too strong).

I didn’t change much from what it was originally going to be. I relooked at the document I had made with the poem where each word/phrase was highlighted and labeled with the exact seconds in the exact clip I wanted to play. The final sound I had last spring was not exactly what I wanted but luckily I had saved all of the separate elements so I was able to put them back together and change the levels. I moved a several shots around which was hard to do as my movements had to be in sync with the words. At the beginning I added a recording of the water from a beach on Ruston Way. And at the end I added a voice recording of myself rehearsing one of the songs I was going to sing in STF so I’d remember how it was supposed to sound; I loved the music in that show and I wanted someone to hear it. I added more footage of me swimming

while the sun was setting at Titlow because I froze my ass off for that. For someone who had literally never edited anything before, this was a challenge, and was another factor as to why it took me so long to finish it. But here I am.

Although I mainly finished this for me, my heart, and my mental health, I also wanted to stay true to my intentions and share it with those who helped me make it and who got me through this past year. There is nothing more embarrassing, but also completely on brand, for me to turn in my thesis a year late, I hope all my Professors get a laugh out of that fact. The amount of times I have both lost and found myself again in this past year is extensive and exhausting, and I am still grappling with the reality of how my time at college ended. I still wish more than anything that I got to perform in STF and gotten to walk across stage to receive the piece of paper I worked tirelessly for four years to get; but more than anything I wish I could hug all of you and thank you in person. Someday. But for now, as always, time is passing.

With immense unwavering love,
Brynn Francis Allen