

In The Den
Essays

By
Michelle Politiski

Preface and Acknowledgments

When I figured out that I wanted to begin writing nonfiction in earnest, I asked myself what I was hoping to gain from the experience. While I still don't have that answer and I'm not sure I ever will, I have some ideas.

I can begin by naming what this particular group of essays did for me. As a young adult in the midst of a colossal healing journey, there are things I fear being known about me—namely, the exact nature of my trauma, its proximity to my sex and relationships, and in general terms, my queerness. These essays contain parts of me that so few people know that I am genuinely afraid to pursue sharing them. I say this not to solicit sympathy or a sense of preciousness, but to be honest about what an internal process it was to write them. These essays were their own healing project. They helped me recall events that the dissociative nature of trauma made me forget. They helped me process those events and offer myself some compassion for having experienced them. In that sense, they served the purpose I didn't know I needed them to.

My healing is not done, nor will it ever be. There will never be a moment where I dust off my hands, throw them up, and say, “Ah, what a pleasure to be done with that!” The journey will continue to have its hills and valleys, and I am pleased that the work of this collection was one of the highlights so far.

There are innumerable people to whom I want to offer gratitude for their presence in this project. First, thank you to Ellen O'Connell Whittet for her guidance in the very beginning stages of this work, and for her constant belief in my writing. I would not have pursued this project without her feedback on *Going Under* and *Strings Attached*, which sparked the first inklings of a collection in that Girvetz Hall classroom. Thank you to Dr. Patricia Fancher, a brilliant feminist, rhetoricist, essayist, and so much more. Her mentorship led me through nearly the entire writing,

rewriting, and revision process, and her support never wavers. She is also one of the most fabulous people I've ever met, and she inspires me daily—not just in the pursuit of adopting an orange cat or lacing up a pair of rollerskates, but in life, generally. Thank you Ljiljana Coklin and Dr. Diana Raab, who each made the Raab Writing Fellowship possible and believed in my project enough to help me fund it. Thank you to Kara Mae Brown, who leads the program to which I owe the progress of my writing. My earliest knowledge of the craft of nonfiction belongs to her. She has been there from freshman year through graduation, witnessing the pitfalls and peaks, from advising meetings in her office to saying, “Hey, you can make beautiful stories from this mess of life.”

Thank you to my sister Ashley. She is one of the few people on this planet who I truly consider to be all-knowing. Just moments ago, I lamented to her about imposter syndrome, to which she wisely quipped, “But you're so young.” She is even younger. Our relationship as sisters is too much to put into words. She is, and will always be, my entire world.

Lastly, thank you to the colleagues, friends, chosen family, and partners who not only appear in these essays, but inspire me to keep writing them. There are too many people in this group to name, but each of their small or large contributions proved their faith in this work. Art cannot happen in a vacuum. Thank you for bearing witness.