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The Consequences of Failing: A Memoir

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The Consequences of Failing: A Memoir

Creative Honors Project in the Department of English

By Olivia Zajac

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29 April 2016

The Consequences of Failing: A Memoir
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Statement of Purpose/Abstract:

Failing is part of our human nature. I have never met a person who has never failed at something. Sometimes when I look back at my failures I feel like crying, and other times I laugh at the mistakes that I have made. But no matter the type of failure I have suffered, I have learned one thing. Failures, along with successes, have shaped me into the person I am today. When I fail, I often fall. But each fall is a chance for me to get back up. I don't plan to stop failing any time soon.

Just like failures, each breath we take keeps us functional, both body and mind. As we continue to live we acquire more and more memories. Therefore, in a roundabout way, memories serve as a consequence to both our failures and our breaths. And as each breath is unique to us, so is each memory. With this in mind, the purpose of this project is to explore some of the events that have occurred in my life, and write them down according to how I experienced them. While others in my life may have experienced some of the same events in a different manner, the goal of this project is to use perspective and memory to illustrate my perception of the events. I intend to use this project as an exercise to immobilize parts of my past by stopping time for a moment so that my voice might give breath to the telling.

This project follows the format of a memoir. It challenges me to explore the world of creative nonfiction while also exploring my own world. I intend to flirt with the limits of the form, enjoying the freedom the memoir offers. In Annie Dillard's

essay in *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* she discusses writing a memoir on a childhood. She doesn't claim that the childhood is her own, but she does state that it takes place in the same city in which she grew up. I intend to use the fluidity between fiction and creative nonfiction to craft an account of my failures in a mostly true, but not completely true fashion. Dillard discusses the two questions one must ask herself when writing a memoir: what to put in and what to leave out. I plan to take full advantage of these two questions by putting in some details that never happened and leaving out some very real truth. Overall, I hope that this technique will allow me to paint a vivid picture of my failures, their consequences, and their lessons for my readers.

Memoir relies on memory, which can become distorted. Understanding that sometimes the truth must be stretched only makes the memoir form so much more exciting. Sometimes it can even be necessary to lie. It might be necessary to lie in order to protect someone, but often a lie in a memoir can help accentuate a point the author is trying to make. Often times these are harmless lies, such as if it was really a windy day or if my dad actually said something. I intend to use these "lies" to strengthen my piece and to help the reader better visualize the scenario. I hope to take insignificant moments, ones that stand out for no apparent reason, and transform them into something that makes people laugh, cry, or gasp out loud, causing them to look quickly about the room to see if anyone noticed their sudden outburst. I want to offer readers an experience, my experience.

Outline:

This project consists of stories that have occurred sometime between my birth and present day. The memoir unfolds in chronological order, beginning with the oldest story and ending with the most recent one. The memoir is sectioned off to create organized divisions in the memoir. I have based divisions on subject matter. These divisions consist of singular stories broken up by transitions.

A sample outline is below:

1. Introduction
2. Section 1: Sorry, was I Rude?
3. Section 2: Training Wheels

I have compiled these stories (or memories) in such a way that the reader does not have any trouble following the order of events. The finished memoir is around 20-30 pages long.

Summary:

The intention of my project revolves around examining myself more thoroughly while using the memoir format. I wish to improve and put to use my creative nonfiction writing skills while also gaining a better understanding of myself. I want to utilize the freedom of the memoir form to put down on paper my history from my own perspective. I hope to explore the consequences of my breaths and to examine the outcomes of my failures.

With time always moving forward, our perceptions of an event are constantly changing. We begin to look at past events in a new light because we have gained more knowledge and experience over the years. My hopes for this memoir are to capture some of my memories in the most authentic light possible. By “authentic”

light, I mean to look at the event without justifying my actions or placing myself in a more positive light. In particular, in my final section where I explore a disagreement with my mother, it was hard to admit or claim as a failure of my own. As part of the human nature, my memory is inevitably somewhat skewed, so my project has involved working against this to the best of my ability – to try and show the moment as fully as I can, as a moment that I shared responsibility for.

When I first started this project it was not about failing, but rather about life experiences that involved smaller consequences that shaped me into the person I am today. For instance, one of the stories includes a time when I acted rudely without meaning to by sitting down during a performance. This act of sitting down was not a huge failure, and while some people may not even see it as one at all, it was nonetheless something that affected my sense of who I ought to be. I became more self-conscious of myself in the world. Examining my own failures has been very difficult, but writing about them engages me in further examination of these moments which lends to a reconciliation between my failure-filled past and my current self. My goal has been to turn my memories into real experiences for other readers, to have them step into my skin for a while. While I do not know who my readers may be, I write toward that connection.

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My first mistake was attempting to come out of my mother's womb feet first. I'm sure my second mistake involved hitting my head on the crib, or something like that. As a senior about to graduate from college I've made plenty of mistakes since then. But this isn't meant to be a list of failures. If that were the case this would go on for pages and pages. No, this is not a list. This is a reflection on the journey that brought me to this moment in time. Originally I had planned on laying out my life story, recounting my successes and sharing a few jokes. But when I looked back on the steps I took to get here, so close to graduation, I thought of all the missed deadlines, lost toys, broken hearts, and shattered expectations. Sure, I remembered being President of Students Against Destructive Decisions and making the Dean's list, but I realized that the moments when I grew the most usually began with a mistake.

At first glance this piece may feel like a lot of doom and gloom. I know that when I experienced the following failures that I definitely did not feel joyous at the time. While my past may feel a bit gloomy, graduating from college and moving into the real world brings it's own dark rain clouds. Through this process I have

challenged myself to sort through the muck of my past failures and search for the hope of a bright future, one that I know I can handle.

Each year the Kindergarten class at Holy Trinity Catholic School put on a nativity play. December 1999 was my year to shine. The day had finally come for our class to find out which part we would perform during the play. I stood anxiously waiting for our teacher, Mrs. Fuhrman, to call my name. I really hoped that I would receive the part of the star. The star was the solo act. The person who played the star got to stand at the highest point on the risers situated on the stage. I also hoped that if I could not be the star that I could play Mary. Mary was a very important figure in the nativity story, so I would not have minded playing her part either. So I listened in dismay when I heard Anna got assigned the part of Mary. I was pretty sure that I knew the most about Nativity story out of all the kids in the class; which should have made me plenty qualified for the role.

Then my shoulders dropped when I heard my best friend Lindsay had been assigned the part of the star. At that point I frantically hoped that I would at least not be assigned the part of one of the animals. I did not want to crawl around on the stage. Finally, I heard my teacher speak my name, "Olivia will play the part of an angel." I was so relieved that I did not have to be a cow. Instead, I got to be part of the beautiful angel chorus. I was very excited.

For weeks after that I practiced my lines. My mom would comb my hair after a bath, and I would try to recall my lines from memory. The lines for the angel part were about singing to the shepherds to announce the coming of the newborn king.

Finally, the night we had spent a month practicing for had finally arrived. It was the night that my Kindergarten class performed the nativity pageant.

I watched as Lindsay climbed up to the top of the risers on the stage. She looked funny with her face stuck in the middle of a silver cardboard star lined with tinsel. I was sure glad I did not get the part of the star after all. I lined up with the rest of the angels a little farther down on the risers. Then there were the shepherds standing watch by their flocks of sheep. I watched as Nathan (a sheep) crawled across the stage as he said, “baa,” looking for the rest of the flock. Mary and Joseph looked all cozy next to the manger. Those who played the cows gathered around where the baby doll that was supposed to be Jesus lay in the manger.

I wore a white robe and a tinsel halo. I looked simply angelic. I knew all of my lines by heart, and I could not wait to show my parents what we had practiced all month. After the star talked, it was the angels’ turn to say their lines. The pressure was on. We recited our poem about how we came to the shepherds to proclaim the good news. We all leaned into the one microphone and half said, half shouted our lines. I got to hold the microphone (it was because I was the most responsible of all the angels).

After we said our lines, I was bored and my feet were tired. I had been standing on the risers playing angel for a long time. I tried to pay attention to the lines of the other performers. But my feet had hurt so badly. So I decided to sit down because even angels get tired. And I don’t think God would tell the angels that they couldn’t sit down. All of the other angels were still standing. Boy, were they missing out. I placed my hands under my chin and settled in for the rest of the performance.

I thought it all went pretty smoothly, besides the fact that the sheep forgot their lines, and Joseph dropped the baby when handing it to Mary. I thought that Mrs. Fuhrman should have made an announcement that the Jesus was just a doll, that Joseph did not in fact drop God on the wooden stage floor. But that was just me.

After the performance I met my parents in our Kindergarten classroom. They picked me up after saying hello to my teacher, and we headed out into the crisp December air. I watched to make sure I didn't slip on the ice as I asked my parents what they thought of the performance. I said that the cows did a pretty good job. They were boys, and boys can be very persuasive actors. My mom stopped me at the car, squatted down, and looked me in the eye.

"Olivia, why did you sit down during the performance?" she asked.

"I was tired."

She sighed. "I know you were tired, Olivia, but it's not polite to sit down in the middle of a performance. It's rude to do to your classmates."

I shifted my feet back and forth in the snow. A patch of packed down snow formed under my boots. My fingers pulled at my fluffy pink mittens. Rude? I didn't think at the time that sitting down had been rude. I had just been tired; that's all. I looked down at the ground, and then I looked back up at my mom. "I'm sorry," was all I could manage to say. Because I was. Sorry, that is. I never meant to be rude. My mom smiled at me, and I knew she wasn't mad. "Next year," I told her. "Next year I will be better."

For a short while after, I was embarrassed and ashamed. However, I later realized that this moment had taught me that chagrin is only a temporary feeling. It's the growth that came from the chagrin that lasts a lifetime.

Kindergarten seems like such a long time ago. I don't think I could tell someone what I learned during my Kindergarten year in school. However, this memory is as vivid in my mind as though it happened yesterday. Writing this story, forcing myself back into my much smaller tennis shoes, has opened my eyes to my change in perspective. I currently have a nephew in Kindergarten. I watched as his class recited the same nativity play that I recited 16 years ago. Lots of mistakes were made. Joseph knocked over the manger, the star slipped walking up the risers, and all of the sheep but one forgot their lines. But they were in Kindergarten. I expected this of them. At the time I was horrified that I had made a mistake (I think I thought too highly of myself as a Kindergartener). I still wish I could take back my actions sometimes. All I can do now is laugh about it.

It took me a very long time to learn how to ride a bike. I'm not saying it took me weeks; I'm saying it took me months. My balance was all over the place. I'd ride a few feet down our ¼ mile driveway before tipping over into the grass, if I was lucky, or tipping over onto the tar driveway, if I wasn't quite so lucky. But I continued to persevere despite my ever-growing collection of scrapes, scratches, and bruises. Finally, in first grade, under the careful watch of my mother, I made it down the driveway and back for the first time ever. Could I do it again? That was the question.

It was a nearly-hot sunny day in July when I made my second attempt to go down the driveway and back. This time it was my dad who was standing watch. The breeze played with my hair. I imagined myself looking like Pocahontas, with my hair beautifully blowing behind me. The reality of the situation was quite different. My hair instead clung to my face and neck, and obscured my vision. I was constantly wiping it off of my face with the palm of my hand. Dad stood on the porch steps as I strapped on my hot pink helmet, taking care not to pinch the skin under my neck. I had learned from past experiences that trapping my skin between the two buckles was quite painful. I then made sure my Barbie elbow and kneepads were secure. The thing that made them “Barbie” pads was the fact that they were pink and purple and had the word Barbie written on them. [So cool, I know.] After taking these safety precautions and getting a few stretches in (one must be limber before attempting such a feat) I approached my bicycle. Straddling the white plastic seat of my purple bicycle, I took a deep breath and pushed off.

The ground beneath me began to move as my feet found the pedals. I gripped the purple, gel handlebars until my hands hurt. The driveway seemed longer than ever as my bike wobbled its way down to the tree that marked my turnaround. While my legs pumped up and down, I glanced at the collection of Band-Aids I had acquired. Each one had its own story, but they all ended the same: my body sprawled out on the tar. Just thinking about falling caused a volt of panic to shoot through me. My bike swerved severely to the right. I quickly yanked it back into the steady pattern I had established earlier on and regained control. Finally, the tree was only a few feet away. I began to

gently brake by pushing my pedals backwards. I had made it halfway! A rush of adrenaline coursed through my veins. I just knew I could make it back without falling.

Stopped at the tree, I got off my bike and turned it around manually, as I still had not mastered the art of doing a 180-degree turn within the width of the driveway. I waved at my dad who watched me intently. But before he could wave back, I was already on my way back to the house. This time I could focus on my surroundings. I noticed the green grass that sloped away from the driveway, the same grass that broke many of my falls. I watched the trees bend and sway, and I listened to the wind whistle through my helmet. A feeling of accomplishment began to grow in me. A front toothless grin spread across my face as I approached the cement slab in front of our house.

Then I became overconfident. Right before the cement slab our driveway branched off towards our shed. However, there was a massive hill between the shed and where I was with my bike. I had seen my mom and older brother, Jesse, go down this hill with ease many times. I wanted to be grown up like them. I wanted to go down the hill too. But then a little voice inside my head (you know, the one that's usually right) reminded me of a conversation with my parents when they told me to *never* go down the hill. Never. They had mentioned something about it being dangerous, especially for beginner bike riders.

I pondered this for a moment. A very short moment. The decision had been made as I turned toward the shed and began my descent. For a second I enjoyed the feeling I got in my stomach as I began to roll down the hill. But that was only for a second. Soon, the wheels on my bike began turning so fast that it became too difficult for me to handle my bike. My feet slipped off of the pedals and my legs began to frantically wave through

the air as I tried in vain to relocate my pedal brakes. I needed to stop, and I needed to stop soon. I looked to my left and things seemed to move in slow motion. I saw my brother from a distance, gawking at me, his eyes the size of owl eyes. The branch he had previously been wielding as a sword to hack off the limbs of enemy trees now hung loosely in his hand. I heard my dad yelling at me to brake. That was kind of useless advice at this point, as braking was no longer an option for me. I focused my attention back to the shed that loomed in front of me as I got closer and closer. I squeezed my eyes shut, my face hurting from the effort. Then, I heard a loud thud. When I finally opened my eyes I was face to face with some tan siding. My bike and I had butted heads with the shed.

A silence hung over the air for a second before my wails broke through. Tears streamed down my face. Everything hurt. Dad and Jesse raced towards me. I'm not sure who got to me first. I had to be carried into the house while I waited for Mom to return from her walk. Bruises had already begun to form by the time she got home. There were bruises on my legs and arms and a very large one, every shade of purple, yellow and green imaginable in an unmentionable place. Let's just say I was glad I wasn't a boy.

Although it was a painful experience I did not let it stop me from riding a bike. In fact, I kept practicing until going up and down the driveway was easy. Eventually I learned to turn around at the tree without having to get off of my bike to do so. And then it came time to conquer the hill. I began at the bottom of the hill and would bike just a little ways up it before going back down the hill. Once I had acclimated to that height, I would go up the hill just a little bit more. As I got used to each new height I eventually was able to go down the hill from the very top with ease. Never again did I collide with

the shed. My dad likes to point out to any visitors that four dents are still visible in the siding of the shed, one from the front tire, two from the handlebars, and one from my helmet.

Life took that opportunity to smack me right in the face. Literally. I'm not going to say that it hasn't given me a wake up call since then. It definitely has. However, now it tends to take the form of dropped phone calls and red marks on white pages. I see the A- on my paper. It's an A, yes. But there is a little dash that follows it. Sometimes that little dash feels just as painful as ramming my bike into the shed.

I'm not entirely sure how I allowed my aunt to talk me into participating in a speech competition about the United States Constitution. In 9th grade. Before I took a history class on the Constitution. My mouth is perfectly capable of forming the word "no." I mean, I don't even like history, unless it comes in the form of *National Treasure* featuring Nicholas Cage. It was one of those decisions you make when you feel full of confidence and like you could take on the world with a single roundhouse, even though you've only taken half a summer of taekwondo. What actually ends up happening is you completely miss your target and land flat on your butt, with your large white sleeves flailing through the air. That was me.

Upon arrival at the speech competition they separated me from my parents. I cheerfully said my goodbyes to my parents as I followed the nice man to the contestant quarters. There was no dressing room with my name written on a yellow star taped to the door. Instead I was lead into a dim room. An oak table and high-

backed chairs occupied the majority of the space. I took a seat and looked around at the company seated at the table near me. Four other people stared back at me for a moment before returning to their pocket Constitutions. I didn't even know that there were such things as pocket Constitutions. What is the purpose of one? Did these students whip them out whenever they felt as though someone was inhibiting their freedom? I mean, as a self-defense tool they appeared pretty useless. I could understand carrying one around if it also doubled as a throwing star.

The boy sitting two chairs down from me, let's call him Todd, was busy flipping through notecards filled with words scribbled tightly on each pale blue line. He looked to be in the tenth grade. There was a boy, Mark, sitting at the right end of the table. His nametag let me know that he was in the twelfth grade. He was busy flipping through his faux-leather bound pocket Constitution. A twelfth-grade girl, Mary, sat across the table from me. Her light brown hair was pulled into a tight ponytail. She bounced her knee under the table as she muttered words under her breath. The other girl, Sam, wore a blue-collared shirt, a brown blazer, and an ill-fitting knee length skirt to match her blazer. She looked about two years older than me. I looked down at my ink-smearred pages. One, two, three...and a half. I counted the pages several times as everyone sat in silence. Sam dropped her pen and everyone jumped. I pulled at a thread in my sweater. Then I scratched at the finish on the table. I could only read through my speech so many times.

Finally, the guy who brought me into the room came in to explain all of the rules to us.

“Each speech should be at least 8 minutes long, but should last no longer than 10 minutes. A man will sit at the front of the audience flipping signs as each minute passes to let us know how much time we have left. After everyone has given their prepared speech, we will be expected to give impromptu speeches. The guidelines for these will be given a later time.”

Mark was called to go first. He came back after about 10 minutes. Then it was Sam’s turn. Then it was my turn. I laid my papers face down on the table, combed my fingers through my hair, took a deep breath, and followed the announcer down the hall, through a door, and into a bright room. Rows of chairs were set up. There were maybe 20 people in the audience, including the man timing the speeches and the three judges scattered amongst the thin crowd. I spotted my parents immediately. My mom gave me a smile as the audience clapped for my entrance. Of course they mispronounced my name. Apparently “Olivia Say-vock” was giving a speech about the preamble of the United States Constitution. I thought it would be a good topic because it did a lovely job of summarizing what the Constitution wants to establish for the United States. I also chose this as my topic because the rest of the Constitution was long and filled with words I would be required to look up in the dictionary.

I started my speech with confidence. However, I quickly realized that I was not going to have enough material to fill my time. I watched as the balding man with the comb over flipped over the number four. I was down to the last third of my speech, and I had only gotten through half of my required time. Soon the fillers came out. I used a lot of “um,” “so,” and “like.” I saw the timer guy flip the seven minute

card over, but I was out of material. It was time to kill this sad speech. I gave my thanks at the seven minute, 32 second mark, and the crowd gave me a pity clap as I walked as fast as I could out of the room. I finally understood why the preparation room was so dim, to hide contestants' embarrassment as they finished their speeches.

After everyone had finished their speeches, the announcer-man came in to explain the rules of the impromptu speeches we were to give next.

"Each speech should be between three and five minutes. You were given a list of possible amendments that may be the topic of the impromptu speech. We will draw a slip of paper from a hat. On this slip of paper will be the amendment that you will give your speech on. You will have five minutes to prepare for this speech."

I had only discovered this part of the contest on my way to the competition. I briefly scanned over the list of amendments, and sort of developed an idea for a speech for two of the seven amendments on the list. I prayed that when I drew my slip of paper it would be one of those amendments.

I was led into what I can only classify as a large closet. There was a random desk, a wooden chair, a mop, several brooms, and lots of file cabinets. I was presented with the "magical" hat. I ran my fingers over all of the options before finally plucking one from the bunch. I slowly unfolded the paper....yes! I had gotten the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures and it also made search warrants requirements. This was the amendment of which I knew the most about, which does not say much. For the next five minutes I scribbled down an outline of my speech.

Finally, they came to get me out of the closet and brought me to stand in front of the judges once again. I talked more slowly this time, going on about a bike for someone's birthday hidden in a closet, and how this amendment provided a lock for that closet. Well, something like that. I started to repeat myself as I earnestly waited for the bald man to flip the three minute marker over. Just as I thought I wouldn't make time, once again, he flipped over the three! I quickly wrapped up my speech and walked out of the room to the sound of applause not filled with quite so much pity this time.

At the end of it all they had us march out in a single file line to stand once again in front of the judges. They awarded second place to Mark and first place to Mary. My mom thought that Mark should have won, as she found his speech the most interesting. Also, he didn't pace as much. After we were allowed to see our families again, Mary's mother came up to me. Normally one would expect congratulatory words (regardless of one's performance). Mary's mom was not one to say congratulations. Right away she launched into a lecture about how I said the word "um" too much and how I should utilize my space more. She told me I should take speech lessons before attempting another contest. She said all of this without even a hint of a smile. I just nodded and waited for her to walk away. As if I couldn't feel worse about the day.

In the end I learned several things. One, I do not like giving speeches about the Constitution. Two, I say the word "um" a lot. And most importantly, I learned that I can fail and still be all right. The world did not stop spinning when I tried something new and failed. I may have felt as though my stomach was being wrung

like a wet dish rag the entire time, but by the time we got to McDonald's for lunch, that feeling was gone.

A week later I got a check in the mail for 50 dollars. Apparently I was the region champion or something like that, as I was the only one from my Legion Post to enter the contest. Honestly, I think they just felt bad for me and made up an award for me to win. Either way, I walked away 50 dollars richer.

This competition served as a reality check. As a ninth grader, I had been fairly secure in my intelligence level. I thought that everything would just come naturally to me. Failing to deliver a long enough speech taught me that if I wanted to excel, I was going to have to put in some effort.

I've always been competitive. In sports, in academics, in gum chewing contests, you name it. I will be graduating "cum laude." This is an honor. I often struggle, however, to feel that way. I feel like I've lost the competition, but someone still handed me 50 dollars. I love the 50 dollars, but I could have had more; I should have had more. Sometimes my successes mask themselves like a failure. I would like to rip away these fallacies because failure often makes me feel beat down, as though a large ape is sitting on my chest as I lay on the floor, flat on my back.

Well, it was that time of year again. It was time to audition for our high school Spring play. Auditions were held after sport practices. These auditions were nothing like the ones seen in movies. I did not have to stand alone on a stage while a row of judges watched my every move. No, I went into a tiny classroom where all the

hopeful actors sat. We were given samples from the script and a list of all the characters in the play. We were instructed to number our first, second, and third preferred roles. The name of this play was "Check Please." It centered around a boy and a girl who went on several dates with several unusual people. My number one pick was the girl who had dissociative identity disorder (commonly referred to as multiple personality disorder), because who doesn't want an excuse to talk to themselves? My second pick was the lead girl (Seriously, it was just titled "girl"). My third pick was the kleptomaniac. That just sounded like fun.

Then the awkward part came. We had to pair up with another person (luckily I always brought a friend to these auditions) and read the sample of the script to our director. She would simply sit and watch, not even a twitch of emotion on her face and then say thank you. While this may not have been awkward for seasoned actors, it sure was awkward for blossoming high school boys and girls, or should I say men and women? Once auditions were over we had the dreaded two-week wait for the cast list.

One day I was sitting in my second period class, listening to my teacher read off the announcements, when I heard her say, "The cast list for the Spring play has been posted outside of the director's door." Second period could not get over soon enough. After class I walked as fast as I could (running in the halls was not allowed) to the director's door where I found no one. Let's be honest, this is not a movie. Not everyone huddles around a cast list. I scrolled down the page to find my name. Our school was so small that everyone who tried out got a part, and some years people had to double up on parts because we didn't have enough people. I wasn't worried

about not making the list, I was just curious to know which part I received. Finally I found it. At the bottom like it always was. I don't know why I ever looked elsewhere. I, Olivia Zajac, had been assigned the role of the dissociative identity disorder girl. I had never been so proud to have a mental illness in my life.

Then practices started. The first several practices we were allowed to use our scripts. Then our director told us to say goodbye to our scripts. It was time that we had our lines memorized. My lines didn't consist of much dialogue between my date and me. Rather, it consisted of a lot of dialogue with myself. I had several personalities. I was a girl, a mom, and a dad. I was shy, and flirty, and mad. I was a lot of things. I was also a monkey. Don't worry, you read that right. I also had a monkey personality. Throughout rehearsals I had the fellow playing my "date" staring at me, trying not to laugh. It could be difficult to keep a straight face. For one part of the performance my monkey personality chooses to stand on a chair. At first I was a little skeptical, especially given the flimsy chair they had provided as a prop. However, throughout the many practices I found that it was indeed feasible for me to stand on the chair and make monkey noises. No problem.

Finally, it was the night of our first performance. I wasn't even nervous. I knew all of my lines and was ready to make the audience laugh. The performance started out impeccably. Everyone was nailing their lines, and the audience was laughing at all of the right spots. After the lead girl and the overly romantic man she was on a date with left the stage, my date and I took the stage. The lights came up once we were settled into our chairs. Everything started out normal. My date and I conversed for a while until I realized that I forgot to take my pill. I never said what

the pill was for, just that I forgot to take it. I started to pull things out of my purse in an attempt to find my pills. I pulled out a wallet, a telephone (one that you would have in your house), and a gun, among other things. However, I had no luck in finding my orange bottle of pills, so the date continued. Soon I started to act a little bit strange. I peeked at my date over my menu, and then started talking about him to myself, saying things like “he’s cute,” or “he’s funny.” Not long after things started to get really out of hand. The monkey personality had escaped.

I feel that I did a quite convincing monkey impersonation. Perhaps I was a little overenthusiastic. I had successfully climbed the chair, given my best monkey screech and chest pounding, and was attempting the dismount from the chair when disaster struck. I was about to get down from the chair when the chair decided to help me out. The legs of the chair went out from underneath me. I landed flat on my back. The chair had shot out from under and hit the table, shoving it into my “date.” I heard an audible gasp from the audience. I had blown it. I had ruined the scene. I then picked myself up as quickly as possible and finished the scene by stuffing my mouth with a dinner roll from the table.

When I got backstage the rest of the cast was worried that I had hit my mouth during my fall since I was clutching my mouth, trying to keep the roll I stuffed in my mouth from falling out. I assured them that I was fine. My back was a bit sore, but nothing serious. The performance finished up without any other hiccups, I mean, besides the girl who had perpetual hiccups.

After the show everyone went out to mingle with the audience and to find their rides home. Several people stopped me to ask if the fall was part of the script. I

always answered, "Of course it was." I'm sure the people who came back the next night wondered why the weird monkey girl didn't fall again.

Looking back on the ape incident, I realize now where my urge to lie about my failures comes from. I am afraid to admit when I have done something wrong. This I will admit. That is why my goal with this memoir has been to push myself to tell the truth, to be completely honest with myself. The hard part is that I am not always proud of who I was in the past. There have been times in my life where I have *definitely* disliked myself due to something I have said or done.

It started out simple. Such things always do. After supper Mom and I had cleaned off the table, packaged leftovers, and had just started doing the dishes. My day had been a long one. I had had an early morning at work, and work itself did not go very well. The workday had been filled with mistakes and long hours. When I arrived home I dug into the homework I had been assigned for over the summer break. I had been frustrated and overwhelmed by all of the work and the homework.

Mom decided that the perfect opportunity to discuss my lack of help around the house was when we were both working together, doing the dishes. Doing chores together has always seemed to be Mom's favorite way of bringing up tough subjects, moral discussions, and frustrations. I'm not sure if she thought that once a person started a task, she couldn't get up and leave out of frustration. I think she thought a person was tied to a task until it was done. I'm not certain.

She started the conversation by asking about my day. I told her about the frustrations I had had at work, and how I felt overwhelmed by all of the homework I had been assigned. Her next move was to ask me, no, she told me, why I hadn't been helping out around the house. I proceeded to tell her I had been busy with work and school. That's when lecture mode kicked in. I can always tell when my mom moves into lecture mode. In that instance, she suddenly stood taller, her shoulders squared. I watched as her eyes never moved from me. Although, my eyes definitely moved from hers. The staring contest was a bit much for me. She had stopped washing the dishes, and I was running out of dishes to dry. Her voice cut the air as she went on about her also being a busy person. I tried to explain to her that I do have school assignments to do besides going to work. I told her it was a little different from what she had to do each day. I shouldn't have said that.

That launched her into her monologue about her daily routines. I tried to tune her out. I had heard this speech several times. Did I know what she did around the house? Wasn't I appreciative of her? Tuning her out, however, was much harder than I thought. I tried to hum a little bit to myself, loud enough so I couldn't hear her, but quiet enough so she couldn't hear me. If she heard me humming, that would be the end of me. Humming did not work, as her voice just got louder. I then tried to create thunder in my ears, like I did in line for confession when I could hear the person in the confessional telling their sins. Unfortunately, the thunder in the ears trick did not apply to lecturing mothers. I felt like I growing smaller by the second under the weight of her words. By the way she was looking at me, I could have been the cookie crumb that was lying on the floor. I was tired of it. I wanted to feel big

again. I didn't want my emotions and her words to make me feel little anymore. I took a deep breath and yelled, "Stop it!"

Well, that caught her attention. Her rant had stopped, but the next time she opened her mouth, angry words came out instead. Our kitchen became a war zone. The sink stood by her and the refrigerator took my side, probably unwillingly. We each battled to gain the stove as part of our territory; nothing was safe from our rage. Sentences lay uselessly in a pile on the kitchen floor after falling from our mouths, as there was not an ear to hear them. We pointed fingers at each other, at the floor, at nothing in particular. We stomped our feet, each person tried to outdo the other. And before I knew what I had done, I had released the bombs, the ones that I should never use. Three of them, to be exact. Small, but deadly ones. I. Hate. You.

Then there was silence. Too much silence for me to handle. It must have been too much for Mom as well because I watched as she walked away. I had won, I thought, but I sure didn't feel like I had won anything. She had taken the high road while I had played dirty. I knew that what I had done was wrong. Very wrong. I'm not sure how those words had slipped past my tongue, but as soon as they had, I regretted them. I slid my back down the refrigerator and seated myself on the yellowed kitchen linoleum. I thought to myself, *What have I done?* I buried my face in my hands. I felt like crying, not because I had been hurt, but because I was angry with myself for doing what I did. *Perhaps*, I thought, *the best thing I can do is apologize.*

Apologizing is hard even when you know you did something wrong.

Apologizing to my mom meant that I would be admitting that I had made a mistake, that I had failed as a daughter. Daughters were not supposed to say such things. But I had been angry. She had been unfair. Hadn't she? What did she know? What good was all her pushy advice? Unfortunately, it didn't matter. No matter the circumstances I don't hate my mom, so I never should have said that I did.

I approached her area of retreat, her bedroom. I knocked once, then twice, and then even a third time. No answer. I quietly pushed on the door so that it was open just a crack. What I saw next nearly wrenched out my heart. There, sitting in her rocking chair, I saw my mom. She looked frail just sitting there. I had never seen my mom look so tiny. Her eyes were concentrated on her worn hands that sat folded on her lap, as though she was praying. I'm sure she was. I couldn't just sit and watch her like that. I opened the door wide and with just a few long strides I found myself standing next to her. I sat on the edge of the bed so I could see her eye to eye. This time I was not going to avoid eye contact. She slowly raised her head so that I could see her dark brown eyes. I cleared my throat. At first I wasn't sure what to say. Then, I gave her my most sincere apology and asked what I could do to earn her love and forgiveness. She shook her head. My heart dropped. Then she spoke.

"I do love you, Olivia. I always will. In the kitchen, when I heard you say that you hated me, I wondered what I had done wrong. But then I realized, I didn't do anything wrong. We were both frustrated. I know that. I needed some time away. I needed to pray. I needed to pray for me and for you. Sometimes only God can help

us mend things. But I would appreciate it if you could help me out more around the house. Sometimes it is a struggle to do it all on my own.”

I couldn't believe how calm Mom had become in such a short time. Just a minute ago we had been arguing in the kitchen. At that moment I truly admired her. I said, “First, I want you to know that I do love you. I was frustrated and the words just came out. Of course, I will try my best from now on to help you more around the house. I love you.”

I pulled Mom up from her chair and into my arms for a long hug. It was probably longer than she wanted as I could feel her trying to escape my grip. We had repaired our relationship. It took a little while for us to get back to where we used to be, but it did happen. Since then we have had other bumps along the road, some of them just as bad, most of them revolving around my not liking how she tried to “parent” me. I'd get frustrated whenever the word “no” would be thrust in my face after a request, and I'd yell when she would make judgments about decisions I've made. She is in no way perfect, but neither am I. I see that now.

The biggest lesson I've learned from the immeasurable number of mistakes that I have made is that even though I've made them, it is important to not let my mistakes define me. I am not my mistakes. I am not a rude child, nor am I someone who crashes into sheds or onto floors. I am not the chagrin that comes after the mistakes, and I am not a failure. I've failed, yes. But I've continually picked myself up, brushed myself off, and tried again. That. That has made me more than my failures. That has made me a success.