

Second Place: Nonfiction

Student Choice Award

"Lasagna"

By Alex Fosnaugh

The onion slightly shifts under my hand as I push the knife through until I hear it click against the board. I keep repeating this until my eyes start to tear up from the onion juices. I hear the butter sizzle in the pan. I finish dicing the onions and throw them in. I think back to just a few months earlier when cooking would've been a surprise.

I remember laying in the warm, soft bed, cold as ice. I wrapped myself in my large, fuzzy, gray blanket thinking about how I should move. I just needed to do something. The warm sunny day outside demands that I do. I just sat there, shivering, wishing that I could just get warm, hoping that I'd slip into a deep slumber so I could forget about it all for just a little while. When I'm asleep I can't think. I just need a break.

I dump the ground beef into a large blue pan. It sizzles and pops as I push it around. My mom is next to me, trying to help me find the spice I'm looking for. I can feel the heat of the pan on my face and I continue browning the meat. A little of the fat pops and splashes up onto my hand. I shake my hand while uttering a string of expletives and another pop ends up hitting my face. I'm being assaulted by a dead cow. One that smells so delicious.

I looked down at my drawing. It was of me. No one else was able to pose for my portrait. I shot it in blue lighting. The picture was unrecognizable to me. The composition was about halfway done and was entirely monochromatic; blue was one of my favorite colors to use. I took the indigo blue colored pencil and held it in my right hand. If I just finished drawing this one section then I

was allowed to eat. I feel my hand tremble and shake like all the energy in my body was centralized in that one place, waiting to burst out, and leaving the rest of me sapped and tired. I gripped my hair with my left hand and focused harder. If I just focused harder, then I would be able to do it. I begin shading and the shaking gets worse, making my lines sloppy. I push down harder; I just need this section done. I have a death grip on both the pencil and my hair. If I just keep trying harder, then I can do it. I kept adding more pressure until the pencil tip broke and shattered. I'm left sitting there, with 2 broken things. At this moment it occurred to me, that maybe only one of them can be fixed.

I sift through the deep red sauce looking for the 2 bay leaves I put in. I've already found one of them, the smaller one, but I'm still looking for the larger one. I stare into the pot of meat, sauce, and various spices already mixed into the large vat of red liquid. The smell was absolutely wondrous, assaulting my nose with both sweet and savory aromas. I finally find the bay leaf, holding it up in triumph. Like I had just won the Olympics.

I combed through my hair and shook the thin brown hairs that were stuck to my freezing cold hands into the sink below. I look into the mirror and pinch at the fat around my neck. Pinching and pulling at my skin, I was looking for any flaw or imperfection. I turned halfway around and looked at the sides of my body, scrutinizing every detail. I mentally traced the stretch marks that ran along my body and I lifted up my arms. All I could do was stare. I stood there for what seemed like hours just peering at the parts of me I despised. No part of my body was safe from my gaze.

I dump in the large noodles and swish open the drawer. I look for my favorite spoon, the bright royal blue spoon with three slots in the middle and a straight handle. Perfect for stirring or in this case pushing down very large yellow noodles. I let them boil for a minute before I squash them with the spoon. The weird starchy smell spreads all over the kitchen and I set a timer.

I stood up and felt the world swirl around me. I placed my hands on my desk trying to get the energy to walk. My insides felt like they were being stirred by a large spoon. I walk to the kitchen, knowing I have to eat. I need to eat something. I watched the water fill-up the blue cup and tried to think of something that would be ok. I practically inhaled the water and noticed how rough and dry my lips felt. I searched through the cupboard and found various roasted nuts. These are healthy, right? Once I had grabbed the small bowl of nuts I sat back down at my desk. My teacher had split us into groups on google meet and I was working with my friend. We laughed and joked about how neither of us understood the content. I found myself thinking about how I wished he could truly see me. Like I saw myself. Would he want to be friends? Would I want to be friends with me?

Thinking back on it, I wish I could remember the actual conversation. It was one of the few nice things I can remember from that time. All the details are fuzzy and overshadowed by the overwhelming guilt and shame. All I clearly remember is the mystery red bowl, my favorite color. That's why I chose it at the time. It's my favorite little snack bowl. Small, red, and cute. Truly something you'd give a toddler and its origins are unknown to everyone in my house. I look at it in the cupboard. I'm glad it was there for me when it was. I grab what I was looking for and get back to my stove. I don't want the noodles to boil over.

I woke up feeling more nauseous than I ever had before. My body was goopy and unstable. The garage door opened and I heard the voices of my mom and dad. I walked out to greet them and I saw a white box in my dad's hand. They greeted me and set the box down.

"We went to Giordanies and got some pizza, you can have some."

"Oh ok, thanks dad."

I opened the box and stared down at the white melted cheese. I shouldn't have more. I reached out for a slice and hesitated. It felt like it was taunting me. They're watching me though. After I had heated it up I took it to my room. I didn't end up finishing the pizza. Instead, I was left alone, with tears streaking my face and a cold lifeless mound of cheese next to me. Barely a bite was taken out of it. Maybe I shouldn't have eaten the pot pie earlier. I was hollowed out and empty, my insides were trying to claw their way out. There was a monster inside me that I couldn't control, but it was offering me control. Control over my body. Sometimes it's hard to tell lies from the truth.

I place the blue glass pan on the stove and grab my ingredients. I first put a very thin layer of the sauce on the bottom before placing the noodles on top. I put copious amounts of shredded mozzarella, ricotta, and sauce stacked between each layer. This cycle repeats a few more times until there's no room left and it's almost overflowing. Then I apply a heavy layer of cheese on the top before placing it in the oven.

I was lying in the dark, abandoned room. My mind felt numb and all I could think about was food. The only sound came from the headphones, blasting music in my ears. I had been listening to music more. My friends felt like they were so distant from me. Like I was an ocean away from them. I paid more attention to the song playing.

“Cracked lips and tired eyes

I'm hungry with no appetite

I'm shivering and shaking

And I tell myself it's fine

But you can't fool your body

You can only fool your mind”

I had heard the song before but I'd never really heard it like this. Something just clicked in me. I did the stuff she was describing. I felt the shame and guilt she felt. I had known for a long time what I was doing wasn't good for me. It wasn't sustainable.

"Just because you know you're colorblind doesn't mean you can see the colors"

I stand back and look at the oven. I've been working on this for a really long time now. I can't wait for it to be done, it's been so long since I've had lasagna and this is my grandma's recipe. It won't be as good as the real thing but it'll still taste amazing. I look at the time and groan, realizing how much longer it'll be.

Mini Pot Pies were about all I would eat for a while. They were simple to make, tasted good, and didn't make me feel awful. One time my mom made a homemade pot pie. It had corn in it and was delicious. She put her whole heart and soul into that one pot pie and it became a favorite of mine. It was much better than the microwavable ones.

I can't remember when I truly started to recover. I don't think there was a definitive moment. I had many relapses. Days where I would still justify eating nothing because I hadn't done anything. There were days I would feel guilty for eating. There were also days I wasn't shivering, days I wasn't immobilized by nausea or crying over food, and there were days I felt like me. I was recognizable again. I pulled the lasagna out of the oven and let it cool.

I was texting my friend. She was in a lot of my classes that semester. She was taking AP Psychology with me and somehow eating disorders had been brought up. I opened up to her about it. I finally talked to someone. It felt freeing as if someone had just pulled me out from under a giant boulder. She didn't understand but I didn't need her to. She suggested things that hadn't worked for me. She told me all the things I already knew, but she believed me. That's all I really needed to know. That's all I really wanted.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Thank god the wait is finally over. The lasagna is no longer like magma and could be safely eaten. I portioned out some servings for my family and made sure to give myself a large portion. My family digs into the lasagna and I taste it for the first time in a long time. There are no thoughts of how I shouldn't be eating it. I'm not convincing myself that my family thinks I'm disgusting. I'm not thinking about how I had already eaten enough food. I'm just thinking about how glad I am I didn't mess up my grandma's recipe.