

September 2016

The Bitter Taste in My Mouth

Lynnaea Myers

Cedarville University, ltmyers@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay



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

Recommended Citation

Myers, Lynnaea (2016) "The Bitter Taste in My Mouth," *The Idea of an Essay: Vol. 3*, Article 11.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol3/iss1/11

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English, Literature, and Modern Languages at DigitalCommons@Cedarville. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Idea of an Essay by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

The Bitter Taste in My Mouth

Lynnaea Myers

Lynnaea Myers is a Sophomore Industrial and Innovative Design major. Her interests include talking, playing her cello, kayaking, water skiing and generally anything adventurous involving friends and family.

Shianne declared, “You’re not supposed to be reading during recess. You’re not allowed to sit alone and read.”

“I’m allowed to read if I want. You can’t say I’m not allowed,” I said with fierce smugness. I was eager to defy Shianne and show her I could decide to not play with her or anyone else whenever I wanted. I was a passive-aggressive force to be reckoned with among my friends.

I sat in the corner of the schoolyard, my bum slowly growing cold and numb on one of the big concrete window sills that sat two feet off the ground. My back was against the pane of three-inch thick, yellowed plastic that I guessed had not been replaced once since the ugly, factory-of-a-school had been built in the seventies. From where I sat, all sound bounced off the massive façade of the brick building and off of me. The thumpity-thump of kids landing half-way down the slide; their sneakers hitting the plastic before the rest of them with a hollow sound. The swing set chiming its high, clear notes. I was away from the other kids, but still plainly visible. The other kids could look up from their games and see that I was not taking part. I was different than the rest of them.

I didn’t raise my head from my favorite book, *Taran Wanderer*, by Lloyd Alexander. I wanted to write stories like this someday; stories that would win the Newbery Medal. I was immersed in the more real, more significant world of Prydain where Taran was a lost soul, trying to discern his identity and purpose in life. I was groaning along with him in his hard and weary search for truth. And, what I thought was every once in a while, but which was probably much more often, I would peer up through my bushy

eyebrows at the kids flying towards me and receding again on their swings, and at the others waiting in line for a cherished turn to see if any were noticing me.

My writing was good. Mr. Peters, my adored English teacher who was the first person to tell me I was good at writing, always read my stories out loud to the class.

“...and I’m thinking to myself, ‘this is better than some of the stuff I was writing in high school!’” The whispered words had floated carelessly out of Mr. Peters’ classroom during parent-teacher interviews to where I was sitting outside, and I recognized them as my English teacher’s words as he spoke to my mom. The other kids didn’t think of writing or reading as being fun, but they were to me, and they were something I was very proud of. I wanted to be noticed and recognized as the girl who reads at recess, or the girl who writes the best stories. To me it was a way of setting myself apart.

I watched the kids playing grounders as they twisted themselves into absurd positions just to avoid the groping hands of the person who was “it,” and hung from the most inaccessible corners and rungs on the jungle gym with the strength that we lose as we grow into adults; the strength of children in a world where everything is big and you don’t notice yourself sweat or tire. Part of me wanted to join them, but I stayed where I was because I wanted to be noticed. The smell and taste of grime and dust from the gravel, and the kids’ hands, and my hands, and the metal was in my nose and mouth. It made my tongue and the inside of my cheeks sticky with thirst. Then the sweet smell of fall and of rotting leaves would blow on my face on a fresh and welcome breeze.

My childhood friend, Shianne, was never good at reading or writing. She was never good at school in general. Shianne had started following me around one year. I helped her with much of the work we did in class and we giggled about boys together. That’s how we became friends. I wonder if- had I understood then what it meant to be like Christ and to love others like Christ did- if her life would be a whole lot different now.

When the school bell rang at the end of recess, we fell in line by class. I looked over at Shianne who was now standing further up in line. She wasn’t looking back or acknowledging me. She was talking

to Cassidy and Emily, the girls who made up cheer routines during recess and wiggled their butts until the boys came over. I knew she was wounded by my abandonment of her. But for some reason, whatever remorse I felt, I shoved away. She was a clingy friend who always copied me, and I would get so mad because I wanted my ideas to be my ideas and mine only. No one else could have the same ones as me. I felt what I thought was a righteous anger towards Shianne for this lapse in judgment that caused her to hang out with those girls now, and it fueled my urge to make sure she knew I was better than her. “Although,” I would often think to myself bitterly, “it makes sense for her to hang out with them instead of me because she acts like them anyway, and she is a cheerleader, and she has told me that the only reason she wants to go out with guys is to get kissed.”

When Shianne started “going out” with Damon, I was so jealous inside, but I would never admit that to myself. He was widely considered as the cutest guy in all fourth grade, but I was too aloof to ever admit that I, along with the rest of the rabble of swooning girls, thought he was cute too. I knew I wasn’t allowed to go out with boys because I was a Christian and deep down, I resented it. I did everything in the small power I possessed as a smart, fourth grade girl who also happened to be the teacher’s pet and to have the respect- even admiration- of most of my peers, to make Shianne’s life miserable. I had to convince her to “dump” Damon. I appealed to her on moral grounds. My thinking was that since I did not go out with guys because I was a Christian, it was wrong to go out with guys. Period. So I told Shianne that what she was doing was wrong. Our relationship just got nastier and nastier.

One day in English class, Mr. Peters told us to do a free-write about whatever was on our minds. Since Shianne and Damon were constantly on my mind, (I was obsessed), I wrote about this. When Mr. Peters asked who would like to share their free writes, my hand was the first one up. I climbed confidently on top of my chair at the bidding of my classmates. I boldly faced the class and delivered a three-minute rant full of run-on sentences and cutting words about all the stupidity of Shianne and Damon’s relationship. As I read, I grew faster and faster. I looked over at Shianne and her face was growing redder and redder. This was just what I wanted. I delivered my speech with all the zealotry of a hellfire and

brimstone preacher. The speech was full of all the moments of hurt between Shianne and me over Damon and her. All the mistakes she had made. But as I watched Shianne's face, a little voice inside of me was saying, "stop! Stop!" By the time I finished, I was speaking the words I had written so fast that it was a wonder anyone could understand them. When the words stopped, the class sat in stunned silence. Now my face was red too.

I don't remember what happened following my delivery of that rant, but I remember a day after that, as things got worse between Shianne and me, when she sat at a different table than me for lunch. We had persevered in sitting together despite everything until then. Suddenly, I looked over and realized she was crying. When I went over to check on her she was sobbing to the other girls about how she thought I was better than her. This was the first time I had ever seen any evidence that all of my words were getting to her. I was astonished, but also sadly gratified. And the most despicable thing was that I didn't contradict her. I just sat there and listened.

I was wrong. I was so wrong! The whole time I was reading my rant in Mr. Peters' class, Shianne wore a cute, appropriately embarrassed grin. And I was infuriated because it seemed as though my speech hadn't made a dent. I had wanted to hurt her because I felt so hurt by her. I used to cry at least once a week because of how Shianne hurt my feelings daily. But now as I look back, I imagine there was panic in her eyes. Shianne always kept a smile on her face every time I tried to get her back for hurting me as if she were laughing at me or as if it were all a big joke, so I tried harder to hurt her. Now I know that it must have hurt her every time. We are always wounded by cutting words- whatever we choose to show. So I must have cut her up real good.

After that year I don't remember writing too much anymore- at least never again in the free and boundless way I did in fourth grade before Shianne and I fought. I think back to elementary school when I used to love writing and I had a passion for it, and I realize I lost that passion. Now, people still say I'm good at it, but I only write to get by. I don't have the same love and imagination for it.

Writing reminds me of elementary school and of Shianne. I helped her in reading and writing in school because she wasn't good at it. I used my status as a good writer to set myself apart and prove that I was better than her. I wrote that terrible speech about her.

Now I don't really write anymore. Every time I think about writing, I think about elementary school, of Mr. Peters encouraging me to write, of the person I was then, but mostly of Shianne and the part I think I played in making her life worse. It's not even that which fills me with the most sadness, but it's that I failed to make her life better. I had the opportunity to love her as Christ loved me, but I didn't. I could have made a difference in her life by loving her, which is something I think she needed desperately, but instead, I made her life darker. That sour taste from all my guilt-ridden memories is always with me when I write.

When we left elementary school, I didn't see Shianne again until high school three years later. It took less time than that for me to realize what a horrible friend I had been to her. In high school, she hung out with a girl named Shayla, and they could both be seen smoking together with the best of them many times daily in the designated smoking area at the end of the school driveway. There were nasty rumors about Shianne and how she behaved at parties. She dropped out of high school before tenth grade.

Last thing I heard was that she was living alone. That was in eleventh grade. Her mom had committed suicide and her grandmother who she had been living with died. Once in fourth grade, I called Shianne and it was her Mom who picked up the phone. Her "hello?" sounded irritated and pale. Shianne's dad never was in the picture.

Many times I've wondered how she's doing, or if now, after all the things I did and she did, I could help her again. I wonder if she's even alive, or if she too took her own life. Many times, I've thought about writing her a letter to tell her how sorry I am for everything I did to hurt her. The letter I thought of writing would tell her that I was sorry for the terrible friend I had been. I would tell her all the things I wish I could take back and that I see now and understand how I must have hurt her. I would tell her that there's still hope for her despite what she may be thinking. But, just like those memories have left a bitter taste sitting in my mouth when I write, that letter has been sitting stagnant in my head. It has never seen the light of day.