

Able



Volume 3

Social Issues Commission
Alma Mater Society, Queen's University

2012-2013

Our Mission

Able will share the views and creative works of people with disabilities, invisible impairments, and chronic illness and pain at Queen's, along with some works from their allies. We will aim to explore the intersection of ability with other issues such as race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality as we examine how our varied bodies and abilities fit into our communities. By bringing together diverse voices of disability at Queen's, we hope to educate and to show solidarity.

Logo and Cover Art By:
Gina Zampino

Editor's Note

Two years ago, I did not have any concept of myself as person with a disability. Although I had registered with disability services in case I got sick later in the year and needed a notetaker, I'd always thought of myself as being sick, not disabled. I have Cystic Fibrosis, a chronic illness. I was used to the monickers—sick, unwell, ailing, // Never disabled. However, for all that I had a chronic illness, I was relatively healthy. I was highly active and participated in soccer, karate, dance, rock climbing, archery, you name it. My body would hinder my ability to do these things, but never stop me. I could force it into compliance. I wanted to do them, so I did. Second semester of first year, all that changed. My lung function was dangerously low, I had lost 13 pounds, and had a hard time just walking around campus. Still, I didn't consider myself to have a disability per se. I used my accommodations to get extensions for work I missed due to hospital stays, started using the elevator instead of the stairs, and got a disability spot on campus. I just considered these things a few of the “perks” that come with having a chronic illness. Sure, I was slowing rotting away from the inside out, but I had a designated parking spot!

Why, then, am I the Able chair? Well, what no one ever tells you about having a disability is how isolating it is. I was alone in my struggles. I was engaged in a solitary fight with a shadow opponent—be it myself, my parents, my classmates, my professors, my doctors, society, etc.—yet all the while striving not to crumble under the pressure of a body that won't do as I ask, can't do I ask. I continued on like this for two years. Then, at the beginning of my third year, a friend of mine gave me a copy of Able Volume 1 with the admonition to read it right away. Not entirely convinced that I would find anything of interest within, I agreed. Upon opening that publication, my life changed. My previous concept of disability and my designation only as a person with a chronic illness were shattered. Inside were stories, poems, and artwork relating to disability—yes—but also so much more. Disability encompasses more than just the positioning of a ramp, or the opening of a door with the push of a button; rather, it is composed of the feelings of inadequacy, isolation, defiance, independence, pride, and many others harder to name, that persons with disabilities must confront every day. Despite our many varied and unique experiences of what it means to have a disability, there exists a commonality of thought and collective emotion shared across the length and breadth of the disability community. That is why I am the Able chair, and it is my sincere wish that Able continues to nurture that feeling of community for others as we continue on into the future.

Rachel Sutherland
Chair of Able 2012-2013

Difference

I'm lying on your chest, on top of the new scar. It's still raw and red. The device protrudes from beneath your flesh.

Yearning to escape.

Your body is distorted, carved up, marred. It's beautiful.

The scars are your history, your suffering, your pain. Your ability to survive. Your body is incredible, I am fascinated.

My fingers run along the lines of these scars, I want to take away your pain, I want to make you feel—better.

So many years ago, we loved each other, we touched, and moaned, we kissed, I held you close. Where are we now?

Love hasn't faded, just like the scars on your body, it runs deep. We heal, we fight to be better but are trapped, hopelessly flawed.

Lying here on your fractured frame, on your broken body, I feel your strength, I feel your pain. I want to make you better.

I want to love you again.

I can't fix you, I can't fix us. I can only love you. I can only tell you that I want to be better, I want you to get better.

But you won't get better, you'll wither and die, not now, not tomorrow, but soon. What happens to us then?

Your beautiful soul, carved up, marred, like your body.

Scarred me.

Get. Well. Soon.

Stephanie Cork

THIS IS MY FUTURE!

What is your hurry? I was asked.

Then there was a non-approving sound

When I announced that I was going to Queen's.

That was what I received from one teacher.

I struggle to not be angry at her.

Here was a chance for me to start—

To develop my autonomy and live for myself—

Away from the perceptions of me that were at least four years old.

Have *Rain Man* and *Flowers for Algernon* informed her decision and choice

Of words at me?

I am not either of them.

I am not an experimental prodigy.

I am not a dependent savant.

I am me.

And I can move forward.

Courtney Weaver



Downtown Heather Halliday

The Fog

Watch your step,

Don't trip—'cause you might forget.

Who you are,

You haven't been gone long, but you've gone far

Barefoot walks, down winding roads that get you lost

One more step,

To see the sky beyond the fog.

Do you hear the

Sound drops of music falling, beating off the roof of pines,

And I'm fine, I'm just calling—shouting, I hear it all around me,

And I'm waist high in the smog.

If only you could reach me, you could lift me from this haze.

Instead I just keep walking, one more step into this maze.

Do you hear the

Footsteps, splashing through the mud and,

I think I'm sinking under—I've been here before,

How did I get out? Don't I know the way now?

Do I walk endlessly through this daze?

One more step into this maze

Tisha Riman

I Am Simply Me

When you look at me, what do you see?
I see creativity, compassion, loyalty, a good friend
When I look at you what do I see?
I see small-mindedness, prejudice and hate
This confuses me because you are so open
You embrace your differences
Yet you feel you can decide this for me
I choose to be open
I choose to not hide
But you try to control me.
Why must I be forced to explain myself?
Is it anyone's business but my own?
Would you take away my right to speak?
I choose to be open because that is who I am
But you would have me unwrapped and on display
How would you feel if you were forced to reveal
Your personal story?
You are compelling people to judge me
Based on that one little part of me
But I am a combination of many unique things
You would take away my right to decide

All because you feel deceived by me
Why must the world judge me?
Strength comes from the choices we are able to make
But take away that right and I'll have nothing
It is my right to choose how people see me, not yours
And you do not let people see the beauty that is me
People are not just one thing
They are a combination of many beautiful things
I am many different things and I am stronger
Because I choose to reveal to the world
All these unique things that are a part of me
But do not exclusively define me
I will not let others judge me based on what they see
I am stronger because I embrace all my abilities
But I do not let them define me
I am my abilities but I am also so much more
And I will not let others label me
Take me, leave me, but do not define me
I choose to define myself
I choose to be strong in the face of adversity
I am simply me. ☺

Sari Gutman



Disembodied Hope Steph Cork





Pain Michelle Williams

Something you should know

It started five months ago,
A burning pain in the middle of the night,
Down there.
I went to the doctor,
"It's likely a symptom of a bladder infection" they said,
"I think I know the difference between my ureter and my
vagina" I replied.
The pain continued,
"Is it itchy?" they asked at the clinic,
"No. It's burning and it's raw,"
"It's likely still yeast anyway."
A few pulled curtains and many nervous,
Uncomfortable, statements from the male doctor later,
And the swabs went away for testing.
No yeast, no STIs, no bacterial infection.
But the pain persisted.
I tried over the counter yeast treatment,
"My vagina is swollen!" I almost yelled to the nurse out of
sheer panic.

"The tests are negative. So why are you concerned?"
That was the response I was given.
It's been two months of persistent pain, and you're asking me
what I have to be concerned about?
I continued to be treated for a yeast infection,
And was given a referral to a gynecologist,
But of course he was on vacation in Hawaii,
So it would be another two months.
Sometimes I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs,
Or throw things across the room,
It's not that the pain was unbearable,
It was that it was continuous and unrelenting.
I would get so overwhelmed that I would cry,
Spontaneously, and for long periods of time.
Then I would feel guilty and tell myself,
There are much worse things that people go through,
I'm being too dramatic.
I finally saw the gynecologist,
He began talking about yeast before he even examined me.

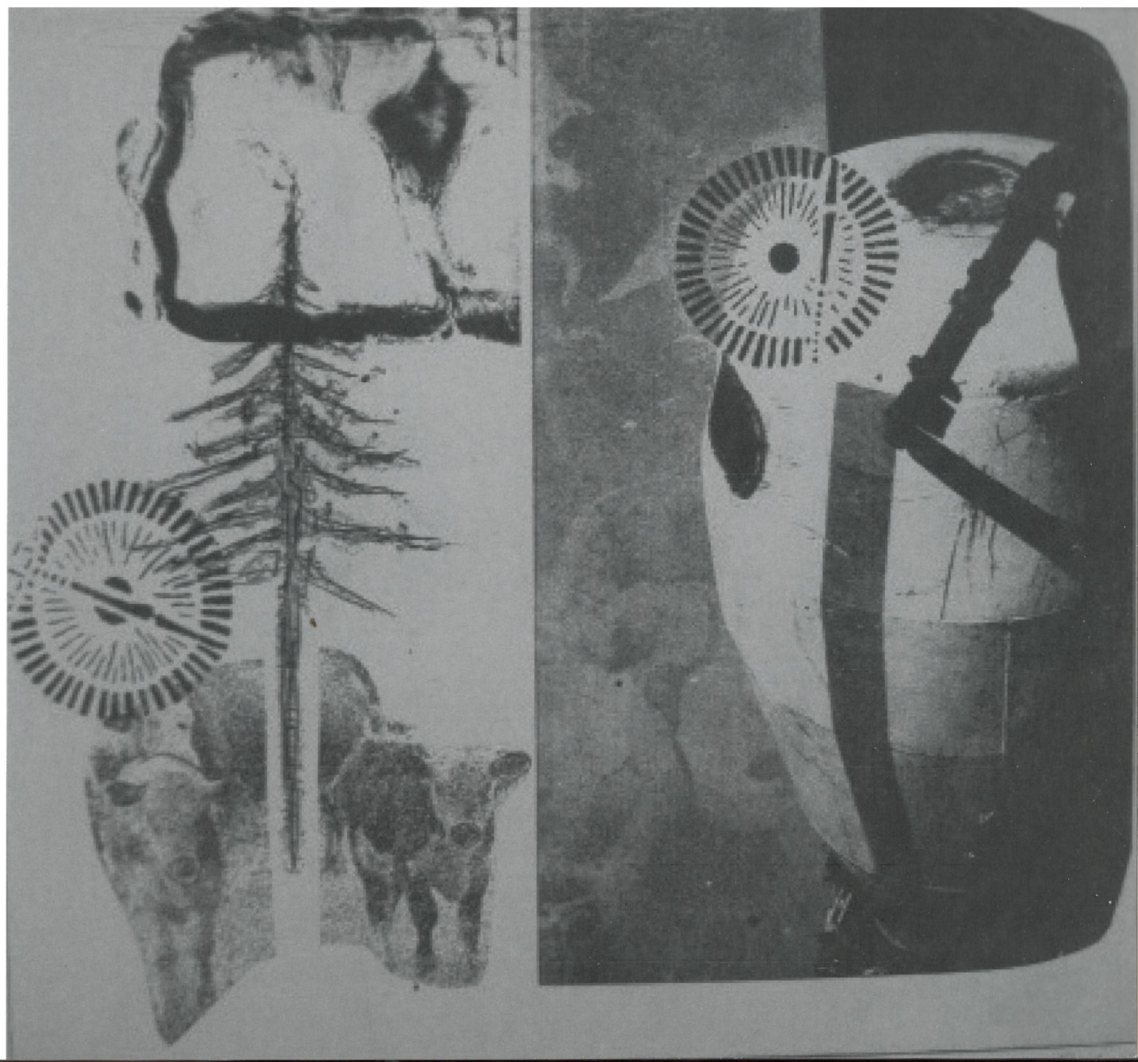
Something you should know continued...

"Don't you understand?" I wanted to scream at him
"It's not yeast! I've already been through this."
I finally saw my family doctor back home,
She handed me a piece of paper with one word written and
underlined at the top:
Vulvodynia.
Unexplained vaginal and vulvar pain.
Apparently up to 15% of women experience it,
And the pain can last from a few months to many years.
Burning, stabbing, itching,
The pain symptoms are expansive,
And the outlook seems uncertain.
Suggested methods to deal with the pain?
Have a bath 3 to 4 times a day,
Apply icepacks,
Find yourself a donut shaped pillow to sit on.
There are treatments,
But they focus on the symptoms,
As the underlying cause is unknown.

I wanted you to know because what I'm going through is real,
It's not in my head,
And I'm not the only one.
I'm sure you can imagine the things that become difficult with
a diagnosis like this,
And it seems grossly unfair.
I wanted you to know that I am doing better,
With support I can manage this,
So please—I don't need sympathy,
I just want you to understand.
And most of all I wanted you to know,
So you learn not to assume,
That when I'm frustrated in class,
It's because I don't understand what's going on,
Or that when I'm emotional,
It's because I can't handle things as well as the rest of you.
I can't tell you the reason, not because I don't want to,
Or that I'm not comfortable discussing these things,
It's because I know it will make you uncomfortable.
And sometimes that reality is the most difficult one to face.

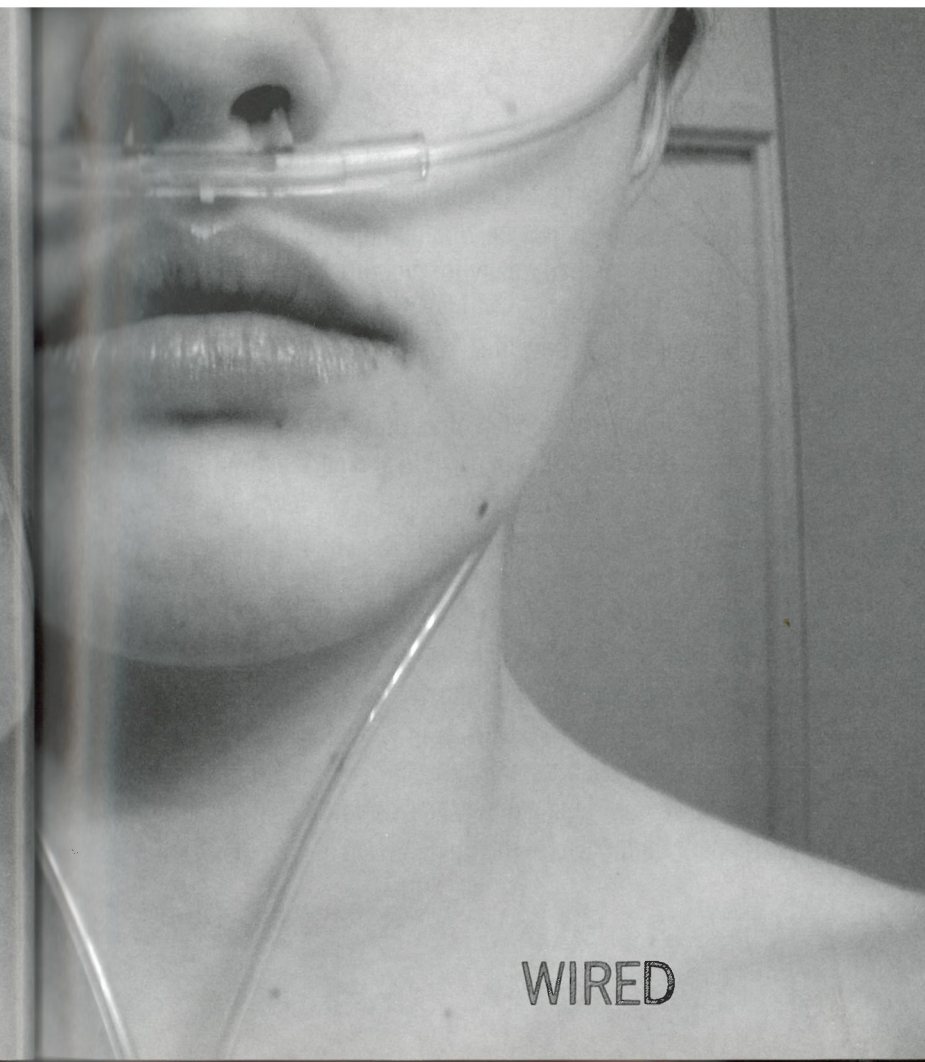
Clash

Heather Halliday

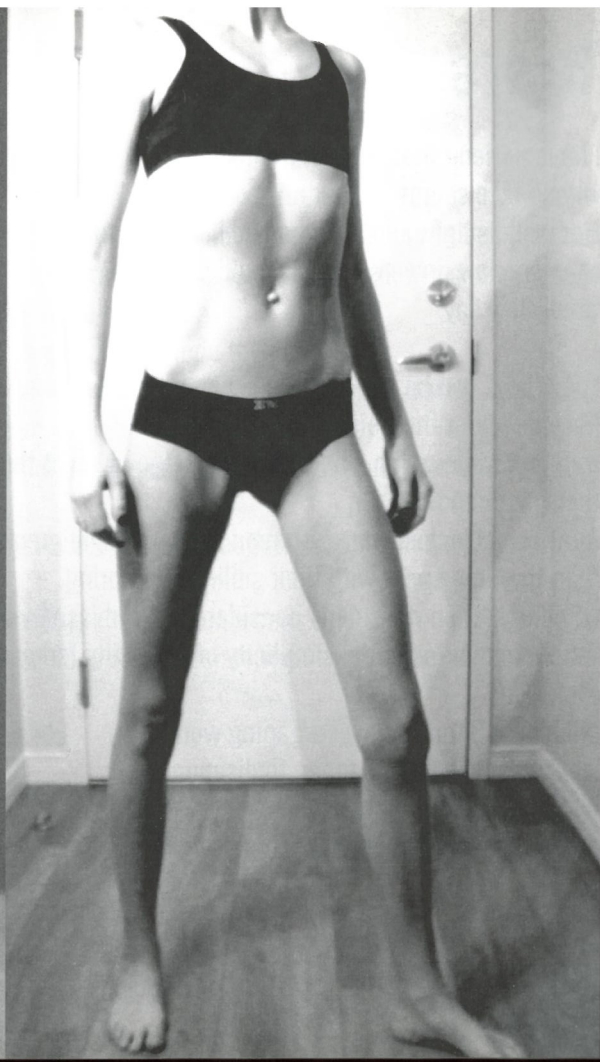


STRIPPED





WIRED



P
R
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D

Tears

I have a friend that seldom weeps
whose face seems to bear no sadness.
Her walk is light and springy, and her smile radiant
as every new university girl should be
Or so they say.

The "they" can be anybody. I've seen it be everybody.
Parents under the guise of greater wisdom,
as if it were found in a book of knowledge given at the birth of
their first child.
Aunts and Uncles, whose opinion are seemingly greater
than the time spent with their sibling's offspring.
Of course, then it's simply considered an unbiased view.
Teachers that insist the simplicity of a passing fad or need for
attention,
sticking a Band-Aid over a gaping wound.
Or Counsellors who happen to disappear
just as quickly as your savings.
Their messages are all the same.

Smiling, excitable, beautiful,
the picturesque campus to your back,
strength and independence wrapped, bow-tied, and left
on your residence bed, ready for pick-up.
Checking off the steps to your success story one by one
leading you to your new life.

The past is not to be spoken of as time fades the scars.
But there they are still, only visible in a certain light.
The kind of light that casts the darkest shadows
and those shadows creep and follow
and if left ignored wrap their cold dark fingers tight
and take hold, razor sharp.
And I've tried to do what I can.
I've taken the blades and hid them.
Opened doors that have been long locked,
while trying to slam others shut.
For to leave my friend alone in this darkness
is the last thing I would do.

And when she cannot be, I must be strong.
But I also grow tired.
Opening, slamming and defending, comforting, soothing,
and bandaging.
This is not about me, but somehow our stories
have intertwined.

Her ghosts are my ghosts.
And sometimes if I look in the mirror
I find her shadows at my back.
And my mind swirls and panic grips
but together we must fight this still taboo evil.
As her life, and mine, cannot be written
as victories and defeats.
Her ways are not clear black and white.
This illness is the dreary grey of the slushy streets,
the murky water made even more clouded by society.
And in the day the sun does not illuminate, but cover.
The world's very own mask, pushing down the pain

and sweeping the truth away to be hidden.
In the daylight we can all pretend, we can all ignore.
We can laugh and sing and play along, choosing to be blind
to the fact the sometimes her laugh is forced, her smile
strained, her voice trembling.
The bright rays seem to guide the way
giving the false security of knowing what lies ahead.
Until that sun, and that knowing, slips away.
And then the darkness comes, and the path is nowhere to be
found.
But I will figure out the path, both hers and mine.
I must.
• For I have a friend that seldom weeps.
But when she does, her tears are red.

Anonymous



"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."

Helen Keller

Ghostly Nicola

Chuk Odenigbo

Whispers

I became deafened in my twenties; this is a different situation than someone who is born deaf. I wear a hearing aid which gives me some sound but it is not the same as the sounds I remember, and I rely on lipreading most often. People often ask me what I miss most since I lost my hearing. When asked, most people who have become deafened later in life will say they miss listening to music or the radio. While I do miss those things, what I miss most are other sounds which the hearing world takes for granted. I miss the sound of rainfall on a tin roof, a babbling brook, the rustle of fallen leaves underfoot on a fall day. I miss the singing of birds high up in the trees and the gentle purring of a cat laying contently in my lap. But more than any of those things, I miss whispers . . . when a small child whispers a secret meant for just the two of you, a lover whispering sweet nothings in the early morning hours.

Ann Demill

The Well

I'm back down here again
I heard the crack
Then the pain in my chest
And I understood
I knew,
I knew I would be back down here again

No one can hear my cries for help from here
The darkness silences all cries for help
Who would want to help someone who always ends up here?
Ends up back down here again

It's lonely here
Even though you know that there are other wells just like this
With others bellowing into the darkness
But that doesn't make it any easier to be here,
To be back down here again

So I cradle myself like I always do
Hoping for the light again,
Hoping there will be no next time
But knowing that there will be a next time,
Another time that I'll be back down here again

Faria Jafri



In Depth S. Hoag

The Human Pincushion



I wonder what it looks like,
This fantastic dress forever being created just for me,
That I've never seen.

I stand motionless,
Waiting for the next pinprick.
Needles don't bother me,
I am a pincushion after all.

I just wonder, always wonder,
What does the dress look like?
Even as I stretch out my arm for the next needle.

I smile unconcernedly.
I am used to holes, needles, and bruises by now.

Jab.

I flinch internally.
Steeling myself.
Just another pin.

Always there is another pin.
For this dress that I have never seen.
Never will see.
For it isn't real.

I am a human pincushion.
I don't mind needles.

Chrys Seddon

Trapped

I feel like I am trapped in a box!
I can only take one thing out at a time
One day I am smart, another I am beautiful, another kind
But I cannot be all three at once
Because they must all be kept in that box

Sometimes I wish I could break free
And live in a world where I can show
All that makes up who I am
Instead of being seen as just a container
For something more beautiful than the world can see

Wouldn't it be nice if the world could see
The true me?

Sari Gutman

The Chair

Hiss . . . Steam rises all around me as I reach for the shower dial. I step out, hair dripping, and hurriedly grab my robe, assiduously avoiding looking in the mirror. Still, I catch a glimpse of a pale ghost winking out of sight as I turn away. I return to my room and start laying out clothes. This is always an ordeal. Nothing too form fitting, it won't look right. Loose clothes are also out. I would be swallowed alive.

Layers. Layers are good.

Why does the simple act of getting dressed have to be so infernally complicated? Eventually, I come to a decision and, once clothed, can return to the bathroom to do my hair. The mirror is no longer something to be feared, I look like a normal girl. A little on the skinny side perhaps, but not too thin. The mirror does not reveal my secrets—the prerequisite belt wrapped around my waist, keeping my pants in place; the heavily padded push-up bra, giving the illusion of breasts. Necessary items, these, in order that I have a figure resembling that of a healthy young woman. I blow dry my hair as the strains of Peter Gregson's "Terminal" fill my apartment. The mournful sound strikes a particular cord today.

Today is not a good day.

Finally armoured, after a fashion, against the stares of others, I leave for the JDUC.

Clubs Night, or, more accurately, a hell similar to one out of Dante's imagining. Heat strikes, oppressive, humid; a result of no air conditioning, too many bodies. Yes, this was definitely hell. Within moments I am drenched. Internally, I curse my decision, and need, to wear layers. Nevertheless, I force myself to brave the levels of hell, each floor hosting a different form of bedlam. The roar of the masses, all burning, all striving to be heard, is deafening. Yet, within this madness, I find instances of triumph. I find pieces of my identity. Upstairs, huddled in a room that only serves to further insulate the rising

temperature, a group of nerdy guys plays Super Smash Bros 64. I smile, my childhood represented, yet I do not sign up for the Video Game Club. This is a moment of past pleasure only. I keep circling. Without a Virgil of my own to guide me through the maze, I quickly become lost. I am searching for the Shinerama booth. I want to see how my friends are making out in the fund raising department. I like to think my speech the previous week has had an effect, but I know this is just a vanity. Students will get involved or not, I cannot hope to tip the balance.

Where is it?

Becoming slightly frantic to escape the fiery atmosphere, as the air around me is starting to scorch my lungs, I plunge further into the abyss. The ground floor of the JDUC, ringed by so many smiling devils promoting their clubs, is the only level still unexplored. Suddenly, I spot a familiar face. Although I have no Virgil here with me, perhaps a modern day Beatrice will suffice. My former TA, Steph, is excitedly waving at me from across the floor. Skirting the edge of one of the campus religious groups' booths, I make my way to her side. Despite our mutual dampness, and my aversion to people touching me when I am this skinny, we hug. We had somehow become friends over the course of the previous year.

"It's hotter than hell in here!" She laughs, echoing my own thoughts. Knowing she will get the reference, I say, "I wish it was like Dante's Inferno, I mean we kind of are in the last circle, at least then it'd be frozen."

She smiles at my sally, but surprises me by looking around suspiciously and then sneakily handing me a small magazine. I look at it curiously. A small blue square, disability blue, it says only "ABLE" across the front. "What's this?" She winks. "Shhh... I'm technically not supposed to give these out to people, but I think you will find it very interesting. It's a brand new Social Issues Commission Publication on Disability Awareness."

Disability awareness. What does that even mean?

The Chair continued...

A little dubious, I promise her I will read it and get back to her. Seeing my doubt, she says, "No seriously, Rach, just take a look. We are looking for a Chair for this year's publication and I think you'd be perfect." "Alright, alright. I will. I gotta go though, I'm about to die."

With that. I leave.

Back at my place, I open ABLE, that nondescript blue square. Inside, I find myself.

*"One morning I made the mistake of looking at myself naked in the mirror before I showered. My emaciated body looked like a morbid caricature of someone about to die; every rib visible, my stomach concave; a thin veneer of skin wrapped around a trembling skeleton. I wanted to cry. When you find your own body repulsive, you don't rebound so easy...I was so ashamed of myself, I couldn't face anybody...I didn't have a disease, I was a disease." **

I flash back to my shower this morning. This is why I don't look in the mirror. I don't want to count the ribs, see the scars, trace the line of my port. I don't want to be a disease. This person knew me, was me. I had to be a part of ABLE.

I applied for the chair position that night. I have been the Able Chair for two years now.

Rachel Sutherland

* Referring to David Roche's zine "About My Disappearance" reprinted with permission in Able Volume 1.

I LOST MY PHONE!

That's what I say about three or four times a week . . . see my housemates can never understand how it's possible that I lose everything all the time.

And yes. I actually mean, EVERYTHING.

I looked under my bed, in my closet, in my shoes, and even through every single dirty sock in my entire laundry basket . . . then I found the damn phone in the pocket of my Queen's sweater!

Can you believe it?!? Why would it be in there? I finally explained it to a friend . . . see I officially lose my phone three or four times a week but it's actually in a constant state of being lost. You can't lose something if it's still lost from the last time you lost it . . . and that's the story of everything I own.

When I find my phone that just means I briefly know where it is, 'cause it's in my hand, and I'm using it, but in between I never ACTUALLY know where my phone is, you know? Usually, I'll put it somewhere obvious and then hope I find it later but more often than not I just happen to put it somewhere useful like in my backpack . . . later I find it when it rings during class . . . and I think "Hey!!! That's where my

phone is!!! I was looking for it earlier!!!"

And now I've realized I actually never know where any of my stuff is—ever—my wallet could be in my backpack . . . because I usually forget it in there after I use it.

It might be in the pocket of my coat . . . I ALWAYS forget it in there.

And my keys could be in there, too . . . but usually they snuggle their way into other hiding spots like the coat hook, my shoes, the hole in my coat pocket, and occasionally I find them in my hands when I'm unlocking my door!

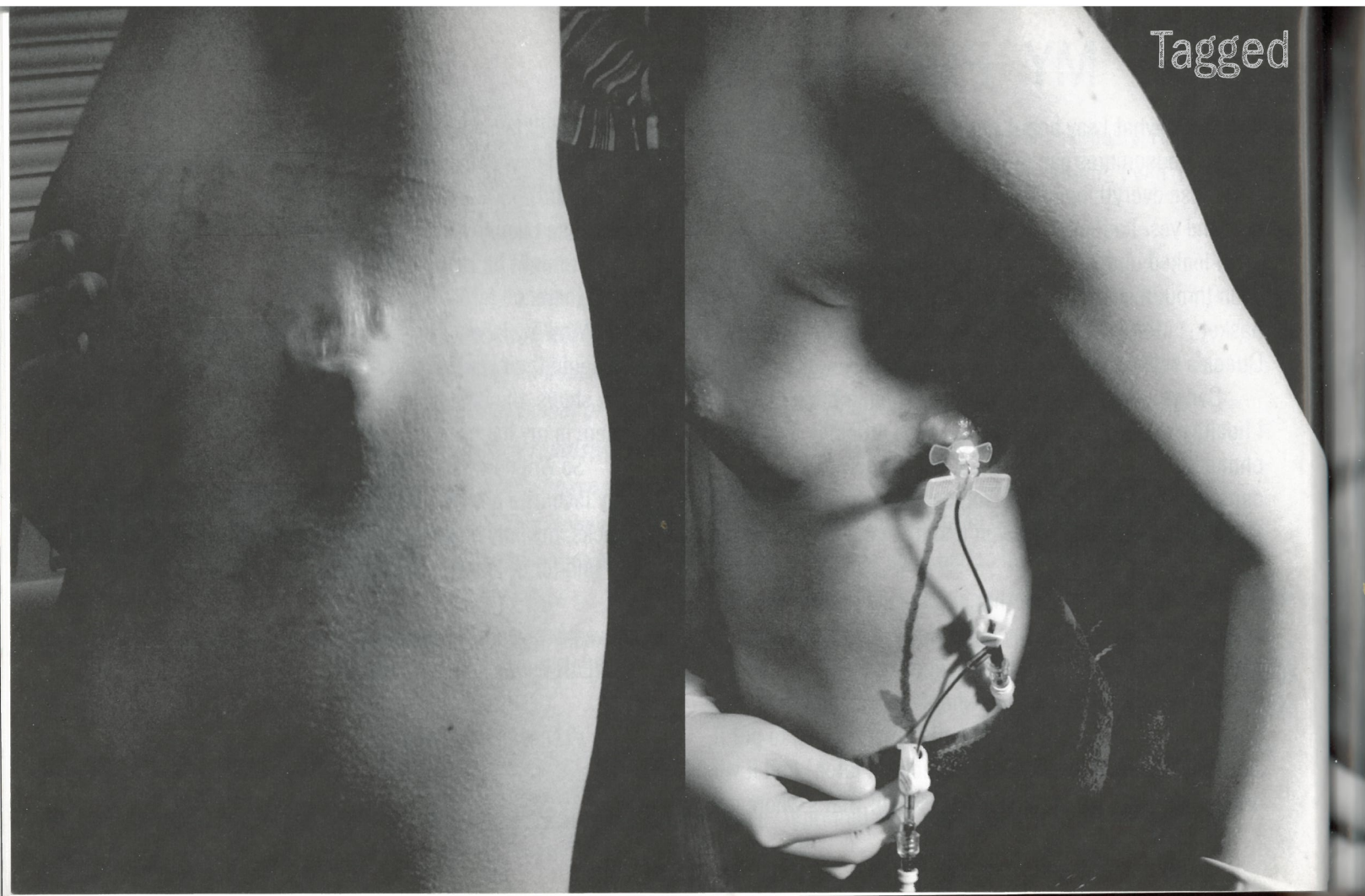
So when I was looking for my phone I found my wallet, my favourite pencil, my face cream, my keys, a couple of socks, my only sharpie, and that damn comb I've been trying to find for at least three weeks. It was a productive weekend.

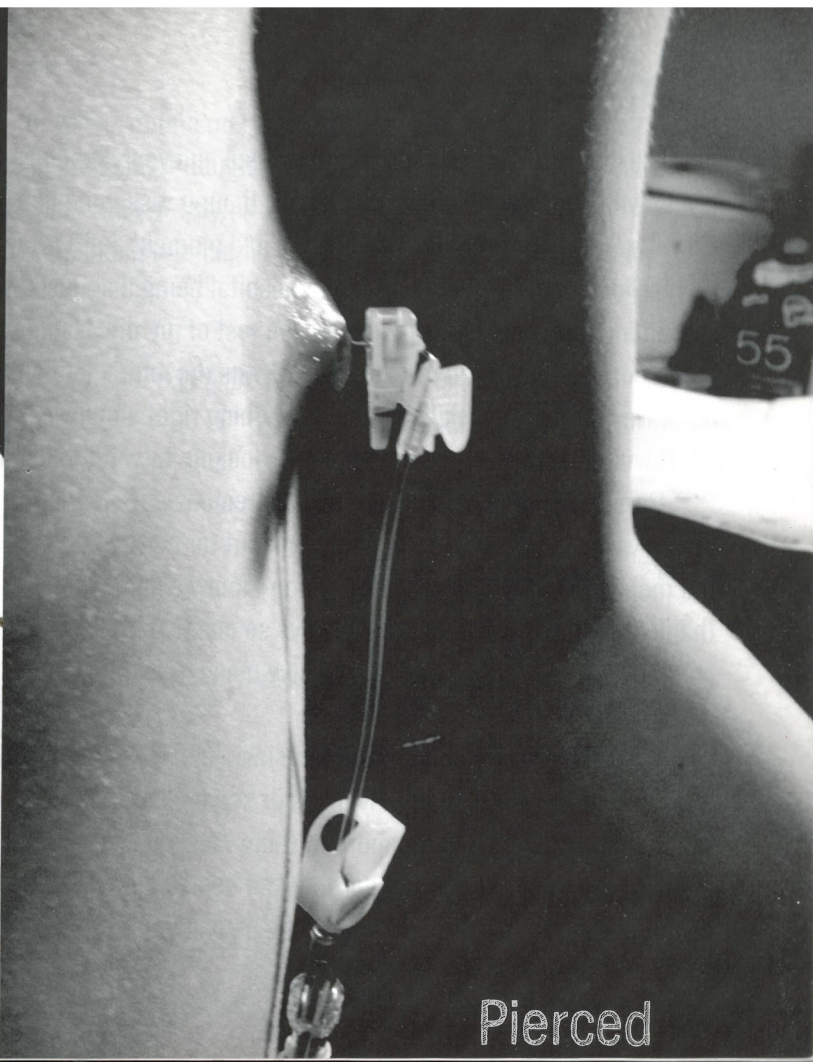
Btw, have you see my phone lying around anywhere? I SWEAR it was just in my pocket . . .

#LDinworkingmemory

Anonymous

Tagged





Pierced

Seizure Free

Looking back, I can't believe it has been one year since my surgery. It seems like it was yesterday and a lifetime ago. Living with epilepsy for a year and a half, though it seemed like longer, really taught me a lot. I learned to be more grateful for what I have, because things can change in a moment, both for good and for bad. One day, I was looking forward to graduating high school, and the next I was in the hospital being diagnosed with a life-changing illness. At the time, I thought it would be something that would be with me for the rest of my life. Living with epilepsy was tough. Though the seizures were uncomfortable, that's not what bothered me the most. It was the unpredictability. I could do everything wrong, stay up late, be super stressed and not have a problem. I could also do everything right and have a seizure. Not knowing and having little control was most difficult of all. Having to cancel on something I was looking forward to because I had a seizure the night before was even more difficult.

During this time, I became really appreciative of my friends. They were always there. Talking to me, skyping me and cheering me up when I had a seizure or taking me out for coffee to distract me. They were willing to chill in my res room when I wasn't in the mood or couldn't go out. I really don't know what I would have done without them. Then there is my family. I think I need to thank them the most. They were always so positive. They always told me things like: this doesn't have to change your life, you can still do everything. I don't know how many times they called the doctor trying to get just the right combination of meds, they never gave up.

A year later, reflecting back on the last year, a weight has been lifted off. I feel like I have so much more freedom. I don't have to worry about carrying my meds or staying out too late. I have become more involved in clubs around campus trying to give back. I think the most important thing I have taken from this experience is perspective—perspective about myself as well as others. Even things that seem horrible can be overcome when you are surrounded by friends and family and if you have a positive attitude. I like to think, that if I can keep a positive attitude when I am having seizures, there is no reason not to always be

positive and live life to the fullest. As well, I have a new empathy for those around me. It is always important to treat those around you with kindness and respect because you never know what people are going through. People who talked to me would often never know if I had a seizure the night before and might think I was just tired or lazy.

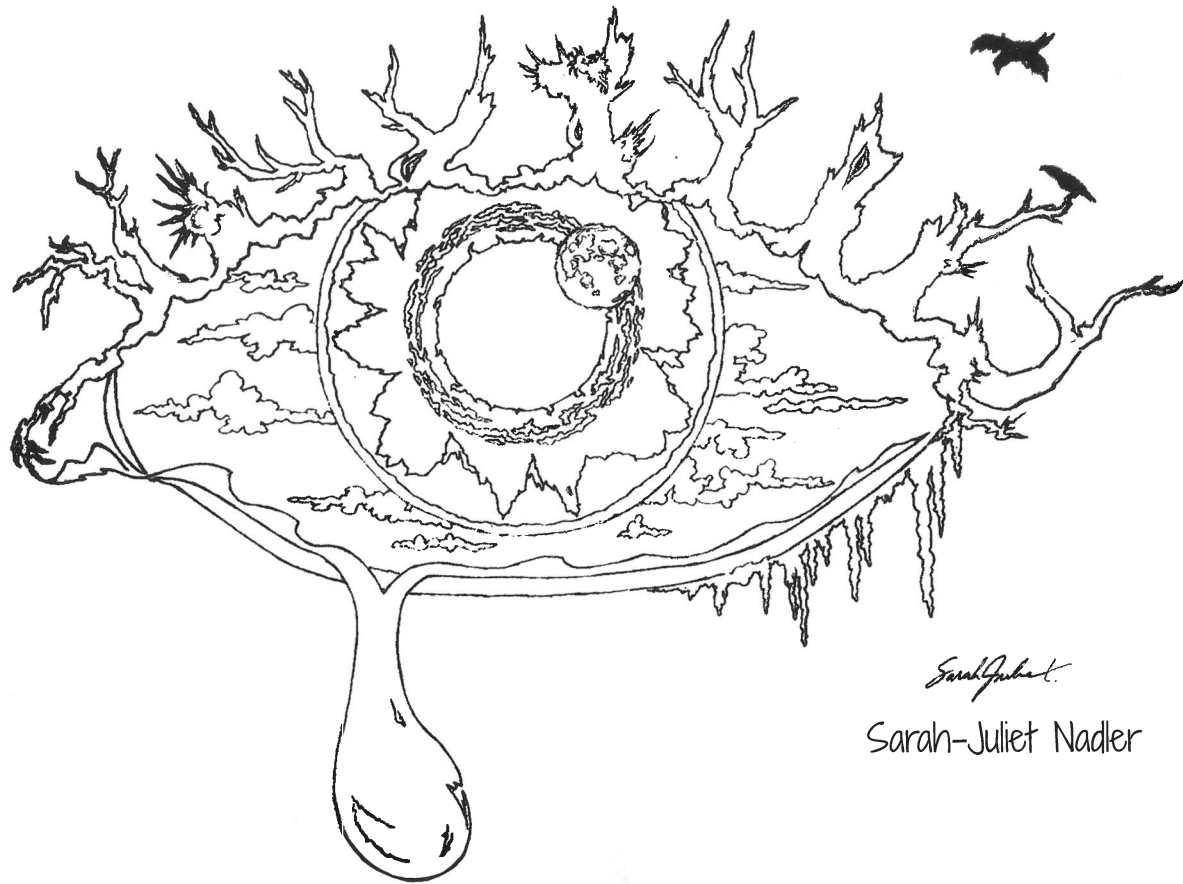
I think the perspective I have gained from this experience is invaluable and though I certainly have missed out on things in the past two years, I would not trade it for anything.

"We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty."

Maya Angelou

Alana Spira

All Things Come To An End



Sarah-Juliet

Sarah-Juliet Nadler

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