



EPISTLE LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Letter from the Editor

Anyone who has ever been “a reader” knows how fundamental that identity is to one’s deeper sense of self. Ever since the very first time I could sound my way out through a story in preschool, I have been a reader, and I bear that label with great pride and comfort, knowing that it is one that will stick with me for life. Even during periods when I do not touch a book for months, too preoccupied with other pursuits to return to my literary refuge, I know that the books are loyal; that the moment I sit down and let myself sink into their world, I will be able to forget all of my other troubles and enjoy the supreme pleasure of getting lost in a book like a conversation with an old friend. I know this because I am, at my core, a reader.

However, for all of the pride I feel at this identity, I have been reflecting more deeply on how I—and many others, I would venture to guess—are sorely lacking in *gratitude* for the privilege it is to consider oneself a reader. When settling down with a novel as well-known to me as my childhood bedroom, I certainly smile fondly at the flood of memories that comes rushing in: being read aloud to by my mother and older sisters, swapping recommendations with my third grade teacher and beaming with happiness when she thought I was up for the challenge of something more complex. But do I ever stop to think about how I really got to be a reader? Do I truly linger on what those hours that my family would spend guiding me through the same picture book, letting me grapple with every word and never wavering in their patience when I struggled? Do I think about what it meant for that third grade teacher to inspire a love of learning in me so strong that I was willing to push myself beyond my comfort zone in pursuit of growth, to encourage me to share my voice with the world?

A teacher can be many different things, but they are known and dear to me by their united effort to open doors for their students, and equip them with the tools to build and expand their own realities. My teachers gave me the biggest gift I can imagine in helping me to be a reader, helping me to understand that that is indeed something to be proud of. While it feels so innate to me that it’s as easy to take for granted as my name, I know that I must honor their commitment to improving the world by letting the *immense* gratitude that I do feel, reflecting on these memories, spur me to action. Every child deserves the opportunity to take on that special title of “reader,” to feel inspired and capable of exploring the world around them with no barriers. And every teacher deserves to feel the weight of their impact and the profound gift that they are putting forth into the world with every lesson. I hope that this inaugural issue of Epistle Literary Magazine can truly serve as this love letter to educators, and inspire readers to take action in supporting literacy efforts and empowering readers everywhere.

Rory Baskin, *Editor-in-Chief*

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Untitled

Pilar Atkins

I was content to go unheard, happy to be unseen; it was safer there than being exposed, having eyes on me.

You could tell. I knew you could, when you saw my eyes spark at a question, or saw my fingers twitch to raise my hand.

You didn't push, didn't press. You followed my lead, let me be slow, and coaxed me to have a voice, at a moment when nothing felt like a more impossible demand.

You were the first step in the longest journey of my life, but you made me feel like I belonged in that classroom, and I will never forget that.

Final Draft

Robbie Sands

In my final year of high school, I had an English teacher whose influence has stayed with me for decades. I struggled in his class, though the shortcomings were mine, not his. Unfinished assignments became quarters marked Incomplete, and the gap between what I should have done and what I actually produced grew wider with each passing term.

Many times, I sat with him in his office. We talked about what was happening in my life—family discord, distractions, the fog that hangs over a teenager who doesn't yet have the tools to untangle his own knots. He listened. He offered perspective. And he spoke about writing not as sudden inspiration, but as the slow weaving of a tapestry—stitch by stitch, line by line. Each stitch might not itself reveal the truth I intended to convey, but with patience, the larger pattern would emerge. His counsel was to trust the work itself, to keep placing stitches even when the design was not yet visible.

By the end of the year, my record still showed an Incomplete. I walked with my class at our graduation ceremony, but the paper in my hand was not a diploma. I told no one. I simply hoped the matter would disappear in the shuffle.

It didn't. Months later, when I began college, the missing transcript surfaced. I was told, in no uncertain terms by my college advisor, that if it was not resolved, I would be academically suspended. At eighteen years old, I had never been more aware of how fragile my future felt.

Desperate, I called to arrange a meeting with my former teacher. He could have dismissed me with a single sentence—"you squandered your chances," "this is no longer my concern," "some lessons must be learned the hard way." Instead, he chose another path. Not indulgence, not leniency, but a kind of steady compassion anchored in standards. He offered me one final chance: to write a term paper that would stand for all the work I had failed to complete. It was a daunting mercy, neither cheap nor easy, but just.

So I set about the task. Over the course of ten days, there was no sudden wellspring of brilliance, only the slow push of effort, sentence by sentence, until a final draft emerged. It was less a breakthrough than the first step in a process that would take years to mature.

But it was enough. I delivered the paper; within days he graded it, converted my Incomplete into a passing mark, and cleared my transcript. I was able to continue my studies without interruption.

What I remember most is not simply the relief of escaping disaster, but the way he handled it. At a time when he had complete leverage over me, he chose to act solely as an educator—demanding real effort, but offering a way forward. In that moment, he modeled what true mentorship requires: the ability to balance rigor with compassion, to see not just who a student is, but who he might be on the path to becoming.

Years later, when I learned of his passing, I regretted not that I lacked the chance to thank him, but that I failed to take it. Gratitude left unspoken became its own burden. It is the lasting reminder I carry: that teachers draw on a

wide toolkit—discipline, patience, fairness, inspiration, and sometimes redemption—and that when their influence shapes our lives, we must tell them so while the window remains open.

The gift of a mentor is not only what they offer in the moment, but how their lessons continue to unfold—truths we spend a lifetime unwrapping, as we grow into the very person their guidance was meant to reach.

The Canon

Lauren Matthews

Shakespeare, Dickens, Bronte, Tarrt

Human nature, broken heart

Jealousy, anger, loyalty, sin

The worlds they create shape the world we are in

Clover

Ruth Beckley

The teacher for this essay, that would be my mother. She taught all her daughters to believe in magic, in luck, in fairies, and the joy of imagination and make believe (which she said wasn't!); how you could make things happen by believing in magic. I think I was a most apt pupil of belief in luck and magic, much more than my two sisters. At least, it seemed that way to me. So it was perfectly natural to me to totally believe that the four-leaf clovers would bring me luck.

The day I found sixteen four-leaf clovers was surely the luckiest day of my life!

It was during the summer holidays, those endless days that seemed to stretch forever to a distant September. Days to be filled with fun in whatever ways we could think of, after our chores were done.

Janet and I often strolled, or bicycled, to the park on these days. Janet was my neighbour and I had known her for as long as I could remember. She was taller than me, plumper too, with short, dark curls and tons of freckles all over her face and arms. She hated her freckles!

Even though I had sisters and we all had our chores, and Janet had only a mother and father and *no* chores, our house was always untidy and hers immaculate. I mean, sometimes you were afraid to do anything except stand in her house and try to look invisible! Janet's mother always dressed her the same way. She kept the house neat, clean and tidy. I dressed the same way. I did my chores—they had to be done; they had to be done quickly (in my opinion) and (barely) pass inspection.

On this particular day, we were strolling along to the park, wondering what other kids we might meet there. Sometimes my older sister was there with her friends and allowed us to hang around with them.

The park was practically empty, and it was hot. We made our way to the swings and tried to cool off a bit by swooshing through the air on them. Even that became too much after a while and we decided to go and sit on the edge of the football field near the tree.

We weren't exactly bored, it was just too hot to do anything else and too early to go home for dinner.

I flung myself down on my stomach and Janet carefully looked for a clean, dry patch of grass to sit where she wouldn't dirty her dress.

I have always liked looking into the grass close up. You can see insects running up and down the stalks, ants with tiny pieces of food in their mouths and, if you're very still, butterflies landing on the clover flowers. I pulled up a stalk of clover and stuck it in my mouth. It always tasted sweet and slightly bitter at the same time. It was then I started looking for four-leaf clovers. I had never found one yet though through all the years of lying in clover patches in the park, but I always looked anyway.

That's when I saw it. Oh gosh! I had to be sure. Sometimes we used to fake them by tearing the leaves in half but this one was whole alright! One, two, three, four! I'd found one! "Hey, Janet! Come over here! I've found a four-leaf

clover!” “Oh, come off it,” she said, “You just tore it.” “No, I didn’t. Honestly! Come and look!” She came over, not really curious, but she didn’t want to call me a liar either.

Sure enough, I’d found one. “Where was it?” she asked. “Right here!” I said. And we both knelt down at the sacred spot and peered at the place which had grown this treasure. “There’s another one!” she said, and plucked it out of the ground. “And look, another!” I said, grabbing it fast before she saw it. Gosh, three four-leaf clovers after all these years! “Perhaps there’s more,” said Janet, careless now of her dress and crawling around on her hands and knees, nose close to the ground. She was practically sniffing for clover, I thought! “Don’t push your luck,” I warned, fairies and leprechauns somewhere in the back of my mind, just as Janet triumphantly snatched another four-leaf clover out of the patch.

Well that did it. Both of us got down to business, minutely examining every single clover in the patch, Time was forgotten as we found one four-leaf clover after another, noses down, tails up.

Gradually, we realized we weren’t collecting any more. We’d exhausted the entire area and I swear to this day if there’d been another single four-leaf clover, Janet and I would have found it.

“Let’s count what we’ve got,” she said. We sat back, crossed our legs and spread our skirts and carefully counted our plunder. Twelve for Janet, sixteen for me. “What’ll we do with them now?” she asked. “Well, let’s not tell anybody where we found them for a start,” I said, “then we can always come back for more when we need some luck; though these should give us an awful lot of luck for a while! I’m going to take mine home and put them in a matchbox, you must never throw away good luck!”

Room 215

Lauren Matthews

She was the first person to point out that I had been pronouncing Maria all wrong.

She was afraid of the sun, and spent the minutes before class removing hats and gloves, and unwrapping scarves, starting out like Miss Havisham, eventually transforming into our whip smart professor.

She was formidable, a true lover of the books she assigned us, pushing us all to participate, analyze, always question.

She had the hint of a Southern drawl and she seemed shy the minute she stopped teaching.

When I heard years later that she had died going into her burning house to save the books she loved so much, I cried.

Untitled

Lauren Matthews

Dr. Myers used to stride into the classroom. You know how some teachers struggle to control the students and some just instantly command respect? She was the latter. I never once heard her raise her voice. We always sat in a circle, so there was nowhere to hide. This was intentional. I looked forward to her class every single time; it was always the best part of my day. After I graduated, a group of us went out to dinner and invited her, and she came! It was like being in a restaurant with a celebrity. The best teachers, like the best coaches, work this kind of magic on our psyches: we strive to be our best selves for them.

Miss Patterson

Ruth Beckley

My teacher Miss Patterson has a way with words

But Miss Patterson is not like other word nerds

She painstakingly chooses her words with care

And truth is the message she loves to bear

With love and with logic Miss Patterson leaves us

The poetry, prose, and debate she weaves us

Coach

Robbie Sands

I was fourteen,
still learning the shape of myself,
speed to match the fleet receivers,
broad enough to shoulder more.

You were already legend,
a small man with a voice that thundered,
and a temper we feared.

On the field, you demanded brutal precision,
but off it, you were a Latin scholar,
a pianist, conductor of choirs and plays,
a man of many callings beyond the whistle and the clipboard.

We learned that fairness was hard truth,
bitter but right.

That respect could be a nod,
what wasn't said as much as what was.

It's all stayed with me,
through that season and all that have followed.

I carry the memory,
measure myself by it still—
a testament that the best mentors endure,
present always.

Beacon

Jennie Miller

We slouched in taverns
where a wayward prince learned honor,
felt the salt of shipwreck
as she guided us through tempests,
and laughed with her at clever wives
who spun their tricks on proud men

Her kindness pulled back the curtains
Her brilliance cast the spotlight
And we remain, to this day, her adoring audience