

DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH

disAbility Service Pride Zine 2026



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The Power of Narrative: Why Disabled Student Stories Matter

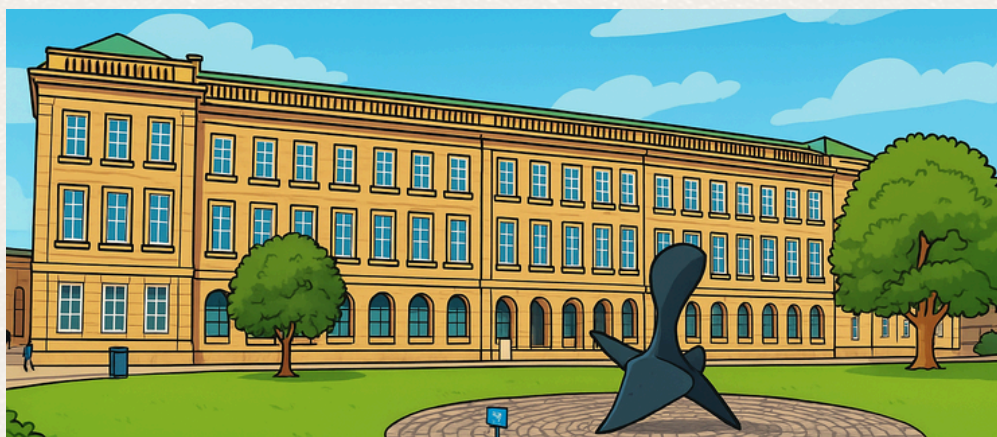
By Declan Treanor

"Data tells us what is happening. Stories tell us why it matters."

Across higher education, universities collect enormous amounts of data on disabled students—registration figures, retention rates, grades, progression, complaints, appeals and accommodation requests. These data are essential, but they are incomplete. They describe trends, not lives.

A student's story reveals something statistics cannot: the emotional, social and educational reality of navigating university with a disability. It explains what it feels like to sit in an inaccessible lecture theatre, to repeatedly explain your disability to different lecturers, to choose between attending class and protecting your health, or to finally experience belonging because one lecturer understood what inclusion meant.

The Trinity Student Stories project recognises that narrative is not simply a way of documenting experiences—it is a methodology for understanding disability and designing better universities. The introduction to the booklet emphasises that talking about disability reduces silence and stigma, helps students feel seen and heard, and strengthens belonging. The project deliberately begins with students' own experiences rather than their diagnoses.



Stories Humanise Disability

A diagnosis explains very little about someone's educational experience.

Two students with ADHD may have completely different barriers.

One may struggle with time management.

Another may excel academically but experience overwhelming sensory overload.

Another may develop anxiety because of repeated misunderstandings with lecturers.

Only their stories reveal these differences.

Narrative shifts disability from being viewed as an individual impairment to understanding the interaction between the student and their environment.

Instead of asking:

"What is wrong with this student?"

we begin asking:

"What happened to this student?"

and ultimately

"What can the university change?"

This represents a movement away from a purely medical model towards a biopsychosocial understanding of disability, reflected throughout the Trinity booklet.



Stories Challenge Assumptions

Stories expose assumptions that policies often overlook.

For example:

"The student isn't attending lectures."

The assumption:

The student lacks motivation.

The story:

The lecture theatre is inaccessible, attendance is physically exhausting, or anxiety makes entering crowded rooms overwhelming.

"The student keeps requesting extensions."

The assumption:

Poor organisation.

The story:

The assessment schedule created four major deadlines in one week while the student was managing chronic illness and multiple hospital appointments.

"The student keeps emailing lecturers."

The assumption:

Demanding behaviour.

The story:

The student has to repeatedly remind staff to implement accommodations already approved.

Stories replace judgement with understanding.



Stories Build Empathy

Research consistently shows that personal narratives are among the most effective ways of reducing stigma and increasing empathy.

Policies change because people understand.

People understand because they hear stories.

As the Trinity Student Stories booklet argues, storytelling validates experiences, builds empathy, creates connection and helps students feel that they belong within the university community.



Stories Create System Change

Individual stories become powerful when patterns emerge.

One story may describe inaccessible assessments.

Another describes inaccessible placements.

Another describes inaccessible teaching.

Collectively they reveal that the problem is not individual students.

The problem is the system.

Narrative therefore becomes evidence.

Rather than isolated anecdotes, dozens of stories become qualitative data identifying recurring institutional barriers

Stories Empower Students

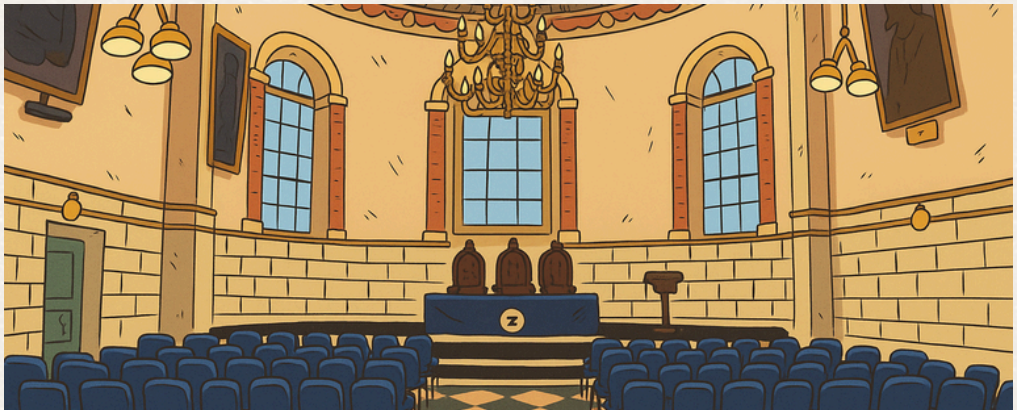
Storytelling is not only for institutions.

It benefits students themselves.

When students tell their stories they often:

- recognise their own resilience
- make sense of difficult experiences
- connect with peers
- reduce feelings of isolation
- develop self-advocacy
- become leaders for future students

Many students report that hearing another disabled student's experience was the first time they realised they were not alone.



Stories Build Belonging

Belonging is rarely created by policy documents.

It is created when students recognise themselves in the experiences of others.

A first-year student reading:

"I struggled too."

or

"I nearly left university."

or

"Things became easier when I asked for support."

can fundamentally change their expectations of university.

Stories communicate possibility.

From Stories to Transformation

The most important lesson from disabled student narratives is that disability is not simply an individual characteristic—it is an interaction between a person and the environment.

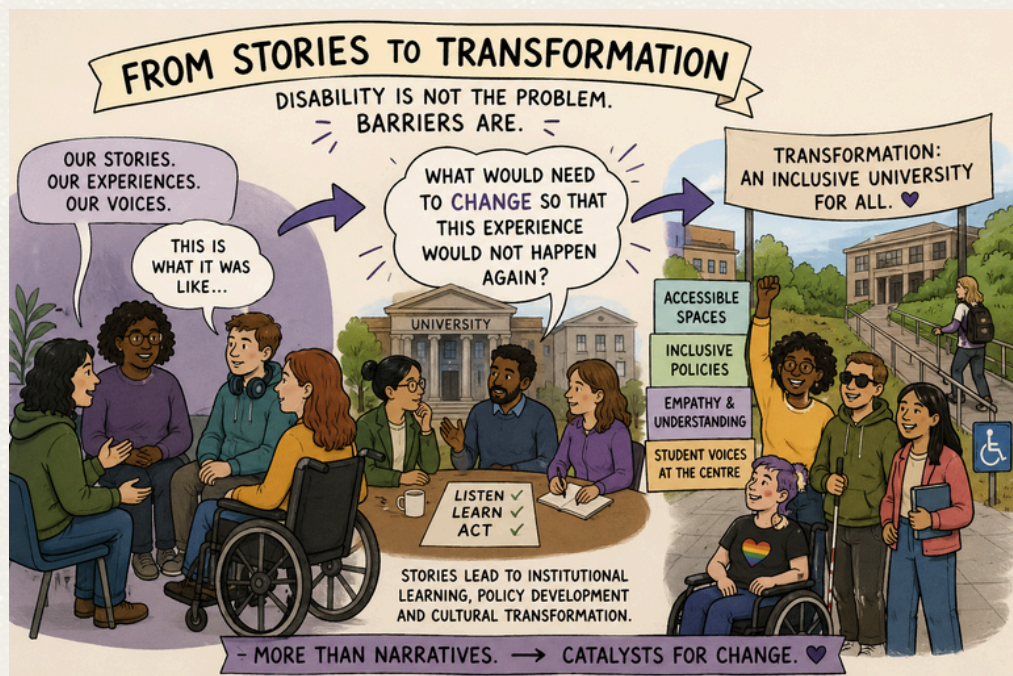
Every story asks the university a simple question:

What would need to change so that this experience would not happen again?

When universities begin asking that question consistently, storytelling moves beyond awareness.

It becomes a mechanism for institutional learning, policy development and cultural transformation.

As the Trinity Student Stories project concludes, these narratives are "more than narratives"; they become catalysts for change, informing policy, encouraging empathy and helping create a university where every student's voice is heard and valued.



The Importance of Disability Pride

The theme for Disability Pride 2026 is
"The World Works Better With Us" (ADA).

Disability Pride month is a celebration of disabled people, disability culture, identity, and community.

Rooted in the disability rights movement, Disability Pride acknowledges the history of activism that has fought for accessibility, equality, and inclusion, while celebrating the creativity, resilience, and contributions of disabled people.

Disability Pride is about being accepted on our own terms. It means disability isn't something to hide or fix. It's part of who we are. Everyone deserves inclusion, rights, and respect, without having to earn them.



Disability Pride Flag 2021 by Ann Magill

Each color stripe has a meaning:

- Red – physical disabilities
- Gold – neurodiversity
- White – invisible disabilities
- Blue – emotional and psychiatric disabilities
- Green – for sensory disabilities, including deafness, blindness and all other sensory disabilities

The faded black background mourning and rage for victims of ableist violence and abuse. The diagonal Bband cuts across the walls and barriers that separate the disabled from normate society, also representing light and creativity cutting through the darkness.

Disability Pride Timeline

1972 Independent Living Movement (California)

Led by disabled activists, the Independent Living Movement promoted autonomy and accessibility.



(Ken Stein)

1977 504 Sit In

Protesters successfully demanded enforcement of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act after 25 days.



(Getty Images)

1990 First Disability Pride Day

Celebrated in Boston,
Massachusetts

Disability rights activists hold historic Pride Day



(teguna media)

1993 Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities established (Ireland)

The Irish Government established the Commission to examine the barriers facing disabled people and recommend reforms.

2005 Disability Act (2005)

The Irish Government established the Commission to examine the barriers facing disabled people and recommend reforms.

2007 Ireland signs the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)

Ireland committed to working towards protecting the human rights of disabled people.

2024 Ireland hosted it's first Disability Pride parade

Dublin celebrated its first Disability Pride Parade in July 2024, marking a historic moment for the disability rights movement.



(Gracemurphy on twitter)

Guilt by Róisín Ní Neachtain

Between the quiet illusions of this forest
I perform into the malachite dark –
the jewelled coarseness of the five trees
at the end of a footprint from the ocean.

The malice of bright dances on the skin
of rock and streams where fish are dying
and small animals choke on the waste of us,
the blaze of self.

I am troubled by the ashen cavities of this place,
the unfinished nests and abandoned burrows.
So I am pale and shallow, unsocked,
and dig my feet into the clay of a grave.

Amphibian ghosts leech onto me,
lap my skin and feed, feed, feed.
I bare my body to them and settle
to ferns who soothe my loss.

There is no fear from this other world.
I am not weak. The flowers do not bleed
and the birds not cry.
There are no starved creatures.

I am not held between the gallows of petals
and the raw tears of soil.
The coneflowers and gayfeathers
fuss and form a shape of a calmer summer.

The small courage of a sickly blossom
rots to an exquisite scent and in its last
life stains the lips of new insects.
The weeds are bold and dazzle blue strangulations.

Rain moistens the bare.
The fire of the sun lingers on
to torment a herd.
A cluster of mating limbs are unashamed.

But I am my own contempt,
I give myself to the heart of this wild thing
from guilt.
Have the flesh from my bones, yellow rose.

Take my weight to your bed.
My soul cannot nurture you.
Make of me a rich dust.



Art by Sadbh Caulfield

Peace at the End of the Journey by Róisín Ní Neachtain

My name is Róisín Ní Neachtain, I am 43. I am autistic but also have multiple other disabilities. I am an award-winning professional artist and writer. I am currently enrolled on the MPhil in Irish Writing. The first time I came to study at Trinity, I was 19. I had just moved to Ireland and one of my doctors thought that being at college would help. Unfortunately, I was far too sick and lasted only two years, switching course after the first year. My time at Trinity was deeply unhappy and traumatic to me. After many arduous years of recovery, at the age of 27, I was delighted to return to study law and political science. I began experiencing symptoms of a major illness very quickly in my first year and was not correctly diagnosed until the beginning of my third year of studies. The consequences of this were disastrous and horrendously embarrassing. My life was upended. I felt truly destroyed. I lost nearly all my friends. My relationship ended badly. I was unable to work. I left college, for the second time, under a cloud. I felt deeply ashamed. I was sure everybody would cast me off as nothing but a failure. I was haunted by the stigma of my disability and circumstances. I could not come to terms with the fact that my big second chance at college and life had ended in such a horrific and deeply cruel way. I had done everything right to get my life back on track and I was here at square one all over again due to an illness I had no control over.

For a long time, I struggled daily with suicidal thoughts. It subsequently took nearly ten years for my symptoms to stabilise and for me to try to rebuild some semblance of a life. I managed to get into UCD and obtained, not without great difficulty, a Masters in Creative Writing. Yet I yearned to return to academic studies. I felt as if I had never had a fair chance to test my academic potential and had spent years looking up college English courses. What if! What if! A couple of years later, I am now nearing the end of my Masters in Irish Writing here. Socially and autistically, being older has made my time easier for me. In every other way, not least because I have juggled work (in the first term) and caring duties alongside struggling with a resurgence of my main disability's symptoms, it has been the most challenging course that I have ever pursued. I have pushed myself to my limits but enjoyed every minute of my studies. The course exceeded all my expectations. The School of English was extremely supportive and accommodating – I have needed an extension for nearly every assignment!!

I had low expectations, given the difficulties in my life, and would have been content and proud to merely pass each module but my results have been good. I am writing this in solidarity with other disabled students. It took me twenty tears and multiple attempts to obtain a college degree. My journey in college education is now at an end and I am finally at peace with my past.



"Watt (Samuel Beckett series)" by Róisín Ní Neachtain

Olive's Impromptu "Pride": The Glorious Adventures of a Gay Amputee

By Martin Duffy

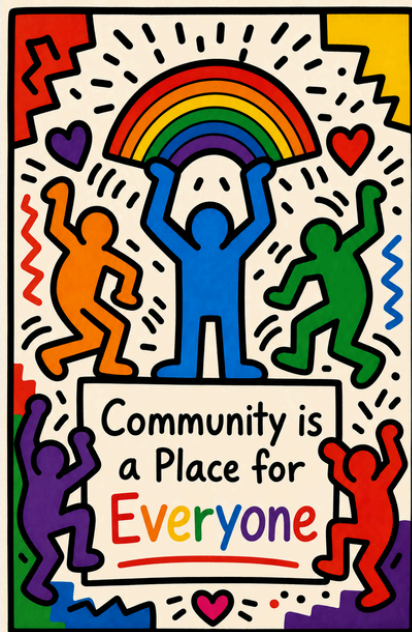
Olive at 60 found herself the last of her generation. For about two hundred-years her ancestors had continuously farmed a little homestead. The first of her clan had most likely been poor tenant-farmers of the great estate. That landed family, the estate owners, scattered across England, had received all of these Donegal lands in the area after 1690 for serving the king in the colonization of Ireland.

These landlords had been posh undertakers for the King, parcelling out the land conquered by the plantation. Many had scarcely set foot in the place but had merely sent court executioners to push the local Irish off their humble fields, and claim them for the plantation undertaker, Sir Ralph Bingley. He in turn, sold many of them on to his trusted lieutenants and re-hired the lucky among the dispossessed, to take on what had once been their own fields, as mere tenant-croppers.

Olive's people had been exactly among those poor dispersed whose only option short of starvation or the boat to America, was to pay rent for the grounds that had once been their ancestral right. They must have fared well or been extraordinary lucky, because by the end of the nineteenth century, the deeds showed that Olive's great, great grandfather had been able to buy back a little farm from the big plot the plantation had stolen from them. She joked that the confiscator's had their revenge on her, for in her mere 20s she had lost a leg in a farming accident. Moreover, as a lesbian, she might well be the last of her family on the land.

Now at 60 she found herself disabled, farming alone, her brother dead, her parents long since lying in the little churchyard by the valley of the Holy Rosary. She momentarily thought with pain of that spot where allegedly a Catholic priest had been hanged for breach of the ban on the public celebration of the Roman mass. Olive was alone struggling with the great workload of agriculture, and with many other inner demons which vexed her as she now entered the Autumn of her life.

Much of the preceding decade had ensconced Olive in fire-fighting to keep the farm viable; to plant, harvest and sell the crops, and keep head above water. She had hardly time to think about herself, preoccupied as she was with the daily strain of tending livestock, milking cows and rescuing birthing sheep. But as she turned 60 it began to become more and more apparent to Olive that she was alone. Far more prescient than that, had been her slow realization, after all these years of putting it off, that she was not like other women.



By Mark Likeman

For all of her adult life, much as she had fought the intrusive thoughts and the impulses, Olive had been troubled with a sense of her difference. She had taken naturally to the farm as a child. She had never wanted anything else. As a little girl she had never asked for dresses or child tea-sets. She took to mucking out the farm animals like a duck to water. She wondered was she a girl at all? For decades she had banished that thought to a distant cupboard which would always take second place to all the other pressing things that needed to be done during the busy year of any farm.

If she needed a reminder of her oddity, she has only to look at the empty stump where once had been her right leg.

And she had needed encouragement to even get half-way round the proposition that she was different from all her neighbours. And luckily that encouragement had come from a most unlikely channel- the new local priest. Olive was a good soul, and she volunteered her time in the charity of the St Vincent de Paul to help the rural poor. And she and the priest were just finishing off for the evening after dispensing all the old clothes of the village. Didn't the young priest say to her, Olive- take time to be yourself and whatever you think it might hurt, be true to yourself.

His words reminded Olive of how she had always felt and looked so awkward in a dress. She remembered an old wag in the village muttering under his breath that she looked more like a man than any farming woman he had ever seen. And she thought of the time she had put an ad in the lonely-hearts club of Ireland's Own magazine, only to be scundered by the vitriolic tirade of homophobic abuse she had received in reply.

But didn't she accept the priest's invitation to have a stout with him in the local tavern to celebrate the success of the jumble sale. And as he sat there with the bright young priest, himself with a smile that would have warmed the frozen heart of the coldest soul in the little parish, Olive felt happier. She momentarily forgot her missing limb and felt a pride in her own sexuality, invisible as it was. And she looked around her and as she chatted with the lovely little chaplain, she realized that was actually dreadfully alone.

And as she bid good night to the little priest, who hugged her goodbye and made her feel so welcomed, she resolved she was not too old to find a life partner to enjoy those Autumn evenings together. She said to herself "this farmer wants a wife" and resolved furthermore that she would make it her earnest business to remedy that want. And arriving home, as she put her keys down in the farmhouse, she could feel the very spirit of her ancestors saying the very same. She hoisted up her prostheses with the big rainbow she had stencilled unto it with pride. And she put on her best dungarees, a cowboy hat and a funky-coloured scarf, and said to herself, "there's life in the old girl yet."



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About the Author

Martin Duffy is a disabled writer specializing in the psychological symptomology of PTSD. He holds awards from Dublin, Oxford, Harvard, and several other institutions including Higher Diplomas in International Relations and Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge. His PhD studies are in Education and can be contacted at mduffy4@tcd.ie

It's not me, it's you by chioma iloduba

'if you don't learn to overcome these issues, you won't learn the skills necessary to become a successful academic' written in an email from a professor in first year.

the doubtful glances from people when i tell them that i—a wheelchair user, shock horror!—hope to become an archaeologist: 'but how would that work?

the shocked faces of strangers who learn that i solo travel for my research: 'how are you able to manage alone?'

the world tends to act like disabled people are limited; but it is able-bodied people who are actually the limited ones:

limited in understanding, imagination, empathy.

with limited ability to just leave disabled people be — masking intrusion with curiosity, forcing our stories to fit into the only two disability paradigms: viral video-worthy inspiration porn or a pitiful strugglefest waiting to be saved by an everyday hero non-consensually tugging at my wheelchair to 'help'

i deserve to be in an academic institution whilst being disabled; not because or in spite of it, but just because. i deserve accommodations that allow me to solo travel, and i deserve to be left alone whilst doing so. i will become an archaeologist, because your limited idea of what one looks like thankfully does not eclipse my passion for the subject — or my good grades ;)

just because disabled people haven't always had a seat at the table in academics doesn't mean that we inherently do not belong. it means that you believe that we don't — sorry, but it's not me, it's you. it's not me who needs to change or adapt, it's you.

and don't worry, i don't need a seat at the table; i already have my own chair.

Contrast

By Anonymous

The integrity of a blood vessel, the narrowing
of bowel, the outline of a cataract
Though exist without, become so clear with
contrast
Without dye flowing through you there is so
much we would never see.

I saw it in your face, no one else seemed to
The terror that can swallow you in rooms like
these
Fear that can follow you for years, lifetimes
even.

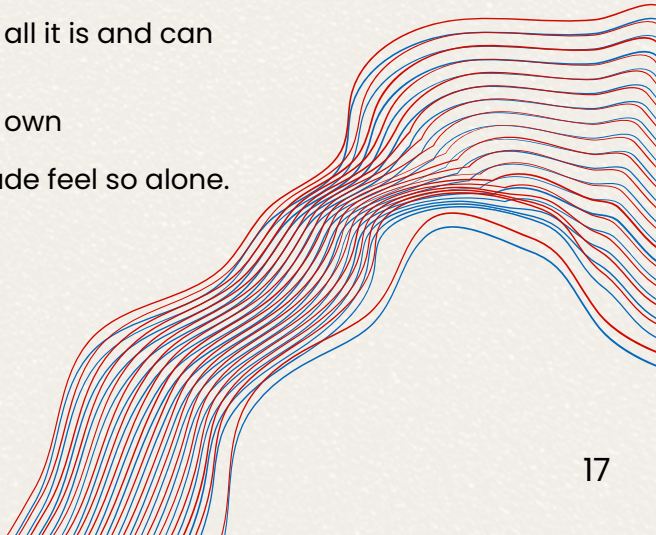
Healthcare workers have 'desensitised' they
say
But that's not what this is.

For months I had prepared for the moment I
would enter a theatre once more,
To be encompassed by the fear I knew so
well
But it did not return.

In contrast to the patient, the student
experience was
Astoundingly neutral
Walking around the wards, around the ICU
Hearing the same words in the same room.

I guess to have felt the fear and emptiness
yourself
Is the only way to see
The devastation of illness for all it is and can
be.

Just as without scrubs of my own
I never understood
Why a child so small was made feel so alone.



The Queer Disabled Peer Group in Trinity College Dublin

In January 2025 the Queer Disabled Peer Group was established in the Trinity disAbility Service. The group was developed due to the research on the overlap of queer and disabled identities. Research has shown that 1 in 3 queer people identify as disabled.

While there are spectacular disability communities and LGBTQ+ communities across Dublin, there has historically been little dedicated space for students who exist at the intersection of both. To help address this gap, the Trinity College Dublin disAbility Service established the Queer Disabled Peer Group a welcoming, student-centred community designed to foster connection, belonging, and mutual support.

More than just a social group, the Queer Disabled Peer Group is built on the principles of community, accessibility, and inclusion. Sessions offer students the chance to connect through informal conversations, creative activities, discussion topics, and peer support. There is no expectation to share personal experiences—students are welcome to participate in whatever way feels most comfortable, whether that means joining discussions, engaging in activities, or simply spending time with others who understand.

Whether you are looking to meet new people, find a supportive community, or simply spend time in a welcoming and understanding environment, the Queer Disabled Peer Group is open to all registered students of the Trinity College Dublin DisAbility Service who identify as LGBTQ+.

If you are a Trinity student and would like to attend these sessions please contact Sadbh at askds@tcd.ie





By Maja Walczak

After I started college, I was struggling, trying to meet impossible standards I set for myself, feeling that I'm so different, weird, and causing inconvenience to so many people that I need to excel academically to prove that I deserve to take up space.

It's such an unkind way to be treating yourself.

So maybe a frog in a bakery is not what most would call "normal", maybe it is weird, but I still think the world is a little bit better now that they're there. It brought me so much joy to make it happen.

A Window Through Time



Photo taken and collage created by Linda Murray

My Third Drawer -

Sat in my bed- I look across my room.
The warm glow of the afternoon sun shines a soft ray of light onto my drawers.

My drawers, pink and white, with mushrooms painted along the side-
Scuff marks from the thousands of times I have walked into it- These repeated hits litter its lower half.

My gaze wanders as I remain still- atop my drawers lay my hats, a Bowie poster, a clay bowl I made in school- and of course my deer skull, James. Pieces of me, from different eras- all the different facets of my life decorate this set of drawers, alongside a thin layer of dust.

Inside the drawers, the chipped shelves hold my belongings, my socks, pyjamas, underwear-

My leotard.

It lies inside the third drawer- abandoned for all intents and purposes, untouched for almost four years now.

Yet- I can't bring myself to throw it out, to donate it- or even sell it for some cash I could spend on something new.

There inside the third drawer lies a piece of myself. It was one I had to leave behind-
one I had to let a thick layer of dust settle over. No matter how much it hurt to let that build.

My third drawer- it held the key to who I once was.
The girl I had to leave behind, she's still there, inside my third drawer.

But I can't return- can't turn light-footed on my toes and become her once more, no- my body won't allow it, as much as it longs to stretch out old cramps and leap free, to take a jump, to see where I'll land- with no fear of the consequences it may leave behind.

These pieces of me, evidence of her- they will have to lie there, in my third drawer- but it's not just there, they lie everywhere, around every corner- staring at me, waiting for me to return- waiting for her.

My hockey stick that lies by the front door, my sports bra's in with my underwear, my hair pins in the bathroom, runners in the press-

They are my drag path. My evidence. Put down not knowing I would never pick them up again-
They serve as a constant reminder of who I once was- what I was once capable of.

But my drag path was never left on purpose.

I dug my goddamn heels, bore my nails into the wooden floor, but it was a battle I wouldn't win.

And so I lay in bed- looking at the path I left behind, my third drawer, my stick by the door, the goddamn dirt left by the discarded boots.

I'm left there with nothing to do but think- about the drag path I have left behind- The path paved by me- the one of every mark I have left in life-

The one that proves I lived- that I still do, despite it all.

By Isabella McMahon Cascella