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By Wendy

Kathleen Ward
College of DuPage

R. Ryan Brandys
College of DuPage

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By Wendy

Kathleen Ward and R. Ryan Brandys

I'll skip the title for now. I guess I could start with my name. Wendy. A poem. By Wendy. God I hate my name. Who has a name like Wendy nowadays anyway? I'm not from the pages of some neverland fairy tale, and I hate hamburgers.

Except the notebook fringe, the page was blank. She could feel the white emptiness silently mocking her.

A poem. I have to write a dumb poem for my creative writing class. It can be about anything, in any form. My options are limitless. What the hell do I write about? These open-ended assignments are so hard.

Her first idea was to follow the typical mainstream of poetry and give it some intense drama, make it a powerful poem about abuse, suicide, or death.

It might grab some attention, but I really haven't experienced any of those things firsthand, so I don't think I could do them justice. I guess that rules out love, too; which doesn't leave a whole lot of subjects.

The closest thing to drama in Wendy's life was stories she'd heard, about mistreatment of her friends. She could use their dramas, for sure, to spice up her poem.

Marion wasn't in college and didn't have health insurance when she found out she was going to have a baby. She couldn't possibly afford a pregnancy. She needed to work, not take time off for maternity leave. At the abortion clinic, protestors swarmed on her. They all thought of her as a murderer. When she wouldn't listen, they treated her like a criminal. No one considered how miserable she felt, walking in there. It was the most difficult choice she ever had to make with her body, and all she got was grief from people too wrapped up in their own judgment to see past the fact that she had no option.

Wendy thought of Liz and her fiancé, Tamir. They were deeply in love, but they had one problem. Liz was Irish and Tamir's Indian family absolutely hated her. They said she was stupid, snobby, and a disgrace to his culture. At the wedding, the groom's side was almost empty, save a few of Tamir's college buddies who didn't care what race she was. Liz had never seen so many empty chairs at a wedding, and in that moment she realized how much her husband was giving up to be with her.

Wendy remembered when Kristin finally got fed up with her parents and the way they loved to push their Catholic beliefs on everyone. Kristen couldn't stand Catholicism or religion in general. Family friends tracked her down and tried to tell her that she was making a terrible decision - and that she was going to hell for it. Everyone at their church looked down on the family because Kristin had abandoned God. Her parents had failed; failed because they tightened their grip and let her slip through God's fingers. And when Kristin stopped going to mass, Mom and Dad kicked her out of the house. They cut her off and pretended she didn't exist. They told her: "We cannot accept your decisions, therefore we cannot accept you." Funny how that was supposed to be a Christian act.

God, look at all these groups of people and their shortsighted judgment. They all think they are doing the right thing. They believe in their hearts that their righteous virtues make them good people, even as they hurt the ones they love. Why can't they see that that's pathetic? More importantly, why can't they realize that they are not good people? Good people don't use the suffering of others to justify their own virtues.

Wendy's friends were gripped by chaos that they didn't invite. They just wanted to live their lives the way they saw fit. Other people didn't like that- it was their family, their friends, and their community. It was their whole culture. And that was the problem: culture had no tolerance. Culture was a collection of individuals who loved to impose judgment on people when they encountered diversity.

It's all so...selfish. People actually get pleasure in the idea that everyone else is wrong. It's fun to punish "wrongdoers" for their actions. They love themselves for it, thinking that they are wholesome, moralistic human beings who are so loving, caring, and optimistic, but really they're just cold and dark. When the puritans burned those Salem witches, they got the same sick satisfaction out of it!

All of the people who hurt Wendy's friends held a common thread that helped to reinforce their idealism. All the right-to-lifers, the God-fearing parishioners, and the Indian fundamentalists peddled and imposed their judgment because of group pride. Wendy realized that it was group pride that bred this kind of closed-minded misbehavior from the very beginning.

They all group together and talk of their superiority. "This is America and America is the best country in the world." "We're Christians, and everyone else is going to Hell." "Heil Hitler and long live the Aryan race." Our history is filled with religions, nations, and races, all proud of their bias, reinforcing it with the group dynamic. The amount

Wendy considered writing her poem about how humanity has a heavy population of closed minded, stupid people. She could describe the dangers of a group that boated superiority, destroying the unique individual. She could write of the little pill of ignorance people took that allowed them to live in bliss while they destroyed those that did not join them. The poem's strength would be its truth. Therefore it was just what she needed to write.

But then Wendy wondered what the response would be to her poem. People wouldn't like it; of course not! It was obvious that no one would want to be told they were ignorant, so nobody would really listen to a lecture like that. No one would actually try to see things from that point of view. Because so many groups of people love their stupidity, getting them to admit this truth would threaten their egos. Their closed-mindedness would be there to coerce them into ignoring her poem. They would judge her! And they would think themselves better for it. Wendy decided it would be a waste to preach her message to a deaf audience.

Forget it. Intelligent people are already open-minded and so they will make wise decisions and avoid stupid people. The masses won't accept this, so there will always be this divide between the morally righteous and the morally right, and sometimes that divide will fall across a family or friends. But the wise will move on with their lives as they see fit. The ignorant, on the other hand, in their happy bliss, will continue to hurt people for their own pleasure, and to escape their own fear. We might be able to look back and criticize the judgments of the past, but we don't see the effects of the judgments we're making now. How can we expect to change our future if the cycle will continue? People are just too stupid to learn.

Wendy started to write a poem about trees in the winter.