

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 46
Number 1 *Fall 2023*

Article 70

Fall 12-1-2023

And This Is How I Felt

Alexa Solonenko
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr>

Recommended Citation

Solonenko, Alexa (2023) "And This Is How I Felt," *The Prairie Light Review*. Vol. 46: No. 1, Article 70.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol46/iss1/70>

This Artwork is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact orenick@cod.edu.

Sometimes when I contemplate my childhood I get a sense of dread rushing through my grown-up, full-figured body. It must be the same dread that I felt at an after-basketball team dinner when I pulled out a calorie tracking book just to make sure the slice of pepperoni pizza the waiter slapped on my plate was Weight Watchers approved. Or the same dread I felt in the Von Maur dressing room getting fitted for an “adult bra” by a random employee who had never seen a girl so young having to get professionally fitted for underwire. Now that I think about it, I still haven’t forgiven my grandmother for that day, even if she was just trying to help.

The more I let the outside world influence me and take charge of me, the more I began to see what they all saw. I looked in the mirror every morning after putting on my Catholic school uniform and I would pull and tug at the fabric draping my front side so it didn’t cling so much; a habit I still haven’t let go of. My obsession with altering my clothing quickly snowballed into wearing up to 5 high-impact sports bras at any single time. The goal was to make myself appear as flat on every side of my body as humanly possible. Only middle school Mia would look up to the storybook character Flat Stanley as an inspiration. I shake my head as I type this because, when I close my eyes, I can still feel the scabs that would develop under my arms from where the elastic from the undergarments would dig and drag against my flesh. My parents started to beg for me to take them off when it was bedtime but I would put up such a fight that we usually would compromise with only wearing two sports bras over one of my dad’s Carhartt t-shirts so it would create a barrier between me and the nylon torture chambers. The scarring eventually got so bad that in the seventh grade, a doctor at Good Samaritan hospital questioned my family about any physical abuse that might be occurring in the household. No, it was just a product of me and my insecurities. I would rather constrict myself so much with seven layers of clothing than be seen with my natural curves.

I cannot seem to put a finger on the exact moment it all changed for me. It must have been the culture shock of transitioning from a private elementary school to a public high school that made me realize how important being different was. Instead of trying to blend into a crowd that didn’t even treat me with any respect, it was finally my chance to be whomever I dreamed of as an emotionally suffering middle schooler. My dad was generous enough to lend me money just before freshman year to start a new wardrobe... with the promise of throwing away any restricting undergarments. And for a while, I loved whom I was developing into. But, it was not without its challenges. Even in high school, I would often come across a scenario or a comment brought by either a peer or a family member that transported me right back to the little girl crying into her stuffed animals. And, I would be lying if I said all of those insecurities are behind me as a 24-year-old woman writing this paper. In fact, most of those insecurities that

other people planted are still inside of my mind somewhere. The real challenge is to not allow any water to nourish those plants.

I look back at photos of little Mia and can’t help but tear up a little. An always smiling mouth with soulful eyes gleams back at me. The water that forms in my ducts gathers quickly as I think about the world of hurt projected onto her perfect little mind. I would protect that little girl from every danger in the world and fill her mind with love and hope and... I pause at the thought and chuckle as a flashback of me hesitating to get out of my car earlier today in fear that the “Maxxinistas” in the TJ Maxx parking lot would point and laugh at me springs into my head. The reality of it all is that no matter how much time and therapy has passed, I will always be the girl getting pushed into the mud at recess and being sent to a weight loss summer camp across the country to try to stop the bullying from her peers. She still lives inside of me but now that I’m almost at the age that the prefrontal cortex stops developing, I realize that while I cannot prevent people from expressing their opinions, I can control how I react to them. Only taking in uplifting and positive energy from others and choosing to leave negativity behind is just one of many ways I have decided to navigate my life. One would say that’s easier said than done and I would have to wholeheartedly agree. But if I didn’t at least try, I would be letting down my inner child—just like everybody else once did.

And This Is How I Felt, Photograph

—Alexa Solonenko

