

# *A Note to the Reader*

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OS24



I was born on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993 in a hospital a couple blocks from a vine-covered house on Oak Ridge Ave. That house is my home, tucked away in Summit, New Jersey. I grow and live in this town. My friends and family travel in and out of the town borders, and I do as well. Its just when I come back, I never feel like I have left. It is a constant, a never changing place of shelter. I was given my name in the hospital, but my character in that house.

My name is Elizabeth Reisen. I never used to call myself that: "Elizabeth." My parents gave me that name. Well, actually my oldest sister, Julia, did. She decided my future after that. Who knew one sentence from a 7 year old could do so much. I am forever grateful to my parents for choosing that name and not her other suggestion: Ariel after the Disney Princess. But, nevertheless, Julia named me and even though I am happy not to be named Ariel, Elizabeth always seemed so proper, so poised. When I was a competitive gymnast I felt like an Elizabeth, but that's really it. Besides that, it never seemed to fit. I guess it sets a good impression. In my experience anyway, it does with adults. Once I introduce myself as Elizabeth I am known as that, I am recalled as that. That word, that name, triggers an image or a story or a relationship. One word can do so much and at least with me, I like to leave an impression. I like to leave them with something; hopefully it is more than merely my name.

Oxbow was the first time I didn't use Elizabeth. I used Liz; a name my friends have called me since I was little, but I was never fully known as. Basically everyone but my teachers and family called me Liz. I like that. I like having the two personalities with the two different generations. I am remembered as two different people. I am more than one, in fact. I firmly believe that each person you meet becomes a part of you. They make up your personality and being. Therefore, I am not one person. I am not just Liz or Elizabeth, but I am my mother, my father, my neighbors, my classmates, my siblings and every stranger I seem to encounter along the way. I am the world. I am the population. At least I want to be.

I think that's how I am and will be remembered: through my connections. I plan to meet everyone I can. By simply shaking another's hand, I am now a part of him or her, and they are a part of me. The handshake is a moment in time. A moment that is now apart of history. We created a story. That story may be forgotten the next day or told at a wedding twenty years later. It could spark a smile or create a tear. I think that that is what our lives as human are made of: little moments, memories that create a life, and the people to go along with it.

If this happens, if I can accomplish the seemingly impossible task of meeting and greeting the world, at least a little bit, I can fully become a part of this world. I can be come a part of others and live on throughout the generations. I can create history, become timeless, a classic. That's how I want to be remembered. Not just as one that was there and now isn't. I want to be here, forever, at least in hearts and minds. Through every second of everyday by many in the world. I am selfish in that way.

I am not there yet, but I will be. One day.

That's where I started with this project. With that idea of, how are we remembered? How am I remembered? How do I want to be remembered? That is why I decided to reflect on my past and my family through the written word. I have weak long-term memory and I do not remember much from my childhood. Little still flutters through my head, but for some reason, the rest of the movie has washed out. It's almost like Alzheimer's, but not quite. This is where my project is now; reflecting on those past experiences and memories.

I am seeing things I did not see before and trying to recall why I am I. What made me choose the life I am living and where I shall go from here. Before I can travel back, however, I must focus on the present and what is going on in my world now.

Physically putting a pen to paper has become a dead practice. Yet, it may be one of the most personal and memorable acts one can make for another person or for even him or herself. Its emotional, to say the least, and I think the flow from head to hand can spark ideas you didn't even know yourself. At least, that's what happened with me. I decided to sit down and write. I wrote about those that matter. Mainly my immediate blood family. They have had the strongest affects on my life. I plan to write more. Maybe to everyone I know. But for now, just the main characters.

My family is changing. Instead of 5 people living in a house, getting sicker of each other by the second, we are spread out all over the country. Charlotte, my middle sister is in Jordan, experiencing the revolutions in the Middle East. She is becoming a part of history. She is becoming a part of the world. Julia is in New York, not too far but growing distant; growing up. And then there is me. At Home. Everyday. Trying to contact them. They keep growing, getting better, and becoming something more. They keep leaving me behind to grow, to learn, to find a place in this world and they are doing a marvelous job at it.

I miss them most when they're right next to me. Right after they have gotten home from another worldly quest. There, right there. I can touch that one red curl hanging in front of her face, or the many freckles tickling their nose. But their minds are back in Thailand, or back in Portland, with the girl that they taught English too or making an 8-course meal for 5. While they go off, I am here, wishing that I could be doing what they are doing. I am jealous. But it is more than that. I am jealous of what they get to do, but not of whom they are becoming. They just keep changing. I think I just miss them. I just want them to stop changing.

They are different, but the same. Charlotte is the "perfect child." That was the joke in my family. But in that joke lies a grain of truth. She kind of is the perfect child. The perfect sister, daughter, student, being. She can do no wrong in the eyes of my parents. Even when she wants to do something they aren't so fond of, just her sense of wanderlust and charisma bring a smile to their faces. That all started at Oxbow. She came back different; better, so much surer of herself. It was amazing to see and I didn't realize it until now but that was the wedge in our relationship. I didn't know who she was anymore. She became Charlotte 2.0 and I was still Elizabeth, the original, waiting for my sister to come home. It was an odd feeling, one I am still trying to name, trying to diagnose.

That does not mean I don't love her. I love her too much. I crave her approval and yearn for her blessing. I want to impress her and Julia more than anyone else. They are my superheroes, the Goddesses of my own little world. They are impeccable and as I watch them grow and make their own decisions, ones that maybe I would not choose, I fight myself. My inner child wants to tag along, go along with what ever they say and do and my other side, my more adult side, wants to stay and make a new path with my own ideas and morals. It's a give and take. It's a complete tug-of-war between myself.

This is how I feel now. When thinking of her I see her physical appearance. I see the red wavy hair and the fair pale skin. I see her great smile and perfect complexion. I see the long delicate fingernails and wide feet. I see her, but then a dark wave appears. Her

physical appearance is covered by thoughts of disapproval and disjointedness. I am writing this to stop that wave, to make it disappear, to only see the beauty in herself.

Julia is a different story. She broke my parents in. Mom and dad weren't surprised after the first couple of shocks she gave them. She was the rebel to look up to. The one full of adventure while Charlotte followed the not so typical path that my parents laid out. At least, that's how I see it. She has the wanderlust, but she goes through it in a bit of a crazed and silly way. But that's what makes her Julia. She is a bit of hipster with full on Manhattan glam mixed right in. Yet, she is stubborn. More stubborn than anyone else in the family. She is proud of what she believes in and I commend her for that. I always preach to my mother about how I am proud that I do not give up, it's just hard for me to see Julia shoot me down when I do or do not want to do something, when I have my own opinions. I just want her to be okay with me having my own opinions. Please do not fight me on it.

There is a good side to this however. Julia pushes me. I love that she pushes me. She supports me in things I would never think of. She wanted me to start my own blog, she loved how interested I became in my writing and she loves what I am doing at Oxbow. At least it comes off that way. It feels amazing to have that support. More than Mom and Dad's. I know they will always support me, but Julia and Charlotte do not have too. And it's really nice to know that they do.

Even though we have our differences, our own personalities, we get along great. We push each other up and bring each other down. It is a complete give and take and we bring out the good in each other, along with the bad, but I think that's natural. We are sisters. We are family and friends and through that there will be fights and disapproval, but always a laugh somewhere in the middle. I love my sisters more than anyone else in the world. As a child I would wonder why other families were not like mine. I could not even imagine not talking to my sisters everyday or having a bad relationship with them. My older sisters definitely spoiled me when it comes to our relationship.

They are simply the best.

My parents support our relationship. It is because of them that we are so close. They support us in everything we choose to do. As long as we have reason for it and as long as it is within their realm of reason. That's where we butt heads sometimes. Our idea of a "realm of reason" is very different. Well, my mother more than my father.

My father is a gentle man. When he gets mad, he gets mad! But that's rare. He is a funny and adventures old soul. He is very much like his father, my grandfather. They have the same baldhead, the same smile wrinkles, and the same wispy lips. I am seeing him become my grandfather. It both scares and excites me.

I see him growing old. I have these thoughts. What if he dies before my wedding? What if he develops cancer like Eddy, my grandfather? I don't know how I would take it, how I would handle it. If anything wrong happened, I am scared I am going to run. I think that is why I am doing this project. To never run. To never abandon him, like I know he will to me, one day. I want to be there. I want to help and in the state I am in I can't do that.

I tell him more than anyone else in the family. I think its because he always has something reasonable to say. Our personalities mesh, almost as if he has groomed me to talk to him. I grew up watching my friend's dads go off to business trips or only see their children on weekends, but my father was always there. I would come home after school and slam into his arms. I would stay there for a couple seconds, feeling happy, feeling safe. I can't wait to hug him. I can't wait too see him.

My dad is different than my mom, a different story, another tale, another life. Yet when I think of him I have to stop myself from thinking of her. They are connected and I am the ultimate combination of each. I am a mix of personality and appearance. I have my father's nose, but my mother's stubbornness.

My mother is an embarrassing, strong-willed fool. We have a complex past, just like any other teenage girl and her mom. It's common practice now to fight with my mother. Almost a ritual I must go through to become an adult. I can slightly remember when my mother and I became enemies. I see it like an old Western film; her on one side of the dining room table and me at the other, screaming our heads off. The guns in our holsters ready to fire. It's scary in a sort, how similar we are, how stubborn we are. Whenever I tell people about her I say the same thing: I have the speech down pat. I go on and on about how fantastic she is and how I get my best traits from her and how much I love her. I do love her, very much. Probably more than I am aware of. But fantastic? Best traits? I have never really thought of it. The speech was supposed to be impressive. To show all of her friends what a literate and perfect child her daughter is. It was to make my mother proud. I think I do, but at the same time, she created a liar out of her own daughter.

I don't think I have ever fully explained her, at least not right. The words have never seemed to really work for her, I mean my words have never really worked for my mother. I have such a clear image of my mother in my head. She is almost invincible in that picture: her curly hair blowing in the wind. And that's how I saw her as a child. She has kept watch over me for almost two decades. Making sure I turned out right, making sure I make meaning to my life.

But, she has almost groomed me for her meaning. I am afraid of her in a sort. To share my own opinions with her. Well, on certain topics. She doesn't understand how her actions affect me. I feel like I am the mother. That I should be shaking my finger in her face and reprimanding her. But it's not her, it's not solely her fault. It is mine to. But she needs to understand. She needs to see that is not just me. I am not the only problem in our equation. I am just a variable. It is the both of us and the both of us need to start over. Starting now.

We need to breathe, to take a step back and realize we could have a great relationship. We have it better than most and we both know that. She gave me my best traits and my greatest attributes. She believes in me and I can never stop loving her for that.

My mother definitely gets a beating from me. She is the one that got the worst in this experiment and I just want to make clear: she is the best mom and an amazing friend. She is an inspiration and a heroin in her own right. She is quite a woman and I do not know if she deserves everything I wrote. But they are my feelings, for now at least, and I needed to get them out.

I love my family. I cannot say it enough. They are too good to me and I like to think I may be too good to them sometimes. We are the typical 1950s family with a twist. We fight and argue and laugh and hug just like any family. But we take different paths in life. We are not the 9 to 5 family and I love us for that. We are originals, a new wave of 21<sup>st</sup> century families. I can only hope we spread!

Like I said, I am not a proper person. I mean I had Queen Elizabeth to look up to and that properness I just could not take on, too stiff, too old. I failed my make-believe namesake. But true to my character, the words in this essay are not proper. They are chaotic and lively and colorful and grammatically incorrect. They are true to my form, to

my many characters and personalities. This is one side of me and not the prettiest. I am a happy person. I smile more than I should and I laugh too much. But what can I say? Someone has to spread a little joy in this turbulent world and I happily fill that position in my own world, in my own family.

My name to my family is more than Elizabeth. It has meaning, much more than a four-syllable word. It gives meaning to a human, to a body, to a soul. I am a daughter, a sister and a loving friend. I am more than Elizabeth. I am a Weiss Reisen and I hold that name with pride.