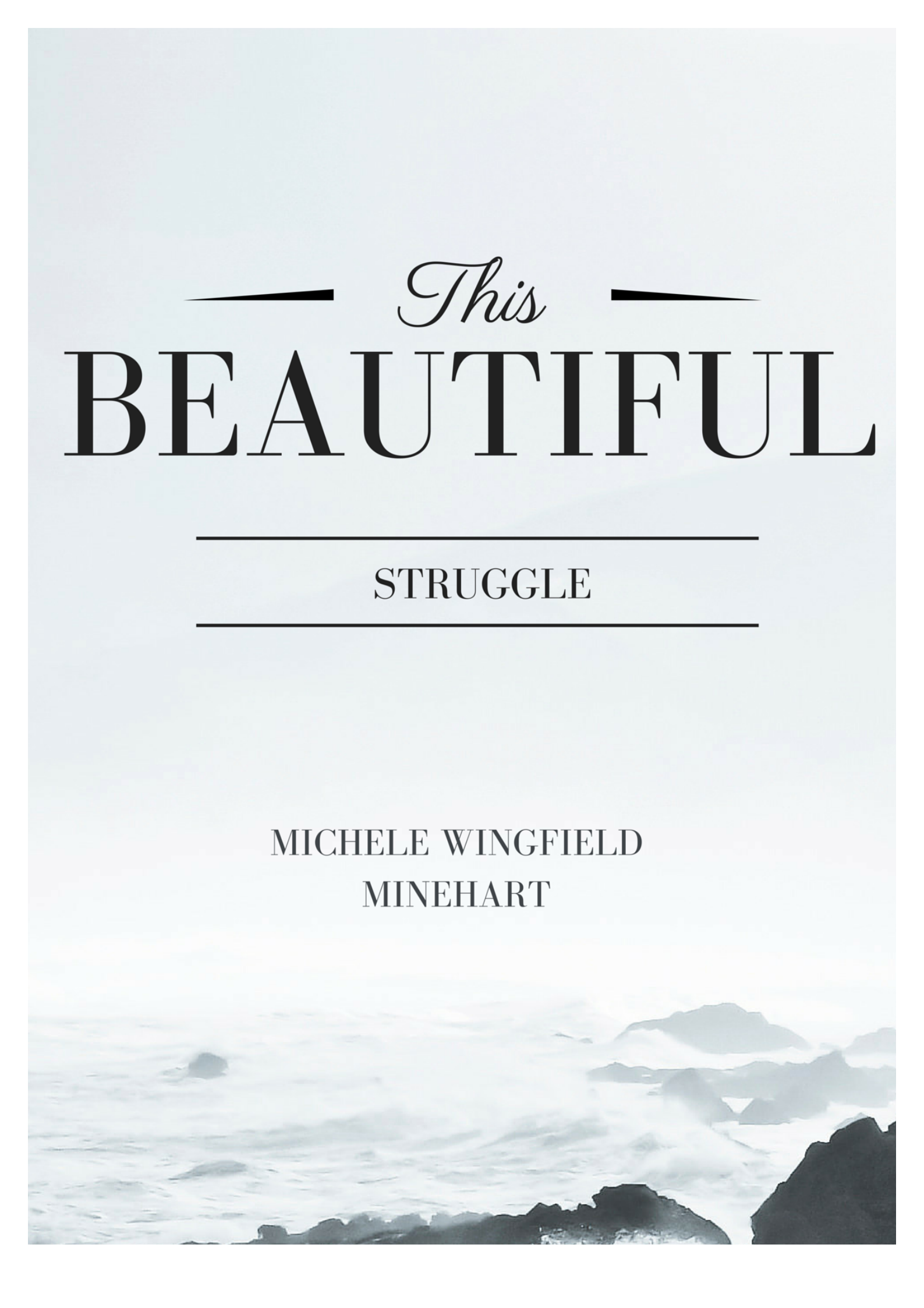




— *This* —

BEAUTIFUL

STRUGGLE

MICHELE WINGFIELD
MINEHART

This Beautiful Struggle: 2015

Copyright © 2015 Michele Minehart

All rights are reserved to the author. No part of this ebook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Acknowledgements

As I looked through these essays, which the Great Wisdom of the Internet declared the favorites among the people in 2015, I recognized a theme: people. Your favorite writings were about some of my favorite people. So, this little book-ish thing is for them.

For Christina, and all of the Mineharts

For Henry, and all of my children

For Diane, and all of the Bettingers

For Kristy and all of the JSUMC family

For Abby and all of the ones we left

For Terri and all of the ones who welcomed us home

For my parents, sister, grandparents, cousins and all of those who raised me

And, of course, for JJ.

Contents

Let's All Be Brave	5
Love in Absence	6
Raising Nerds	8
Best Friends	10
A Tribute to the KLM21878.....	12
The Easy Thing to Do	17
Staging Life.....	19
Where's Terri?.....	21
When Hard Things are Good Things	23
The Memory Making Machine.....	25

Let's All Be Brave

You know what's brave?

Showing up. Sometimes that's the bravest thing you can do.

Letting your outsides and your insides match - that's brave. So few people live lives of integrity. (Literally, integrity comes from being *fully integrated*.)

So is stepping on a battlefield on behalf of people you don't know or potentially don't even like.

Loving your son while burying your toddler - that's brave. Excruciatingly brave. It's brave to move home.

It's brave to let your 25-year-old son venture to a South American country with no plan.

Writing a blog post, saying you're lonely - that's brave. One of my bravest friends did that and all of a sudden I realized how safe I was with her.

Admitting to your closest friends that *something isn't right* is brave.

You can be brave to avoid a drink, a party, a person.

You're brave when you love your husband, even when you don't feel like it. Even after he has hurt you.

It's brave to divorce. It's brave to stay.

But you know what's not brave? Calling people a coward. Making a contest out of bravery. One-upping and being condescending. None of those things take guts; they only disguise the cowardice.

To believe that one person's bravery shortchanges another is to believe there's a quantifiable, limited amount of brave in this world. **There isn't.** It's a lie we tell ourselves as we pit ourselves against others. To do so is to live by what [Brene Brown](#) calls Scarcity Culture and it simply isn't true.

May we each do something brave today. Celebrate it. And don't hold it to the measuring stick of another person's brave thing. Instead, celebrate their bravery, too. We can all do brave things.

Love in Absence

September 11, 2001: Chances are, you remember where you were, who you were with and the feelings that arose that morning.

If you're from Upper Sandusky, there's a good chance you can also zero in on October 11, 2001 and where you were that evening. Whose house you visited, the person you called, and how you processed. You recall the first time you spoke to Carol in the following weeks, lacking words but your heart yearning to express the grief. If you're from Upper Sandusky, you can probably recall your thoughts on the missing Homecoming dance that year or the wait at the funeral home.

A group of students from the church gathered in the chapel and when Colleen locked the doors, the floor was covered in tissues. Friends of the family arrived the next evening and found Carol washing dishes, the only thing that made sense at the time. At the funeral service, JJ stood stoically in support of Sarah as she spoke.

I know these stories so closely because they've become a part of me. They're a part of my genome so much that you might surmise I was actually there. Maybe in your mind, you replace the girl who rode in the limo with JJ from the funeral to the cemetery with my face. I often do. I wish it had been my hand he held. I pretend I gave Jim and Carol hugs or coffee or Lambrusco in those awful days.

But I didn't.

Truth be told, I was a junior at OU. I was likely getting ready for the annual Fall Retreat, my biggest challenge of the day being finding a ride on Friday. I was probably at a Bible study that night, talking about "real" things like the inerrancy of scripture. **Honestly, I have no clue what I was doing on the day that would change my all my future Octobers.**

Is it fair to miss someone you never met? To hear these precious stories and long to know the person behind the pictures? It's complete bull that I have never heard that laugh or the way she would shriek when JJ picked on her.

If I'm honest, and perhaps a tad selfish, I'll tell you: I feel completely cheated. Jipped. Shortchanged. **I've never had the joy of Christina in my life, only the sorrow of her absence.**

So today I'm missing something I never knew I had. After 14 years, the latter 12 of which I have been present, I grieve the hole in my family life, the place where she belongs but does not sit.

Love is like that. Perhaps this is when we know our love has reached a depth indescribable by words alone. You take on the story of those you love and make it your own. You allow your love to grow in the absence when the presence isn't available.

Raising Nerds

While at the lake, the young boys contemplated fun things to do that didn't involve screens. Now one to contribute, my eldest offered, "I had math homework. That's fun!"

Part of me is so *very* proud. This will put me in a top-notch nursing home someday. Upscale with organic applesauce and fair trade decaf coffee. Only the best (and most expensive) for this genius' dear mama.

The honest part of me will say it scares me. If you've had a child, sibling or even a dog, I think you know the feeling. A sense of wondering, *will he be included?* As his mother, I love him in a particular and all-encompassing kind of way. I'm aware the rest of the world doesn't have such thick ties. They're free to love their favorite parts and tease the rest, which is terrorizing.

We want our children to be loved and accepted. This is why we buy Under Armor, yes? Those little 10-year-old bodies don't need power-wicking and compression. We're buying a Sense of Enough because we desperately want them to *be* enough. To be included. Whether or not we had a place there, we want our kids to sit at the Cool Kids Table.

Except, I would argue, we actually *don't*. We just think we do. Most of us don't want to make *cool* the ultimate goal, it's simply the most visible one. If other kids are flocking to your kid, then your kid must be someone great, right?

We mistake popularity for connection. I think, perhaps, when we say we hope for our children to be "included" what we really wish is for them to be known and loved for themselves. We want them to have friends who appreciate and honor them. We want them to feel the connection we have with our closest friends, families and partners. (Or that which we wish we had.)

The easiest and most readily available solution is to help them become what is *likable*. There's a profile out there (one, I would say, that is much more rigorous for young girls, but that is for another time). Depending on your context you have to put in the ingredients for the right amount of brains (but not too nerdy), athleticism (in our parts, there's never too much of this), good looks (but not to the point of vanity) and charm. When we succeed at this potion, society readily responds by asking other children to respond to and seek out this prototype.

I absolutely love that I'm raising a little nerd. I think it's cute and inspiring. I don't want him to change - to love math less, to care if his clothes match more. But I do want him to be accepted. To be valued. [True friends](#) will do this, I know.

The easiest thing to do is ask him to be like everyone else. The risk of hurt and rejection seems slender when there's less differentiation. As usual, I'm not in this for the easy- I want [the good](#). But I'll be honest... living my values is hard, especially when my kid's childhood is on the table. What if I'm wrong? What if these values aren't worth it? What if the hurt he feels when he's not popular leads him to other, less desirable ends?

I tell you folks, this parenting gig - it's not for the faint of heart. Especially when you're trying to change the world at the same time.

Best Friends

I met my first best friend, Diane, on the first day of kindergarten. She rode with me on bus #5, and she sat with her big sister, Amy. In a foreshadowing of my future life, I sat down in the seat across the row and turned to them and asked their names. I promptly forgot the names, but I stuck with them when we got to the school, down the stairs and into the room on the left.

Later, probably not the next day, but in my mind it sticks together with the bus ride introduction, I sat by Diane as Mrs. Mouser reviewed addresses. She asked us each our zip code. We were both 43345 and we thought this was a sure sign we were destined to be BFF forever. (Nevermind you, the class was divided by town - all Ridgeway kids went in the AM, the Mt. Victory kids in the PM. Which means, every single kid in our class was a 43345. But, whatever man. Destiny.)

I managed to keep her around through my elementary years, even when the 80s fashions were at their height and I wore biker shorts under everything. We were equally book nerdish-enough to not apologize for spending the weekend reading *The Babysitter's Club* newest release. We would regularly stay the night at one another's house and if on a Saturday, it was a *special* big deal for me because that meant I went to church with her on Sunday. Though I often went with my mom to our own little country church, her church was something else. Their sanctuary - it was huge! I returned to that church years later, on Diane's wedding day, to discover the room seemed so large because I was so small. As a 23-year-old, the sanctuary was quite ordinary.

Diane and I played in the band, rode bikes, and explored the outdoors. I helped her with her chores in the dairy barn. Her dad teased me about anything and remains one of the most hilarious people in my memory. I saw my first living being birthed in their barn, a small calf, which the mother had trouble delivering. John had to help pull it out. Diane's mom asked questions about our days and our friends and when we were disappointed she would sympathize, saying, "aw, bummer!" She would serve us breakfast of fried doughnuts, made from those biscuits in a can, fried in a fry daddy and tossed in a bag of sugar, with a side of whole milk, straight from the cow. Or Tang.

In our teenage years, we parted ways. It was amicable, mostly a result of interests - I took readily to sports and cheerleading and she enjoyed band and music. We ended up in different classes, only seeing one another in Spanish or Advanced Math. She started dating her boyfriend-now-husband and I flitted around social circles as the seasons changed.

In my more typical teenage raucous years, as rumors piled up, Diane never treated me differently. I think it was one of those things where you love a person at a deeper level, not for how they act in a given day or year, but for the true nature of the person you know them to be. Maybe she did roll her eyes or

shake her head, but I never knew. She treated me as a good friend would, and that's what mattered to me.

A friend once told me Diane's mom had called my mom with concern about my behavior. I have no idea if it was true or if my friend made it up. I didn't respond with fear. I felt loved. Someone cared enough to ask. Someone cared enough to call. It was a brave thing that her mom did, if the tale is true. I hope I have that kind of bravery in my soul, that kind of love for another person's child, to call up a fellow mom and say, "hey, is everything okay?"

JJ told me that a boy in Henry's class referred to my son as "his best friend." This is the first time in his nearly seven years of life that the title has been spoken. I'm thankful another person on this planet appreciates him, and even elevates him to a VIP level. The boys trade Lego love and he's coming over to play this week. It's a special time, probably more for me than even him. I'm anticipating many years of sleepovers and pizza nights and baseball games and lego-athons.

There are no guarantees that my kids will develop the kind of relationship that Diane and I shared, one that I revere still today. I realize kids tend to have hot-then-cold patterns to friends and things change over time. I feel it would be a tad bold to ask God to give each of my kids a Diane, though I would be thankful if He did. I do hope my kids each find families full of Bettingers. Good people who hold hands as they pray and work hard and ask us to each pitch in as we visit. People who make you feel loved and accepted and welcomed.

But I can't control their friends, nor even their choice of friendships. I can't dictate them to my choice of friends or families and it wouldn't be fair of me to do so. What I can control is what I offer to the future BFF's of my children. I can fry the (gf) doughnuts and offer to take them to church. I can listen to their stories from school and create space in my household where they feel safe and free and alive and loved. I can care enough to call in those troubling years - not judge or advise, but to listen and to be present.

I want them to have friendships filled with enjoyment and like interests and special secrets. I want to give them a place to keep that friendship safe, alive, and even sacred.

A Tribute to the KLM21878

If you've been around this blog long enough, you know I trust my pal Kristy (formerly known as KLM) and frequently quote her wisdom. So, in honor of her 30-somethingth birthday, I offer a brief history of my first other half. (Because she was around before JJ.)

There was that time when she agreed to help me lead a Good Sex retreat. We woke up with our normal extrovert headaches in a cold building, formerly a granary, and I was snuggled up close. We had a brief chat about her need for personal space. We also discussed the fact that when Jesus sent the legion of demons into the pigs, he had full power and authority to have sent them into antelopes or earthworms instead, but instead He chose pigs. Thus, we shouldn't eat bacon. It was a young and immature decision that we later reversed.

There was the time we went to Ichthus. I took an early crew and she came later with a few other students. The rains that year were so severe that we barely made it into camp. It was pouring rain and muddy. We had packed an air mattress and I put it in the back of my dad's truck instead of a tent because there was limited tent space and I wanted more distance between my body and the mud. Of course, the cap to the air mattress remained in Upper Sandusky. I had a rash on my eye. It was so muddy that the trucks to empty the porta-potties couldn't get in to do their thing, which made our "facilities" a tad disgusting. One student went to use them and had to puke before turning around for much-needed relief. So as Kristy arrived I felt relief to have an ally. She told me that because they couldn't get into the camp the night before she had to take the other students and stay in a hotel. "But don't worry, I slept on the floor." Oh, you mean that dry, warm, floor with running water nearby? *Such a dear.* Did I mention I had a rash on my eye? The irony is that we had made t-shirts for the students (on M.A.S.H. military patterned shirts) that said: R.A.S.H. "Rain and Sweat for Him." We never made another themed t-shirt.

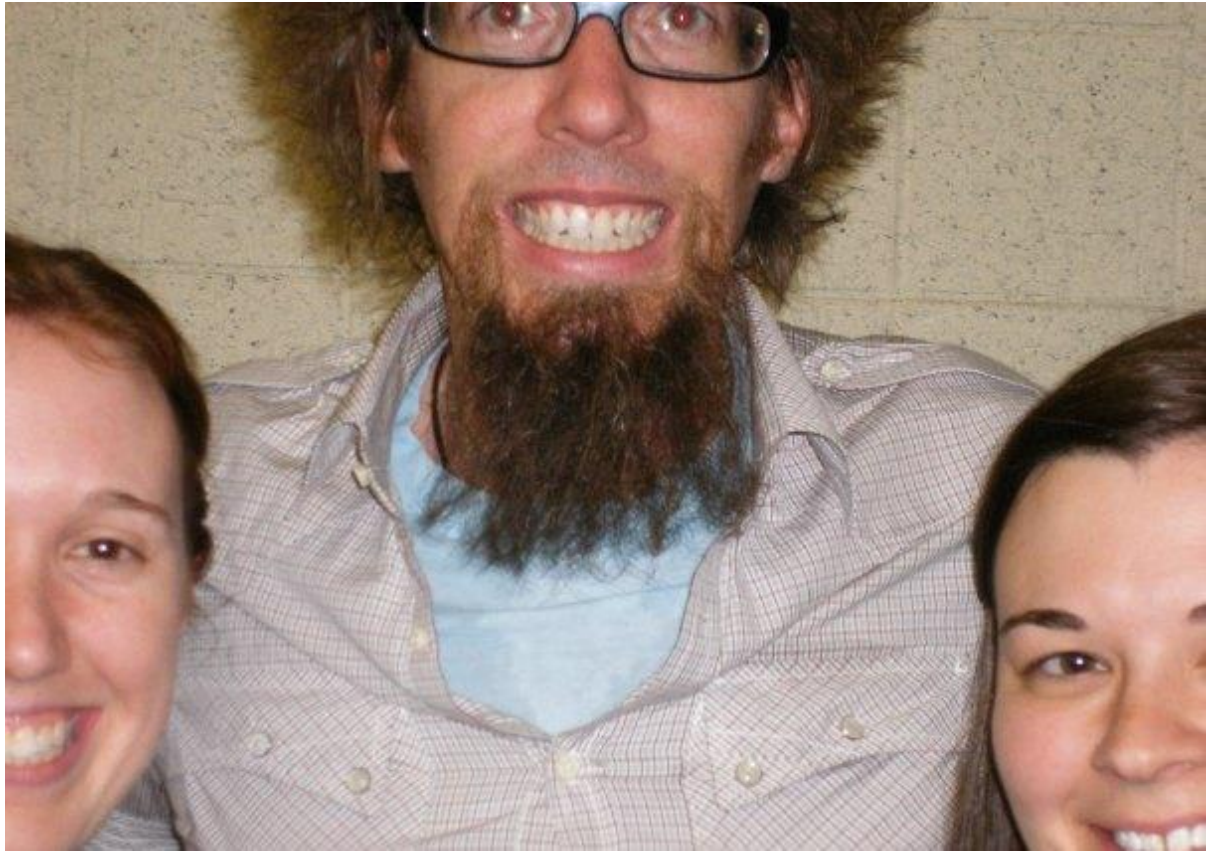
There was that time soon after she got her new job that she was invited to the Holiday Party in Chicago. A room and dinner for 2 was paid for so we went. We shopped the Mile and froze walking over the bridge to get a deep dish pizza. We discovered the Grand Lux Cafe, where we returned each and every time we visited the Windy City (which was a surprisingly high number of times). We went there with friends at a later date to see David Crowder, a weekend gap between when the bleeding began and the procedure that would end the miscarriage.

There was that time we drove all the way to Kings Island to watch David Crowder. We stopped for dinner, meandered through the park without riding a single ride and watched him open the show. We were two of only a few people who stood and sang apologized to our neighbors for "what is about to happen." Then Michael W. Smith came out and we sat down while everyone else bee-

bopped around. We got bored by the third song and drove all the way back home.

There was the time we took a bunch of kids to Lakeside, for the first time. All of the girls lived in a 4-bedroom house with one bathroom. David ("Daaaaaaviddddd") was in charge of the boys. We met every evening to talk about the Yay Gods and the Help Gods of our time there and I heard some of the most mature requests from our students. KLM would log all these things and post them to our Xanga page for parents to follow along. We had purchased a cord that gave us the teeniest bit of internet through her old flip phone cell. She would read the emails and wishes of the parents and we would howl as Sue would break into some sort of drama about DOOL and Holly had to tell us that she was keeping us up on Days of our Lives. I watched one of my students express that he had made a decision to follow Jesus that week. We drove home, exhausted, stopping at Applebee's to drink and swear that we would never return, only to make a list of things we wanted to differently next year. She told me that if we ever leave Lakeside wanting to come back, we're not doing it right, because it takes everything you have to love so strongly all week long. I've adapted that wisdom in many of the ways in which I try to contribute to the church and world.

There was that time we drove to Monica, PA, quite possibly the strangest little city we've ever been to, for one of our final David Crowder escapades. We finally met him and had our picture taken. Since we were traveling just the two of us, we had to hand the camera to a stranger to snap the pic and we were sorely disappointed later.



When a stranger says, "I don't know how to use this kind of camera," a word to the wise: believe him.

It was in Monica that we ate at a shady "Italian" restaurant and when we returned to the hotel room we found we didn't bring an opener for our favorite Chilean red. I think she somehow rigged something with a fork just before I threatened to break open the neck of the bottle. Since then I travel with a wine opener in my toiletries bag, right beside the toothpaste, as a necessity.

There was that time when we decided we were ready to add to our household and we adopted a dog together. We created our own version of a pre-nup and said the dog would go with her when we parted ways. We found the mangy Dinah at the local humane society and loved her boundless energy, even when she ripped up my dining room carpet. After Dinah - and KLM - moved out and JJ moved in, I found the house much too quiet and insisted on getting a dog right away.

There was that time that in the midst of her grief I told her to "find joy." I was the worst kind of Christian and friend. Somehow she both forgave me, without even telling me, and loved me anyway. She is the best kind of Christian and friend.

There was that time that we sat on my couch with a glass of wine and solved the problems of the world. Actually, "that time" was all the time. It was the best way to end the day.

There was that time we decided to just start a Bible study and invited a few other ladies that we adored to come over and gab and talk about angels and Jesus and raising kids and husbands and sex. So we met every week. Even at 8:00 at night.

There was that time the Bible study decided to meet at Los Arcos because something bad had just happened and we drowned our sorrows in a pitcher or... so.... of margaritas. At least one 16-year-old was summoned to retrieve his mother.

There was that time we lost a beloved friend. She had been in the hospital and I stood in the back of the church as the pastor's wife got the call. We needed to get the service over so the pastor could make it to Columbus. KLM was the lay leader up front and we were signing that it was an emergency. I remember her making the ASL sign for "dead" and I said "no" only to find later that indeed, it had been fatal.

There was that time that we went to the weddings of our "kids." We sat together at Slim's and giggled like school girls until his mother came down the aisle and then we sobbed like babies 80% in pure joy at watching this young life grow up and 20% in sorrow that the days of that young life, and our precious time with him, were long past.

There was that time that I made a half-hearted comment about starting a book club, which our friend Jill took seriously. Suddenly this time she and I met with 4 other women to talk about books and babies and life and food became a highlight of my month. I had never been in a book club before - I barely knew what one was - and yet we found ourselves in the [world's best](#).

KLM hasn't taught me everything I know, but she's taught me the best of what I know. I seek her opinion on the things that require deep thought. Of course, I give her advance notice because she doesn't like me to spring it on her, but she comes back with wise, gracious and hilarious perspective.

As I've mentioned before, I rarely *rarely* suggest products or things to make your life better. Instead, let me advertise friends like this. **They exist.** Seek them out, treasure them and remember to text them back. Because they will become one of your most precious commodities.

May you know someone of great wisdom, humor and forgiveness. May they sharpen your dullness and soften your pointy-ness. May they save you from yourself more than once and may they accompany you through the darkest and brightest places in life. And may they still love you when you post it on the interwebs.

The Easy Thing to Do

Wheels touched down on Dayton soil last night late, thus now it's time I leave behind my palm trees, fruity drinks and the only effort of trying to finish a novel before the end of the trip. Now we hit the ground running. We walked in at 1 am last night to half packed boxes, zero groceries and a list of questions for a realtor the size of my arm. My head hit the pillow as I was thinking, "shit just got REAL."

We returned to frustration. Stress. Change. Goodbyes and hello-agains. And do you know what the easiest thing to do is? **Doubt.**

Did we make the right decision? Will we be as happy? Is this what we're "supposed" to do?

Our culture simply doesn't embrace the fact that [hard things can be good things](#) and walking against that current takes more energy than I imagined possible.

The easiest thing in the world you can do is nothing at all. Of course it's easier for us to stay than go. Of course it's easier for us to remain in our house than move to a new one. But by staying the same, we're never afforded the opportunity for growth that change brings about.

On the cusp of change, bracing for the fall, our minds crave sameness. [Homeostasis](#). Doubt is our mind's way of returning us to what is known.

Yet we're not called to live based on what we know, but rather *that for which we hope*. And not the "gee, it'd be nice" hope. The Hebrew word for hope carries a connotation of "waiting." Something that is not, yet will be. We will never arrive at hope revealed when we keep returning to what we know - that is a thread in the story of the people of God time after time after time.

Someone much smarter than me said **the opposite of faith is not doubt - it's certainty**. Knowing. The thing that keeps us from walking into our hope-full reality is what we already know to be true and our fear of leaving it. Our fear that this new thing won't be as good as our current thing.

Perhaps this is why God's repeated message - over and over and over, beyond any other commandment, warning or promise - is "do not fear." He knows our limited minds, our troubled hearts and reminds us that living with hope isn't always knowing, it's trusting.

It's easy to doubt. It's easy to stay. It's easy to avoid change. But I suppose that if I had to choose between an easy life and a life filled with daily hope in a future that surpasses my understanding, even at the risk of disappointment, I'd choose a life of hopefulness any day.

May we each choose a life of hope over ease today.

Staging Life

It's been a whirlwind of activity around here for the past month, getting the house ready to sell. I long for the good ol' days when you simply put a sign in the front yard. Nowadays so much more is involved. (I blame HGTV for 98% of it. Can we all just acknowledge that we're setting the standards a tad high?) We worked hard on the place, have a wonderful house to offer and found an excellent agent. We have reason to believe this will sell very, very quickly.

Let's take a moment of appreciation and look at this [beautiful piece of property](#).



But that is not the point. No one really cares about the details of real estate transactions. Yet this is why you keep coming back to read my silly words, because I find deeper meaning in real estate. *It's a gift.* (Ha! A curse, really.)

Folks in these parts are into *staging* their homes for selling purposes. Apparently this is not just a thing on TV, but it really happens. My realtor actually employs stagers to come into my already-nice home and make it even more inviting. They were here for less than 2 hours pushing couches around and stacking books. JJ and I sat down the night we took pictures and vowed to "stage" our next home when we moved in because it looks so gorgeous right now. With [curtains](#)! And it's clean! **Forget "live like you were dying." *Decorate like you're moving, I say.***

These ladies helped put on the finishing touches. I was a pretty easy case for them because the *real* work came a month before, when I invited my friend Abby over to lend her expertise. Ok, actually I may have frantically texted her when I had peeled all the wallpaper off our bathroom and had zero plan for what color to paint it. The next day she arrived, feeling under the weather, but with her color wheel and notebook.

We walked our entire house. We noted which rooms needed fresh paint, which hardware needed replaced. *For the love of heaven, Michele, go buy some*

curtains. She didn't say it that way, but she should have. *Take down these pieces, put up those*. Art. Oh, the art. I need people in my life who love and find good art. Even Ikea "art". I'm in total love with what we found for \$40 and it's so *us*.

Then, after the sweaty work was done, she came back. *Let's hang these pieces here and those there*. She brought boxes - boxes! - of her own stuff to hang on my naked walls. She didn't haphazardly hang them based on the obnoxiously large screws already in the wall - she placed them because of things like lines, and where your eyes move about the room, and natural light.

Abby presented me a vision for my home. *This is what it could be, Michele*. **She saw the beauty of what we already had and enhanced it with a few changes**. Updates. While what we had was good, she gave us something better to consider.

Friends, this is how the prophetic Church could (and perhaps should?) operate. We don't have to be a life-in-crisis place in the world. People might be quite content with their furniture arranged around the peripheral of the walls, but that's because they never thought to turn the couch a different way. Perhaps people are content with their going-to-work, baseball-coaching, grocery-getting lives, but perhaps they've never thought to arrange their lives in such a way that those very same "couches" suddenly provide more beauty. A teacher once told me, *it's not what you do, it's what you do with what you do*.

May we become people who help others stage their lives, not just for the selling - at the point of crisis or major decision - but for the living. For the *enjoyment* of it, all of the days. **May we help others invite beauty in to their homes and their lives**.

And may we also become people who seek that from others. I cannot imagine what my home would look like had I not asked for Abby's color wheel (and then admitted that I actually just wanted her to pick out all the colors). **May we surround ourselves with people who live beautifully and share their wisdom**. May we allow them into our homes and lives and give them freedom to make suggestions, not because they have it perfectly figured out but because they're willing to try some rearranging with us.

Where's Terri?

Terri saved me more than once already. We've been in our new/old town for just over a month, but the number of times I've left her office full of gratitude is greater than the number of times I've went to Walmart.

The most recent occasion for my visit to Terri's corner office was my upcoming mortgage payment. These new houses - well, they need paid for. Which required me knowing the amount of my monthly payment, along with finding a way to get money into and out of the checking account that would pay it. And if we could make all this happen in a way that repeated itself without so much effort, double word score. So I slumped into Terri's office to admit I had indeed lost the passwords to make my online banking come alive AND I couldn't find the payment books the bank had just sent. (Banking is hard. And so is moving.)

And then, she fixed it. Zim, zam, zoom, everything worked. I signed my name. She picked up the phone. Magically, all things banking-related worked again. *How do real people do this?* I wondered aloud.

How do real adults keep passwords and mortgages and school registrations and apply to see new doctors and salvage hearing aids left in the rain and read aloud to their children and potty train? And some of them - they even WORK. ALL YEAR 'ROUND. How do they do this and not loose their ever-loving minds?

It turns out that not just banking is hard. Or moving. Adulting, my friends, is terrible. *Terrible!* I'm not sure why this is a thing. Who decided we all needed to "become responsible" and "take care of ourselves" and "become productive members of society"? I'd like to talk to that person. I'd like to hire them to keep my calendar straight. And also, potty train the baby. This is going terribly as well.

Sometimes I look around and try to find the Terri's of the rest of my life. *Who around here is going to make this easier for me?* People like Terri have spoiled me. Now, I'm put off by people who aren't trying to make my life easier. Like the woman at our former doctor's office who wouldn't let me email a form to the office but instead insisted I mail the hard copy *with a stamp*. (Add "buying stamps" to the list of hard things adults do. This task derails me every time.) And don't tell me the office "doesn't use email." They do all their doctoring on ipads and laptops.

And where is The Terri at the school? If I suddenly go missing - after checking the laundry room - it would be best to look under the pile of 37 pink and green forms that the school requires. Per child. I could be buried alive. One person was so kind to point out that this is going to be my August activity for the next 14 years of my life. Times four. Can we please get a Terri in this office who will make things work electronically, so that all 62 people who need my cell phone number "in case of emergency" can simply pull it off the database?

I need a Terri everywhere. Someone who makes the day work just an eensy bit better. People who love their job, no matter what it is, enough - or so much - that it makes life better for others: these are my people. Like last week: I drove through Starbucks. The barista cheered for me when I made my selection. This. **This needs to happen more.** Cheers and helpfulness. Not forms and stamps.

Go, my friends. Be a Terri. Make some magic happen for someone. Make life a little better. Cheer, help and encourage.

When Hard Things are Good Things

JJ and I have an amazing opportunity in front of us. We get to move home, close to family, where he can teach in the local schools, as he had hoped those years ago when he decided to change careers. We're excited - only as the stars perfectly aligned did this become a reality. **This is a good thing.** Yet, it is a hard thing.

It's hard to leave. My friend dropped by with chocolate - and later with cilantro - when she knew I was struggling. I have to *leave* thoughtful people like this! It's totally unfair. Our beloved school is only a Troy campus. Our church family. Our small group. My yoga studio. My work.

It's hard to pack. We're painting, de-cluttering and staging a house to put on the market with 4 nosy young children. This isn't just hard, it's nearly impossible.

It's hard to find a new home. The size of our family makes us a tad needy in the space department. The size of our income makes us a tad needy in the budget department. And now that I've been surrounded with these delightful people who know about beautiful things, I want all of the beautiful things. In fact, I just hung up curtains in my bedroom tonight. DO YOU KNOW HOW FINISHED A ROOM CAN FEEL WITH A SET OF CURTAINS? People, this is valuable information that needs to be shared. Buy all the curtains! Even the cheap ones from IKEA that need hemmed! Hang them on an inexpensive IKEA rod and do a happy dance at the beauty of a properly clothed window!

I digress. Back to the hard things. (Although, cutting in a straight line to hem curtains is HARD. For me.)

Part of me, in my early morning festering of woe, wanted to throw in the towel. Should JJ rescind? We could just stay. We can be in a house, with a yard, right here. (WITH BEAUTIFUL CURTAINS, let's not forget.) Perhaps we made the wrong decision. *This is too hard.* If it were good, it would be easy, right? Things would happen with rainbows and butterflies and the occasional unicorn. Prices would drop, water softeners would be included in the price and the next 3 months would consist of mimosas with the ladies I love most. That's how we know when we're doing the right, the best, the good thing. Right?

Where did we come up with such a philosophy of life? Why do we believe once a decision starts to cost us something, we're doing it wrong? If it's hard, it's also bad? These are terrible guides into life. **Everything in my life that is worth anything to me has come with a cost.** Being married, mothering children, often even my work- they all tend to be hard. But they are *good*. Beautiful, even. They're my best offerings to my world. If I took steps away every time it gets a bit challenging, I would be halfway around the world by now, drinking Italian wine and reading old books by the sea. But that's not good, it's just easy.

So my mantra now is *good things can be hard things*. They're not mutually exclusive. The Easy Button that Staples wants to sell us only rescues us from buying printing supplies. If we start using it with the rest of life, it could end up quite boring. It's only through engaging challenges that we find out it's true worth.

The Memory Making Machine

Of growing up at home, I remember:

- Playing dolls in the living room while my mother worked (the shop was basically the front porch at that time). I set my doll on top of the kerosene heater and it went up in flames. She put out the fire. The doll went into the trash.
- Hours spent playing outside, just my sister and I. We climbed the huge farm gas tanks behind the barn. The little one was there first, a silver tank. We pretended it was a horse and named it Silver. Then this HUGE one arrived (I believe for diesel). It was also silver, but that name was taken, so the mammoth "horse" was named Goldie. These two horses lived just yonder of Kitty Peak, a small pile of dirt where one of our barn cats birthed her kittens.
- Convincing our friend Katie that Gummie Bears lived in our front tree.
- Spending entire weekends on the couch, reading.

Of family vacations, I remember:

- The long drives and finishing my homework for a week in the car on the way down.
- The time my mom forgot her purse under the bench at the bus stop in Pigeon Forge and my dad sprinted back to the hotel to find it.
- Spending lunchtime each day in Puerto Vallarta watching the timeshare salesman attempt another deal. We said it was more entertaining than our usual *The Young & The Restless* lunchtime show.
- Every time we left the country, someone thought my sister and I were twins. Even despite the hair color, height, eye color and general facial dissimilarities.... twins?
- Learning to ski in Cumberland. Don said I couldn't get back in the boat until I got up on skis. I got up the next try. (I subsequently got bored of the boat pulling me around and spent the follow up trips to Cumberland curled up in the front of the boat with a book. That's my idea of vacation.)

Of time with my grandparents, I remember:

- Grandma letting us pick out 3 kinds of cereal for our 3-day stay.

- Riding to the lake and fighting about who got to ride "on the hump" while we listened to the Oldsmobile song on repeat. (Which was in a tape player, so it was the old rewind, stop, listen, rewind some more, stop, listen, rewind, stop, *To Far!*, Fast Forward, *Oh Just Stop Here*, method.)
- When Rebecca put on some of grandma's make-up and it was burning her face and we had to go to the neighbor, Jenny's house to find grandma so she could tell us to wash it off with Pond's Cold Cream.
- Playing Hide the Thimble.
- Grandma Cella's homemade waffles. (I'm noticing a breakfast food trend in my memories.)
- Going camping and playing on the playground. I fell through the huge hole in the middle where you climb up and down and it knocked the wind out of me. I cried. A lot. I think this is why I hate camping.

These are a sampling of my memories, what comes to mind first. There are more, of course, but I don't want to bore you with the non-poignant parts of my 35 years on this earth. For some reason, (we can probably blame [Inside Out](#), though this has been brewing for some time) I've been pondering the ways in which memories are made. It's probably because the past month has been spent doing one of two things: moving or vacationing.

I appreciate our culture's sentiment at wanting to value the time with people we love over material things. A quick scan of Pinterest will give you all the wall hangings (our generation's version of the cross-stitched pillow) with sayings about making memories, not money. I say to this, *Cheers!* I'm in wholehearted agreement.

Yet something about the approach is amiss. These memories we wish to make seem a bit contrived. Forced. Our culture's general approach at Making Memories Not Money is to spend money as an attempt to buy a few memories. We go on this trip. We try that excursion. We bring home the t-shirt, the stuffed doll and the photo of us making the 9000 foot drop. And we ask the children their favorite part and it's doing the monkey bars in the play area that looks exactly like our smallest city park.

Ask my small group, I'm all about "creating space" for the magic to happen. Slowing down, providing opportunity, [the pause in the middle](#). If we don't prioritize time with family and friends, these memories will probably never exist.

Creating space and buying the all-inclusive package¹, however, are two different things. The problem with going into an event with the hope of Making

¹ I just went on an all-inclusive vacation. It was delightful. This is not a statement of all expensive things are bad.

Memories is that you're ultimately buying a product. You fork out the \$72.95 and spend the time, and now you want the memories. *Remember when? And how we?*

Memories aren't made with purchases. They aren't even created in the Big Events. They're not created in the rushing through of the outing, making sure to have "family day" and "date night" and hashtagging the Instagrams appropriately².

Actual memories are formed when we're fully present to the moment, not by the moment encompassing all attributes of perfection. The lighting doesn't have to be right. We rarely catch it on camera. And if we ask our kids, chances are the memories will rarely involve what we think.

The only thing I remember about Disney World was my complete disappointment with Cinderella's castle (a hallway? seriously?!) and the fact that my sister did not want to ride Space Mountain and it was a long line, so we didn't. That's what I took away from the Most Magical Place on Earth.

But the rest of the trip to Florida? I remember riding my grandparents' 3-wheeled bicycles around and around the park they lived. I remember shuffle board. I remember sitting on their make-shift porch with strings of bright lights around the canopy. I remember watching Hee-Haw and Green Acres with complete confusion.

I'm not sure how do this memory-making thing right. I know my kids will make their own memories of our time, no matter what we provide. I simply hope that I don't live under the guise that because we went to All of the Places and Did All of the Things and Bought All of the T-shirts (<- that will never happen, I'm too cheap), that their memories will be Big and Amazing and Wow.

Perhaps that's the goal? Remembering what memories are and what they do. It's not a competition. At the end of our life, we won't be sitting around comparing vacation stories and passport stamps. We won't recall itineraries of our vacations, the things planned and lived. We'll remember the people we spent them with and how they made us feel.

² I have done all of these things. No blame. They are not bad things.