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Do You Remember?

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Do You Remember?

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Do you remember your first day of school?

No I do not. My parents took pictures. Even the image of my far younger self sitting in the first of many desks to come is incapable of stimulating my latent memories.

Do you remember enjoying a winter fire with your family?

No I do not. I can only remember the green firewood bag sitting on the hearth, mostly emptied at that time, holding naught but little splinters, begging me to toss them in the fire with the rest of the larger pieces. I remember stepping on the bag, surprised by how much the fragments of wood hurt me; tiny spikes creating their own fire beneath my skin. As far as I can recall, I never was one to take pain well.

Do you remember the first time you met your childhood friend?

No I do not. I can only guess at what that day might have been like. I have no recollection of this first encounter. I wish I did. I miss her.

Do you remember where you were on 9/11?

No I do not. The only thing I remember of that day was watching TV after my mother pulled me out of elementary school. Something about the news. Shocking red letters against a deep navy blue background. Nearly every American remembers this day but me. Why? Why can I not remember something that was so traumatic to an entire country?

Do you remember watching horror movies in sixth grade?

No I do not. Eleven years old, sitting in the basement of my friend. I can only remember the scratchy feeling of the blanket we hid beneath during the most terror-inducing parts. Later, the white rise and fall of the metal footboard at the base of her bed, standing out against the blackness of the night, unable to fall asleep. Staring at the dull green numbers on the face of the clock, waiting for my mom to save me from the terror of that darkened house. I may not recall much, but the feeling of terror I have not forgotten. Never again will I watch horror movies so late at night.

Do you remember losing your first tooth?

No I do not. I cannot distinctly remember losing any of my teeth. I can remember the gummy texture, copper-like taste, suddenly empty space,

where a tooth used to be. Who's to say those fragments of memories aren't from the sixth tooth I lost or the eleventh tooth I lost? They could be, and I will never know. I will never sort out what my mind chooses to remember and what it does not.

Do you remember pets?

No I do not. Casey is but pictures of her sprawled on cement gleaming with the sun's rays, stories told of her sharp Basenji yodeling, videos of her bounding playfully, energetically over grassy expanses. I do not remember what she meant to me. Ivory is no more than a mind's-eye image of an old, possessive poodle, murky eyes following me, just daring me to take her spot beside my mother. I was the first daughter to take away her best friend. She despised me.

Do you remember your first crush?

No I do not. People say a girl's father is the first man she falls in love with. I don't remember anything of my father beyond last week.

Do you remember your sixteenth birthday?

No I do not. I can only assume what happened that day. The only aspect I can recall is turning off the lights, and trying to ignore the incessant "tick," "tick," "tick"ing of those ever-persistent clocks, that soft noise becoming louder and louder, eating up one's attention until nothing can be heard but it. I can guess that I did not sleep well.

Do you remember your first day home alone?

No I do not. I can remember instances where I was left home by myself, but not specifically from the first of such occasions. General, but not specific. When speaking of an entire experience, generally is what I remember. Specific comes only to small, insignificant details; general only when looking at a situation overall. An unspoken, yet understood quirk of my memories.

Do you remember playing your first video game?

No I do not. Those expensive disks so very important to me, and I cannot remember holding that light gray controller in my little-girl hands, frustrated yet exhilarated. Why is that? Why can I not remember an experience so important to who I know myself as? "You were sitting on my lap, on the floor, crying because you were afraid of the first jump. You don't

remember at all?" No. I cannot remember anything of that. You've told this story so many times, it has become a part of my memories, but I can recall nothing of that first experience.

Do you remember the first time you crossed the street?

No I do not. I have crossed the street thousands of times in my seventeen years of life. One crossing cannot be distinguished from another. The memories of black tarmac, stitched up with squishy black tar, fun for little children to poke at with their bare toes in the heat of summer, occasionally marked with a manhole, are distinct, but they blur together, and I could not separate one from the other, were I asked to.

Do you remember your first kiss?

No I do not. How could I remember an experience I've never had? How could I not remember an experience I have had? Who's to say I have kissed someone and I simply don't remember it? Who's to say I haven't kissed someone and those little fragments of memory are an attempt by my mind to offer me just that? Who's to say I never watched those horror movies, and what I do remember from that night is the residual desire of my wishing I had? Who's to say I never have had any pets before and all those nips and barks I can pry from the back of my mind are simple fabrications? Who's to say everything I see and experience and remember is false, inventions of my imagination?

I am a seventeen-year-old girl, and I have no memories. I don't remember anything important, and without those whispers of my past, I don't know anything of who I used to be, or why I am the way I am. Every day, I find it harder and harder to discover what I must do with myself. Without any kind of recollection, I feel as though I am missing parts of myself. The only grounding figures in my life are my family and friends, but without recollection of what they used to be like, I cannot know how they change and mature either. Without my memories, I feel isolated and alone. For me, there is no God to prod me along, alternately blessing and testing me, simply because I cannot recall any trials or times of grace.

I don't believe anything is real.

Kathryn Knutson is a junior at Gilbert High School, who is currently taking college-prep classes at ISU. She plans on studying creative writing in college.