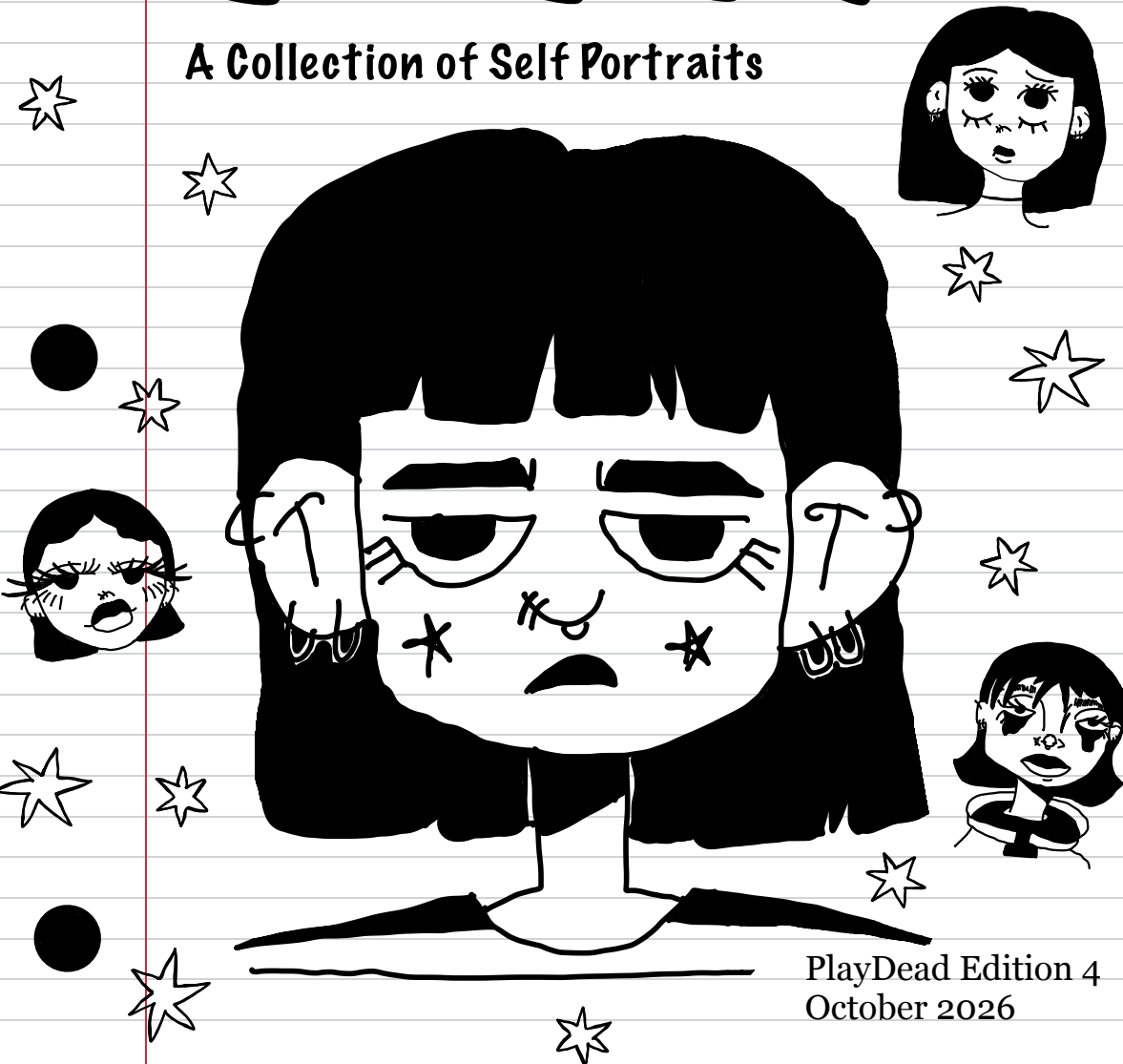


Me.

A Collection of Self Portraits



PlayDead Edition 4
October 2026

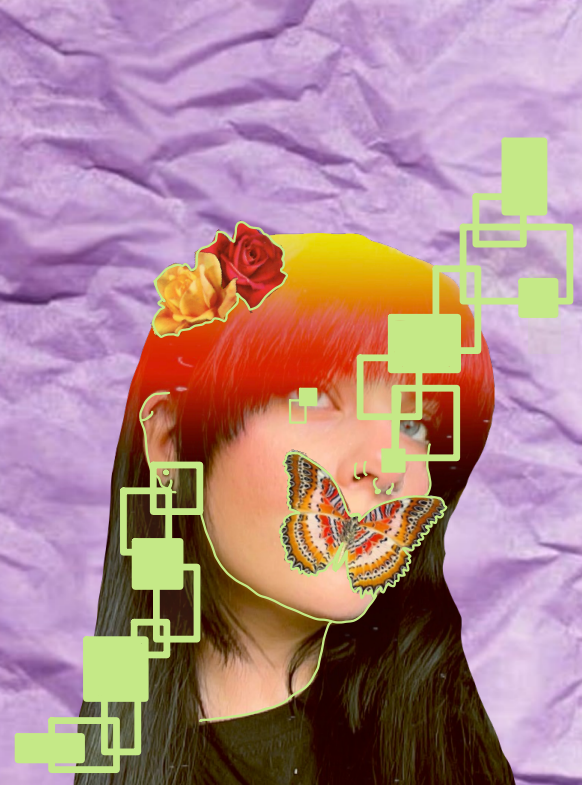
A Lesson in Irony

Not everything I write has to be profound.

The poem does not need an innocent start: insatiable hunger. No need for luscious meat that melts in my mouth. Blood so smooth, coating my teeth, tongue. Fingers licked greedily. Feasting does not have to be gory, urgent, primal. Peeling back soft skin to get to succulent flesh. Discovering why offal was coveted for centuries. The reader (though disgusted) has no need to worry that they cannot look away. Picking precious sinew, capillaries, cartilage from my teeth. Marrow sucked dry: gluttony's altar at my feet. The poem does not need to take a turn, revealing that I have been eating myself. Finally indulging, finding pleasure in my body's offerings. Reflecting—as I gnaw on whatever gristle is left—that I do not have to frame auto-cannibalization as an allegory for finding the value in myself. Yet, I am full, and in that fullness I have forgotten

I do not have to tear myself apart.







THE STAR

FACT INTO FICTION

The Ethics of Memoir Writing

Stories Under Scrutiny

A Million Little Pieces by James Frey: A memoir that promised a raw look at addiction and incarceration was revealed to contain numerous exaggerations about Frey's jail time and rehabilitation experiences.

Love and Consequences by Margaret B. Jones: This memoir that details the childhood of a half Native American gang member was actually written by a white woman who was raised in the suburbs.

Misch: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years by Misha Defonseca: A memoir that tells the story of a young Jewish girl who escaped the Holocaust by traveling across Europe with the protection of a pack of wolves was discovered to be entirely fabricated. The author—who was not even Jewish—used a fake name for publishing and spent the war safe at a school in Belgium.



Correspondence vs. Coherence

When writing a memoir, truth is evaluated and measured according to two different standards: correspondence and coherence. The correspondence theory of truth states that a proposition or statement is true if it matches, depicts, or corresponds to an objective fact in reality. The coherence theory of truth states that a proposition is true if and only if it fits consistently with a specified systems of other propositions or beliefs. Unlike the correspondence theory—which uses the objective world to judge truth—the coherence theory aims to create internal harmony within a web of beliefs.

In memoir writing, it is important to find a balance between these two standards. Truly successful memoirs rely on a mix of both theories. They need correspondence to ground the story, ensuring accuracy and truthfulness. However, coherence is necessary to craft an emotional journey that makes sense to the reader.

Now Ask Yourself: Where is the Line?

While correspondence and coherence play key roles in quality memoirs, it is crucial that non-fiction stories remain just that: non-fiction. So one must ask, where is the line between cleaning up a piece to make it more interesting and hiding behind exaggeration to craft a falsified narrative? Truth in the context of a memoir is a complex topic. In reality, memoirs do “fictionalize” life, but polishing a story from raw facts is not the same as inventing those facts.

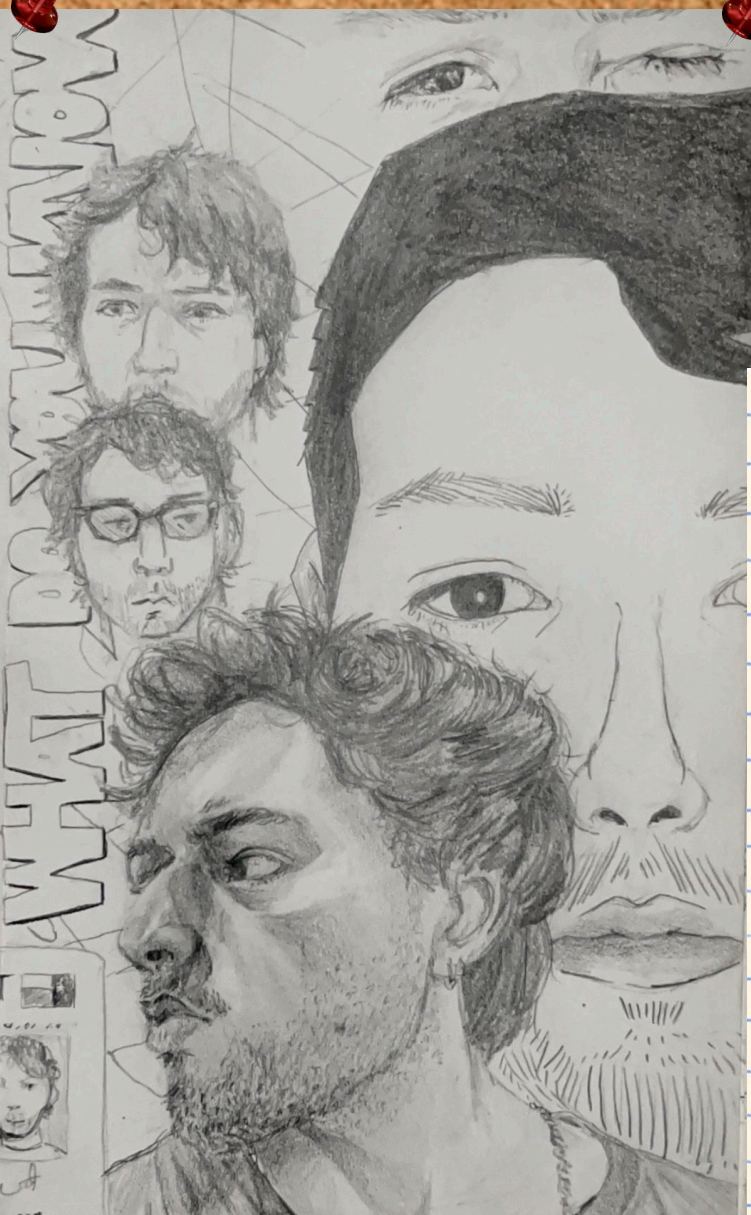
Memoir authors are forced to rely on memory when bringing their stories to life. Memory does not replicate events perfectly. It embellishes and, occasionally, even steals from other people’s accounts. This means that the events authors portray are influenced by their own interpretation. One person’s truth can sometimes be another’s lie.

While the whole truth—and nothing but the truth—is rare due to the fragility of memory, authors should aim to tell the story that is the closest to reality. It is important to acknowledge that this is no small feat. With such a saturated market, authors may be tempted to embellish and exaggerate, as a means of heightening a dramatic arc or an emotional moment. When faced with this decision, an author knows what the truth is and they may choose to ignore it; a choice that only benefits them. Lying results in losing the trust of readers. It steals the opportunity for a reader to see into the life of someone else, all because the author wants to look good and sell books. Memoir authors need to rise above this attitude by choosing not to make significant changes to their life stories. In the event that they do make impactful alterations, authors should feel obligated to let their readers know. The “truths” authors sell stand in representative of their moral character.

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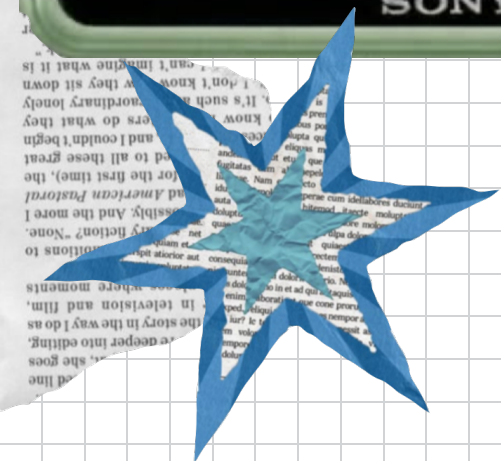


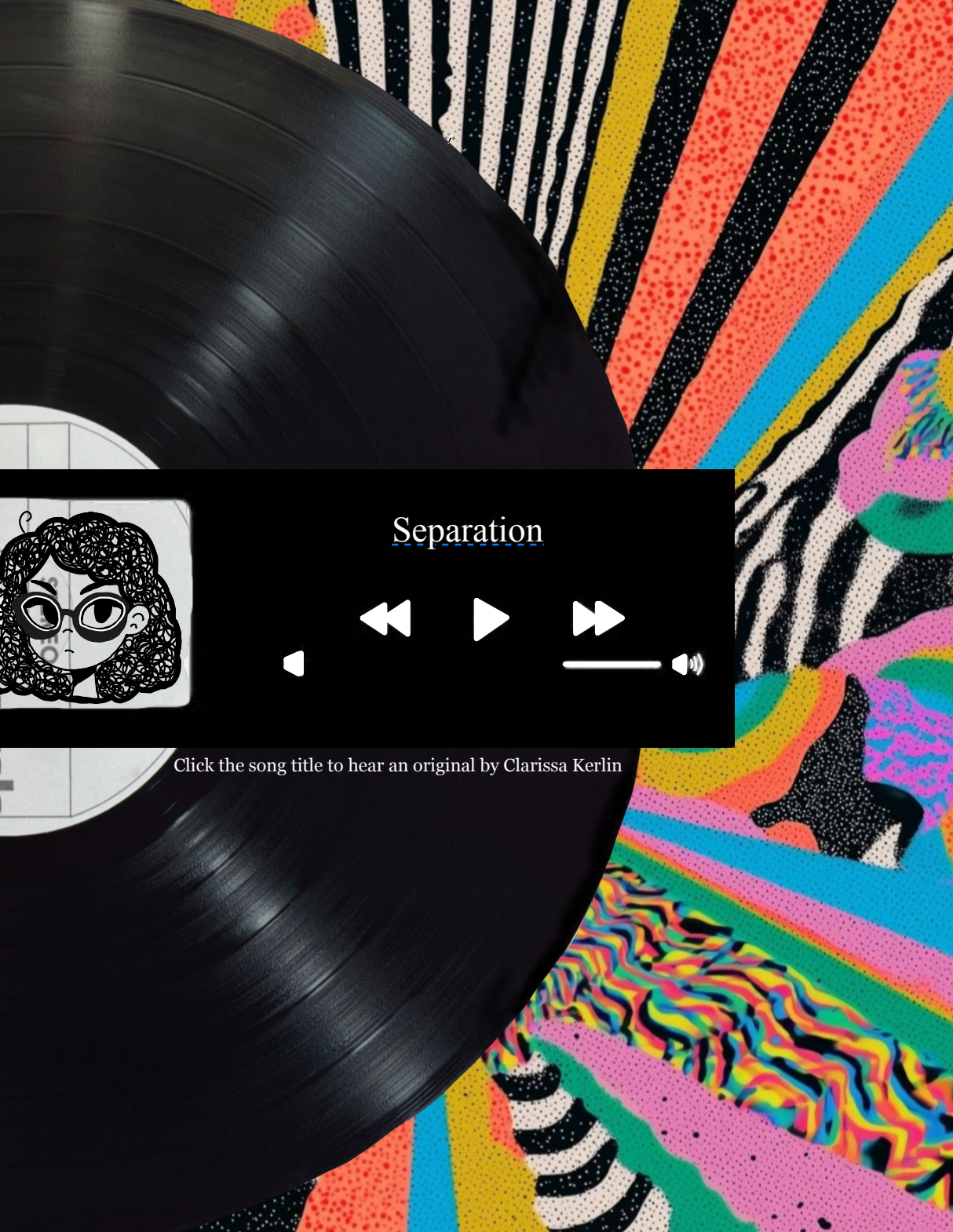
The first time I ever did a self portrait I was in the 7th grade. It was an assignment for Art 1. Most thought nothing of it, I'm sure, but I was struck with despair. How could I depict myself? This vessel I feel so disconnected to? I recall I abstracted this self portrait so that two halves when bent would make a whole. I got a B. I was furious! I followed the assignment perfectly! That was me - segmented parts smushed together to make a whole.

I gave it away. It never made its way home.

Revisiting self portraiture, I touch on the idea of different whole selves. Imprints of the self as distorted by self perception. I struggle with body dysmorphia more often than not, and struggle to pin down what version of me is the "true me". To this I say: all of them. To me I say: all of you.

I never thought at 29 that the one thing would define me so deeply is grief. Yes, I'm a daughter, a sister, a niece, a cousin, and granddaughter, a best friend, but I feel like the one thing everyone looks at me and thinks is, "She's filled with grief," "I feel so bad for her," etc. When I was younger I used to be defined by different things. First, I was the girl who would fall all the time (honestly, I still am). Then, I was the girl who got horrible nosebleeds. Then, I was the dancer, the plus size girl, the Swiftie/fangirl, the writer, the reader. And I still am a lot of those things, but the thing that seems to define me the most now is grief. I live with it everyday. I feel the people I've lost in the little things, in the big things. I don't need it to be consumed by me when I'm with others. I already feel guilty for doing things that make me feel happy when I should be sad. Yes, I feel guilty for not being there when they passed. I don't need to be reminded of it. It will be the one thing that never changes. So, yes, I may be a girl with a dead dad who will never have him walk me down the aisle one day, but I am so much more than that. —Brittany Sims





Separation



Click the song title to hear an original by Clarissa Kerlin

FROM THE MIND OF A PORTRAIT ARTIST

An Interview with Photographer, Mike Sauter



Mike Sauter is a local Philadelphia, Pennsylvania photographer and videographer. He is currently working for the Temple University athletic department, shooting content for their social media pages, school website, and other promotional material. Mike also works as a freelance photographer and videographer, capturing graduations, engagements, weddings, gender reveal parties, and other stylized portraits. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Mike to discuss his work—specifically his experience as a portrait photographer.

What inspired you to pursue photography?

It began when I was younger, and I would use my mom's camera to take photos. Then, in high school, I decided to take a Video Production and Photography class. I figured it would be an easy class, but I ended up truly loving every aspect of working with cameras. It was also during this time that I discovered it is possible to make photography a successful career. Eventually, I found my niche in portrait photography and my passion for sports photography.

How would you describe your photography style?

I consider my photography to be very action oriented. I also aim to fill my shots with emotion. I want to tell a real story, so I search for the small details that exist within those larger cinematic moments. I enjoy capturing raw authenticity—people truly expressing themselves without any fear of judgement.

You mentioned you like telling stories with your photography. What is the particular story you are trying to convey?

It all depends on the subject. When it comes to portrait photography, my goal is to capture who that person is during this specific moment in their life, with the hope that I am creating something they can look back on in the future. I want the photos to feel authentic, rather than trying to portray my subject as someone they are not. No matter the moment, I want to immortalize their personality. I think photographs act as keepsakes for memories, so I want the people I am photographing to be able to look at these images and find themselves transported back to that exact point in their lives.





It sounds like photography really is your passion. What do you enjoy most about portrait photography in particular?

I enjoy being able to bottle moments and memories that people want to hold on to forever. I find it extremely fulfilling when a client prints out a photo I have taken for them and displays it in their home. The translation of my work from digital to physical media allows people to appreciate it in a whole new light. This turns it into something you can touch, really bringing it to life. Rather than just viewing it on a screen.

How would you define a successful portrait?

I would define the success of a portrait based on how my subject feels during shooting. I want them to feel comfortable and confident, especially when they see themselves in that final photograph. If they feel the image is a true representation of both their inner and outer self, then I consider that a successful portrait.

It's clear that capturing your subject's inner self is a priority for you. How do you achieve this?

When taking portraits, I aim to make people feel comfortable enough to be themselves in front of the camera. I understand that being photographed can be an awkward experience. So, I try to create an environment where they know they do not have to put on a mask or act a certain way. During the booking process and their session, I try to get to know my subject and give them direction if I see them drifting towards an inauthentic performance for the camera. I believe the best portraits happen when someone is not worried about being judged, allowing them to naturally express themselves.



What is the greatest compliment a subject has given you after seeing their final portraits?

I think one of the greatest compliments I can receive is when a subject prints their portraits out and displays them for others to see. There was a time when I took graduation photos for a classmate and her family loved them so much that they used them to decorate the venue for her graduation party. The images were posted outside and hanging all around the room inside, as well. Each table was even topped with different photos from the graduation shoot. It was also flattering to hear her friends and family at the party complimenting my work and asking who the photographer was. It was very fulfilling to see my hard work being appreciated to that degree.

You can see more of Mike's work on Instagram [@direct.bymike](#) and LinkedIn as Michael Sauter.





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