

# “Reborn”: A Kids See Ghosts Anthem On Healing

*Rachel Goldsborough*

Dear Rachel,  
It's my pleasure to congratulate you on having your piece *Darkness Visible* chosen for publication in the *Medical Humanities Journal of Boston College*! The editorial board is excited to publish your piece. Do you have time to do a quick zoom this week to discuss edits? Looking forward!

I stared in disbelief at the email on my laptop, resting on a table in a classroom at The Ohio State University College of Pharmacy, surrounded by the chatter of other pharmacy students discussing primary prevention of cardiovascular disease. The message came from LinkedIn, from a current student at Boston College, referencing a poem I had submitted over a year ago when I was still immersed in topics surrounding the brain, public health, and the morality of healthcare. My first thought was, *this can't be right*. So I replied: *Thank you so much for reaching out! I had submitted poems last year, and didn't know they could still be considered for future editions. I'd be happy to meet sometime this week or next.*

I remained unable to process this news. I told my friends, who congratulated me; told my roommate, also an avid writer, who exclaimed how proud she was in all caps. I set up a time to meet the editor the next day, after my shift at work. I even made a mental note to reread the poem in preparation.

Two years ago, I wrote *Darkness Visible*, a poem highlighting the experience of one of the hardest and darkest years of mine, and many others', lives. It was one of my original pieces; one of my favorite pieces.

A year ago, I submitted a few poems to the *Medical Humanities Journal* to be considered for publication. While I liked all of them, *Darkness Visible* was the one I was banking on; was hoping would be good enough. To the point that when another piece, *Midnight*, had been chosen instead, I was surprised. At the end of the day, I was elated to have anything of mine be good enough to be published- I was and still am by no means someone that ever thought that writing would become an art form to which I would turn; to purge emotions I could not describe unless through verse and metaphor. By no means did I think I was talented. However, *Darkness Visible* was the one I was most proud of, and wanted seen. Now, here it was- the moment I'd been waiting for. When I got home that evening, I opened up the poem to read it over like I had planned... then immediately closed the document again. I couldn't fathom reading it; couldn't bear what felt like a confrontation.

Because here's the thing: everything has changed.

Two years ago, I was trapped at home in the middle of a new and frightening challenge to public health, our community's health, and my own mental health. I recall the feelings of loneliness; disconnection; uncertainty about everything and what in the world any of my choices meant. In such a confusing time, I felt like I had no power to decide definitively who I was and what my values were. So I went into autopilot. I pushed through the last month or so of class, sitting on my computer for hours staring at slides and lecture videos. Entering the summer, I traded pictures of the brain and computer code for

readings on philosophy and recordings of myself for an online public speaking course. Knowing pharmacy school required the PCAT, I skimmed through a Kaplan test prep book for about a month before masking up in a cramped cubicle for four hours. I spent a lot of time outside, and though at times the Maryland heat made me feel like I was in an oven, it was better than sitting inside with my thoughts (one plus? I got *incredibly* tan).

When we (miraculously) came back to campus, I decided to schedule and take the GRE, because I still had no solid plan. I stared at a five-pound book of practice questions for about a month, then sat in my room to be proctored on camera while doing math completely in my head. I struggled to name hills and valleys on bones, while happily diving into psychopharmacology. My roommates and I still tried to go out, to socialize, to have fun and laugh away our stress. On the surface, considering the circumstances, it all seemed okay.

If you looked closer, things were truly ugly. 2020 was hands down the worst year of my life. Drowning in anxiety and depression, I defined myself with indecision. I didn't know how to act around my friends anymore; didn't know what was and wasn't the right thing to do. Lived in fear of hurting loved ones. Worried about not being good enough. I no longer had faith I was putting my time into the right work or people. The only certainty was that I was so incredibly scared of losing any singular thing I deemed 'good' that I was willing to become only a fraction of myself if it meant I could hold on to *something*.

I ruminated. I cried. I walked for hours at a time. I drowned out thoughts with music. I couldn't stop the trembling in my hands and body. I constantly questioned myself. Everything felt wrong and I couldn't understand why. Even just trying to go through the motions, the road I was on was covered in broken glass.

It was when Thanksgiving rolled around and I saw myself in the photos with my friends that it clicked. Standing there, peering over my friend's shoulder at the phone, I felt my whole body go cold; felt the sound rush out of my ears; felt everyone around me disappear as I stared in horror at my hollowed-out

face.

As it turns out, the reason I thought my roommates were whispering behind my back and exchanging looks when they didn't think I noticed wasn't paranoia on my part at all. They knew I had had an eating disorder, and they thought I had relapsed. They just didn't know how to talk to me about it. I had completely stopped taking care of myself; doing right by myself; and in that moment, I decided to shift back into manual.

When 2020 became 2021, I no longer tolerated being passive. If I wanted to feel like I deserved anything, I needed to take action; and that meant making some of the biggest decisions that, to this day, culminated into a new era for myself. One decision left me heartbroken. Another made me braver. A third made me feel like I had a voice again. Still more helped me practice gratitude for what I already had but couldn't see before. Funnily enough, though, the most important decision I made was not to decide: instead of pursuing one future, I put in the legwork to pursue... options. Electing to be open-minded offered up door after door of possibilities, and in the comfort and freedom of allowing things to be left unknown, I was led straight to an answer I never saw coming: that someone would choose for me.

When I sat down for (the) Ohio State University's interview day, I was somewhat set against pharmacy school. Mental health was a passion of mine, and I felt sure that I needed time to pursue other opportunities that would show me how to make that my life. Pharmacy didn't seem like the (white) coat I wanted to wear, and after years of considering it, I was ready to walk away.

(The) OSU turned me right back around. Despite being on Zoom, the staff's personality and warmth jumped off the screen, and other prospective students left me smiling and laughing, presenting the same kind of humor, values, and opinions on life and the show *New Girl*. The day was flying by and I barely noticed until I got to the final portion: a professional interview with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. At the time, I knew nothing about him, and he knew nothing about

me- only my name and a list of questions for me to answer that I needed to use to pitch myself. On a rush from the day and everything I'd been doing the last few months, I animatedly talked to him about my life, feeling like I was in a casual conversation more so than an interview. As we worked through his questions and I gave my responses, I noticed his face changing; reflecting.

Looking at his computer, he asked me, "Do you have any more questions for me? Because I have one more question for you."

I felt a small bit of panic at that, and said I didn't think so. I sat in a moment of silence, anxiously waiting for him to call me out, or somehow find something inauthentic. Instead, he said, "You know, in these interviews, sometimes there's a point at which I realize I need to stop interviewing, and start recruiting."

He then looked directly at me and asked, "How do I get you to come here for pharmacy school?"

I froze; felt my eyes widen. He went on to say that based on what he was hearing, I'd be an asset to the College of Pharmacy, and that I could bring something new to the student body. I was astonished- here it was. Everything I'd done to heal; to make a name for myself. Here was someone who could see it- the work I'd put in to feel like I had the potential to be someone important.

Still on the spot, I blurted out some response I can no longer remember, and he sent me on my way with a final statement that he hoped I would choose Ohio.

And I did. As soon as I ended the phone call accepting the open seat in the Class of 2025, my roommates screamed and rushed over to hug me as I broke down in tears. I remember thinking with overwhelming triumph, I *did* it. Come August of last year, I proudly slipped my arms through my white coat and elbow-bumped the Associate Dean on my way off the stage.

Did I still worry for months before school started that I was making a mistake? Sure. Was I terrified of moving to a new city where I knew *no one* and *nothing* about what it was like to work in a

pharmacy?

Oh yes.

Did I remind myself and find peace in the knowledge that I could always change my mind and figure out another way? Absolutely.

But I haven't had to.

One of my jobs is as a pharmacy intern at OSU's Student Health Services, a role I absolutely love. The day of my meeting to go over my piece, all hell broke loose: prescription after prescription, patient after patient, consultation after consultation; two *different* students coming from the hospital, each with a list of prescriptions the length of a CVS receipt. All the while, myself, the technicians, and the pharmacists behind the scenes struggled to keep up- typing, filling, running insurance, answering the phone, and more.

We dove into hour after hour of chaos, and at one point I heard my supervisor, one of the pharmacists, go, "What is going *on*? This has to be the *weirdest* Friday ever."

Then, in a small lull, I was asked how long I was supposed to stay. The end of my scheduled shift was fast approaching at this point. I hadn't stopped moving since I'd punched in, had barely remembered to drink water, hadn't had time to get coffee, didn't bring food with me, and knew I had another obligation soon.

But I also knew this day wasn't like other days. So I told them I'd be happy to stay.

I left over an hour after I was supposed to, and after assurances that they would be okay without me, I reluctantly packed up my things and rushed out. When I got back, I caught my roommate on her way out. Working on her Master's in Fine Arts, she and I quickly became close friends with a shared love of writing, and have been able to see and appreciate how our personal styles have evolved with time. She asked about my day, and still running on the adrenaline, I excitedly told her what had happened. She looked at me with incredulity, and her response spoke volumes: "You know, if someone else had had the day you'd had, that would have been their breaking point; but the fact that you see that as the

best day of work you've ever had? *That's* how you know you're in the right career."

That wasn't the first time something in my current life had put a smile on my face; made me feel like I was doing something right.

And it certainly won't be the last.

