

# From the Voice Within

By Brienne Cummings

A Multigenre journey through  
Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*

Dear Reader:

I'd like to introduce you to Melinda Sordino. Melinda is a wonderful, intelligent and witty 9<sup>th</sup> grader. But she has a secret. This secret runs her life, rules her thoughts and ruins her dreams. It is a secret of which she has no words to tell. Her secret has rendered her practically speechless.

In addition to keeping this haunting secret, Melinda must also endure the struggles and pain of starting high school without a single friend and an army of enemies. You see, in the weeks before school started, Melinda and her now ex-friends attended a party thrown by a fellow classmate and upperclassman. The girls were drinking and having the time of their lives until "IT" happened. That was when Melinda lost her voice. She didn't know what to do, but she knew she needed help. So she called the police. By then the words had flown from her throat. Though she had remained wordless, the receiver in hand, the police sensed her urgency and rushed to the place of the party. Melinda had allowed the cops to break up the biggest party of the summer, but no one knew the truth. No one knew why she had so desperately needed help.

Each day of school tortures Melinda. She's the butt of many jokes and cruel threats. She's pushed around, taunted and harassed. Mashed potatoes "accidentally" find their way to her chest. Everywhere she turns there are angry eyes glaring at "Melinda Sordino, the girl who called the cops." She has only one friend, Heather-from-Ohio. But even she is just considered a "faux friend." Her only sanctuary is art class where Mr. Freeman has given her a year long assignment. She must make an artistic depiction of a tree that can "say something, express an emotion, speak to every person who looks at it" (p.12). This tree will challenge and stretch her and eventually become part of her.

Outside of art class, she does her best to fit in, to survive, to heal her many wounds. But her grades suffer, her social life fails, and her spirit remains caged behind the secret that has taken away her ability to speak.

In the following pages, I hope to take you through the mind and emotions of Melinda Sordino. Her story has touched me deeply and I have learned so much from the agony and courage she has in common with the millions of others that share her secret. As Mr. Freeman would say, "Welcome to the journey" (p.12).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brienne M. Cummings".

Brienne Cummings

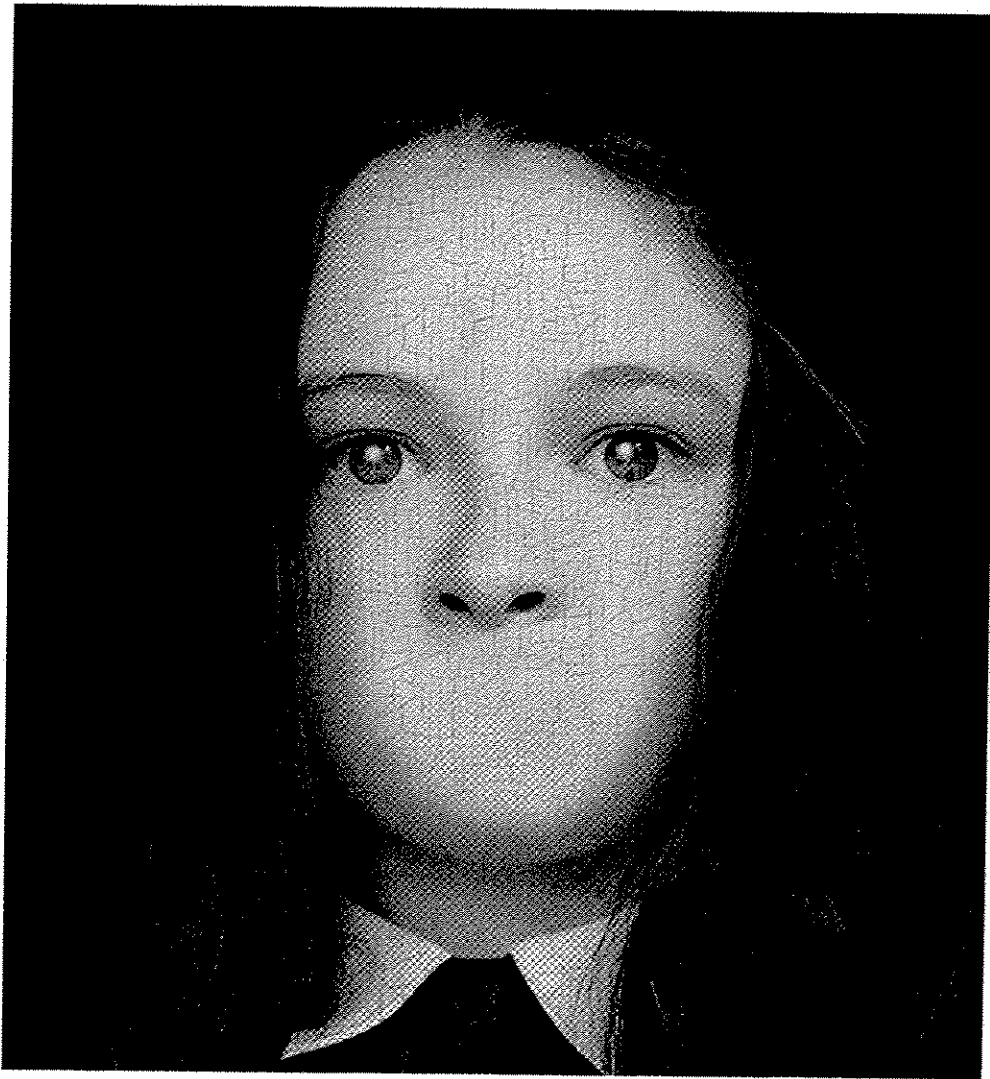


# *fear*

Fear lurks in corners and behind darkened doorways waiting for a faltered step with which he can trip you. He breathes down your neck and sprinkles your forehead with sweat as you sleep. Fear is a fiendish addict for insecurities. Don't turn to look over your shoulder, he'll be standing there shaking hands with your worst nightmare.

## Insomnia

The thoughts trapped in my mind keep me awake. These unsaid ideas and feelings give me no chance for rest. I'm so tired. Tired of being tired, tired of hiding, tired of fear, tired of not having the strength to say the words that could *free* me. How do I break the silence? The words in the deepest part of me are dark and ugly. They need to be said but keep me silent—awake—dead. I need to speak, but I don't know how. Silence is my only friend. I will not speak, not yet.



**Mr. Freeman:**

*"This is where you can find your soul, if you dare," he says. "Where you can touch that part of you that you've never dared look at before. Do not come here and ask me to show you how to draw a face. Ask me to help you find the wind."*

Welcome to Art class:  
A soul searching  
Soul bearing  
Soul finding  
Kind of place.

We won't be drawing clowns or  
Carving trees.  
Not even sculpting rabbits.  
You will be working with me by your side  
To find the words that speak your soul.  
You will be working to give life and meaning  
To the everyday.

Today I ask you to open your hearts and  
Throw your heads out the window.  
This is the place you will learn how to examine  
Yourself and find the truth and in doing so  
Learn how to breathe life.

Welcome to Art class  
Welcome to the journey  
Welcome to life!

Dear Abby-

I have a secret. I don't know how to tell it. But everyone at school hates me. All my old friends, even Heather. It wasn't my fault Abby. They don't know that though. They won't give me the chance to let them know. I didn't want to get them in trouble. I just needed help. That's why I called. I just needed help.

**Melinda**

**Best friends  
All through Junior High  
Rachel and Me  
But things went wrong—very wrong  
I want her to hear what I have to say.**

**I need help!  
From you, Rachel  
Something terrible happened that night  
I had to call the police.**

**We were all having fun  
until he led me away  
into the woods, alone.  
I didn't know what to do**

**Why are you doing this to me?  
I need you, Rachel.  
I need you to listen to my story.**

**Rachel**

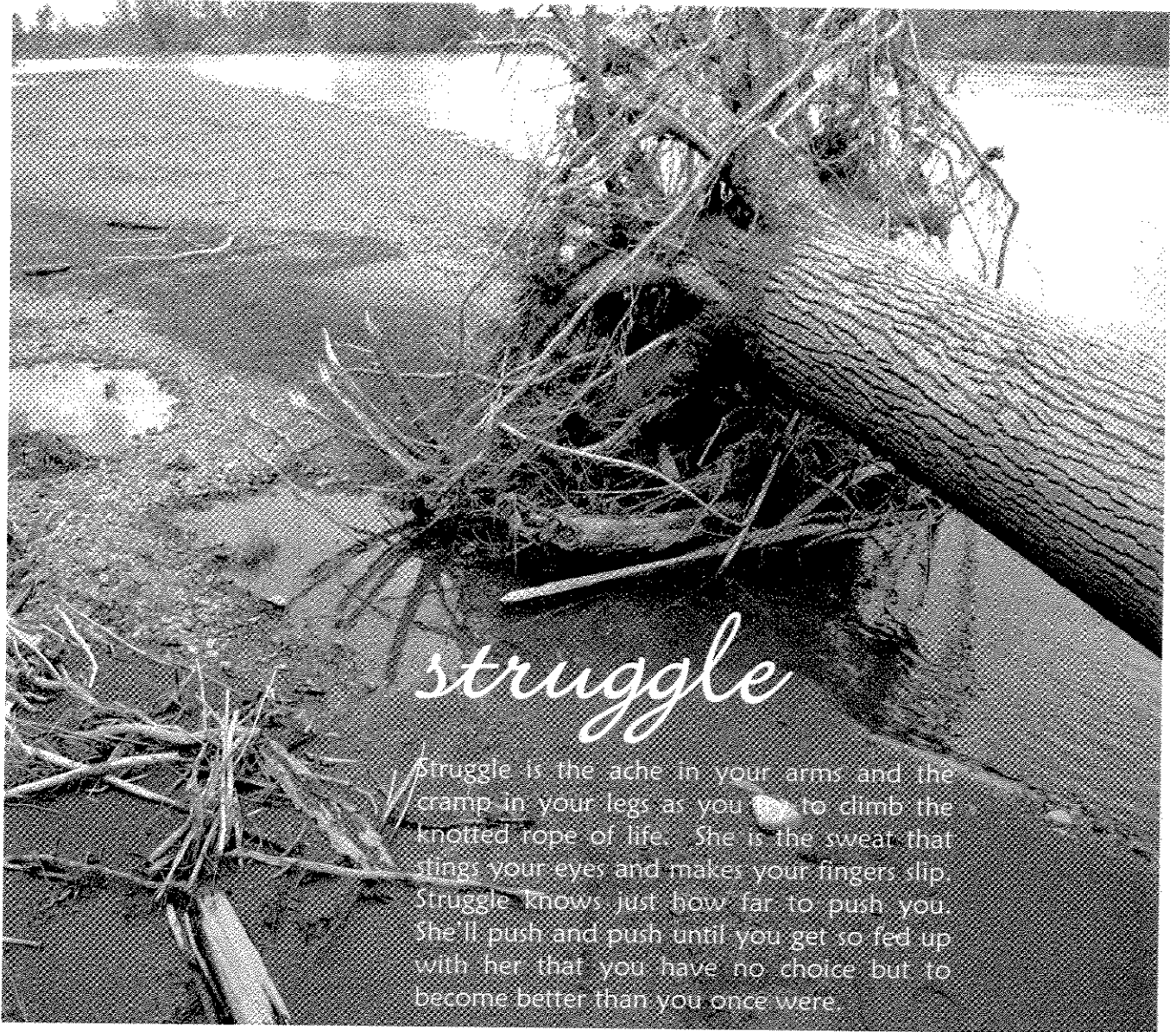
**Best friends  
All through Junior High  
Melinda and Me**

**Hear what she has to say?  
No way!  
I don't know what she was thinking but,  
She needs help.**

**She just had to call the police  
and ruin the best night I'd ever had!  
I just don't understand,  
we were all having fun.**

**I didn't know what to do  
so I stopped talking to her  
stopped being her friend.  
Why would she do that to me?**





## *struggle*

Struggle is the ache in your arms and the cramp in your legs as you try to climb the knotted rope of life. She is the sweat that stings your eyes and makes your fingers slip. Struggle knows just how far to push you. She'll push and push until you get so fed up with her that you have no choice but to become better than you once were.

Abby, how do you tell someone that her boyfriend raped me?

-Voiceless in Syracuse

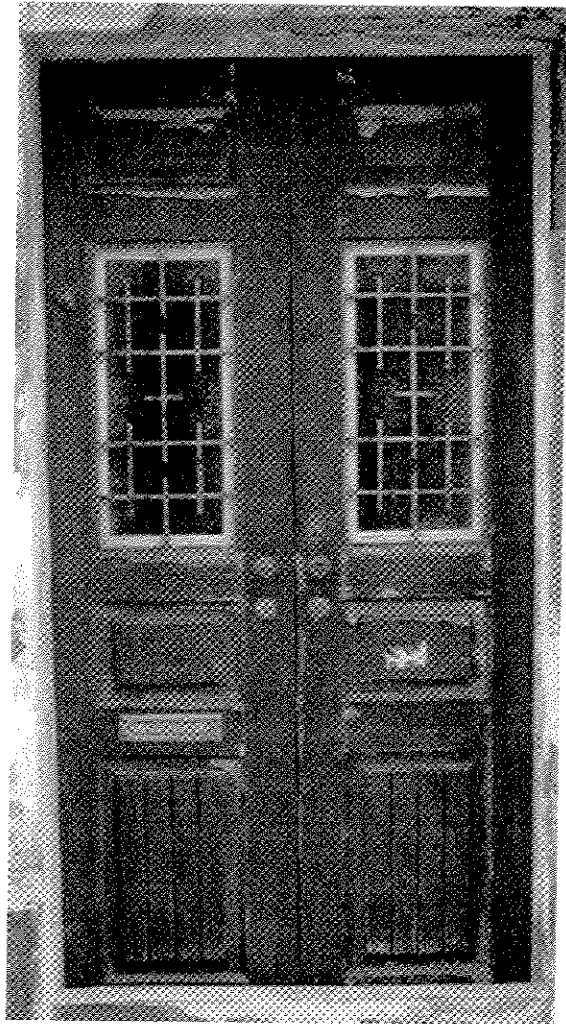
## Ode to My Closet

Oh dear Closet,  
How I love Thee!  
Your sour smell,  
Your dusty corners,  
And lumpy chair  
Are everything that I need.

You're my escape when the  
Burden is too heavy.  
You're my solitude when the  
Crowd too suffocating.  
You're my safe haven when  
I need protected.

Thank you, dear Closet  
You're the only one who  
Through the dark and the ugly  
Still sees me:  
Who I am,  
Who I was,  
Who I need to be.

Dear Closet, thank you for  
Listening to my silent words  
And never closing your door on  
me.





**IT**

**IT** is everywhere  
in my mind  
in my fear  
in everything IT should not be

**IT** stands tall  
blocking me from everything I want

I want peace  
I want joy  
I want acceptance  
I want to speak

But I can't because **IT** is there-  
haunting me

**IT** laughs at me  
and teases me

**IT** tortures me  
blowing in my ear  
and playing with my hair

**IT** hurt me

**IT** has silenced me

Andy Evans

is

**IT**

# RAPE

The statistics for rape are alarming. According to the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network and The National Crime Victimization Survey, every **two and a half minutes**, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted. **58% of rapes go unreported. 47% of rape victims are raped by a known acquaintance.** Youths **12-17 are two to three times more likely** to be sexually assaulted than adults.

Rape victims also frequently suffer from **Rape Trauma Syndrome**. It has been discovered that immediate reactions to rape are usually expressed in one of two ways: expressed or controlled. Restlessness, crying or sobbing and anxiety when describing the assailant are traits of an expressed reaction. **Masking and hiding feelings, and feigning composure** indicates a **controlled** reaction.

Physical reactions include **sleep pattern disturbances**, eating pattern disturbances and symptoms specific to the attack. Victims express emotional reactions in many ways. Often a fear of dying is prominent. Other feelings range from **humiliation, degradation, guilt, shame, embarrassment, self-blame, anger** and revenge. Because of this wide spectrum of emotional reactions, victims are prone to **mood swings**.

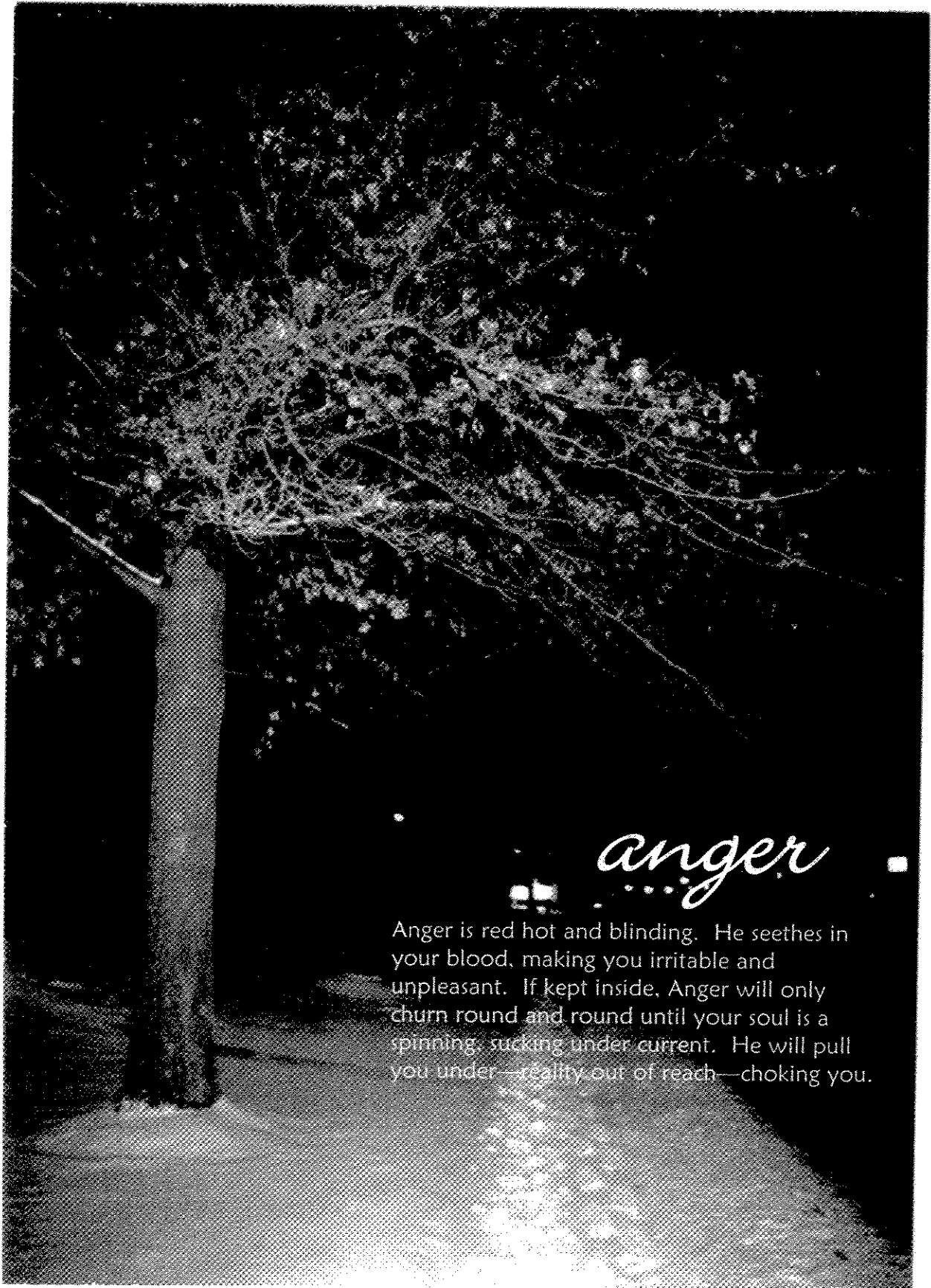
However, there is also another form of reaction most commonly found in victims who have **not reported the rape** to anyone and who may not be dealing with the feelings felt, or is dealing with them **internally**. This is the **Silent reaction to rape**. Because of the lack of expressed reactions to this traumatic experience, the silent victim suffers **from immense psychological burden**. It is important, when treating a silent victim, to encourage the victim to embrace and discuss his or her feelings. It may be necessary for the victim to go over the details of the rape: the circumstances, the rapist, their emotional reactions, who they did or did not tell, and/or their thoughts since the attack. **It is important to learn why the victim felt that there was no one they could tell about the incident.**

## Recipe for a Martha

- 1 cup bubbly personality
- ½ cup physical attractiveness
- 3 cups community service mindset
- 2 tbsp. craftiness
- 5 pints acceptance from other Marthas

Begin the preparation by blending the physical attractiveness with the bubbly personality. Knead in community service mindset. Sprinkle with craftiness and gently fold in the acceptance from other Marthas.

Shape this mixture into small balls and spoon onto a cookie sheet. Bake in a high pressure system similar to high school for 25-30 minutes. Remove and cool. Decorate in high priced, seasonal or matching outfits. Enjoy!

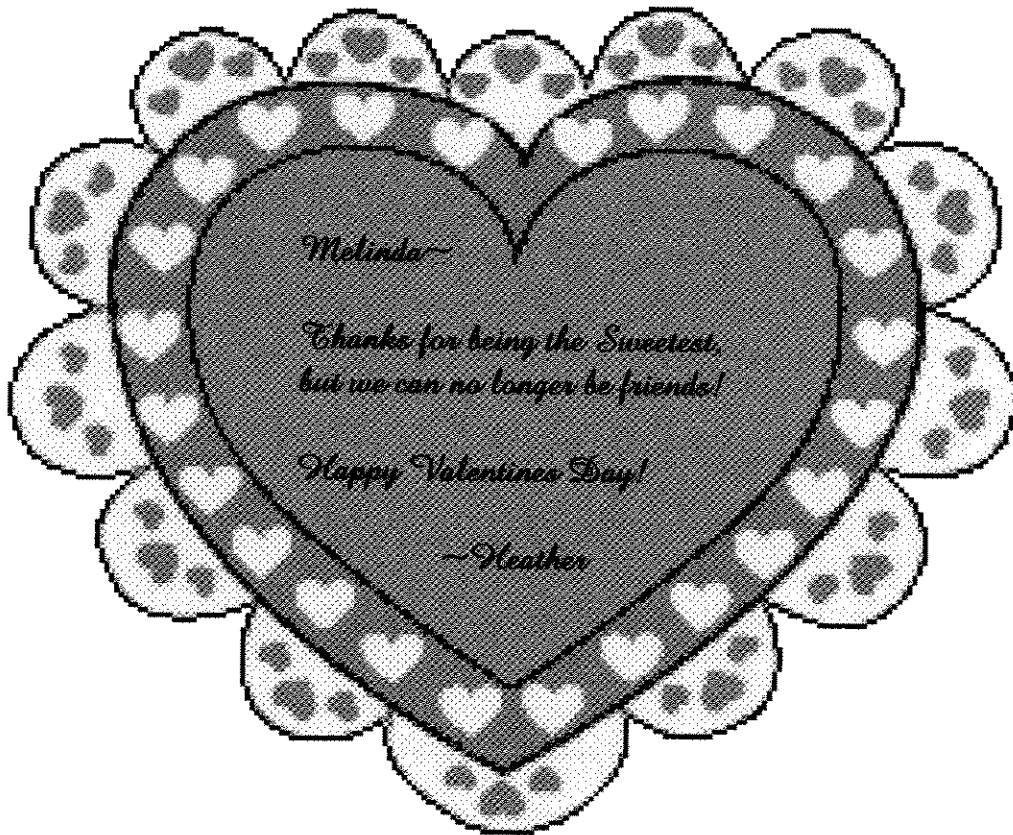


## *anger*

Anger is red hot and blinding. He seethes in your blood, making you irritable and unpleasant. If kept inside, Anger will only churn round and round until your soul is a spinning, sucking under current. He will pull you under—really out of reach—choking you.

## 10 Lies a Rapist will Tell You

1. It's your fault.
2. You wanted it as bad as I did.
3. You never said "No"
4. You can't tell anyone what happened.
5. It's your fault.
6. No one will help you.
7. You're a liar- the rape never happened.
8. You're alone.
9. The truth will only hurt you.
10. It's your fault.



## The Final Round

Andy

That night at the party  
you wanted me  
We were both drunk and  
I got what I came for.

Raped?

You were all over me.  
You were practically  
begging!

Force won't get you anywhere.  
I'm still stronger than you and  
you know you want me again.  
You won't say no.

Melinda

That night at the party  
you wanted me  
we were both drunk and  
he got what he came for.  
He got me despite my screams-  
He got me despite my struggles.  
I got  
Raped.

Begging for my life back is what  
I've been doing this year.  
But, I'm through with that.  
I'm taking my life back with  
force.

NNNNNOOOOOOOOO!!

I'LL NEVER LET YOU HURT ME AGAIN!



Bathroom Graffiti:

Merrweather Rocks!

ALEXANDRA IS A WHORE

BOYS TO STAY AWAY FROM:

ANDY EVANS

J.R is cute!

M'n E'n S are the sweetest girls ever!

W.B.L.

Dear Voiceless-

I want you to know that you are loved and that you are not alone. I hope that you believe in your soul that this was not your fault. Because, it wasn't—he hurt you. Maybe writing this friend a letter, like you've written to me, will help make telling this secret a bit easier. Don't worry about your friends; they'll come around once they hear the truth. You did what you had to do. Be brave, Voiceless! And know that, if anything, I believe in you! Good Luck!

-Abby

Scabby lips and down turned eyes,  
Secrets kept and outright lies.  
She's not who she used to be,  
She's not who she wants to be.



There are lines on her young face,  
And dark circles under her eyes, in place.  
Results of the dreams that haunt her,  
Results of the man who hurt her.

She was not ready,  
She did not know,  
She can not speak,  
She can not show.  
Silence can not remain forever, though.

A voice from within still slumbers  
And a need grows fierce like hunger.  
The tree of her soul grows roots and  
branches,  
Giving her the hope of second chances

She knows she has the right to speak,  
To shed the shell of timid and meek.  
Scabby lips and down turned eyes,  
She lifts a pen and reveals the truth she  
hides.

## \*Note Page\*

### **\*Fear, Struggle, Anger and Growth:**

After the style of J. Ruth Gendler in The Book of Qualities, I have created a series of four pieces that show Melinda's path of emotions. I personified each emotion in a way I believe Melinda might characterize them if asked to describe her emotions in this way. I have tied in Melinda's art project of creating a tree that speaks with the background of each personified emotion. As she travels through the various emotions in the story, her trees change. I chose pictures of trees that I believe represent Melinda and her state of mind when she is going through each specific emotion.

### **\*Dear Abby:**

Melinda doesn't know how to tell anyone her secret in the beginning of the story, like many victims of rape. However, she does know that her survival and healing is directly tied to its telling. I used the Dear Abby pieces to show this awareness. While searching the internet for information about rape I found many resources for rape victims that gave advice about how to tell someone you've been raped. Dear Abby is that resource for Melinda. Melinda knows she must tell, but she doesn't know how. So she writes Abby, an objective advice giver, to get the guidance she needs.

### **\*RAPE:**

This expository piece is composed of the information I gained through research about rape and the consequences of such a trauma. I was highly surprised at the statistics and alarmed in light of the rape scare here on our own campus. I feel that it is so vitally important that young adults are informed about the prevalence of acquaintance rape and that they know how they can protect themselves from such attacks. I was also intrigued to find information about Rape Trauma Syndrome. Previous to my research, I did not know it existed. Through reading about it, I was able to see why Melinda portrayed many of the characteristics that she did. The bolded pieces of information are the stats and characteristics that directly apply to and were shown in Melinda. Her story is, unfortunately, not one that is unfamiliar and I chose to bold these specific traits to show that she is not alone in her struggle with rape.

### **\*10 Lies a Rapist will Tell You**

This piece is based on two things. First, through out the story, Melinda makes lists of 10 Lies They Tell You in High School. I modeled this piece in that fashion. The second inspiration was all the inclusions of Rape Myths or Lies about Rape on many rape-help websites. So many victims of rape have misconceptions about what their rights are and how they can get help because of what their attacker has told them. I wanted to show the most common lies rape victims are told. I wanted to give a glimpse into the haunting mind of a rapist and the tactics that are used to make the victim feel at blame and alone.

### **\*Bathroom Graffiti:**

This piece is a recreation of the graffiti Melinda adds to the stall in her bathroom at school. I feel this is important to include because it marks the beginning of the telling of Melinda's secret. She shows strength and courage in this action. When she returns to that stall a few weeks later, her message "Boys to Stay Away From: Andy Evans" is joined by countless other anonymous writers sharing their disgust for Andy. In this moment, Melinda knows she is not alone and I believe it gives her the push she needs to break her silence with Rachel.

### **\*Nameless Photograph Poem:**

Melinda is not completely healed at the end of the story, but we know that she is going to make it. She has told her secret, she has mended her friendship with Rachel and is well on her way to conquering "IT." She creates her final tree, her final representation of the tree she is, and says, "It isn't perfect and that makes it just right" (p. 198). This poem is the culmination of her growth. She has feared and struggled and angered and now she writes-telling her story, healing.

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## Self-Assessment of Lit-Based Multigenre Paper (EDT 428/528)

Name Brienne Cummings

Date May 1, 2006

Full Title of Paper : From the Voice Within

- 1) What surprised you by the process of writing this paper?

I was surprised by how much fun I had and how much passion that was kindled in me to make sure that everything was just right and that I was portraying Melinda and telling her story in a way that was honest, powerful and moving. When I first started this project I was pretty apathetic. I had a huge number of other final projects to complete and was not excited about a research paper, whether it was multi-genre or not. Once I completed all my other assignments and was able to focus solely on this paper, I got completely wrapped up. I found myself lying awake at night trying to work out the kinks, or tossing around ideas for genres while driving. I was engrossed in this paper and I loved it!

- 2) Tell what was hard about writing this paper and explain why.

The hardest part about writing this paper was creating genres that accurately portrayed the complexity of Melinda and her situation. I didn't want to portray her as flat and one sided and that took a lot of trial and error and experimentation with different genres. It was also difficult to organize my genres in a manner that flowed and would make sense to a reader who had never read Speak before.

- 3) What could you have done to make your work more efficient/productive?

I'm not sure. I've been working on this paper for almost three weeks and it has had my direct and full attention for the last 6 days. I have worked diligently reading and rereading and listening to the story. I have done a great deal of research and have spent the most time writing. I wrote way more than I actually used and I did that on purpose because I knew that some pieces wouldn't work, or would work but just wouldn't fit in *this* paper. I don't want to sound like I did everything perfectly, but I definitely worked really hard on this assignment.

- 4) Were the lessons that your peers provided productive in getting you to produce writing you could use in your paper? Any advice you would offer?

I do think that the assignments I learned from my peers help me. I didn't use many in my final draft but many of the in-class genres prompted genres that did make it into my paper. It's hard to find a genre that you can teach in a class where each person is working with a different text. So, the only advice I have would be to pick a genre that is very flexible and can be used in many different focuses. Pick something that can be long or short, visual or not, serious or funny.



- 5) What did you further learn from the process of creating this multigenre look at your chosen piece of literature? (By all means, consider the research you did as well as the actual writing all the genres and putting together the papers)

Through writing this paper, I feel that I got to know Melinda more than I've ever known a character before. I scrutinized her behavior and her language (or lack thereof) and then researched to find out why she behaved the way she did. I learned so I've never suffered any trauma comparable to rape but I did relate to Melinda on many other levels and being able to express her and her emotions in many ways was like being able to get to know and understand myself better.

- 6) What is your advice to future students who embark on creating Lit-Based Multigenre Papers?

Don't take this assignment lightly. It takes a lot of work and a lot of dedication. Start early so that you have plenty of time to experiment and plenty of time if you hit a dry spell while writing. Dig into your character and the issues he or she is facing and do your best to bring the truth to the surface. Do your best to tell the story of your character as if you were there. Research the obvious as well as the small nuances of your story. Try everything, don't use everything, but try everything. Work with every idea and every whim and then only include your finest and best pieces.