

## Written Concern

I am an adult trying to make a friend. Why? Because I have had friends in the past and they helped me to adulthood. Just what did we help each other towards, we now adults, I wonder, when friends are more and more jinxishly hard to make, have, and be. I am an adult who needs a friend, you are an adult who needs a friend—jinx! We are both cursed into awkwardness. The most intense friendships of my life, structurally and biorhythmically, conspired when I was 15. That same year, in Health Education Class, we each had to fill out an anonymous index card with a personal, “very personal,” concern. The index card would be swallowed into the hairy alien body that is Health Education Class, be randomly reshuffled and spat out among other Health Education Classes, and come back, trawling an anonymous response from another Health Education Class student. Every 15-year-old girl has a secret. The most socially intense year of my life also happened to be the year I woke up to words as meaning-bearers. Duh, right? Words bear meaning, carry it, like little cargo trains between us. But they can also bear meaning, withstand it, like a loving body bears the pain. Words, my kid-woman self saw, could bear to say things I myself could not. So you bet I wrote a very personal concern. More personal and concerning than I, at 15, could know. Until the anonymous student reader responded, and most seriously. We’re talking a kid my age. As an adult, suddenly thinking of this, I am moved. I would pledge my life to this kid now days. The kid said, I will be standing by the bottom of the library staircase during lunch, everyday, for the next two weeks. If you need to talk, I am there waiting for you. After 13 days, I went to the bottom of the staircase. There the kid was, a pale and lanky boy, acne, a beanie over his long greasy hair. We wandered off campus and around the block, winter’s gun-metal gray anywhere you looked. I don’t remember a word said. What I remember now is bumping into the kid, over a decade later, in a bar in Manhattan. My friends were meeting up with his friends, we ended up next to each other, realized we shared a far-off town. His hair was very short, gelled. But I recognized his name. The kid. Probably with laughter I told him the story. He said he had no recollection. In fact, the story appalled him. Why would he have done that? It’s a

little creepy! I haven't really thought about this second encounter. Not till now. I am an adult, deep into adulthood, trying to make a friend. I think I want a friend because I have experienced friends before, some of them strangers, and they changed me. I should say, by friend I mean:

- Musculature for arriving at meaning, on foot.
- Those who show their toys. Don't hide them.
- Where I see myself shackled, you see wrists glinting dandelion stains.
- No, you won't just go inside me. Because if you just go inside me, there's no one outside to knock.
- To know our parameters, we spar, with velvet antlers.
- This isn't funny. I can make it funny. Belly laugh echoing like a womb's missing baby.
- You feel all that? Feel it. Let me sweep your floor. Swept dust like traces of volcanoes on the moon.

This is my concern. I'm writing it down. It's not so very personal as concerns once were. But maybe part of being adult is seeing the very personal is not so personal. Often the personal has nothing to do with us. And how that doesn't mean that this isn't written for a me, and a you. I will wait for you, everyday for the next two weeks, at the bottom of some staircase. I will fight the urge to be appalled at myself. I will truly do this. I will do this and I will believe you is anyone. I'm a deep believer in what can be. Most of what can be is not. I'm a deep believer. I don't have many friends.



**Saudade** (Portuguese: [sɐw'ðaði]). *The love that remains.* A deep melancholic nostalgia for a person or thing that is absent, or perhaps for what has not even happened. *A pleasure you suffer, an ailment you enjoy.* Missingness.

Punch out holes to form word, backwards and upside-down. Punch through with anything you've got. A dry blue pen or needle with ghost thread are very suitable.

Fold paper in half. Stand it up like a bottomed-out triangle. Desire is always a triangle, and Saudade is a triangle with a side ever missing. Now what we have here is an imperfect paper lantern. Unlike a child's but reminiscent of it. What we need is a candle to place within it. To glow the word into being through its holes, its sinuous absences.

What we must do is make our own candle out of ourselves. We have what it takes but only over time. Earwax.

Only our very own sticky inner buildup can make a candle to light up the holes of Saudade. Now this may take strange heaps and gaps of time.

How do you take your Saudade?

We can make the candle of earwax in real-time or time-lapsed, singular or communal. (A communal earwax candle vastly speeds up the process, but can also diffuse it.)

For this light show, for better and for worse, we have no director.

It is up to us, the individual actors waxing uniquely nostalgic.

Our earwax candle will not be a hard amber jewel. It will be eerie putty stickered with lost hairs and loose glitter and dead skin bits and mapped with overlapping finger whorls.

No shame in that.

This candle of our inner buildup should gutter and hiss and go out and flame up. Like desire. Or memory. Or illness. Or imagined pleasure.

Do not hold the word lantern in your hands. Remember, it has no bottom.

Brooke Larson is a writer, performer, and sometimes wilderness guide. She authored a book of essays, *Pleasing Tree* (Arc Pair Press), and forthcoming chapbooks *Origami Drama* (Quarterly West) and *Daughter Particles* (Dancing Girl). Her work has appeared in *Gravel*, *Split Rock Review*, *Timber*, and *The Journal of Creative Geography*. She tweets [@brookeLarsoon](#).