

Head Above Water

Anoka County Library Short Story

By: Hannah Jurek

Prologue

I started this journal
To keep track
Of my life.
To be able to remember
What happened in my life
While Mom was in
The Military.
But that isn't all
This journal captures much more
A lot has happened.
A lot still is.
But this journal is my own.
It is my own time capsule.

Day One

Not a lot changed
In one day.
I still have bad grades.
I am busier, though.
I have to take care
Of Roland
Who's autistic.
I have to take care
Of Aubrey
Who has ADHD.
I have to take care
Of the mail.
I have to take care
Of the dishes.
I have to take care
Of my room.
I have to take care
Of dinner.
I have to take care

Of myself.

Day Two

Dad ended up
Getting Elan.
There is a lot
Of paperwork.
I don't get it.
Why must you buy
A child?
Why do I have to pay
For time at school
With a tutor.
Mom and Dad didn't pay
To have me.
I don't pay
For teachers to do
What teachers do.
But Dad must pay
To adopt Elan.
And I must buy
Help with math.

Day Three

It's hard.
All of the money.
All of the paperwork.
All of the activities.
No more extracurricular activities.
No more going to hotels
To get out of the house.
If you need a snack
Ask a friend
For money
Or for a snack
But never
Buy a snack
With your own money
Because you know
We have food at home

And you know
We're tight on money.

Day Four

More money
More money
We need
More money.
To pay for the therapist.
To pay for the doctors.
To pay for everything.
We need more money.
We need a bigger house.
I can't share a room
With three people
And not realize
The money we need.
Elan has been loving our house.
He doesn't realize
What's happening
Since this is an upgrade
From the adoption center.
Because our life
Is better than some.
That's why dad doesn't want money from others.
But we need money.
We need money.

Day Five

At least it is Friday.
At least it is Friday.
Fridays are full of happiness
And hope.
Right?
There is no way
That today
Our house was taken away.
Foreclosed.
Gone.
There is no way

That we packed up
And left.
There is no way
I failed a test
And an hour later
I was called home
And dad was on the phone
Though he is always gone
At work
As a waiter
And as a nighttime bartender
With a few hours of sleep.
There is no way
That it is a Friday.
There is no way.

Day Six

I thought Saturdays
Were great
Until you have to move in
To your cousins' house
With twelve people total
Including you
And you share a room
With not just four people
But five.
At least we don't have to worry
About bills.
We shouldn't have adopted
Elan.
We didn't realize
The financial dip
Mom would make
Moving to serve in the military
For just one year.
But the dip
Is bigger
Than expected.
We need money.
We need money.
The doctors talked about money

At Roland's doctor
For his autism.
At Aubrey's doctor
For her ADHD.
Aunt Lourine drove us to these appointments
That are magnets
To money.
Aunt Lourine
Told me not to worry.
But I worried
A lot.
I worried about
Money
About school
About tutors
About everything
You need to stop worrying, Ana.
We will figure this out.
You need to stop worrying.
I can't stop worrying.
I need to stop worrying.
But I can't stop worrying.

Day Seven

It's been a week.
An anniversary
Of mom going
To the military.
But that week
Felt like a year.
A decade.
A millennium.
That week
Wasn't a great week.
At least I got to go to Church.
Where I'm at Mass until noon.
Because we have breakfast
All twelve of us get ready
And head out the door.
At 12:30 I have my Church group
Until two o'clock.

And I help out at the preschool
Until three thirty.
Since Elan is young
Like my cousin Brody.
And their group goes longer
Because they take breaks and do crafts.
After that
We go home
For dinner
For game night
To spend our only time
With dad.

Day Eight

This journal
Might not make it
To the end
Of a year.
This journal
Might only make it through
The beginning
Of our journey.
But that is okay
Because life is a river
With twists and turns and unknown streams.
Life is a mountain
With ups and downs
And everything in between.
But most certainly
Life is hard.
And that is okay.
Mondays are hard
But that's okay.
Because I got a C-
On a math test today
But that's okay.
We're going to move into a new apartment
For the five of us
And move out of Aunt Lourine's.
And that is okay
All we need is money.

I wish things were back to normal.
All we need is money.

Day Nine

Veterans Day!

Bring A Veteran You Know!

Give a speech!

Sing!

Join the ice cream social to raise money

For a charity of your choice (put charity ideas below)!

At Weerie Middle School's Cafeteria

At 8:30-10:45 (Hours one through three!)

I can't bring my veteran.

It's too embarrassing to sing

And try to raise money.

Maybe I could sing

And get money.

It's too embarrassing to sing

But I would get money.

Should I sing?

We need the money.

Day Ten

We need money

If we get that apartment.

If we want to pay for the doctors.

If we want a little money

To have

On hand.

Maybe we can use

The money

To get out of our debt.

Something.

We can use the money for something.

Am I something you can donate to?

Are we something to donate to?

Can I sing?

Am I horrible?

We need that money.

Day Eleven

It's Thursday.
Friday Eve.
Friday Junior.
Pre-Friday.
We haven't been living
At Aunt Lourine's for too long
But long enough
To get irritated.
Next Monday
Is Veterans Day.
Next Monday
Can change my life.
Next Monday
I can sing.
Next Monday
I can get money.
Do I want everyone to know
I need money?
Can I do it?
Will dad let me?
Will I get the money?
Should I tell him?
I think I'm going to sing.
I think I am going to get the money.
I don't think I'll tell dad
I'm singing
Only that
I'm going to my assembly
Even though it's optional.

Day Twelve

Friday.
A day of joy.
A week of staying at Aunt Lourine's.
I got a B-!
On a math test!
It is as if
The Earth knew
What I was going through
And how happy

I am
That I got a B-
On a math test.
Dad doesn't know
About the money
But says he'll take money
Out of his savings
To rent an apartment
As long as I
Get a job
At 14.
So I said yes
To working the concessions
At the hockey rink.
So I said yes
To work at 14.
So I put in my application
Nervously
At the local hockey rink
So dad would rent
The apartment.
This makes up for last Friday.
This was a real Friday.

Day Thirteen

Saturday appointments.
Mixed with moving into an apartment.
Dad said he would take off today
To move in.
That was fast
For the apartment to be ready.
I think dad knew for a while
I think he signed the paperwork
Before the house was foreclosed
But needed time
For finalizations
So we moved into Aunt Lourine's
For a week.
I have to sing
In two days.
To get money
To share a room with one person.
To get money

To have a little extra wiggle room.
I need that money.
We need that money.

Day Fourteen

It's Sunday.
We went to Church.
We did our Church day.
With Youth Group and Preschool help.
We did game night
On our own
Without five other cousins
And two adults.
Just me,
Roland,
Aubrey,
Elon,
And dad.
I wish mom were here.
I wish mom were here right now.
I have to sing tomorrow.
At the assembly.
I'm nervous
But we need the money.
We have a little more money now
But spent it on the apartment.
I'm ready to sing
American Soldier
I'm ready to sing
In front of the school.

Day Fifteen

I've never gone up
To the desk
To turn in a paper
Better students usually turn in.
About academic excellence

And other great things students do.
I just come to the office
For retakes
Because I am bad at school
I am ready
To sing.
I go up onstage
And listen to Emiline Jean talk
About soldiers
That she doesn't know
And make a great speech
Because she is Emiline Jean
And she can do that
Without knowing a soldier
Herself.
Finally
It is my turn
And I get up to sing
And I choke the first words out.
Everyone tells me
To look at the crowd
To find my friend to look at
But my life is hard
And I moved to this school
Right after the beginning of the year
So I don't have friends
Right now
And it is hard
To sing.
But I get more comfortable
And confident
As the song goes on
Until
The end
Where I sing my heart out
And I hold out that last note
Beautifully
Until
I scream
And I kick
And elbow
The person
Who snuck behind me
While I was singing
And wrapped my arms around me
Through the kick and elbow

Until I turn around
And realize
Mom's back.
Until I realize
And I start crying
And I tell her everything
Offstage
And I receive the donations
People gave
Of \$2,000.
Which is enough
For two months of rent.
Which is enough
To keep us afloat.
And mom isn't mad
I got the money.
She just cried with me.
I'm proud of you, Ana.
I'm proud of you.
And I looked down
For the first time in two weeks
And saw my knee on the ground
Not bouncing
My body
Wasn't shaking
And I could breathe.
And mom called dad
To take off work
And come to the ice cream social
And have my brothers and sister
Skip school
To get shakes
With the money
We now have.
Mom isn't home for good
Just a veterans day break
For the people in training
Since most of them
Have been gone
Since April
For six months
And finally got a holiday.
My mom joined at a weird time
But she got to come home
For two days
And those two days

We sorted things out better.
I still have to get a job.
We are still struggling.
But we're better.
We're not under the water
Our heads are up.
And we are finding a boat to clutch onto.
We haven't found one yet.
But it's easier to try and find a boat
With your head above water.

Epilogue

That wasn't a year.
I ran out of room.
But it wasn't a waste, either.
Dad stopped working overnights
He only has really long days.
We're improving.
My grades are all B minuses to B pluses
Which means I am improving
For once
In my life.
Still no after school activities
For a year at least.
Still not perfect.
Still tight on money
But we are getting
To be a little looser.
Still not perfect
But improving.
Like I said at the beginning;
I started this journal
To keep track
Of my life.
To be able to remember
What happened in my life
While Mom was in
The Military.
But that isn't all
This journal captures much more

A lot has happened.
A lot still is.
But this journal is my own.
It is my own time capsule.
But it doesn't end here.
More happened.
More "time capsules" were made.
More lives were touched.
A year went by
50 more weeks.
But that is okay
That I only put in two weeks.
Because I ran out of room.
And I will never forget
These two weeks
That changed
Me
My life
My perspective
My family
My everything.
I still have Church on Sundays.
And appointments on Saturdays
And progressing grades.
But everything has changed.
And I will never forget
To take my head
Out of
The
Water.

Sincerely,
Ana Wordoff