

## Dear Diary,

Diaries, actually. There are seven of you now, stacked haphazardly beside me. You're a mismatched pile: the oldest, a squat brown journal complete with a broken lock; the youngest, a *Lord of the Rings*-themed volume I nabbed for \$1 when the movie first hit big. In between your covers lie 16 years of my life.

When I first got you, my 11-year-old self, excited at the thought of having my own private space, scribbled "IF YOU LOOK PAST THIS PAGE I WILL HIT YOU HARD!" on the inside cover. Those first few years, I saw you mostly as a silent friend I could vent my problems to, and accordingly filled you with complaints about my parents ("No one understands me!") and worries about my schoolwork ("Today we had a math test. It was really hard"). As I grew older, you witnessed my first day of high school ("It was OK") and my first high school football game ("It was awesome!!"). My favorite entry from those years centers on a band trip to Tennessee. The 10-page chronicle includes descriptions of what we ate, what we visited, where everyone sat on the bus—with illustration—and the various, complicated teenage dramas that unfolded. Somehow I had forgotten about a particularly nasty love triangle involving me, my friend, and a cute

saxophonist we both liked. It's things like that—events long forgotten, but brought vividly back to life upon rereading—that make me so grateful to have you.

My entries tapered off as I got older, several years passing with barely a mention. But my more recent diaries pack a punch, featuring my acceptance to grad school ("I was shaking uncontrollably when I opened the letter!"), my experiences living through hurricanes Isabel and Katrina ("Reading by candlelight: not as fun as it sounds"), and the shock of the Sept. 11 attacks. On days like those, I instinctively turn to you, Diary. You provide an outlet I can't get anywhere else, a place for me to record my inner thoughts and frustrations without fear of judgment. On your pages, I can be as mean, as optimistic, as cynical, or as depressed as I want. I can talk through my problems. I can wallow shamelessly. I can dream about the future.

For the past decade and a half, you've provided me a place for catharsis. Whether my challenges were big or small, my joys long-lasting or only fleeting, you listened just the same. Thanks to you, I have a permanent record of myself that I'll always cherish, even as I prepare to crack open a new journal and start adding more entries.

Love, Jessica 

*Jessica Bridges is an assistant editor at Spirit.*

