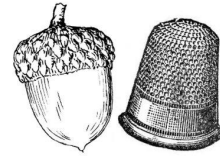


Letters to Wendy



Written and Performed by Katherine Gallo

Inspired by the writings of JM Barrie

*“Both of you know it’s your time to grow,
to fly apart to reunite...
don’t look behind,
fly till you find
your way towards tomorrow”*

~Sebastián Yatra

Dedicated to Molly,
Forever the Nana of my Nursery



2008-2022

PETER

Dear Wendy,

Hello.

This is Peter.

Pan.

In case you... er... know another Peter.

I am writing a letter to you. This is a letter.

I write letters now.

(He's quite proud of it too)

Neverland hasn't changed much since you and the lost boys left.

Well, it's a bit quieter, I suppose.

NOT IN THE BORING WAY though.

It's actually nice to always be the loudest one here.

Tinkerbelle's loud for a fairy I guess, but I of course am still far louder.

(TINKERBELL appears and twinkles quite loudly)

Tink!

Alright, alright fine!

(Back to the letter)

Tinkerbelle would like me to tell you that she's still louder than you.

I do not think this is true, Wendy, but if I'm to be here alone with Tink for a while, I don't think I should challenge her for she can be quite cruel, as you know.

Though this is my first letter, I no doubt am the best letter writer to have ever lived

Which is why when you have finished reading this, you must pin it to your wall so everyone can see how wonderful I am at lettering

Have the lost boys learned to write letters at sChOoL yet?

I bet not.

I miss you a little bit.

Not too much.

But a bit.

I shall be sure to make quite a mess so you'll have lots to do when you come to do my spring cleaning.

(PETER makes a little mess, to make a point)

Signed, the world's number one letterer,
Peter Pan

(PETER fades and KATHERINE appears. They look to where PETER just was and sigh fondly upon seeing the mess he's made.)

KATHERINE

In the original Peter Pan story, when Peter first arrives at Wendy's nursery, looking for his shadow, Wendy is enamored by him immediately. He looks at Wendy and proclaims "one girl is worth twenty boys," and calls her clever.

Wendy, taken aback by the kindness and praise coming from this strange boy, proclaims that she should like to give him a kiss, to which Peter replies by holding out his hand, for he does not know what a kiss is, but will know when she gives him one. Wendy decides to follow his cue and gives him a thimble, calling it a kiss. Peter figures he should give her one in return, and hands her an acorn, calling it a kiss as well.

For Peter and Wendy, these 'kisses' are tangible gestures of their love for each other. No matter how they change and grow, and how complicated their feelings towards each other become, that first moment of simple affection is immortalized in two little trinkets.

When I turned five years old, I asked for a Peter Pan birthday party. My mom made the entire thing by herself. She made the playset in my backyard look like a pirate ship, organized a treasure hunt, and infamously spent days cutting out huge paper islands, before my dad pointed out that her hands were likely cramping because she had somehow been using left-handed scissors, despite there being no left-handed members of my family. This was also all while she was about 7 months pregnant with my brother.

The day finally came, and we had the 2003 Peter Pan soundtrack playing in the yard, and I specifically remember running over the patch of dirt between the bush and the birdbath as it played. We laid down on long paper and my mom traced us so we could then color in our own 'shadows.'

Suddenly, my dad burst-
No.

(try again.)

Suddenly, my dad BURST out of the back door in a FULL Captain Hook costume. We all screamed and ran as he chased us around, brandishing his hook as he did.

Now, this was no ordinary pirate costume. No, it was a GLORIOUS pirate coat, brocade, gold buttons and all, and my usually bald father had a life-like wig of Hook's iconic black curls. He even had heeled pirate boots on, leaving dents in the grass as he ran. His hat was no cheap party store pirate hat, but a marvelous one with a feather so lush that it must have been from an ostrich. I actually found a picture of him from that day, and here it is:

(KATHERINE shows a picture from the Picture Book)

Except none of that is true.

The party is, and the decorations are, and my dad really did surprise us in a pirate costume, but it looked like this:

(KATHERINE flips the page)

Now, don't get me wrong, he looks great. Apparently my mom just asked him to get an eyepatch and a hat and a hook, and he rolled up entirely decked out by comparison.

But it's nothing like I had remembered it for 15 years.

But that doesn't matter.

Because this memory? This party? My dad's costume?

That's a Kiss.

And like Peter and Wendy's kisses, time can move forward and people can change and memories can warp, but that pure, concentrated love at the center of that gesture? It stays.

Now I'm 22 and

I may not always know how to talk about my relationships to my parents, but I can always talk about thimbles and acorns and kisses..

That's why this story stays so popular, I think.

It reminds us of when things were simpler.

When every day was full of kisses and our biggest concern was battling pirates in our nurseries.

I mean, god, I remember when I was like 11 and my biggest concern was the fact that my bedroom looked vaguely like a self-serve frozen yogurt shop.

No, seriously.

There was this place in my hometown called Yogurt Crazy, and it was the Place To Be after school talent shows, musicals, etc.

And the walls had these wacky lime green stripes on them, and I decided that my room simply had to also have them, so my mom and I spent hours if not days painting them together and they looked SICK.

they looked BEAUTIFUL.

I basically lived in a frozen yogurt shop, which was really a huge win in the year of our lord 2011.

ANYWAY

These stripes must have activated some deep fight or flight instinct within me because the first night I tried to sleep in my room after we had painted them I was like

...

Nevermind, I want them Gone.

And my poor mother was probably like

“Katherine. We just finished painting. You probably just need to get used to them.”

Only for me to be like

“Mother you do not understand. These stripes. Are actually very much not what I want and I DO think they are going to kill me in my sleep.”

I DID get used to them eventually, of course, and they became staple Katherine room decor

and though it was certainly a stressful experience for little Katherine, I’m a recent college graduate now.

So my daily stressors now look less like that and more like

~what am I working towards?~

and

~are my relationships just changing or are they ending~

And I can’t help but long for the days where my biggest concern were the stripes on my wall, and my mom was always just down the hall to comfort me about it.

PETER

Hiya, Wendy!

You simply shall not believe the adventure I had today. It was perhaps my greatest yet, and I knew at once that I had to tell you so you could tell the story to the lost boys so that they may not forget how wonderful I am.

I woke up this morning and realized that I had gone far too long without reminding the pirates of the Jolly Roger who the TRUE leader of Neverland is, and so I decided to pay them a visit.

I went all the way from the hideout to the ship without a single soul noticing because I had decided to be the most quiet bird Neverland had ever seen. Tink says she heard me, but I'm quite sure that's just Tink lying because she's rude and jealous of my exceptional quietness.

(PETER climbs the windowsill, walking along it as if it were a ship mast)

I arrived just as the sun was setting, so I had to be extra careful of my shadow landing on one of the sails and giving me up, but ever since you sewed my shadow back on, it's been much more keen to do as I say, so I snuck by without an issue.

Suddenly, I

(He jumps to the floor)

JUMPED onto the deck, and a few pirates...

no.

Suddenly, I

(He jumps to the floor again)

JUMPED onto the deck, and a few pirates...

And was surrounded by no less than twenty pirates, all hoping to be the one to deliver me to Hook (dead or alive).

(We're transported to PETER's fantasy as he begins to reenact his battle)

I fought them all off with one hand behind my back, and some even jumped ship before I got to them after merely watching me fight my way through the lot of them.

Finally, I got to the captain's quarters.

A mere grin at Mr. Smee sent him running off, and I was left to face Hook myself.

(Is Hook really gone for good That should be a good thing Why does it feel bad)

(Snap out of it. You're telling a story.)

But Wendy, you won't believe it.

The codfish must have been too afraid to face me, because he didn't even show his face!

I suppose my last battle with him WAS quite impressive, so I don't blame the old man, but I suppose I expected more from a so-called captain.

Anyway, I secured a trophy for my efforts.

(PETER rummages about the hideout, until he produces a telescope.)

Hook's telescope.

It is of much better use to me anyway, as I can hold it with TWO hands unlike some people, and now I shall be able to spot pirates attacking our home before they ever get close.

Talk to you later, Wendy.

Make sure to tell the boys my new story immediately, for it surely will not be long before I have another.

- Peter

(PETER sends his letter. TINK twinkles in a fashion we can only assume means "dude... give it up")

PETER

Oh, give it a rest, Tink.

(She twinkles again)

PETER

Oh because I'm sure you know all about letter-writing.

(TWINKLE TWINKLE. Oh that's just mean.)

PETER

She is NOT too busy growing up to write me back!

(beat)

Everyone knows you must write at least 50 letters before you get one back.

You would know that if you were smart and clever like me instead of dull and stupid like you.

(TINK flies away, offended)

(PETER is left to ponder this. Before he can Think Too Much, KATHERINE appears)

OKAY but what if I hate When Wendy grew Up?

Context: YEARS after publishing the original play, JM Barrie added an epilogue called “When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought,” In which Peter returns to Wendy, but far more time has passed for her than him. Wendy has to break it to him that she’s too old to return, and Peter is upset briefly before casually deciding to just take Wendy’s daughter, Jane, off to Neverland with him in Wendy’s place. ,

Oh, and the best part is that he tells Wendy that he forgets everything.
 She asks about Captain Hook. He has no idea who that is.
 She asks about Tinkerbell, and he remarks that she has likely died, but shows no remorse for this.

NO, YOU KNOW WHAT? I DO HATE IT.

I literally do not give a single shit Jimmy John Barrie. you may have created peter, but you’re wrong about this bit.

you put this boy through HELL.
 you made him feel abandoned by his parents
 you made him fight evil that no child should have to face
 you let him build a little family, only to have them all choose to leave him

and he STILL managed to be Good.

he befriended the fairies
 he fought the pirates
 he gave a home to other boys so they would never have to feel alone like he did,
 and you make him FORGET?

no, no i’m sorry.
 I forgot that you were GRACIOUS enough to allow him to remember Wendy leaving him.

how DARE he treat him like that?
 how DARE he force all that upon him and then take his family away?

and most of all, how DARE he make him forget?
 Peter deserves to remember.

(big ol beat)

(Well, fuck. I just Jimmy John-ed myself.)

the wall story isn't funny.

earlier, when i told the story about the stripes on my walls, it wasn't fucking funny.

i tell that story and i tell it as a funny anecdote because i feel like it SHOULD be. because i don't WANT every tiny thing to make me feel like my world is breaking.

but when i got into bed that first night, it suddenly hit me that I had done something horrible and irreversible. MY walls, the walls that had watched me sleep every night and provided the background for every game of make-believe, were forever altered. I would never see them in their original state again. It couldn't even be remedied by painting over them, because that would only suffocate more of the original paint, making me betray my walls even further. Worse, I could see the stripes with the lights off, so I couldn't escape them even in the dark.

I sobbed, and was unable to sleep in my room for multiple weeks.

All I wanted was to enjoy it.. I had been SO excited. SO proud of my funky stripes. SO anxious to show them off.

But something in my brain would not allow it.

And it wasn't just the walls either

Each new opportunity, each exciting change, comes with looming dread that my brain will find a way to ruin it for me. So much so that even in the few times the change itself has gone fine, the lead-up to it is so torturous that it doesn't even matter.

And every time one of these things happen, my first instinct is to joke. To make silly little jokes out of my silly little brain and push away the sinking feeling that it is becoming harder and harder to function.

I fantasize about being kidnapped by a pirate or fighting a sword fight to the death because it sounds SO NICE to be hurting because of something tangible and larger than myself rather than something inside of me that I can't define.

And I have to believe it wasn't always like this.

But I can't remember it NOT being like this.

I try as hard as I can to remember the feeling I see in my eyes in the pictures of the Peter Pan birthday party, but I can't. I feel joy like that, sure! Of course I do! But what was it like to feel

that joy without an undercurrent of panic? Without waiting for the other shoe to drop in my mind?

Why did I have to forget it?

Why do I remember pulling my hair out in 5th grade but not NOT pulling my hair out in 4th

Why do I only get to remember - only get to know that something about me is Not Right?

Why can't I remember when I didn't know that yet?

Why does it seem like Wendy's story makes everyone long for the simplicity of childhood, while I'm forced to see myself in the boy that never got that luxury?

I want to remember.

(PETER finds his thimble in his pocket.)

PETER

Wendy.

Wendy.

Wendy.

Wendy, you won't believe it, Wendy!

(a revelation. He holds the thimble close and begins rummaging through a basket of odds and ends until he produces a perfect acorn.)

I have the most wonderful news!

I have found my kiss-

Or your kiss-

The kiss I gave you!

The one that saved you!

You must be missing it terribly, but I've got it!

You must have forgotten it or-

No, you must have lost it, Wendy!

You must have dropped it when Hook took you away or... or when you were helping all the lost boys... or... oh, it doesn't matter!

What matters is that I simply must return it to you, Wendy!

I know I said I would not return until spring cleaning, but I cannot wait

Because I am Peter Pan and you are Wendy Moira Angela Darling and we must have each other's kisses so we do not forget!

(PETER carefully places the thimble and acorn next to the basket of odds and ends, and begins flitting about the room, gathering what he needs for the journey to London)

I shall be there quite soon, I imagine.

The flight to London only takes a night or so, you'll remember that, Wendy.

So do make sure to keep your window open and I will soon-

(crash. In his frenzy, PETER has accidentally knocked over the basket, and buttons, marbles and acorns have gone tumbling all over the floor, taking the kisses with them.)

PETER

No.

no no no no no no no no

(HE panics, searching through the mess for the acorn that he has decided is Wendy's, but it looks like all the others.)

Don't worry Wendy.

Don't

Don't worry a moment, Wendy.

I will find it.

I will find it again.

I will find it again because Wendy you must have your kiss so that you may never forget me just like I have mine so that I may never forget you because Wendy, Wendy I forget things far faster than I like to admit... I think I may have forgotten Hook by now if not for the letters I write in which I mention him... But Wendy, you do not leave my mind like the others because... we

(PETER finds the thimble)

Because you gave me this.

(he holds it so close that it may as well be inside his chest)

And this cannot so easily slip away.

But now...

Yours...

(PETER looks to the mess of little bits and bobs before him)

I wish I really was the boy who WOULD not grow up, that I was so brave that I refused to grow up and that's why everyone loves me but that's not true it's just not true.

Because if I was the boy who wouldn't grow up, that would mean that I could but I don't and I don't think I *can*.

And it's really scary to want something you can't do, wendy.

And why won't anyone just tell me how?

Why won't YOU tell me how.

Wendy, why won't you tell me how?

Once we were playing Mother and Father Wendy do you remember and you said I wasn't doing it right so I asked what I did wrong and you said there's "much more to being a grownup than I was doing" and so I asked what else there was and you said "I don't know."

And I think you were lying, Wendy, because if you didn't know then how did you do it?

How did you know just how to play Mother?

How are you learning how to be a real Mother right now while I can't see?

I think I am very angry with you, Wendy.

And I did not notice for quite a while because Angry is something I feel for pirates not for friends and mothers

And I do not like how complicated it has all become in my head!

Wendy, maybe I'm not angry at you.

I

I think I am angry at me.

Yes.

Yes, I think that i am angry at me and

And very frustrated by you.

(Frustrated is a word I once heard Hook use, I do hope I'm using it right.)

Wendy, I'm frustrated because sometimes I can't sleep because I can't stop thinking about how you left Neverland before you really knew what growing up means.

All I can think about is how one day you'll find out that

while being a girl may just mean being a boy with a much kinder heart, being a woman is so very different than being a man and both are awful in their own ways and how horrified you'll be.

But Wendy I'm So ANGRY at me and FRUSTRATED with you because

You probably won't mind any of this at all and

I DON'T GET IT.
 and I WANT TO GET IT.
 I want it to be easy.
 I want to be easy,
 I want to move forward, wendy. I want to grow but I don't know how and I HATE IT.

I want to be THRILLED that Hook is gone. I want to run around his ship and take his treasures
 and wear them all
 I should feel free! So why do I just feel like something is ending?

Wendy, i think frustrated was not the right word after all.
 I am just SO jealous.

(the lines begin to blur between KATHERINE and PETER)

I like to think that as you begin to grow up you will look in the mirror and notice that you aren't
 shaped like the other lost boys anymore, and that you will tug at your nightgown to hide it, and
 then find an ace bandage hidden in your father's medical closet and use it to bind your chest for
 almost a year.

That you will experience the day when you realize the other children have never been laughing
 WITH you.

That you will one day have to choose between being who you are and not being alone.

I like to think that you will do that because *I* did that.
 I like to pretend that I'm far more like you than I am.
 Because, Wendy, it is far harder to be like Peter than it is to be like you.

When you are Peter, growing up has much higher stakes.
 There is far more to lose.

I hate the way JM Barrie ended your story because it ended with you happily living as a mother
 and a wife.
 And I'm jealous because I don't know if I could ever do that.

And it's not fair that YOU were the one that got to run away to Neverland when you had hardly
 anything to run from.

Every supposedly exciting change in my life sends me into a downward spiral.

I spent years pretending I hadn't gotten my period and squeezing my chest into too-small bras because my body was changing in ways that made it feel alien, and I didn't even get a choice in the matter.

Fuck, I can't even give my hidden kisses without looking around to see if we're safe first.

But YOU found Peter at your window. YOU got to fly away.

Wendy, you may think growing up is scary, but do you realize how fucking lucky you are? I mean, if nothing else, you are so like your mother that if you feel lost, you can just look to her and see a shining example of what you will be.

(taking in the space PETER plays in)

He does so need a mother.
No one knows it so well as I.

Your mother and mine.
Your mother and mine.

(KATHERINE takes a breath, grabs her teddy bear, and sits on the floor.)

Dear Mom.

I remember the Peter Pan birthday party fondly not because of the games or music, but because of the image of you hunched over paper crafts with left-handed scissors, creating my favorite world from scratch while still denying you're "crafty"

My whole life, when I've tried to illustrate to people how much I've always loved Peter Pan, I start with the anecdote that when I was a child, I unlocked my window every night, just in case he came to take me away.

I never did that.

In fact, I have absolutely no idea if the windows in my childhood bedroom had locks on them at all.

I think the reason I lied was because I didn't know how to tell the other children that I cherish every night in my nursery.

And that I couldn't imagine flying anywhere you couldn't follow me to.

You, who slicked my hair into a bun every afternoon and told me I was beautiful.

Who held my hand as I cried in the fitting room when none of the children's jeans would fit my thighs and hips anymore.

You, who were dubbed "superhero" by my internet friends after you drove an 8 hour round trip to bring them to our house for a sleepover because you knew I had finally found people that didn't snicker when I turned my back.

You, who made my friends realize how kind mothers can be. Should be. And who holds them like your own whenever they need it.

You, who made a global shutdown a secret joy for me, as I never thought I would get to see you every day like that again.

You, who would be surprised by all of this because you don't do it to be a superhero.

You just do it.

You always have.

Mom, I don't think it's that I can't grow up.

Or even that I don't want to.

I think it's that every step I've taken towards growing up has felt like a step away from you.

Most of the time, I understand Peter more than I understand myself.

But I had to figure this one out for the both of us.

For Peter

Or my Peter, anyway,

The fear isn't just growing up.

It's coming to terms with the fact that there isn't anyone to show you how.

And that if you're going to do it, it'll have to be in a way the world doesn't favor or expect.

Wendy grew up to be the spitting image of Mrs. Darling.

She may have been reluctant to grow up, she never had to wonder if it was possible because she had a model to follow.

Peter calls Wendy his Mother because she is all he wants to be.

But when you're like Peter, you spend so much time trying to grow into your mother's image,

And it is so, so scary every time you do not fit.

All my life, when I tried to imagine myself as a grown-up, all I could picture was you, Mom.

And as time has passed, that image has felt more and more wrong. More and more untrue.

I am mourning the fact that I cannot be like you.

That there will always be parts of me that you do not understand.

I'm terrified of growing up because I've never seen someone like me do it.
 I've never met a grown-up that resembles what I would like to someday be.
 And I am often tempted to push those feelings away; to squeeze myself into your image and ignore the parts that do not fit.

But then I think of Wendy.

I think about how heartbroken she would be if the strange boy that once appeared at her window dressed himself in a school uniform or grew up to be a banker or lost even a dash of his pixie dust, even if it was in pursuit of staying near her.
 And I know *you* wouldn't want that for *me* either.

And I guess

If I have to figure out how to grow up without an example, then the good news is that I get to make my own rules.

I can't be like you. Not without betraying myself. But that doesn't mean I can't keep parts of you with me.

Your kindness.
 Your fierceness
 Your bravery.

And perhaps Peter wouldn't be so afraid if he knew that can keep Wendy with him in the same way.

I think he might just need someone to show him how.

So what do you say, mom?
 Should we show him how it's done?

(Music swells. It's not PETER or KATHERINE, not Neverland OR here. It's both. KATHERINE Begins to dance. Slowly, PETER begins to as well. It's a one-person pas de deux, as the two jumbo and twirl amongst the kisses still strewn on the floor, as if they're dancing in the rain, splashing in puddles as they go. They're flying.)

(after a while/after the music ends)

PETER (or is it KATHERINE? Maybe both)

Dear Wendy

I flew today.

I didn't tell you because I didn't want it to worry you, but I haven't been able to get off the ground since you left.

Or I suppose I didn't really want to?

I still had happy thoughts, sure, but none of the special sort that make you want to lift up into the air. Do you understand? Of course you do.

And usually, thoughts of you make me feel like that, but recently every thought about you has also been a thought about how you growing up means me being alone.

But today was different because today I thought about how happy you must be.

I thought about

How Proud you must be to have your own room, outside of the nursery.

I thought about

How Glad you will be when your mother gives you a dress that looks like hers.

And how beautiful you will feel when you put it on and it fits you in just the right way to make you feel like a woman.

And I thought about how I don't want that, Wendy.

And I do not want to be a man either.

But I am SO HAPPY that You do.

And that is not a lie.

I do not lie.

... except to pirates maybe.

I miss you Wendy.

And I miss when things were simple.

But I do not miss the Peter I was before I met you.

And though I may be lonely now, remembering that you care for me, no matter how far away you are, makes me feel very brave indeed.

Oh, and Wendy?

Can I tell you a secret?

You do not have to be a child to fly

Not really.

You can be a grownup too.

I did not want to tell you because I have never met a grownup that remembered how to fly

And so I thought perhaps they couldn't
But there's really no rule about it.
The pixie dust can't tell.
And if anyone can keep flying, it's you.

You simply must remember what it feels like to be a child.
And Wendy?

I won't forget if you won't forget.

(PETER crows. KATHERINE crows too. Neverland swells back to life.)

THOUGHTS

- how am i meant to be a grown up if i only just met myself?
- i just need a little more time
-