

# GOOD DIFFERENT

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# The first time

I broke down  
in front of anyone  
was in the middle of the evil place:  
Walmart.

All the people  
and noise  
pricked inside my head  
like a hundred shirt tags.

It was a Saturday  
and the aisles were crowded,  
people yelled,  
the overhead music crackled,  
some smell like sour milk spilled  
through the air and turned my stomach,  
and Mom wanted me to decide  
on a new pair of jeans  
from the millions of racks.

All of a sudden  
the whole store—  
screaming kids  
and stiff AC air—  
was folding in on me,  
like too-tight hugs from strangers.

I ran,  
locked myself  
in one of the changing stalls.  
Mom banged on the door  
but I balled up on the dirty  
tile floor  
and cried  
and hyperventilated  
till my head stopped spinning

and my eyes dried  
enough for me to see.

When I opened the door,  
Mom pulled me out  
of the store,  
ditching our groceries  
by a mannequin  
in reds, whites, and blues.

Once we got in the van,  
she locked the doors.  
She let me cry.  
She opened the glove compartment  
and gave me a pack of cookies.  
“I always keep some goodies aside  
for a bad day,”  
she said.

But when I calmed down,  
Mom said,  
“Selah Godfrey,  
never ever cry  
in the middle of a store.

Always hold it in  
till you make it back to the car.”

That became  
the first rule  
for my list  
on how to be  
a Normal person.

# For Mrs. V's Homework Assignment on Why I Like Pebblecreek Academy

by Selah Godfrey

Why do I like Pebblecreek?  
It's a silly question. Of course  
I like Pebblecreek. I just *do*.

I like the sound of the whole class reciting  
the same jingle, or singing the same song, together.

I like learning words like "ubiquitous" and "omniscient"  
that always surprise non-Pebblecreek adults.

I like the way my best friend Noelle wiggles her eyebrows  
in that goofy Noelle way and makes me laugh  
when we're in class or on cleanup duty.

I like that the stairwells always smell like Pebblecreek stairwells  
and the classrooms always smell like Pebblecreek classrooms.

I like that I've been in the same school building  
every year of school and know where all the rooms are.

At Pebblecreek, there's a way for doing everything:  
raise your hand to speak in class  
electronics off and put away  
no makeup  
lunches and jackets on the shelf  
in your assigned spot  
just outside the classroom.

Even though lots of kids complain  
about all our rules, I like  
that I don't have to think about  
what to wear  
and know what I'm  
supposed to do.

Everyone at Pebblecreek is part of the Pebblecreek family,  
and it really feels like that,  
like all the teachers are my aunts and uncles  
who always tell us at the end of each day,  
“You are loved and worthy  
and can do great things.”

At Pebblecreek, all the kids invite each other  
to each other’s parties.  
Even if we aren’t all close  
they’re always *there*,  
because we’re stuck with each other  
in the same classes each grade,  
so we kind of have to get along.

I like that everyone knows me  
as the Girl Who’s Good at Drawing  
and people always say nice things about my drawings  
and ask me to draw them.

I like that there’s a place for me at Pebblecreek.

Pebblecreek might not be perfect  
but it’s familiar  
and I never want to change it,  
like a pair of favorite shoes  
that even if they’re falling apart  
you tape up and try to fix  
because they’re special and important  
and yours.