

The Moth Effect Selected as a 2025 Best American Essays' "Notable"

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Kylie Smith

English Department alum Kylie Smith's essay, "The Moth Effect," has been selected for the Notable Essay list in the 2025 Best American Essays anthology. Her essay examines the theory of epigenetics through the peppered moth and personal narrative.

Kylie began her piece during her time at USU — not from a particular class but one day at brunch with two writer friends. She comments, "Eventually, I requested feedback on the draft from my fellow graduate students in Dr. Jennifer Sinor's graduate nonfiction workshop. The piece was in a terrible state! The workshop triaged it. Without my fellow graduate students, I never would have finished."

Since she started the piece four years ago, Kylie says it now feels like a relic of who she was in 2021. In reflecting on the process of revisiting the piece post-USU, she notes, "Even if I were to write about the same subjects now, I wouldn't interpret them the same way because my life has changed and my perspectives are different. It's jarring to revisit the girl I was, but it's also special. I know that only that version of me could have produced 'The Moth Effect.'"

Her piece was published in the Colorado Review in 2024, and the editor of the journal let Kylie know her work was nominated and named a notable. "I was excited and extremely humbled," Kylie reflects. "There was also a part of me that shuddered at the realization that my work was actually being perceived in the world. Through this process, I had to accept that when you publish something, actual people might read it."

In giving advice to future students, Kylie says it is important not to take being in a writing program for granted, despite the stress that can come from it or other parts of life when in the program. "It is special to be able to devote so much of your life to creation and to have a community of like-minded people around to advise and encourage you," Kylie comments. "USU is a particularly supportive environment. I hope that you take advantage of every opportunity presented, learn from as many professors as you can, and push yourself creatively. There isn't a lot I wouldn't give to be back in Ray B. West, sitting in a semi-circle, and listening to a peer read their work."