

ABSTRACT**THESIS:** Falling: A Story of Liquor and Love**STUDENT:** Ellie M. Isenhart**DEGREE:** Master of Arts**COLLEGE:** Sciences and Humanities**DATE:** May 2010**PAGES:** 101

This thesis is a creative nonfiction narrative composed of five movements, each of which begins with a letter to a central character in that section. While these epistles began as narrative devices, through the publication of this thesis, they become true and public letters to some of those whom I love most. Preceding each epistle is an epigraph, which keys the reader in to a specific moment within the story about to be told.

The thesis investigates the question of what constitutes family: blood, friendship, understanding, shared history and future. It asks whether a family can be created of surrogates and how this surrogate family can function in comparison to one of blood ties.

The first movement explores my relationship with my once-distant father—a collection of scenes and musing that discover forgiveness and, ultimately, love. The second movement examines the effects of my sister's chronic illness on our family, and more specifically on the trajectory of my life. The third section rests in the comfortable safety of my life-long friend, Walter. His role not only in this narrative, but my life, has been that of a safe place to which I can return. The fourth section admits a years-long love my heart harbored for a close friend and the extremes to which I resorted to both love him and let him go, and the final section narrates the beginnings of my relationship with Matt, who is a constant source of balance in my life.

Within these pages, readers are confronted with difficult questions about multiple forms of love, truth, and friendship. More than anything, though, readers will find the story of a young woman who, at 25, is just learning to stand on her own feet and speak with her own voice. What does it mean to cope in different ways: to drink copiously, eat without end, and search for love in places she is sure to not find it? What does it mean to allow one's self hope in the face of probable failure?

