

NOTES

Mother Nature can, at times, be friendly, and at other times, be one of the most destructive forces on Earth. In her fictitious short story, *The Queen of Oz*, Kristy Thomas introduces us to Elizabeth Queen, a young mother, whose life is forever turned upside-down after a tragic storm. This selection should be performed by a female and may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. Like the storm itself, this selection should build in intensity as the story progresses. Also, just like in real life, once the storm passes, there should be a certain resignation, a calm that is almost scary because it's so quiet. At the heart of this selection lie two of the most important emotions known to humankind: Love and hope. Play each with honesty and realism. This is a tour-de-force for the mature performer. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer where to turn the pages in the manuscript.

I was named after the Queen of England. My mother was not really interested in national celebrities, so she named me after the Queen. It was honestly a two-for-one, because her favorite musical group was—you guessed it—*Queen*. Come on, you know *Queen*, don't you? They were a group of men who looked like women, but don't judge. That was popular back in the day. According to my mother, she would rock out while listening to *Queen's* greatest hits on the radio. Apparently, she rocked out a little too hard one night and got pregnant. She rocked out again and named me Elizabeth. You probably won't be surprised to learn that my middle name is—wait for it—Queen. So to recap, my name is Elizabeth Queen, and today I am here to talk to you about my life; or rather, what used to be my life.



This is the photograph that best represents my hometown to me, so I am submitting it for the book. I never thought that I would be worthy enough to be *included* in a book, but an editor, who is putting together a pictorial tribute to my hometown, thinks I am. You see, I lived through 'it.' A lot of people didn't. I was born and raised in Joplin, Missouri. Now do you know what I survived? On May 22, 2011, a tornado tore through my small town and—well, it was described as a “catastrophic event that will be forever remembered in the heart of America's history.” Wow, the heart of America's history? And here I always thought I lived in the good old Midwest.



Before May 22, 2011, Joplin, Missouri was known for—*exactly*—nothing! No one ever says, “Hey, let’s take a family vacation to Joplin, Missouri where we can do absolutely nothing. Pack up the kids!” But when this is all you know, it’s all you know. And it’s home...you know? So when this woman from New York came to my door and asked me if I would participate in her book documenting Joplin before the infamous tornado, I said yes. She asked me for a photograph that best represented Joplin to me—before the tragedy. The one I chose is of Laela, my daughter, in the hospital nursery. It was funny. Kevin, my husband, had picked up the wrong baby. He’s standing next to Laela’s crib, and the nurses are in the background laughing. I laughed so hard, I cried. This is another picture of Laela. She’s at the *Wizard of Oz Museum* in Kansas. She wouldn’t take off her souvenir ruby slippers for months. She would climb into bed with Kevin and me. She’d click her heels three times and say, “Home, Mommy. Home, Daddy.” She was too young to get the line just right, but we knew what the clicking of those heels meant. It meant she was home and safe with us.

I don’t like to talk about my story, but today is special. It is the anniversary of my husband’s death and the disappearance of my daughter.



Joplin was ready for a tornado. After all, we lived in “Tornado Alley.” That day, I could actually smell that storm coming, as I stood at the back door. “Laela! Laela, it’s time to come in, baby. There’s a storm coming!” She never wanted to come inside. My mother once bought Laela a *Wizard of Oz* playhouse. A yellow ramp led to the front door, and it had paintings of the Lion, Tin Man and Scarecrow on the inside walls. The Tin Man was always her favorite character. She thought, “If your heart is full of love, you can do anything—even fly.” And fly she did. She would fly around the room like a beam of love. She was always so full of life.

I keep talking about her like she’s dead. Rest assured—she’s not. She’s—she’s out there. She’s out there trying to find her way home. Everyone tried to tell me she’s gone, but I knew it wasn’t true. Here I am, years later, still knowing it’s not true. She’s out there, and she is going to come home. When I talk to my husband during my prayers each night, he tells me that Laela is not in heaven with him. Well, if she’s not there, she must be out in the world somewhere looking for me. So I ask him to ask God if He will just tell me where she is, so that I can go get her and bring her home.