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115 Vernon Street: Writing Associates' Journal, "JOURNEYS of the Mind, Body and Spirit"

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JOURNEYS of the
Mind, Body and Spirit

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"Variety's the very spice of life,
That gives it all its flavour."
-- William Cowper
The Task 1785, Book II

The Question(s) Of an Interview(er)

Once we've finished reading a good book, we give its author a certain amount of power. We recognize their skill to write a thought-provoking, fun, witty, or wise book. We admire their talent to write something worth reading. (I'm not just referring to Hemingway, Garcia Marques, or the like; I just mean any old average "good" author.) We brag to our neighbors about the silly anecdote, tear-jerking climax, or mysterious ending that brings the book up to another level of skill. We, as readers, give the author lots of attention and power and put them high up on a pedestal. The great amount of power we give them makes us separate ourselves from them in that "they" are the writers and "we" are the readers.

Self-Reflection of the Interviewer Pt. I

When I was younger, I had this notion planted inside of me that writing was always done in a formal setting. This came from learning in school to read books and to write essays. In class, we read books by profound authors, not poems by a classmate. That showed me that only a select few are capable of writing something good. A writing piece (essay, story) was something long and important. It couldn't be a short piece of writing; if it was, it was grouped with a lot of other short pieces and made into a long book called a collection. Writing took time and effort, spell-checking devices, proofreading. It was definitely not something that could be complete in a few short minutes. I did do a lot of writing in middle school and high school, but it was always essays and papers as class assignments. I did have the opportunity to write for many different subjects, so that gave me a lot of practice and also helped me to develop some skill. Even though I was able to write a lot during those years, it was only for school assignments. There was no time for me, for anyone, to write essays or short stories outside of school. There was homework, extra-curricular activities, and friends. All I could do was write for a grade. Plus, even if there was time, how could I just sit down and write a story? I was just a teenager, not an author.

As a middle- and high-schooler, one thing I did spend a decent amount of time doing was emailing and instant messaging. Even though I was plenty busy (I had a lot of homework and a lot of after-school activities), I had a lot of friends and the internet was our means of communication. I grew up in the age of computers, the age of the internet. Everyone was using email and IM, but little did we know, we were writing. We weren't stupid, we did know we were punching keys and letters were appearing on the screen, but this writing was incredibly informal. Phrases like "C U L8ER" and "THNX A LOT" were acceptable. I wrote emails and IMs all the time, but didn't think that made me a "writer." I didn't think all my time spent emailing counted as time spent writing. I wasn't aware of it then, but I was developing a skill.

Essential Questions (on Writing)

Who am I as a writer? Who are we (as in this world) as writers? We all write something, whether it be books, a customer's drink order, or an email to an old friend. What does writing mean to us? To specify what I mean in such a broad question: What do we view as the purpose of writing? What do we write? Do we enjoy writing or do it as a chore or try to avoid it all together? How can writing be put on display? Is writing the most important art form today? Could we even live without writing? What would a life without writing be like?

I have all these questions that I have a need to be solved. I've used writing all my life but have never sat down and analyzed my thoughts on it. But where do I start? When in doubt, it's best to fall back on the support of others. Why not see what other people have to say about writing?

Does What We Say Have an Influence on Others As Writers?

As an experiment, I interviewed a number of people with different occupations on what writing means to them outside of their profession (or schooling). I wanted to interview people of various professions, not just English teachers or Writing Associates, to see if the average person writes often outside of their job or schoolwork. I hoped to prove that no matter what profession a person has, writing has been and will always be necessary in society. I interviewed a 1st grade teacher, the Chief Counsel of the U.S. Dept. of H.U.D., a high school student, and a retired secretary. I started out by asking them, "What does writing mean to you outside of your profession?" They were allowed to take the question as whatever they felt it meant and answer accordingly. After they let out all their thoughts, I finished by asking them, "What do you think about a life without writing?" I clarified by explaining that my question referred to what they thought about a life where writing never existed. By asking them these two questions and letting them talk, I tried not to interfere with their thoughts on writing. My goal was to provoke any comments they had towards writing outside of their profession or schooling simply so I could learn more and come to analyze and make some sound conclusions about writing outside of school or work.

Responses on Writing: The Interviewees

The 1st grade teacher replied that she uses writing in many mediums outside of her profession. She writes letters (using paper and pen) to communicate with long-distance relatives and connect with old college friends. She uses writing to express herself, to let someone know she's thinking of them and to make them happy. To the question regarding a life without writing, she responded, "How would we know what's come before us to know where we're headed? How does all that (referring to history and family stories in particular) get communicated from generation to generation?"

The Chief Counsel told me that he uses writing all the time by emailing and writing stories through various civic organizations. It's a way for him to let others know what's going on. Nowadays, he's

adapted to using a computer, but prior to new technology he used a typewriting, letter writing and dictation. In response to my question about a life without writing, he immediately declared, "Life without writing. Wow." He believes that it would be difficult to have histories of the world and scientific writing. He is firm in his belief that the unavailability of writing would have set us back as a world.

The high school student feels that writing is a way to communicate with a different world and a way to show feelings. She uses writing mainly for poetry, but also for email, notes, instant messages, and texts. Her stand is that there is no life without writing. "Writing is life. People would be less intelligent because you wouldn't be able to communicate with others. You wouldn't be able to know history."

The retired secretary uses writing outside of her job to write thank you notes, newsletters, invitations, and letters (especially to keep in touch with friends in other countries). She is currently writing (biographical) stories about her younger years as well as doing some genealogy research. She felt that life without writing "would be disastrous" but that it would never occur because writing's existed for so many years.

It is clear that these four candidates view writing as a necessary communicative tool in daily life. All of them stressed its importance. I also think that during this interview all of them discovered something new about themselves as writers: they write more than they realized they do. People use writing everyday in the most common forms: leaving notes, emailing, and text messaging. Since it's so commonplace, many people don't realize that something so quick and informal could constitute as actual "writing." Neither did I, but I do now.

My interviewers told me about how they email and IM but I don't think they realized until after the interview that something so minute and easy to write is considered writing. I also underwent this realization during the interview. Asking them about all the ways they write and inquiring as to whether they email and IM helped me to see what I hadn't yet discovered: that I considered those as writing forms. Writing informally is writing too!

Why the Gap between Writing for School/Work and Writing for Oneself?

Who knew writing informally was considered writing? I wish I had known at a younger age that there are a hundred genres of writing instead of just a few that we learned about in school. Maybe that is why there is this remorse for writing for school. We don't get to write what and how we want. No wonder everyone is spending so much time writing outside of their profession. They need to write less formally on their own time to escape the writing they have to do for work or school.

Not all writing outside of school is informal, especially not as informal as emails and instant messages. Poetry, songwriting, and even recounts of funny family stories are different types of writing that one could participate in outside of school. Getting students to understand that writing outside of school

doesn't have to be about writing long persuasive essays is half the battle. Students need to be taught about all different genres of writing so then they can be encouraged to take part in it. Learning this at a young age will also help to clear up any misconceptions so that students may not carry them into adulthood.

I wish there was a way for teachers and administrators (especially at the middle and high school level) to help students value the importance of writing for themselves. I wish there was not such a large gap between writing we students do for ourselves and writing for school. For the most part, elementary school teachers and administrators do a good job of getting the word out to the parents to help their children practice writing. The importance of writing outside of school is stressed much more in elementary school because that is the time in a child's life when they first learn to write. Parents of those students are taught to help their child with writing as much as possible outside of school in order to compliment the work the teachers try to achieve in the school. With that in mind, middle- and high-school teachers should encourage students to write outside of school even more so simply because learning how to write is not something that starts and finishes at the elementary level but must be continued throughout daily life in order to develop life-long skills.

Responses on Writing: The Interviewer

Although I began with the primary purpose learning more about how others write outside of their profession, I decided to conjoin this effort with also focusing on how interviewing others on writing and learning their thoughts on it could help me to develop my own take on writing.

From my point of view on writing outside of school, I share experiences with all of the interviewees. I use writing most often to express my feelings in a private sense and to communicate with others. Each morning, I wake up to eat my breakfast with pen in hand, freewriting. I don't limit myself. I write about whatever comes to mind: what I did last night, my worries, even my schedule for the day. It's a way of freeing myself from what lies ahead during my crazy days. No limits, no boundaries, just me and my pen and paper.

In regards to communicating with others, I don't text or IM or have a facebook account, but I do email and write letters. I don't write letters too often, but I email a lot! I probably write an average of five (or more) emails a day. It's the only way for me to connect with teachers and with friends and family without having to use minutes on my phone.

I also use writing daily in the most informal way: to scribble down notes to myself so I can remember to call Lucy or print out the email from my friend from Italy. I don't know what I'd do without my agenda and tiny pink heart-shaped pieces of paper! Without a pen and paper around, I feel lost.

Writing is one of the best means of communication. If you are unable to reach someone by phone or talk to them in person, you have the opportunity to text message, instant message, email, facebook

them or write them a letter. Writing is a centuries old tool that humans have used (and obviously continue to use) to communicate ideas, questions, and problems, among other things.

Self-Reflection of the Interviewer Pt. II

So it's true. I feel lost without my pen and paper. I am really dedicated to writing, more than I realized. I write a lot for every class and outside of school, I freewrite, email, and write notes in my agenda, every day.

A life without writing "*would* be disastrous." Writing has many functions that other art forms just cannot replicate. It is true that we'd be set back as a world if there was no writing. Writing has enhanced and literally advanced our society. What started out as a means of passing down information among generations and grew as a means of communication became a truly vital aspect in the lives of humans. Writing can express things that nothing else can. This importance of writing, on all levels, is shared among all people, regardless of profession.

From my interviewing experience, this is what I've concluded. No matter what one may think about writing for their profession or for school, all, whether they like it or not, would be lost without writing. They use it daily to communicate (through letter writing, emails, instant messages, texts, and the like), to express feelings, to tell stories, to record and share history, and so much more. With all that we use writing for, no wonder we feel society would be less advanced.

Now do you see? *Everyone* is a writer. No, we're all not authors, but that doesn't mean we couldn't be. We have the ability to give ourselves the power we give authors, so why don't we all try writing an article for the newspaper or (if you feel the urge) writing a novel and submitting it to a publishing company? We all use writing daily, so clearly we all have enough practice. Our skill may need some refining, but so does everyone's, even published authors, for there is no end to the life-long process of writing which helps you become a better writer.

What about a football player that has yet to try out for a team? He's been playing everyday with his friends since he was little but never thought he was able to play on a team. Why not? He's had enough practice, and although his skill may need to be refined, that's what the coach is for. All he needs to do is try out for the varsity team.

Just like this athlete, we too have the ability and the power to take the step from writers to authors. We have had enough practice writing for school and work and outside of that. While some of us are used to writing more formally than others, we have all still been working our entire lives to develop a skill. Whether we choose to take that next step of becoming an author or not, we know we could, and more so than that, we now know the truth: everyone's a writer.

To anyone else these are just words
Sarah Gardiner

I.
I heard a man beating
a woman through a hotel wall
one night in Freetown.
He would not open the door
to me, hysterical white
woman in the hallway crying
motherfucker while she screamed.

Two days later, I got on a plane,
watched Africa spread below me,
red earth and sharp angles.
I was glad to leave.



The Old and the Young
Luc Rioual '10

II.
Every day, I give thanks
to whatever forces pulled you from Iraq.
When I read the paper,
your name will not be there.

The space of a continent releases pressure,
lets the blood flow again.
When you speak it is all at once: I saw a man
beat the shit out of his wife
with a stick. I stood there
with my machine gun.

III.
I wake up suddenly, find no mosquito net.
I wonder if sudden noises in the night
still send you to the floor,
rolling for your gun,
if daylight hours ever find you
wishing for its weight in your hand.
Sand clogs its barrel, the soles
of my shoes still cling to red earth.

"My favourite thing is to go where I've never been" – Diane Arbus

"Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else." – Gloria Steinem

I Journey Back in Time and Space

by Elisabeth Cianciola '10

I journey back in time and place. I travel east, back towards my European origins. I bridge the time gap, but never bridge the Atlantic. I stop in Newport, Rhode Island with my family once again on a warm December morning.

I do not remember much of the journey there; my mind drifted in and out of consciousness as I napped in the car. "Is this the right exit?" my father did ask, but otherwise he piloted without assistance. I had an old-fashioned popcorn ball on the way to get me in the mood; my sisters joined me. We took Route 9, which follows the Connecticut River. It is one of my favorite parts of the state, ever since I did an internship with the Connecticut River Watershed Council over the summer to organize a river clean-up. When I was a little girl, we would come to Mystic, Connecticut to visit the seaport, and once we even went to the aquarium.

I force myself to wake up to look out the window as we crossed the final bridge. The water is such a brilliant blue and the island scattered among the waves are so small. I cannot help but wonder if someday they will be part of the underwater kingdom (I have been reading *A Green History of the World*, which warns of rising sea levels due to global warming). Our car seems to be carried to the right as if riding an ocean current when we reached the land on the other side. We are blown along the main drag downtown past the boatyards and shops. We journey up a hill past a dark church set on a triangular lot. Through the big intersection and down the street and we're at The Elms.

My older sister and I choose to use the restroom before we begin the tour. I know The Elms like the back of my hand now and lead her there myself. We go down to the gift shop where the tour lets out, passing under the circular drop off. Vines grow across it to obscure deliveries from view (as I've learned from the audio tour.) We come up to the front entrance, guarded by two potted Christmas trees. I accidentally push the door too

hard and almost hit someone waiting inside. While I wait for my father, I examine an artificial tree to the right of the short white marble staircase. Round balls that look as if they're made of steel wool hang on some of the Christmas lights. "We could make these," I point out to my mother. I accidentally knock one off as I turn about to check out the red amaryllis plants (I got a white one for Christmas) and the giant balls of red and cream-colored artificial poinsettia flowers hanging from the ceiling, but it is easily replaced.

I am once again awarded a headset from a curator as if it were an Olympic gold medal. What would it be like to be a museum curator, I wonder? I think it would make a great retirement job myself. I walk to the left to the sunny south side of the mansion, and the voice directing where to stand and what to look at plays in my mind from the summer and from when I came as a child over the Easter holiday before I hear it on the player. I study a silvery holiday display of a three-dimensional scene constructed from aluminum cans by a man working in his basement. When I start going through the rooms, I listen to the "extra" stories that are optional instead of the main tour.

The lady of the house was well-loved, but I remember being shocked to discover that she was no great beauty. In photographs she is homely, her curly hair pinned up and eyes sunken into her large face. I suppose at my young age I had expected a beautiful face to match with the beautiful house. As I thought about it, though, I grew to like the idea. She was an ordinary woman like me...

I pass through the conservatory in the southwest corner slowly, drinking in the vivid green. A mirror hangs on the east wall, reflecting the expansive green lawn, trimmed hedges, lion statues, weeping beech, and garden gazebo from outside. I nod my head in approval as I recall how the lady of the house would ask her gardener to a game of cards.

I listen to stories about the tapestries, the wall panels (cut to fit the rooms), dining etiquette, naval balls, a china set designed to have reptiles emerging from pond settings. The original "The Elms" was a mere

cottage in comparison, like the shoreline ones we've seen in Cape May (still multi-level with a front porch and awning). Meanwhile, Christmas trees of all sizes are tucked throughout the house for me to feast my eyes upon.

I quickly ascend the next staircase to the second level. The marble table I am instructed to walk towards weighs something like 2000 tons. It has never been moved, although it was auctioned. Today a nativity set rests on its sturdy surface. I pass by the bedrooms, which range from dark and rosy to pale pastels. I am told to look at the legs of a chair to determine what era it is from. Husband and wife had separate bedrooms at the time as ladies entertained guests and wrote correspondence in theirs (the letter opener is a remarkably large knife).

The central room on this floor also had large trees, but it also boasts a great photograph collection. Will our photographs ever be displayed as artifacts as opposed to memories? As I pass through the hall I hear how the housekeeper would take inventory on all the linens before and after they were laundered to be sure everything that was cleaned was returned. I pass under the skylight that lets in light from the servants' floor above. In the summer behind the scenes tour, I walked on it, but this was a summer home (the coasts have moderate climates, I recall from ecology last semester) and few would stay to care for it at this time of year. Nonetheless coal would be delivered to a trap door on the street and carted into the house. The husband made his fortune in coal, an environmental shame.

On the mezzanine level I see the china and the dumbwaiter. Only the butler had access to the family silver; he was probably the only servant paid high enough wages not to be tempted to steal any. A teaspoon was worth more than the others made in a month. The servants' stairs are lined with white tile; it reflects light and is easy to clean. At the time, light bulbs were only at about 5 watts. In the dry kitchen, there is a display of Christmas trees decorated by local school children. I vote for the one with copper hands clasped promoting peace. The others are good to: Nutcracker theme, seashells, gingerbread houses, and more. I am reminded of

my performances in the Nutcracker and my seashell collection. In the room before the restrooms are displays showing other historic homes the preservation society was unable to rescue. I relinquish my Olympic medal at the wet kitchen. This is where you hear the story of the phrase "on the back burner." I guess it was for food that was already cooked but should be served hot. Back out through the delivery door to our car, we head for the coast.

We pull in at the lot across from The Breakers and cross the street. We walk up to the right entrance, marked for members only, but no one is directing traffic, so we push our way in. I pacify myself with a pink and red cinnamon candy cane to endure the wait. At last we are pointed into the men's dressing room, on the right, where guests would brush off the dust.

Our tour guide is probably the only young one they have; she has a dry sense of humor. Impressively, the Vanderbilt mansion was constructed in only two years. This is because most of it was constructed in Europe, shipped, and reassembled on site. We pause in the courtyard area, which would have been open during warmer weather. It is about a fifty-foot cube. Artificial red poinsettias are arranged in a tree shape on the wall across from us.

Upstairs, we listen to the story of Gloria Vanderbilt and her son, Anderson Cooper, while I note the orchid accents bringing life into the uninhabited rooms. The bathroom has four taps: hot and cold, salt and fresh water. The back bedroom features "black and hot pink floral"

*"You may have tangible wealth untold
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold
Richer than I you will never be
I had a mother who read to me"
- Strickland Gillilan*

An Old Lady & A Bowl of Miso Soup
by Elizabeth Stannard Gromisch '09

I taste the salty broth dripping off the spoon
Cringing a little when it touches my lips—
I can never make it quite right.

Not like the old lady who holds her
spoon so elegantly
And does not allow drops to fall back
in the bowl.

I swish my spoon and scrape the bottom
Grabbing a couple of pieces of seaweed
slices.

A simple soup that brings back old
memories—

Of the way I used to be and past lovers
Whose stories I hope to soon forget.

The broth grows colder as I turn
And look at the old woman and her soup
With a far off look in her eyes:

Does she have those same memories
Evoked from the salt and seaweed?

Little lines have already begun to form
And soon I will become that old woman
With a cooling bowl of overly salty miso
soup.

rebecca aberle 2.14.08

she was a painter

she was a painter
of horses and children
and small birds wearing hats of snow
we would race mock bishop's weed
down waterfalls
until i slipped and fell
and her ankles followed mine

blotched with wilted iris
she sought out her parents
they said trust us
it's not important
just ignore it

but blotches became puddles
so they sent her
loosely wrapped
to men with
white hands and white walls and white brushes to
whitewash her
placing white pills like their eyes in her
autumn brown palms

still puddles pooled
became lakes
but through white haze
came gold
and haloed Gabriel
he kissed her swollen cheeks
and asked her for faith
told her to come back to
her heaven home

coughing up fog
she tried -
to pour the coloured oceans
from her skin

i found her braced against the tide
(gripping flooded soil)
mauve husks dampening
forget-me-not-blue
she took my hand in hers
and we walked along the brook of our childhood
speaking of
how small and dirty it is now
and how we worry about
falling in

Katherine Meltzoff

Tatoos

I have paid three people to put ink under my skin on three separate occasions. I have paid them up to \$150 to inflict almost unbearable pain upon me while permanently marking my skin with a needle. As a female college student, this often seems somewhat out of place. Inevitably, people who see my wrists or left ankle ask questions. No, I did not mark my skin because I think it looks "sexy", nor am I addicted to the pain. I have not made these marks on my body to make a statement, and certainly not to rebel against my parents.

Instead, I got them to represent the reason I get up each morning, and the reason I am able to fall asleep at night. Quite simply, I got them because I wanted something to represent the reason I am still alive. I got my first tattoo during the summer after my Junior year in High School, the second one right before my Sophomore year of college, and the third in February of my Junior year in college. I have one tattoo on each inner wrist—a cross and a rosary. I did not place them there by accident, or because I wanted to be able to hide them. I placed them there because those symbols represent the reason I never became one of the many people who have bled to death from self-inflicted wounds in that very spot.

The cross on my right ankle is positioned as such because any action one takes begins with a single step, and each step I take is done with my faith in mind. If it were not for what that mark represents I would be unable to get out of bed, leave my room, or take a single step in any direction. I would be paralyzed by fear and utterly incapable of movement.

While these tattoos may, to others, represent physical changes, they mean something far more important to me. They are part of both a physical and mental journey that will continue as long as they stay beneath my skin. Those simple strokes of ink, like my journey, will not fade or disappear. They are permanent in every sense of the word.

Luc Rioual

L.A.T.R.G.

red seats fading to black
and they were several minutes
late on dimming the lights
i get lost in three years prior
and the things i once felt
hands drifting on top of hands
heart ripping through your chest
itsn ot very often i want to jump
up screaming
"holy shit!! i'm actually happy
today!"
but today sadly is one of those
days
but even though i feel like that
i need to remind myself
wishes don't come true
no matter how hard you close your
eyes

SEA

roam through crowds like water on rocks
flowing endlessly
no focus
but the mouth
where i can escape this sardined
existence
i ebb on
spit int he water fountain
piss on asphalt
water on rocks

JEALOUS LUNGS

Envy strangles
smiles of strangers
pathetic
no words spoken for hours
sleep alone
wake up alone
frozen room
frozen milk
frozen fingers
goose bumps
raised hair
why do i spend so much time
wishing i was someone else?

STILL HUNGRY

stale garlic bread and bad chicken
sometimes i wonder if i'm makng the right
choices
do people hear me when i speak?
should i care if they do?
schools of fish
connecticut wish
i don't know what i want



*separation. inferiority complex.
walk 30 paces behind and talk to yourself in your head.*

A Ghost Story

By Claire Haley

When Daniel got stabbed in the heart, he was pretty unhappy. For one thing, it hurt like hell, and for another, he knew he would never find out who the murderer was in *A Nice Glass of Corpse*. Unless of course they had a decent library wherever he was going. He had teetered on the edge of religion at the end of his life, part of him highly skeptical and part of him Pascalianly pragmatic. If he had known he was going to die he would have tried to sort that out in advance.

He was slightly nervous when he stepped clear of his own body and no contingent of angels pulled him into the sky. He waited for a moment, expecting to hear a booming voice or see a blinding light, but eventually he had to accept that nothing was coming.

He wondered how long it would take for somebody to find him. He had read an article on Reuters about a man whose cat dialed 911 after he had a heart attack, saving his life. Daniel regretted that he didn't have a cat, but on second thought, he was pretty sure he had also once read an article about cats eating their owners' corpses when left alone with them. He tried to think of somebody who might miss him, but he didn't have any lunch dates to not turn up for or plans for drinks with a friend or even work obligations since he had taken a leave of absence from his job at the library. Then he remembered that he was due to go to his mother's house for dinner in about a week and when he didn't turn up she was bound to panic.

"How mortifying," he thought. "I have to be found by my mother."

It wasn't that he was a social outcast. He had friends and he got on well with his colleagues at the library and he had never once even entertained the idea of playing Dungeons and Dragons, but since his divorce he'd become a bit antisocial. His retreat into isolation came largely from the embarrassment of having been left not only for another man, but for a mere child of twenty-two. He admitted to himself that Liz looked quite good for a thirty-eight-year-old, but she bore no resemblance to Demi Moore. There was just no understanding today's youth. Now, though, he wished that he had let this unfortunate circumstance roll off his back rather than holing up in his apartment feeling sorry for himself.

He was aware of what a pathetic figure he cut in this final tableau, lying there on a dingy carpet the color of congealed wood glue, blood pooled around the fresh cavity in his chest and a look of mild surprise on his face. It had not even happened glamorously. He had no idea who the man in the ski mask and the cheap black imitation leather gloves was, although the sudden absence of his television and Xbox 360 suggested certain things about the man's occupation. It would be one thing if he had been stabbed by Liz's new boyfriend in a heated battle for her love. He could have lived with that. This death seemed so cold and anonymous that even suicide would have been preferable. That, at least, would have taught Liz a thing or two about how to treat your husband of fifteen years.

Why had he become a ghost, anyway? Did this happen to every person who died? All of his theoretical knowledge on the subject had led him to believe that ghosts were restless spirits with unfinished business to attend to on earth, but he could think of nothing unfinished in his life except the reading of his mystery novel. Surely he hadn't been kept back just for that. The gods were not that cruel, if they did in fact exist. Just in case, Daniel decided to finish the book. He wanted to know how it ended, anyway, and it wasn't as though he had any place else to be. The book lay on the floor next to his body and he made to pick it up, but his hand passed straight through it. This was a most interesting development.

At that moment he realized that he wasn't standing or walking, but floating above the ground. New ideas began to formulate in his mind. He could go anywhere he wanted and nobody would know. Thinking of Liz's supremely superstitious nature, Daniel had an initial instinct to make his way to her apartment and terrorize her and the boy, but his inability to even so much as pick up a book ruled out any eerie furniture rearranging or opening and closing of drawers. The most he could do would be to try to let her see him, and maybe make some creepy moaning noises at night, and he didn't know yet whether that was even possible. He didn't know all of the rules yet, after all.

As tormenting his loved ones seemed to be out of the question, he narrowed his destination down to either courtside seats at a Knicks game or a gentleman's cabaret and floated down to the lobby and to the front door of the building, which proved to be solid. Now, this didn't make any sense at all. Shouldn't he be able to just float on through? He couldn't be expected to haunt his apartment for all of eternity. Try as he might, however, he could find no way out. Passing through the walls within the apartment and even getting into other people's rooms posed no difficulty, but the outside walls remained as solid as ever. The elation he had felt only moments before quickly deflated.

In lieu of any better ideas, Daniel decided to kill some time by watching his neighbors. If nothing else, it would allow him to determine whether people could see him or not. When the Delgados from next door didn't bat an eye when he floated around their kitchen singing "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" at the top of his voice while they ate lunch, his question was answered.

After he finished eating, Mr. Delgado went into the living room and turned on the television. *Wheel of Fortune* was on which suited Daniel just fine. He liked a good puzzle now and again. Just as a naval officer from Wyoming won the first toss-up, he was startled to see an apparition pass through the door of the Delgado's apartment. This ghost looked to be a few years older than Daniel and the combination of his outdated clothing and the nonchalance with which he floated into the living room and stationed himself in front of the television suggested that he had been dead for some time. He didn't seem to notice Daniel, and Daniel didn't know whether he should approach him. He had not yet learned what the proper etiquette was for introducing yourself to a ghost. His fellow phantom spared him the trouble of long deliberation, however, when the sudden sound of a dish crashing to the floor of the kitchen drew his attention away from the television. When he turned, he noticed Daniel hovering tentatively next to the couch.

"Can you see me?" he asked.

"Well, yes," Daniel replied.

"Finally! I've been waiting years for somebody else to haunt this place. Everybody seems to die in hospitals these days and I'd almost given up hope."

"So we *are* ghosts, then?"

"Naturally. I take it you're newly deceased."

"Just this afternoon."

The specter took in Daniel's appearance: short, plump and middle-aged.

"Heart attack?"

"No, murdered."

"Murdered!" Daniel nodded. "How exciting!"

"How did you die?"

"Stroke. But tell me, who murdered you?"

"I don't know, really. I couldn't see his face, but he looked like a burglar."

"How did he do it? I didn't hear any gunshots."

"Knife to the heart."

"You don't often see that nowadays." He paused, contemplating the glory of such a death. "My name's Terrence."

"Daniel."

"I'd shake your hand, but I'm not sure that's possible. I've never met another ghost before."

Disappointingly, Daniel's outstretched hand passed straight through Terrence's.

"So you're really the only other ghost in this place?"

"I'm afraid so."

"How long have you been dead?"

"Since 1977. This building was new then."

"Geez, you'd think *somebody* would have died here during that time."

"Well, I don't think everybody becomes a ghost. It's hard to say, really. Maybe there are other ghosts and we just can't see them. I'm not sure how it all works."

"And here I was hoping you'd be able to tell me what to do."

"Well, I've picked up a thing or two here and there. Did you know that we can't leave the building?"

"Yeah, I tried earlier."

"You're taking it better than I did. I was bound for the women's locker room at the gym down the street and smashed straight into the front door. You'd think after death we wouldn't be able to feel pain, but that was quite a blow."

"Any other tips?"

"Well, I've tried haunting people but it's very difficult. They can't see you, but if you concentrate hard enough sometimes they can hear you. I've only managed it once, twenty years ago."

"Who was it?"

"The hottest girl in the entire complex. I watched her get dressed for a date and made some catcalls. She nearly jumped out of her skin at first, but she managed to convince herself that it came from another apartment."

"That's lucky."

"If you say so." Terrence gazed wistfully into the distance. "Anyhow, aside from that all I can tell you is how to keep from dying of boredom here, in a manner of speaking."

"Well, that'll do for now. Do you watch TV with Mr. Delgado every day?"

"Only on the weekends. He's pretty good to watch with because he usually falls asleep. All of the other people in the building shout out the answers during quiz shows and they're usually wrong, too. You don't want to be here on weekday afternoons, though. His wife watches these horrible soaps on Telemundo."

The two ghosts watched the show in silence for a few moments. Daniel wasn't sure how to proceed. It seemed that he would be stuck here for some time if he followed Terrence's advice, but as he had no other ideas he supposed it couldn't hurt to go along with him for a little while, at least. He had eternity to figure it out, presumably.

When the show ended, Daniel decided to go back to his apartment to check on his body. He invited Terrence to come with, which delighted him.

"A real life crime scene! And to think, I was just going to go watch Karen Carlisle in the shower."

Daniel and Terrence floated into his apartment through the living room wall. The body lay just where Daniel had left it and he felt almost disappointed. It was the same feeling he used to have when he came home to the apartment right after Liz left and everything sat exactly where he had left it that morning. The orange juice hadn't moved to the other side of the refrigerator. The remote control remained stuck under the same cushion. Then, as now, the answering machine light refused to blink.

Terrence was having great fun looking around Daniel's apartment.

"I never really came here before. You were kind of boring and you hardly watched any television at all."

Daniel didn't quite believe him, but he wasn't sure he wanted to know how much of his life had been under the scrutiny of a specter.

For the rest of the evening Terrence showed Daniel around the complex, pointing out the apartments where the prettiest girls lived and where people had the best TV watching habits. Daniel tried not to allow himself to feel bored, as it seemed that he would have to spend a very long time in this routine.

Some rooms offered more entertainment than others. As Terrence led Daniel toward Karen Carlisle's apartment, excitedly talking about lathering and exfoliation, they passed through an apartment in which an elderly woman watched a gay porn film entitled *Good Will Humming* on an expensive looking laptop, and another in which a group of teenage boys clustered around a copy of *Cosmo Girl*. The ringleader, a short and pudgy youth with feathery blonde hair and glasses, read out loud to the others.

"It says here that thirty-five percent of teenage girls would rather date a nerd than a bad boy."

"Thirty-five percent? That means exactly 192.5 girls in our grade would do me! Do you think I should ask Jenah to come to our next Magic Club meeting?"

Over the next few days, he followed Terrence's example, meandering from apartment to apartment in search of amusement. Terrence measured the quality of the day by how many naked women he managed to see, but Daniel preferred listening in on telephone calls and dinner table conversations. The two ghosts periodically checked on Daniel's body and each time they entered his apartment Daniel hoped that it would have been found while they competed to see who could come closest to winning the Showcase Showdown on *The Price is Right*. The day of his planned dinner with his mother was almost upon him when suddenly, during one of his and Terrence's routine checks, his phone rang. They drifted over to the telephone stand to check the caller I.D. It was Liz.

"It's my ex-wife. She never called when I was alive."

"The ironies of the world are myriad."

The two ghosts watched the phone ring and ring until the answering machine clicked on and Liz's voice suddenly filled up the apartment.

"Dan, pick up. I know you're there, where else would you be? Look, I need to talk to you. Soon. Can we meet some time today? Dan, please pick up. Okay, fine. I'm going to try again later, but *please* call me back."

The machine clicked off.

"I wonder what she wants," Daniel said.

"Forget about her. Trust me, it's useless trying to find a connection with the people you've left behind."

"I know. It's just strange."

"You'll feel better when they find your body and get you out of here."

Terrence floated over to Daniel's body and admired his wound and the blood while Daniel continued to stare at the answering machine.

"Terrence?"

"Yes?"

"Am I going to be like this forever, do you think?"

"I don't know. Probably. Look at *me*."

"But there has to be some way to move on to... I don't know, some other plane of existence, or at least nonexistence."

"You'd think so, but I haven't puzzled it out yet."

"Do you think we're meant to do something? Find peace within ourselves, or resolve something that was bothering us when we died?"

"I've tried that, believe me. I was quite content when I died; or at least I thought I was. If there had been something important for me to do, you'd think I'd have figured it out by now."

"You see, I wish I could have gotten back at Liz before I died. I wish I had found some eighteen-year-old blonde and brought her to one of Liz's plays. I know it's bad to feel vengeful, but I'd like more than anything to just once see her feel regret for what she did. But there's not really much I can do about it now, I guess."

"The best you can do is to keep yourself amused. Now, I've been saving this one for a rainy day, so if you want some quality entertainment, there's this couple that lives a couple of floors up who have the most spectacular fights. I could watch them for hours. They live in my old apartment."

Terrence and Daniel made their way through several empty apartments and one in which a young couple was engaging in a bit of afternoon delight, which Daniel had some trouble tearing Terrence away from, before entering the Cox's apartment. There they enjoyed taking in a picture of domestic unrest. When they arrived, Mrs. Cox was cutting her husband's shirts to shreds with a brand new pair of cloth shears. When he politely asked her what the hell she thought she was doing, she replied that she needed something with which to stuff the voodoo doll she was making. He retaliated by throwing her sewing machine out the window.

"It makes you feel better about your old relationships, doesn't it?" Terrence said.

"You know, it sort of does."

When they returned to check on the body the next day, there was another message on the machine.

"I guess Liz called again. Or maybe my mother."

Just then they heard a knock at the door.

"Hey, it looks like somebody's missed you after all."

There was another knock, a pause and then the sound of a key turning in the lock. Liz came into the apartment looking agitated.

"Daniel, where are you? Look, I know you're still upset with me but if we could just talk... I want to apol-"

She caught sight of his body on the floor and screamed in horror.

"Daniel! Oh no, oh *no*!"

She rushed to where he lay and threw herself on top of him.

"And just when I had decided to take you back," she sobbed.

"Take *me*, back? You should be so lucky!" he shouted. Her head jerked up, her face white as the walls.

"Who's there? Who said that?"

"I did, you ungrateful bitch."

Daniel hovered a few feet away feeling something like triumph as he watched her looking back and forth between his inert mass and the empty space his specter occupied. She stood up and backed slowly away from the body, terrified, and began to weep. Daniel laughed as he watched the tears stream down her face, and a golden

light fixed itself upon him and drew him irresistibly up to the heavens. Feeling thoroughly cheated by this sudden departure of his new friend, Terrence went to console himself in Karen Carlisle's shower.

Sarah Schoenbeck

Ushered Out

Worn, a traveler carves light from the leafy
scope.
His clothes, a sodden mass of sweat and
earth,
Press hard at his knees, and whispers of
hope
Buckle under butchered screams of an
unsung birth.

Silver comb in hand she steps into his wilds.
Her hair rains down in steely sheets, the tips
Of furrowed fingers veiled by the storm.
Beguiled,
He watches her feet redden with the falling
drips.

It is not the cries that bring her to this glade.
An offer of washing is to be made.

Somewhere Over the Palm Trees I

The sun disappeared into the clouds,
As you disappeared into the sea.
I yearn for your warmth you emit upon my
spirit.
The pounding in the skies,
Mimics the beat of my heart.
And I wonder if the waves
Will carry that sound to wherever
the blue waters take you.
Somewhere over the palm trees,
bright lights will reign over the sky.
They will last as long as the distance
that separates us.

Somewhere Over the Palm Trees II

You exist as a still-frame in my mind.
A vision of embrace
that distills my fear.
As melodies drift around us,
the tears fall from their graced
innocence.
A still-frame that captures purity,
You were only visible to me
in a snap-shot.
Unable to become carnate.

No longer that still-frame in my mind,
You have become my most favored
Moving Picture.
My subconscious dreams vividly of an
embrace
to distill the cruelty of time.
Melodies lurk throughout the hallows,
craving to have life.
Memories not yet made begin to form.
You become the invisible vision,
of most real proportions.

Betsy Perez '10

Somewhere Over the Palm Trees III

You have once again become
that still-frame in my mind.
A slide show that shadows my steps.
Constantly contracting cardiovascular
motion.
Repeated reflections readily remind me,
Of optimistic optical opportunities.
Delineated delusions drown my distress.
Belated blackness bronzes beauty.
Hallucination haunt the highways,
Emulating eternal emancipation.
Guiding games of glorious grandeur.
Manifesting a marvelous mate in a
Fortified fortress of fabulous fantasies.
Abstract allusions of
aforementioned action.
Neurotic notions number my nights.
Tunes travel torrentially through me.
Yearning, for yesterday,
Initiating incurable inspiration.
Photographs bewilder my thoughts,
Somewhere over the palm trees,
Wilderness awaits me.
Somewhere over the palm trees,
Still-frames convert to
moving pictures.

Standing on the balcony of a lovely two-storey cottage, I closed my eyes, drew a deep breath, and then opened them again. Immediately came into sight was a spectacular sea-view, displaying nature's unparalleled beauty. The sun was beaming above my head. The surrounding air, imbued with the balmy freshness of seawater, was redolent of a Hawaii beach. I could not help but cast my mind back to three years ago, to the moment I decided to take a break from study and traveled alone to Honolulu, Hawaii, in the U.S.

The excursion to Hawaii was, undoubtedly, an exceptionally memorable experience in my life - partly because it was the very first time I proved myself audacious enough to travel alone, and partly because it provided me with a perfect hideout to escape from all the stresses and pressures from work. After a total of twenty-three hours of exhausting flight, I finally landed on the very continent of America, thousands of thousand miles away from home. My host came to receive me at the airport, and I could not wait to embark on my journey that very afternoon.

Hawaii is renowned for its marvelous beaches and majestic volcanoes. Among all, the Fleming Kaupala beach always tops the list. Situated in the southern part of Maui, one of the five big islands of Hawaii, the Fleming Kaupala beach prided itself on being America's best beach of all time. It did not take me long before I was bewitched and mesmerized by its unique splendor and indescribable charm, the type of charm which could be reconstructed nowhere else in the world.

Taking a scenic route along the coast of clear blue water, I savored every breath that I took. It was a cloudless day. The sky was the color of aquamarine, and the sand the color of gold. As long as the air was still, the sea lay there as calm as the sleeping beauty, shrouded by an ethereal skin of mist; but the gossamer was quickly removed upon the descending of soft breezes, stirring up layers and layers of ripples, ripples which were embroidered with sparkling diamonds in the sunshine.

The breathtaking sight took me aback. I could not help but gasp at the magnificence of nature's creation. All of a sudden, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of great relief and unspeakable exhilaration - this was the time I came to realize how insignificant humans are compared to nature's profundity; and how many good things I would missed in life, if all I knew was work, work, and still more work. Children were gamboling along the seashore, shrieking and chucking at times; sunbathers were lying quietly on the sand, resting and reposing all the time. However, right then I only had my eyes fixed on the tranquil water. Nothing could possibly distract me. Nothing at all.

I only wish I could slow down the time and relish another pleasurable moment at the beach. Savoring the newly discovered philosophy and the sense of exhilaration it brought me, I headed directly back to Hong Kong. From that moment onward, my life has been forever changed - not only because of my newly established sense of pride gained from the solo travel experience, but also, and more importantly, is the realization that there is more to life than work, and that it takes more than money to make a fulfilling life - an appreciative eye for the aesthetics of nature - which has been granted to us free-of-charge, but only if we take the time to touch it and feel it with heart.

July 21st 1972: Queen's University Belfast Quadrangle 2:36 PM

"Wellingtons were a good choice," Margaret thought as she rocked from toe to heel in her mallard-patterned rain boots. It was brisk for July and her warm weather boots were still caked with mud from the last time she'd worn them.

"I told you you could grab my coat on the way out," said the girl next to her sucking on a rollie, quick to mistake her silly habit for discomfort. "Damn," she said, the cheap paper sticking sickly to her lip as she threw up her hands in a failed frisk of her own jacket. "Left the cards upstairs."

The smoker's name was Katherine.

"You'd think," she began with a renewed fervor, "that I would have at least remembered the damn cards. You want?" she motioned at the soggy mass that had found its new home between her ready fingers. She'd assumed her "And if you don't mind me saying so" stance.

Margaret, not in the mood for yet another verbal onslaught, spat out, "I'm good, thanks." She said it a lot quicker than she'd meant to. Just once she wanted to turn to Katherine and deliver bluntly: "Mind taking your gripe of the day elsewhere? That would be much appreciated. Thanks." It was a line that had not gone under practiced.

"Flipping drills. If they haven't got their routine down pat by now..." Katherine trailed off into a mumble, her spasmodic energy redirected into rolling a new cigarette.

Katherine always seemed to be rolling a new cigarette. She was under the misconception that she and Margaret were good friends. Margaret had of course failed to correct her of this notion and didn't think now was the time to start. Plus, out on the Queen's University quadrangle, Katherine's uninterrupted drone kept Margaret from thinking about the night before, and for that she was beyond thankful.

An austere looking man appeared at the head of the green. "The bomb squad has given the all clear. You are now free to re-enter the building."

"Bout bloody time," Katherine shuddered through a cloudy exhale. She turned to Margaret, still rocking. "Maggie," she said hesitantly, "care to rejoin the land of the living?"

Margaret looked up. The rest of the crowd had already begun to shuffle back inside. Katherine took her firmly by the forearm and shook it reassuringly.

"He'll come around you know."

She was of course speaking of Damien.

* * * * *

July 20th 1972: On the N1 to Dublin 4:41 PM

"Oh!" The body of the 1969 Ford Escort dropped low into the ground with an uneasy jolt. Half a dozen white-gloved birds decorated the road feet in front of the car. Margaret had dug her nails into the cushy outside rubber of the dashboard. Damien looked left, caught her whiter-than-usual profile, then slung his gaze over his shoulder to the drop-jawed pair in the back seat. He tittered to himself, paused tellingly and then feigning anger with his company's dawdling reaction demanded, "Well?"

"Have you absolutely lost it?" Margaret's tone was frigid. "You stopped for magpies?"

"A perfect seven," he sang gleefully.

"There are only six, Damien." Margaret often sounded less than impressed.

"One for sorrow. Two for joy."

"Damien, it's already quarter to four. We couldn't get to my cousins by five if we tried."

"Right. So let's not try." He flashed her his signature cheeky smile.

"The ball starts at six thirty and Elizabeth would never forgive me if I - us, sorry, if we didn't make the start of it. She's had that beast of yellow taffeta picked out for months."

"Well, it is a *May*Ball."

"Yeah, it's really important to her and-

"No Maggie, a *May*Ball in July. If the event's two months in the coming I'm sure our twenty-minute tardiness might just be excused. You have to wonder why a Trinity education is so highly regarded when its 'educated sorts' can't quite grasp the calendar system. I will bravely volunteer my bottom if disciplinary action is deemed necessary."

"Damien!" Margaret said it like tired explicative.

Beaming his teflon smile, he resumed count of the unnaturally still flock. "Three for a girl. Four for a boy." He nodded at Margaret encouragingly.

"Five for silver. Six for gold. But, seven?"

"Ah, indeed, the most elusive of magpies, the secret-keeping seventh. Why I am graced with her presence for the duration of the evening if I'm not mistaken."

"Ugh, you are saccharine."

He reached over and tapped Margaret's nose. "Magpie, will you keep my secret?"

"You PILLOCK!" she yelped with a full smile.

"Agreed," he said with mirrored expression. Their flirtatious grins locked, the Escort heaved itself upwards and rolled on.

* * * * *

July 21st 1972: Queen's University Belfast, Registrar's Office 3:54 PM

The austere man was back. What did he want this time.

"If I can have your attention. Over the course of the last two hours, roughly twenty bombs planted by the IRA exploded in Belfast City. There are both injuries and casualties but we do not know the exact count at the moment. We advise you to stay here until such time as we see fit to give a definite all clear. That is all that we know at this time. Thank you."

"Well," said Katherine, shaking slightly while fashioning another rollie. "Good that you ended it with him really, isn't it? Don't you normally meet for lunch on Fridays?"

* * * * *

July 20th 1972: Trinity College Dublin, May Ball, College Park 11:09 PM

Margaret had her eyes closed. Derek and the Domino's *Layla* swelled in and around the grounds. She stood in the center of the cool college green in her new periwinkle frock from Anderson and McCauley's, rocking toe to heel, like her mother on baking days. Sundays at home guaranteed a flour-wrapped kitchen. The radio dribbled news until it was time for her father to put on his wellies and see to the cows or some other charge. And then, for a short while, the Beatles or the Yardbirds would play for their flour-spattered audience, careful not to give up the game by moving too freely in front of the kitchen windows. Rocking was the subtlest way to be happy then. Now it was the only way.

"This song," she said as she pressed her palms to her forehead, "it just makes you want to get out you know? 'You've been running and hiding much too long!'"

"Magpie."

"Sod Belfast," she said to herself.

"Maggie."

"Yes Damien."

"You've got me on my knees."

"Well no that's a great line too, but the whole song just." She made a jab at the air in front of her with a loose fist and Damien reached for it. She opened her eyes and looked for the boy attached to the hand now restraining hers, but he wasn't at eye level.

"No Maggie, you've got me on my knees," he repeated resolutely. She looked down to see Damien, smaller than usual, crouched over his poorly polished shoes. Then from his waistcoat he pulled a gold bracelet. He tried to fasten it to her arm. Without so much as a second look into his pleading eyes, she smacked him hard, once across each cheek. Then stared accusingly at her own pink fingertips.

"What do you think you're doing?" She knew not to whom the question was directed. Her response was completely unexpected. Even as she began to lower her hand, ashamed of it, sure it wasn't a part of her, she knew that that single act was more honest than she had ever been with Damien.

"Magpies predict the future. You're my magpie. What can you see in *our* future? Tell me that *this*," he bit his lip and tightened his hold on her, "that *we* aren't in it."

Her raw fingers throbbed to the electric guitar.

He faltered. "We have a future, don't we?"

"I may be your magpie Damien, but you are my yardbird. I'm sorry." She took his hand, now limp in hers, and placed it gingerly on his own bent knee. She turned to walk back towards the rugby pitch crowded with students. She pursed her lips together, desperate to keep the all too familiar taste of salt at bay.

* * * * *

July 21st 1972: Queen's University Registrar's Office 4:23 PM

"Oh Margaret."

"Yes Joanna?"

"In all the confusion I forgot to tell you you've had a message." She placed a folded bit of paper on her desk.

"Thanks Joanna." Margaret picked it up and read:

12:30 call from Damien Henry:

Maggie, I just want an explanation. I'm taking the bus into the City. Please meet me at our usual time at the corner of Oxford and Ann. Pub lunch at the Duke of York OK?

Cheers Damien

A surge of guilt flooded her.

Someone turned on the telly. The newscaster commanded the room. "Between the hours of 2:10 and 3:30 today, Belfast was devastated by twenty-two IRA bombs. Despite the various warnings given prior to the bombings by the Provisional Irish Republican Army, there have been nine recorded casualties. Many were killed at the Oxford Street bus station and several people were killed on Cavehill Road. Information is still coming in. At this time, we can only begin to comprehend the damage that has been done."

David Slatkin

Butterflies Dreaming They Are Men

The front staircase creaked and moaned in rising succession. A knock rattled against the doorframe, and an old woman appeared at the door.

"Good morning Frank. I'm leaving for Mass, but I wanted to bring you some Ensure. I know it tastes terrible, but you know that if you don't keep your weight up with this that Dr. Young is going to put that feeding tube into your stomach."

She put the can of chocolate Ensure with bent red-and-white striped straw onto the old mahogany table in front of the old man she addressed as "Frank". "I'll be home in ninety-minutes." She leaned down, and after meeting his baby-blue eyes with her own, kissed his soft cheek. "Isabel can't come to take care of you today. Her father had a heart attack last night, and she is staying with him at the hospital to make sure he gets proper care. Wouldn't it be nice if our Lilly were a nurse and could take care of you? You should be fine while I am gone, but if there is an emergency just press the First-Alert button on your remote and an ambulance will be here in minutes."

The old man nodded up-and-down. He opened his mouth to speak, but the sounds that flowed through the air were not words. Tears formed in his eyes. The old woman wiped away his tears gently with her thumb, and caressed the skin of his cheeks under the plastic tube of his respirator. She stood up, and moved towards the door. She paused and turned around to face her husband again: "I love you Frank, and I don't need words to tell me that you love me too. I already know. I'll see you soon sweetheart."

After a few minutes the front door sent shivers throughout the house as it kissed the doorframe. The old man exhaled deeply over the sound of the morning programming on Animal Planet. He turned off the TV. In the newfound silence the hiss of his respirator tickled his ears. He placed the remote next to the can of Ensure and caught a whiff of the pungent fake chocolate odor,

"Magpies" a certain of cans he had consumed, and the illness that induced it. With his lip and the arm of his chair to stand up. When he reached for the stroller of his familiar cool grip in his hand, and slowly walked over to the window. A black Cadillac pulling out of the yellow two-car garage that some might say a miniature New England barn. The garage door closed automatically behind the car as it rolled toward the suburban street.

The old man absorbed as much of the room as he could from the light reflecting off it, and slowly made his way to the adjoining staircase. At the top of the staircase was an automatic lift that his wife had had installed to make it easier for him to move between floors. He reached instead for the recently polished wooden banister, and rolled his oxygen tank down one step at a time with his other hand. To his right were recent images of smiling faces trapped within an instant of time behind a prison of glass.

As he moved down the staircase he stared into each picture and smiled. He could not help the flood of memories and associations held within each face that grew younger as he descended. Towards the bottom of the staircase he paused longest to stare at a picture of his oldest son as a newborn cradled gently in the arms of his wife. Though he was not in the picture, he saw his own happiness in the wrinkled lines of the reflection staring back at him from the glass. He released the oxygen tank that was now resting at the bottom of the staircase and shuffled over to the picture and gently kissed the memories of his wife and son. The last picture on the staircase was of his mother and father. As he gazed into it he smiled and gently ran his fingers across it.

His heart beat quickly with powerful strokes that made him feel as if the room was pulsed in-and-out to the rhythm of his pacemaker. When he finally caught his breath, he grasped his oxygen tank and rolled it towards the kitchen. As he walked through the foyer his right hand caressed the green wallpapered walls his wife chose over thirty-years ago. The room was filled with

warm late-morning summer sun. At the threshold of the kitchen he grabbed the doorframe, and stepped inside. He rolled his oxygen tank over to the kitchen counter and took several deep breaths. IN-and-OUT. IN-and-OUT... When his lungs no longer clawed at his chest for more oxygen, he moved both hands to the clear plastic tubing that connected the oxygen tank to his lungs via a two-pronged hose protruding from his nostrils, and pulled it out. He heard the hiss of the escaping oxygen as it flowed coolly over his nose, lips and cheeks before he placed it around the handle of the oxygen tank, and twisted the valve shut.

The sensation of pins-and-needles tickled his skin, and he grabbed the counter to support him. He stood as straight as his pressurized spine would allow, and after a few more labored breaths slowly shuffled towards the back door. There he grabbed the silver handle of his wooden cane from the umbrella bin, and turned around to absorb the room. The scent of fresh cut pine relaxed his nostrils. His father's Grandfather Clock announced the passage from present to past with each tick. The sun warmed the backs of his neck and ears. To his left he saw the five wooden chairs tucked into the long old walnut farm table where he once ate many delicious meals prepared by his wife for his children and him. On his right was the kitchen counter where he once cutoff a small tip of his index finger helping his wife prepare a dinner for his company's president and wife. The room was inundated with radiant light and rapidly flashing memories speeding through his mind faster than he was able to distinguish them from one another. As he began to breathe deeper and deeper to try to catch up with his memories, the Grandfather Clock chimed that it was fifteen minutes past ten. It was getting late, and he had not a moment to spare.

He turned towards the back door, placed his hand upon the doorknob, and turned it open. The golden sunlight and cool fresh air danced upon his face and hands. His ears were filled by the sound of chirping birds as he stepped out, and felt his way into the backyard with his cane. After cautiously shuffling his way along the blue slate path he came to the garage door. He reached his

right hand into his pocket, and it emerged clutching a golden key that he carefully inserted into the keyhole of the door to turn the deadbolt open. He pushed open the door, and turned around to look at the brilliant yellow light cascading off his home. There was not a single cloud in the sky, but his light blue eyes forecast showers.

The inside of the two-car garage appeared almost black compared to the bright sunny day outside. It smelt like old cobwebs, dust, and dirt. He flicked on a light with the snap of a switch. Aside from an old workbench, some tools, a lawnmower, and garbage cans, the room was almost empty. The man's tired legs carried him to the back of the workbench where he pulled out a blue tarp. He moved it into the middle of the room and carefully extended the surface area of the crinkling blue mass of shining fibers. At the center of the tarp was a thick climbing rope that he had kept from his summer climbing the Appalachian Mountains with friends after he graduated from the College of The Holy Cross. He picked up the rope and walked over to a ladder in the corner of the garage, and dragged it onto the middle of the tarp. The man mounted the ladder and placed his right arm through the coil of rope to rest it on his shoulder as he climbed the ladder.

There he carefully unwound one end of the rope, and tied it around an oak beam that ran parallel to the cement floor with the best knots he remembered from his many years of Boy Scouts and sailing. As he descended the ladder the rope swung perpendicular to the ground like a pendulum,

The man took his glasses off his face and placed them on the workbench. He reached into his pockets and removed a leather tri-fold wallet, solid gold Rolex, set of keys and an envelope, and rested them on the workbench. Then he took off his woolen navy cardigan, his beige polo shirt, and white v-cut undershirt and folded each into a neat pile on the workbench. He fumbled with his feet to take off his own brown dress shoes, then slid off his socks to reveal them to the cold cement floor. His hands fumbled with the buckle of his belt until it opened, and then he removed the belt

from his pants. His trousers were very loose, and he had no difficulty undoing the button that kept them up. As he slid down his fly he felt each tooth vibrating into his hand through the zipper. He was naked except for a diaper. In the past he may have felt embarrassed, but over the last several months he had grown more accustomed to the diaper than being naked.

After he had finished stacking his folded clothing; trousers on bottom, then cardigan, polo, undershirt, socks, belt, wallet, watch, glasses, and envelope he remembered to take off the family insignia ring that his father passed on to him, and removed the crucifix around his neck. He caressed his wedding band, and kept it tied to his left index finger. Then he fidgeted with the envelope, turning it over and staring at the red wax that sealed it shut with the image of his family seal. Turning the envelope to its front he silently read his rune-like handwriting:

*Grace,
My Love for you is like the Ocean,
It is Endless and knows no bounds.
Always,
-Frank*

He kissed the envelope and placed it on the top of his clothing as he turned towards the ladder. His breaths were very labored now, and he was becoming increasingly dizzy and lightheaded. He directed all his strength into the act of walking to the ladder and ascending it. He stopped on the fourth step and transferred his weight to the balls of his feet. There he grabbed the rope and tightened the loop at its end around his neck until he felt the blood pumping in his throat. To breathe more easily he stood as tall as he could, further onto the tips of his toes, and took a couple of deep and labored breaths.

With stars dancing on the sides of his vision he closed his tear-filled eyes. He took a deep and raspy breath, smiled, and jumped as high as his bony legs would lift him away from the ladder. His eyes were closed, and for an instant he felt weightlessly suspended in time and space. He

witnessed all of his existence coalesce into a single essence like a star going supernova and collapsing into a singularity.

A quick cracking sound reverberated throughout the garage, followed only by the sound of two drops of water pinging off the tarp, one right after the other.

* * *

Darkness was punctured by brilliant white light as a young boy awoke naked in the radiant summer sun that warmed, but did not burn his skin. He was surrounded by a green meadow of thick and soft sod speckled white by sweet smelling patches of flowers. Sitting up, he realized he was resting upon a small hill overlooking a dark lake trapped by a circular ridge of jagged green mountains, which clasped a shimmering mirror of the amber sky together like the hands of a titan.

As he looked around the boy noticed that there were no insects buzzing into his ears or animals sauntering about. In fact, there was no motion around him, except for the bowing of the grass, plants, and trees, and rippling upon the lake. There was a stillness and peacefulness surrounding him which he could not remember ever experiencing before. In the past he was terrified of being alone, but he had the wind, the sky, the sun, the mountains, the forest, the plants, and the dark lake as his companions.

Shifting his weight to his legs he effortlessly arose, and surveyed his playground. Between the lake and the young boy lay a meadow covered by the most colorful assortment of wild flowers he had ever seen. They grew in patterns and shapes that looked vaguely familiar, but he could not remember from where; certainly not his geometry textbook.

Pushing off the ground below him, he leaped stride-by-stride closer to the wild flowers, closer to the black lake. As soon as the wild flowers began to lick his ankles he looked down and discovered that the colors of the flowers imprinted themselves upon his flesh like paintbrushes. There he threw himself to the ground, and his momentum carried him through the field of wild

flowers, and onto the shore of the dark lake. His body was covered by every color and shade imaginable, making him almost invisible against the landscape surrounding him.

Carefully he approached the edge of the dark lake and stared at his reflection, which in turn stared back into him. The young boy tilted his head and squinted his eyes as if he did not instantly recognize the young reflection staring back at him. He paused in his reflection and the reflection stared back just as intently. It was then that the boy realized how dark and black the lake truly was, for he could see no bottom: only pure darkness through the gently rippling reflection of the vision of the dark lake.

Since the young boy could only perceive the dark lake through his eyes, he was determined to discover more. Without a moment's pause he locked his sight onto his reflection and dove into it head first without once moving his gaze from his mirror twin. He was suspended in the air for only a moment, but it felt like an eternity. As his eyes touched those of his reflection at the surface of the dark lake, his awareness was submerged by a sensation of oneness with his reflection. It showed him everything he had ever done, and everything he would ever do. Then the boy and his reflection dissolved into the dark lake.

The boy felt the cool dark lake washing over him in undulating waves of emotion that washed away his sense of separation and individuation. It was as if he woke up from his most vivid dream only to experience another. He felt how the valley formed by the rising of the mountains, and witnessed the first organisms to emerge that were buried deep within, as if he were the valley. He remembered all the subsequent life and experiences that had flourished in the valley before it was flooded by the melting of the ice-capped mountains, and became the seat of the lake. His perception of the universe changed as the water above him refracted the light of the sun, and prevented him from seeing things as he once did.

At first the valley tried to fight the water because it blocked the valley from the only world it had ever known, but no matter how hard the valley tried, it could not escape the water. Unable to resist any longer the valley let go of its attempt to change the universe that rested upon it, and let go of its former perception of the universe before the water composing the lake collected in the valley. The valley remembered that it had not been a valley before the mountains arose around it. It had been something different once before, and it would be something different once again. It came to see the lake as neither positive nor negative; merely something that was and would continue to be until it too changed and transformed as all things do with time. The valley realized that it had nowhere to go and nothing to accomplish. Hindered neither by the conceptions or perceptions of the universe surrounding it, the valley eventually discovered that the lake was the looking glass of the universe within and without. Although the valley could not see its own reflection in it, it understood that it was an inseparable part of the lake, because it defined its boundaries. Upon this realization the valley and lake became the eye of the universe. The dark lake experienced all there had ever been, and all that there will ever be.

There it lay staring at the world and heavens around it, while the world and heavens stared back into the dark lake, until the time when the world would also dive into the dark lake; and the valley, the dark lake, the young boy, and the world would become one, and in becoming one: become nothing.

* * *

A siren shrieked throughout the room. A clammy hand emerged from an unknown abyss and silenced it with a thunderous pound. An ocean of blankets began to toss and turn as if caught in a mighty swell, until they erupted toward the heavens. A figure emerged from beneath, and with a mighty roar he arose from his slumber and shook the earth beneath him as he ascended his mighty throne. He closed his eyes, and read the digits "6:00" from the inscription upon his eyelids. With

skilled movements he plucked trees from a roll and wiped himself with them before flushing them into the mighty sea.

As he stood up he caught an outsider's perception of what he himself believed to be, and shuffled closer. The man and his mirror image met at a point equidistant to both, yet the point where they met seemed unperceivable. Suddenly images of an old man hanging himself, a young boy running through a meadow, and the experiences of a valley flooded his memory and blocked out his perception of the world outside himself. He became unstuck from time, and trapped within eternity. These were the dreams he had during the night, but like most people had forgotten upon waking. He remembered how real each experience that happened within the dreams truly was; perhaps even more real than the reality he believed to inhabit.

"Am I still dreaming?" he thought to himself? With that thought his reflection stared back at him and the room reappeared as if not even a second had elapsed from when he approached the mirror. "Am I going insane?" Unfortunately he had to stow such queries in order to get to work, so he returned to his ritual daily routine: shower, shave, dress, get in car, drive to Dunkin Donuts for a medium coffee, "regular," and bacon, egg, and cheese English muffin, drive, eat, show security parking pass, park, run through lobby, enter elevator, hit number eight, stroll confidently down third aisle of cubicles on the left, wink over at boss in corner office, and finally landing in the eighteenth cubicle on the right-hand side. While he waited for his computer to boot up, he unpacked his briefcase, and then checked his e-mail to see what was on the agenda for today. "Data entry, data entry, and more data entry, it never seems to end".

As morning faded into early afternoon by the intensity of the rising sun, the young man grabbed the remnants of his second mug full of coffee, and headed for the break-room that housed a refrigerator, coffee maker, cupboard of mugs, a microwave, and enough rectangular tables to sit

over fifty employees at a time. He filled his mug with more black liquid of energy and alertness, but before he could take a sip--

“McGowan! What the fuck happened last night? Did you seal the deal with that smokin’ blonde you were hitting on at Ralph’s?” asked an anxious colleague.

“Gid’s, you scared what little Guinness I had left in my bladder halfway down my leg. Chill out man! No, I didn’t ‘seal the deal’ with that ‘smokin’ blonde’ from last night. She asked me what I did for a living, and I told her that I ‘worked a dead end data entry job to pay the bills until I had enough money to travel around the world for a couple of years’. She said I was ‘deadbeat’ and that I should call her when I got a ‘real’ job, but didn’t give me her number. I think she was trying to break the dumb blonde stereotype by being ironic. After that I just grabbed a cab, and smoked some hash before I went to bed. Speaking of which, I had the weirdest fucking dream last night...”

Gabrielle trailed off, before almost shouting, “I gotta hit up the bathroom Gid’s...fucking coffee.” He power-walked with a tingling sense of urgency to the Men’s Room.

After one of his longest stands at the urinal he emerged before the sink, victorious over his bladder once again. He rewarded himself with pink soap, and while running his hands under the warm stinging water, caught his reflection for the first time since he woke up. He fell through his reflection in the mirror once again and lived through the same dreams that had taken him away from himself twice before. Again he awoke on the other side of the mirror staring at his reflection, unsure of who or what he was really staring at. “Is this all just a dream? Am I going insane? Am I cracking apart?”

It hit him like a sonic boom that severed his mind from his body. His mind was blank and his body was numb. Eternity lasted an instant, and he finally understood everything in his dreams, and consequently everything inside and outside himself.

When he came to he was lying on the floor of the bathroom crying out in laughter. As he jumped up he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror, and ran over to kiss it saying “thank you!”

That instant, the young man’s boss entered the bathroom, and McGowan instinctually jerked his head away from what he saw. “Mr. McGowan, just what the hell do you think you are doing over there? I’m not paying you to stand around and finger-fuck yourself in the mirror. Although finger-fucking yourself may be the closest you ever come to getting some real pussy, I demand that you get back to your office and do some fucking work!” McGowan turned in horror as he first saw his boss, Mr. Shepherd, but the shock soon faded from his face. Before Mr. Shepherd could say “finger-fuck” twice McGowan was doing everything he could to refrain from laughing, and as soon as Mr. Shepherd finished announcing “work”, McGowan began to laugh convulsively.

“Are you trying to fuck with me young man? Don’t you have any respect for your boss, the man who is the God of your future here at Fuktifino Corporation? Do you want to throw away your life?” barked Mr. Shepherd.

Taking a deep breath and exhaling it, McGowan responded in a clear and honest tone, “Mr. Shepherd, let’s get some things straight first. Neither you, nor any man aside from myself, are the ‘God’ of my life or future. I have absolutely no respect for you, a man who claims to be deeply invested in his ‘Christianity’ and ‘good ole’ family values’, while at the same time going home with your secretary’s crimson lipstick glued to the base of your cock. I spent my first year here kissing corporate ass and doing whatever needed to get done, and I never once received any recognition for all the sixty-plus-hour-weeks I worked. For the last two years I have done everything I could think of to undermine this corporation: from pissing on the toilet seat to contacting the IRS about tax evasion. I have put myself on the line more times than I can even count. I now realize that more than anything in the world I wanted to get caught polluting your

precious flock. The only reason I have not quit yet is because I thought my life and future depended on this job, but I now realize that it was in fact you who were polluting the flock with the only tactics you know to give and obey: fear. Well Mr. Shepherd, for the first time in my life I am not afraid of you or anything else in this world. I am perfectly content in this moment, and if it is my fortune that this moment continues into the future moments, I will take them as they come. While I feel no obligation to you, or anyone else for that matter, I will have you know that I am doing the opposite of throwing my life away; I am taking it back.”

Mr. Shepherd’s face was fireball red, and he began to shout a flagrant response at the human being standing before him, but he fell silent as his eyes met those of McGowan, who with a smile, lifted his heel, and headed for the staircase and whichever paths he found along the way.

David Slatkin

Still Further

Matter and Energy coalesce
 To a point
 Of pure Consciousness,
 And explode through
 All dimensions of
 Space and Time, and
 All the nameless cracks in-between.
 Being rests at
 The Center.
 Watching the waves
 Capture and create
 Perception and experience,
 Who stare back
 Into Being.
 Lost and confused
 I cry out for
 Being to toss
 Aside the curtains
 And expose the screen
 And projector of its production.
 But I realize
 I am the screen, and

I am the projector
 And the production.
 Interconnected,
 And alone,
 I rest upon a rock
 And think...
 The mysterious puzzle of
 Life begins to unfold itself.
 Present moments
 To the past;
 To the land of ancestors
 And loved ones.
 Where we all go,
 piece-by-piece,
 Day-by-day,
 To The Eternal Void,
 To The Matterless Eternal,
 To The Land of All Pasts and Futures.
 Body trembling
 Heart pulsing,

The feeling
 of being alive,
 And fading.

When light dims,
 Other senses grow.
 In the absence of light
 We sharpen our
 Sensitivity to
 The Consciousness that
 Pervades in
 Pulsating streams
 Through us.

What is this I
 Speak of?
 Observations and communications

Of the material
 Universe we believe
 Our True Selves
 Exist within.

I speak in half-truths,
 False-truths,
 Wayward and
 Whimsical
 Material-truths.

They exist as
 Temporally bound playgrounds
 For our Endless,
 Conscious Beings.
 Transforming to
 The next generation.
 The one we achieve
 And grow towards;
 Our Infinite, and
 Ultimate
 Awareness!

If you were a Godlike
 Ball of Conscious Energy
 Imbued with Awareness,
 Would you not
 Create a more

Permanent
 And
 Tangible universe?
 Broken down into
 Slower and less
 Fleeting,
 Longer lasting
 Ideas:
 Cast in iron-clad egos
 Of Identity?

Nothing but
 Ramblings
 From the Twilight
 Zone
 Of the Dark-Side of
 The 11th Dimension.
 My attention and
 Resolve cannot last.
 All is impermanent!
 Such is the manner of
 All things and
 Being!

Endless imagination
 Captured in
 Existential corpses.
 Decaying and growing
 To prepare us
 For the realization
 Of the True Infinite
 And Ultimate Reality
 From which we are derived.

The animal-like
 Self-aware ladders
 Of genetic molecules
 That built our
 Bodies to replicate—
 Godlike Atoms of
 Matter and Energy
 Trapped,
 But in learning the
 Tao of Universal Order
 Continue to
 Change and form
 New and better
 Mechanisms

And means
Of propagating
Endless, expansive
Awareness of—

The ability to Master
The Tao of
The Orgasmic,
Explosive Awareness of:
The Biggest Bang
Of The Universe!

Maybe we are the
Only planet
Consciousness
Was tricked into
Being trapped by
Matter;
The ever increasing
Helix that cages
Our spiritual
And Cosmic Entity.

Temper and direct
The orgasm
Of your realization
Of universal interconnectedness
Which we were only physically
Built to explore,
With one person
At a time.
Before the realization that
The sexual fulfillment
Of experiential
Interconnectedness
Is the lowest
Level of achieving
The spiritual realization
Of our interconnectedness.

Beyond and under
Our material and
Dull perceptions.

The curtain falls.
The show is over.
But life begins
As the lights burn on
And we leave our seats.

We share what
We have seen,
But words
Are never enough.

Go Deeper!
Go Further!

Keep going!
Further!
Further!
Further!

OM!

Piper J. Klemm
March 4, 2008

Boo Radley

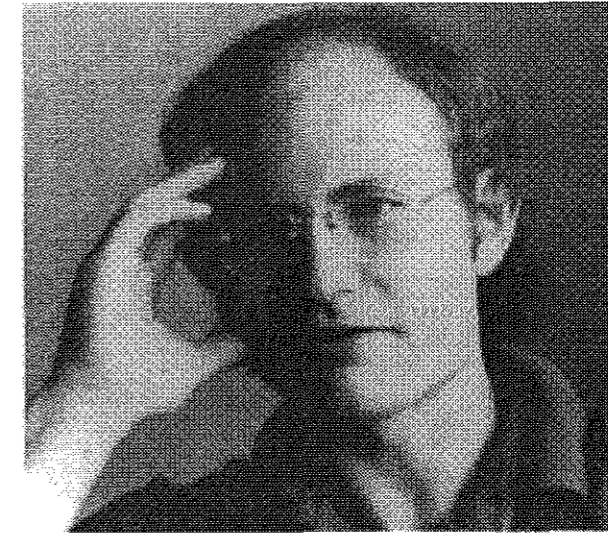
When I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* for class in 7th grade, I never expected the unassuming purple paperback to change my life. The story was captivating, the writing, exemplary and the subtle nuances still resonate after many hundred readings. I found reading through the eyes of a child was so refreshing. As someone who has never felt like they have been allowed to be a child, I relished in Scout Finch's accounts of the happenings. My responsibilities and expectations were so adult in nature at such a young age, I sometimes felt lost with my much older peers. After graduating from high school at fifteen sans prom and formal graduation, I found myself looking for my missing childhood. Somehow, *To Kill a Mockingbird* appeased this. I found myself wishing that a Boo Radley would be there to save me from boredom and when neighborhood dealings got too much. I got part of that wish when I was fifteen and moved across the country to a new neighborhood.

He lives in a house with a huge iron gate and huge green foliage surrounding it. Actually he has three properties side-by-side on the shores of Lake Washington. I have never seen a vehicle come to or leave the wrought iron gates. We are both Leos, our birthdays fall in the beautiful Seattle month of August. He is wealthy and famous, I leave my house and socialize. Together, we are the American dream. Separate, he probably has some social disorder and I am just normal. I have never seen him, but my response would be similar to Scout's "Hey Boo" in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I would say "Hey Gary" and that little voice in my head with more manners than my tongue would say, "I mean Mr. Larson." But this has not happened yet. I still have no idea what he looks like, save a picture I have taken in 1989.

Here is what I do know. Gary Larson was born August 14, 1950, in Tacoma, Washington. He rose to comic fame with his Far Side cartoons and the 22 books published from the series. He

has the books and calendars, mugs, tee-shirts, etc. that gave him enough royalties to retire in 1995. He lives on the water at 6023 NE Windermere Drive. His house is valued at \$5.544 million dollars and he pays roughly \$100,000 in taxes per year. He is married to Toni Carmichael, an archaeologist and their telephone is unlisted. They were married in 1987, the year prior to the one I was born. He still does the occasional cartoon for charity auctions. He has a vacation home on Orcas Island, which is part of the picturesque San Juan Islands. Contact information is: Creators Syndicate; 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700; Los Angeles, CA 90045. Tel: (310) 337-7003. Fax: (310) 337-7625. E-mail: FarSide@creators.com. Web: <http://www.creators.com>. But these are the easy facts, the ones that can be found from some hunting. They do not tell the story of the endless days plotting to lure him out.

I moved into this neighborhood, rich with Nobel prize winners and other interesting people, when I was fifteen from Philadelphia. Endless book clubs, garden clubs, neighborhood cocktail parties and every other reason for a get together held together the neighborhood, my new world. I knew no one and Seattle represented the complete unknown. My pony, Posey, would not fly out until six months after me, so I wasn't sure what to do with myself. In Philadelphia Posey was my life- hours and hours each day were spent attending to her. Now, I suddenly had those hours free. The academic rigor of my private school was no match for my new college life. Commuting to school found me at a loss for making many friends, and I lacked interest in my classes. Their lack of academic rigor allowed me to lack interest and for the first time I felt truly bored. I took up things I had never done before like watching television, learning to be a socialite in my new neighborhood, and attempting to lure out Gary Larson.



Gary Larson in 1980.

This is the boring, average Gary that floats in my mind. Skinny and lanky with glasses, he could almost be a professor and fit right in with my family, but he is different. He writes comics for a living. He has no societal aspirations.

Now, I say Larson has never left his house, but that may or may not be true. Since no one knows what he looks like, no one can identify him, so for all I know, I see him at Safeway buying eggs and milk and he just looks at me and laughs. Or perhaps, he died many years ago and was stuffed in the chimney. We just simply don't know. I have observed his house and set my running and driving schedule to monitor the comings and goings at many hours of the day. Nothing ever happened.

I started small and true to *To Kill a Mockingbird* style. As Scout fantasized about, I bought the sugar shop out of lemon drops completely and made a path up the hill from his front gate to my front door to lure him over. And then I waited. I read in front of the picture window in my living room, waiting for him to stroll up the walk. And then, because it is Seattle, it rained. And sugar melts. I started on my next adventure. A couple of days later, I took my kayak around his boat

dock. He didn't appear to have a boat, but as I generally don't row in my glasses, I couldn't gather all that much. I went back the next day with my glasses, but as the current was very strong, I was not sure that I could make a quick getaway should the situation merit it. I think that I may have an active imagination. I chickened out of getting too close and knocking on the back door, saving the encounter for another day. I was realizing that I was going to step it up if I was ever going to meet him.

Why did I want to meet him? It seems odd that a fifteen year old develops a sudden obsession with a random fifty-five year old man. As weird as it may seem, I was and still am convinced that we would hit it off and be the best of friends. I won't say that age is just a number, but we have similar senses of humor and apathy for the human race. We share a love for science and he can see the humor in it where I can't. Larson and I both have a fascination with herpetology. We are both Seattlites- coffee lovers to the core. These are all common themes of his comics and common themes of my life. A friendship or a best friendship with your famous reclusive neighbor just seemed to be the natural progression. He was also what I desired to be. I was so lonely without my friends and pony and without new friends, that I sought out different kinds of friends. I saw Gary as someone who chose to be lonely and was seemingly content with it, otherwise he would simply leave his house. Like Harper Lee's hermit nature, but an order of magnitude greater, Gary, if indeed alive, showed me that there were content people in a more secluded situation than the one I had. I wanted that.

So, I left facts and listened to rumors. I went to cocktail parties and asked what people knew about him. I made sure that he was invited to all these parties, but as anticipated, he never showed. I did find out one key fact, however, from all this gossip.

"Hi Dr. Finkelstein, how's your garden? What would you happen to know about our neighbor Gary Larson?"

"Well, Piper, he doesn't like attention or to be bothered. He just kind of hangs out at home all the time, from what we can tell. I have heard that he enjoys playing the banjo."

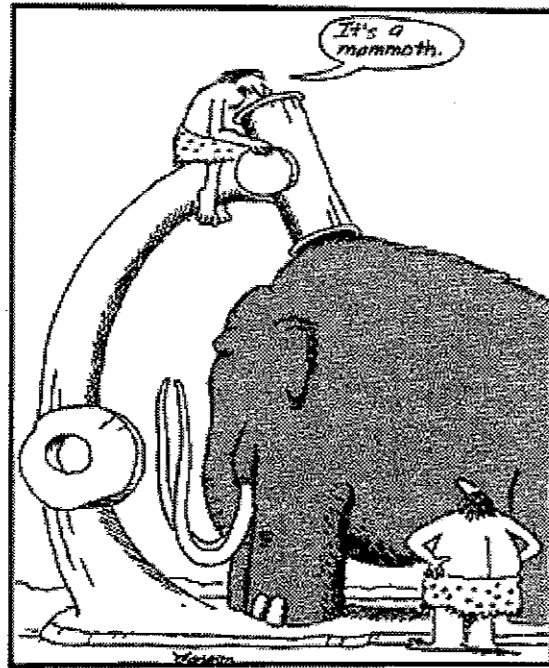
Gary Larson is obsessed with playing the banjo. Bingo! I had found my in.

The next day, I went to the library and got out every banjo book I could find and started to look on Craig's List for a used banjo. I asked around about lessons or borrowing one, but decided that lessons would be too slow for my friendship timeframe. For about a week, all of my free time was funneled into the \$15 banjo that I bought off Craig's List and the books I got out of the library. Finally, I was ready. I set off my video camera and made a video of myself playing the banjo. I didn't say anything in the video, just played away on Mary had a Little Lamb. I attached a note on my P stationary to the video that said, "Hey Mr. Larson, I heard that you play the banjo too. If you ever want to jam together, please call me at (206) 303-8572. Sincerely, Piper J. Klemm (the yellow house) P.S. I love your comics and you're pretty cool."

Totally creepy and I can admit it. I put it in his mailbox and waited. Three days later, I got a letter in my mailbox that had gone through the post (a far distance to travel for the sake of two mailboxes).

"Dear Piper, I found your video very entertaining. I do not tend to leave my house. Keep up the banjo playing. Gary."

Inside was an autographed comic, coincidentally my favorite with a mammoth.



I find this comic so hilarious because it shows how much science changes. We are doing things right now that will seem so obvious and elementary in fifty years. Many things accomplished in the last century are at the "duh" level already. And that is what this comic says to me. Well, "duh," but science needs to catch up with accomplishments. I could discover something in my lifetime that could fit in this comic and have almost the same level of "duh" factor.

It was pretty awesome. I got it framed and put in my room. I just wished that he had signed it, "To my best friend." Everything can't be perfect all the time. He definitely has a beard, I decided. All suspected crazy people have a beard. He must be agoraphobic, at least, but I think that he goes to his vacation home. There is a hole in my theory. I never thought too much that he had a disorder, rather I always felt that he just preferred life his way.

A few months later, the neighborhood lost power except for my end of the street. My mom gave me place cards to put in everyone's mailbox saying that if they needed a hot shower or to charge their electronics or something cooked so come on over. My mom is always so nice like that. The power ended up being out for four days and our house was bustling with neighbors the entire

time. I put a card in Mr. Larson's mailbox and there was no visit from him. Used to failure, I still felt disappointed. I later rationalized it that if he never left his house, he wouldn't have a cell phone or anything to charge. Or maybe he is quirky like Stephen King and won't own a cell phone. Still, he would rather cold shower or not shower at all for four days than run the risk of running into people.

I have lost my chance. As I have moved and no longer have the neighbor connection, I will likely never meet him or see his face or worse, ever be friends with him. I will read the comics and laugh and tell people of my stories. But there will never be a happy ending now.

As I look back on that fateful year of my life, very few are fond memories. However, my time 'with' Gary are among the best. I can rationalize behavior now, hindsight is 20/20. That year, I only wanted to be happy and content after my center of gravity changed coasts, and it is something that has taken me a long time to achieve. And, I did it on my own, without any help from Mr. Larson.

"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." – Oscar Wilde

Writing's Impact on My Life My Arrival and Origin

As a freshman, I wrote a powerful piece about my thoughts on affirmative action. It took me time to really collect my ideas and thoughts. The most difficult piece of the puzzle was finding the best way to adequately express my feelings on paper. I wrote the essay for my English 101 class and actually, it was one of the first essays that I wrote at Trinity. During my first semester at Trinity, I was plagued with writing tendencies that were created during my high school tenure. I had the uncanny ability to write too much. Let's just say freewriting was never a weakness for me. At times, I would endlessly drift from one topic to the next and because I wrote so much, my writing was very repetitive. I would often reiterate the same concepts again and again and again.

With much revision and hard work, my essays evolved into something more. They became logical and strong. Going to the Writing Center and having countless meetings with my teacher improved my writing immensely. I learned new concepts that strengthened my writing. I was able to piece together complicated concepts.

The After-Effects of Frequent Writing

The improvement of my writing essentially affected all of my classes that semester in a very positive way. It was as if I had a major epiphany. The clarity of different concepts filled my mind. I was able to write many pages about a topic, revise the paper immensely, and then repeat the same process over again. As my writing gradually improved throughout the semester, I would not repeat the same mistakes in my essays. A common one was using too many words to make a straightforward statement. By revising, I quickly learned the importance of simplicity. Saying less can actually strengthen a paper.

My Shining Moment

My essay about the significance of affirmative action was the most time I had ever spent constructing a paper prior to my arrival at Trinity. However, with all the effort that I put into it, I was very pleased with the end result. I was initially concerned because Affirmative Action is a powerful topic. Some might even say that it's a bit controversial. I wasn't sure what the reaction of my peers would be before I read it aloud in class. Prior to reading it, a poll was taken to see how many people were pro-Affirmative Action and anti-Affirmative Action. It was pretty much split down the middle. The positive responses from my classmates gave me the audacity to publish it in the school newspaper. Similarly, the reactions of students that read my article in the *Trinity Tripod* were also great. Many people sent e-mails or gave encouraging feedback about the essay.

This experience prompted me to become more interested in the realm of writing. My experience transformed from one of pure agony and procrastination to one of excitement and curiosity. Okay, so maybe I procrastinate a little bit but I still enjoy writing. Maybe that's why I became a writing and rhetoric minor.

My Never-Ending Problem

The hardest thing for me about writing is knowing when to stop. I have the extraordinary ability to write endlessly about topics. I go through many phases. The first paragraph or so is my warm-up. It's probably very similar to a freewrite. My only goal is to get my initial thoughts on paper. After a page or two or three, I've really got my juices flowing. Now I'm ready to write. The ideas start striking my mind like a lightning bolt. Eureka! I've got it. I then begin to ramble because so many different concepts come rushing in. All of a sudden, my sentences become longer, which translates into longer paragraphs. These paragraphs become so long that in many instances, they span over one page. Then I have to begin the meticulous process of breaking down these super long paragraphs into much smaller ones.

I have the tendency of literally writing down the first thoughts that come to my mind.

Therefore, my paragraphs often start with the discussion of one topic and end with the final thoughts

about a completely differing subject. These massive difficulties make the process of editing so time-consuming and tiresome. The most frustrating instance is taking the time to write a paragraph and then realizing during revision that it doesn't correlate with your paper at all. Therefore, the paragraph is eradicated just like that. Ugh! When it happens to me, I immediately turn off the computer and watch television.

My Rationale for Writing So Much

Writing a lot of information serves as my safety net. I feel more confident and comfortable writing my paper when I feel that I've said all of my thoughts and opinions. In truth, I have improved a bit. I don't write nearly as much any more because making the same mistake over and over again becomes rather annoying and extremely frustrating. Listening to teachers give their spiel about writing too much has become a little too repetitive. Unlike my freshmen year, I'm aware of my inherent flaw. As a junior, I've identified my writing fault and am doing everything in my power to fix it. Will I ever find a solution to this quandary? Maybe this problem will be solved before I leave Trinity. Well, at least I hope so.

The Battle Within Myself

Now relax. Take a deep breath and absorb what I just said. I just went on a rant that lasted a page and half about criticism in writing, a topic that doesn't correlate with my paper. Didn't I just discuss in the section "My Never-Ending Problem" about my ability to write paragraphs that are completely off topic. Yet, I made the same mistake anyway. There has been a battle within myself, which started during my second semester as a freshman. In terms of writing, my first semester at Trinity was more of a learning experience. I guess I had some writing talent but I was still really raw. My writing needed to be perfected and molded into something better. Thanks to English 101, this occurred.

After completing the class, I thought everything was perfect. I assumed that since I learned so much during first semester, my writing would naturally blossom. I thought all my writing problems

were solved. Right? Wrong! The battle I speak of is a clash between knowing what to do and actually doing it. By my second semester at Trinity, I was cognizant of my many writing flaws. I was aware that I have a tendency to write too long, be very wordy, and lose structure in my essays. Nevertheless, I still do it anyway. Why? It's been two years and I still make the same mistakes. Heck, I made the same mistake in this essay. Is there a solution to this problem? Maybe it's more writing. I never wrote more at Trinity than in my first semester. I was involved in two English classes that each required extensive writing along with a seminar that challenged my writing prowess. I often found myself writing pages of information everyday. The more I wrote, the more I improved. My efficiency and progression as a writer was startling. I was able to write 5 quality pages in a shorter span of time than I had ever done before.

Finding a Solution to This Battle

Writing on a more daily basis might finally end this battle. The objective is to rid myself of these mistakes. The problem is that I want writing to be easy. But maybe it's not easy. These recurring mistakes could simply be the natural process of writing. This would entail writing information, editing it, and constantly revising it to the point of completion. Maybe it's not my writing at fault but rather my mentality. Do the best writers in the world have a propensity for making the same mistakes? I'm not sure. But I hope I find an answer soon because I need to know if this battle is a temporary thing or a life-long struggle.

What Happened After Freshmen Year?

One thing I was especially proud of was the creativity in my writing. When I brought my 'A' game, my writing had a very unique style. I could discuss a very serious topic that required intense researching of the subject matter. I could also write somewhat comedic pieces that added a flavor of my personality. The ability to invoke my personality onto a paper gave me the most sense of pride. I had the unique ability to take a topic of a paper and make it my own. Notice that I'm talking in the past

tense. Hmm. As a freshman, my ability to assess my writing was at an all-time high. But then sophomore year came.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that in terms of sophomore year, my writing was a complete disaster. On the contrary, I performed quite admirably on many of my papers. The issue lies in my progression as a writer. I'm a person that always looks for a challenge. I feel that it's moments of adversity that really tests people's mettle. As a freshman in English 101, my abilities as a writer were tested to a level I had never experienced before. In some instances, my initial drafts of essays were completely erroneous. Therefore, I would have to write future drafts that were totally different from my first draft. I mentioned my essay on Affirmative Action earlier in this paper. You should see my first draft of that essay. It was not very strong and more of a research paper if anything. Then you should compare that draft with the final copy. These two drafts were night and day. Although they discussed the same information, the two drafts couldn't be more different from one another. Even the titles of these essays were different.

The Distinguishing Factors of English 101

The evolution of my paper was another factor that I was proud of. Like many, I find it difficult to start writing any essay. When I'm faced with a 5-page or 10-page paper, I often procrastinate to the very last minute. In English 101, I was forced to write drafts of essays before submitting the final copy. This gave me the opportunity to really examine my writing before submitting a final copy. I had the chance to write several versions of a paper before finally submitting it. Unfortunately, this option was not made available to me in other classes.

My Frustration and Desire to Return to the Good Old Days

My main objective as a writer is to improve my writing in all facets. I don't think that happened in my sophomore year. I wrote decent essays and received good grades but I found my writing style to be very repetitive. Instead of being able to instill my creativity into a paper, I often found myself writing long, generic research essays that discussed boring topics. Writing a research paper here or

there is expected and frankly, commonplace in a collegiate setting. But when all of your papers have a similar style, that's when you know something is just not quite right. This takes me back to my current status. I have a yearning to get back to my freshman roots. I want my writing to be challenged in a new way and I know that it will happen in this class. It's amazing what people can do when they are pushed to new limits. If they don't give in and are determined to fight through the adversity, they are able to reach limits that they assumed were insurmountable.

Writing Can Be Used as Therapy

I'll tell you a secret. The real reason why I like writing is not for academics. I find academic writing rather boring. Writing used for therapy is far more interesting. As a freshman, I suffered a pretty devastating foot injury that really impacted my first semester at Trinity. I was a young and naïve kid that was going through his first real moment of hardship while acclimating to a new environment. Yet, I was able to use writing as a therapeutic means to keep my mind off the harsh reality of the situation. It was very difficult but I survived and am now stronger because of it.

Similarly, I find out yesterday that I will be physically unable to play soccer this year after dislocating my knee a few weeks ago. This is by far the most devastating thing that has ever happened to me during my collegiate experience. I've been training hard for this season since November. I have never been so physically fit. Over the summer, I worked at a law firm from 9:30 – 5:30 and trained in the gym everyday. I dedicated over two hours of my time preparing for the rigors of this season on a daily basis. Why did this happen? Maybe I'll never know. I'm a big believer that everything happens for a reason. But I'll be honest; my faith in God has never been tested like this before. Nevertheless, like freshman year, I will have to fight through adversity and use writing as a way to get my innermost thoughts on paper and ease the burden of this catastrophic disaster. It will be a tough task but one that I believe I'm ready for.



Farewell Senior Writing Associates!

Brooks Barhydt '08
Ashley Bell '08
Michael Bojko '08
Ryan Butler '08
Jessica Hart '08
Kara Henderson '08
Gwendolyn Hopkins '08
Manpreet Kaur '08
Lizbee Kearney '08
Megg Miller '08
Jennifer Moor '08
Michael Robinson '08

Welcome New Writing Associates!

Michael Chung '11
Shana Conroy '10
Stephen English '10
Margot Gianis '10
Chelsea Hanse '11
Stephen Kendall '10
Sarah Khuwaja '10
David Lindner '09
Kathryn Murdock '11
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The Trinity College Writing Associates publish this journal on an annual basis for writers across the disciplines.

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