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Dear Co-Authors: Epistolary Revelations of Five Writing Center Directors

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REFLECTIONS

ANNE ELLEN GELLER, MICHELE EODICE, FRANKIE CONDON, MEG CARROLL, ELIZABETH H BOQUET and MICHAEL SPOONER

Dear Co-Authors: Epistolary Revelations of Five Writing Center Directors

COLLABORATION, THE PERSONAL, AND THE SELF: MICHAEL'S LETTER TO THE READER

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford recently called, as they have done in the past, for reflective accounts of collaborative processes among writers.¹

They don't mean to encourage simple enthusiasms or mere narratives of experience – forms that often pass as reflection. What the field needs is interpretive work. We need work that will suggest terms and unlock expressions by which we may understand collaboration. Meaning is what we're after.

Collaboration is not the overt subject of *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*, a book written by five co-authors, but what its authors achieve there, in my view, merits study, because the experience of co-writing every paragraph, every phrase of this book was so unique, powerful, and successful.²

Exposing the dynamic that sustained this partnership is the purpose of the five letters in the following pages.

In composition scholarship, we seem to have near-consensus lately (and near-surprise) that the personal lives of scholars do in fact impinge on what and how they study. Ronald and Roskelly declare collaboration as an ethical choice, a commitment to work against the competitive reward system in academe.³

Even so, as Smith points out, the personal can be illuminating or merely cathartic. The cathartic is not just bad form, it “addresses readers as *if* they were the author's intimates, and thus falsifies intimacy.”⁴

The partners below write primarily to each other, and they address each other authentically as intimates, yet their audience is complicated by you, the reader of this joint essay. If exploring the personal and ethical dynamic of their collaboration is their purpose, they also want to honour the line between the illuminating and mere catharsis.

I am often troubled by the impulse of composition scholars to conflate all writing-together – even all writing – under the sign of collaboration. I think important understandings are obscured when we do this. What happens when we contribute a chapter to a volume, for example (or a

section to an essay), is usually not collaboration. It is parallel writing toward a shared audience. It is *cooperative* writing.⁵

Collaboration is that other process, the one that involves suffering, that painful powerful dynamic of exchange between individual and group, group and individual. Remember that? Remember how eventually you can't even write without hearing your partners' voices in your head? It's maddening. Your words, your sentences, have been ingested by a thing, an avatar, a Collective Author that has somehow come to life. Slowly, you are losing your grip. It is as if not only your words, but your mind, your very self, is affected. That is just what's happened. You've joined a community.

This is why, (in *First Person 2*), Kami Day and Michele Eodice write that co-authoring is epistemic.⁶

It's not just that all writing is intertextual. Intertextuality doesn't require us to engage a living, breathing, challenging, changeable human person. Collaborating is altogether different. Like making music together, it builds on, and depends upon, mutual respect, engaged action, flexibility, and vulnerability. To make a collaboration successful, we risk the self: "Every rehearsal of the Maggiore [String] Quartet begins with a very plain, very slow three-octave scale on all four instruments in unison...No matter how fraught our lives have been over the last couple of days, no matter how abrasive our disputes...or how visceral our differences...it reminds us that we are, when it comes to it, one."⁷

Inevitably, co-authoring raises the question of identity – shared identity, composed identity, a joint avatar, if you will – because, as Day and Eodice observe, co-authoring will lead you to a "more spacious understanding of authorship." If a more spacious authorship, then a more spacious self. Like Ronald and Roskelly, Day and Eodice believe a "collaborative value system is the 'way of being in the world' that can transform academe."⁸

It may be that the deepest contribution of collaborative work like *The Everyday Writing Center* is how it models community – because, even in the most general sense, community is an enlarged, and enlarging, sense of self.

This is risky stuff for Western academic authors. Some of us are happy to laud the social turn, to trace intertextuality, but we are not prepared to write or think like this. And those who reward us for scholarship in the humanities are not prepared to think like this, either. To do this transgresses something deep. What we need most from reflection on collaborative writing, I think, is a deeper understanding of this community consciousness, this transgression. Meaning is what we're after.

In the letters below, the five co-authors of *The Everyday Writing Center* individually untwist the thread of their collaboration, and collectively develop the terms of identity, consciousness, the personal, and the epistemic that are emerging as so important to collaborative work.

THE FRIENDSHIP-ENDER: FRANKIE'S LETTER

Dear Anne, Beth, Michele, and Meg,

I've a confession. I've been gnawing on an incident, worrying it obsessively and this morning – I can't do it alone anymore. So here's hoping that telling the story empties it of some of its bitterness.

The other day I was in my office talking with a colleague. A copy of our book was sitting on my desk; he glanced at the front cover, then flipped to the last page. He closed it.

“Well – five writers and 130 pages. Each of you wrote, what, 25 pages?”

I said, “We wrote it together.”

“All five of you wrote the whole thing?”

“Yes, – all five of us wrote the whole thing.”

“Sounds like a friendship-ender to me.” And he handed the book back to me. I was shocked. As I considered my reaction, I realised what shocked me was my own boredom at his response, which I liken to Benjamin's notion of the shock that modernity produces.⁹

I felt crowded somehow. Alienated somehow. For my colleague, maybe, the book was just one more artifact of congealed labour – and really not so much labour after all since we produced it together. I was swamped by a kind of exceptional ennui. What was there to say?

This morning, this is what I understand: when I am with you all, I don't feel this way. And the shock, the boredom my colleague has provoked is exactly the condition that brought me to that point of yearning to write with you. In our early conversations over drinks and email exchanges, before the idea of the book was born, I felt convinced that the problems and issues I encountered in my everyday life in the writing center were so much more complex, ambiguous, and interesting than the disciplinary conversations that seemed then accessible to me. But you all understood, maybe even shared my need to resist the sucking force of that ennui, and you invited me to a different sort of table altogether.

For weeks now, I've been thinking about this conversation with my colleague, trying to make sense of it. I imagine what Michele would say, in a telephone conversation stolen between meetings. We'd talk, I think, about professional jealousy, careerism, the ways that mediocrity loves company. I imagine Meg listening, attending to the hurt and sense of betrayal I feel even though I want to laugh it off. I see the glint of mischief in Anne's eyes as she considers the conversation as a teachable moment. I imagine the story Beth might tell that captures the essence of the moment and its absurdity. I imagine us all together around Meg's kitchen table, talking about the limits of imagination we've encountered in trying to describe the process by which we produced our book – the commitment we felt to co-authoring and the challenges of acting on that shared commitment.

If only my colleague had posed the questions implicit in his remarks, what a conversation we might have had! We might have talked about what the process of writing together looked and felt like, might have explored together those moments of struggle, of difficulty, of fear. I might have found words to say that the experience of co-authoring, so far away from being a “friendship-ender,” pulled me kicking and screaming into what I can only describe now as intimacy.

Speaking of which, you know, I’m terrified of intimacy. I want always to preserve some sense that there’s a bit of me that no one else in the world will ever have access to. Of course, I’d like to appear to be open, extroverted, gracious, loving. But when push comes to shove, I don’t want anybody knowing too much about how I feel. If I try to explain this facet of myself – this intense need for privacy – I can’t seem to produce the final word. Abandonment, betrayal, shame may be apropos, but probably not as much as my happy, torturous love affair with secrecy and with having just one little card up my sleeve. Had I known before we began the ways I would be exposed to all of you in the process of writing together, I think I never would have had the courage.

There must have been something else lurking in me, some desire I’d successfully suppressed or simply failed to notice – a yearning to see through other eyes, through your eyes. And no one ever tells you that once you do that – try on someone else’s eyes – those eyes can see right back into you even as you look out through them. You are the observer and the observed, noesis and noema. Trickster stories warn that if you take those eyes you may never see the same way again, but the desire, the curiosity only has to trump your sense of danger for a moment and it’s too late. You are changed. I am changed.

Is the vulnerability – produced by the creeping awareness of being the seeing one who is also, always being seen – what my colleague finds unimaginable or unbearable? Writing the book required of us a kind of presence for which careerism cannot account, which traditional notions of the conditions necessary for learning and for the production of knowledge does not acknowledge. But my colleague seemed so unconscious of any of this that I just keep right on probing the pain of that conversation and still feeling broken by it.

About a week after the encounter with my colleague, I was still nursing a lingering hurt, feeling still the heavy lump of ache and boredom in my belly. But the kids were hungry so I took them out for dinner to a Chinese restaurant. Here’s what my fortune cookie said: “What the mind does not allow, the heart does not grieve.”

“Oh my God,” I thought, “a sign!” And then I thought, “Who the fuck puts a fortune like this in a cookie?”

And then I was confronted with the necessity of explaining to my babies why a fortune cookie made me cry. There is no end to my exposure.

Now, I know a book is not a baby. But, in affective terms and as one of its writers I would no more consider our book an artifact of congealed labour – bearing some exchange value, diminished somewhat by the mode of its production, but little if any use value (the impression I got from my colleague) – than I would think that of my babies. When I consider why, I realise

that while my impulse to write with all of you cannot be separated from the social, from conditions of domination, an emergent alienation, and resistance, neither can it be explained exclusively in those terms. To write with you, like the impulse to conceive new lives, had something in it of the ineffable, of hope and of desire. I yearned, I think, to recognize and become recognizable – to know and be known under the unspeakable conditions of love, whatever the risk.

I've been reading Ricoeur and Judith Butler and I can't stop thinking about that damn fortune cookie. It occurs to me that to notice, to recognize vulnerability in one another exposes the ethical field on which our relationships with one another fold and/or unfold. Butler says: "[W]e must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human."¹⁰

The intimacy that writing together can require and impose whispers through tutorials and conferences with students, traces its way through work with colleagues in ways I might never have heard, might never have seen if not for the four of you. I find I have to re-learn how to tutor and how to teach, how to collaborate with folks who aren't you – like the colleague whose mind will-not-allow-for. You've given me the chance Butler describes at the closing of her book, *Giving an Account of Oneself*. She writes, "To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven."¹¹

Thank you for the wild, wily, irascible loveliness of that chance.

Now won't you teach me once again the role laughter plays in insurrection? Please advise me.

Love, Frankie.

WRITING IN THE PELOTON: ANNE'S LETTER

Dear Frankie and all,

Telling us this story of your colleague, Frankie, and telling us how you're wrestling with the experience feels so much to me like all the exchanges that drew us into this project. As long as we've known one another, we've been spread out across five states, and emails have brought us together. Early on, we always told stories like these. We would pose questions so rich and unanswerable, or present dilemmas so enticing that everyone would chime in with responses. Sometimes silly, sometimes serious, sometimes downright dire. Interpretations of Beth's dreams, online quizzes, an uncomfortable run-in with a colleague like this one, departmental and institutional politics. Before we even realised it was happening, it seems to me now, something pulled us more and more, deeper and deeper, into conversation. And those conversations took us new places. I think even early on we felt what you describe – that our writing to one another, our early writing with one another – was already tracing its way through our individual work.

I don't know if you remember, but when we started the book prospectus, Michele wrote to all of us about the word "peloton." Michele, as always, was ahead of her time. Peloton wouldn't become a *Merriam-Webster* word of the year until the following year, when Lance Armstrong's seventh Tour de France victory would bring it greater attention.¹²

The peloton is the cyclists who ride together in a tight group, working to support their team leader. I kept that email, and, truthfully, I've thought about it often, wondering why Michele offered the word.

But when I talked with one of the Clark University writing center tutors this week, I started to see just what Michele originally saw, and maybe even more. In that effortless way our tutors surprise us with their expertise even as they apologize for having no real expertise, Chris, a former physics student, taught me how energy is conserved in the peloton. He held a manila envelope up on its end.

"See how I'm pushing this envelope forward," he said as he moved it slowly through the air. "Can you see how it pushes air molecules ahead of it out of its way? Visualize the vacuum created behind it. Imagine how there's less air pressure pushing against anything behind the envelope. In fact, there's actually a bit of an air force behind and to the sides of everything behind this envelope."

Think, Chris told me, about the way air blows into the cab of a pickup when the back sliding windows are open even as the truck moves forward. Remember, he said, a convertible driver's long hair doesn't blow back, as in cartoons, but actually blows forward and to the sides. And suddenly I *could* see. Anything behind the leading forward force has to exert just a little bit less as the leading force exerts just a little bit more. Anything behind is drafting. The definition of a bicycling peloton now made even more sense intellectually and resonated even more loudly: "Peloton: A densely packed group of riders, sheltering in each other's draft." ¹³

When we were sitting around Meg's kitchen table saying "what if we start with this?" and offering something any one of us, or the whole group, wrote from, we were in the peloton, drafting. Away at our respective computers, working alone at a text that had been passed on to us by someone else in the group, we were drafting. And, most of all, against the resistance that this project did not seem possible, at least one of us was always optimistic enough to keep us drafting. We wrote and revised and drafted this book, sheltering in the draft of whichever of us had just been writing in the lead. And anytime and every time life and family intervened and someone needed to conserve herself, pausing in her work for an hour, for a day, for a week, another of us, or a subgroup picked up the lead.

Here's what I would want to tell your colleague. I've been thinking about the obvious extrapolation of the peloton to academic writing and the comparison between what is coauthored and what is individually authored. A group project like this one, which might be read as each of us writing or thinking less may actually be a project in which each of us wrote and thought more. Maybe we got deeper, or dare I say it, further into new territory, because of going it together cooperatively rather than going it alone. Birds migrating in Vs, it turns out, draft cooperatively too, with those flying at the tips rotated cyclically so all the birds in the V feel flight fatigue

equally. Bicyclists and birds and co-authors, all sheltering in each other's drafts to catch one another in rhythms, to move somewhere, to encourage one another. Faster, further, keep on.

These days, I worry about writing alone, which is funny because I've written alone even as we've all been writing together. I hope I can write texts of my own, single-authored and bound, that pull others and offer shelter all at the same time, texts that take all of our thinking deeper and further, texts no less than what I know all my colleagues, including all of you, deserve. Beyond this project, my peloton is suddenly and more obviously colleagues who write and think all around me but who I know less well than all of you. I have to now trust they are as committed, as supportive, as interested, as funny, as filled with passion, as hopeful for our world, as all of you. Your colleague makes me worry, but maybe he, too, is just fearful and needs only to allow himself to see and be seen through the eyes of others to realize his own potential and "vacate the self-sufficient 'I.'"

I'll be curious what the rest of you think.

With love,

Anne.

EPISTOLARY REVELATIONS OF AN UNREMARKABLE WOMAN: BETH'S LETTER

Hi everyone,

Just back from the gyno. An unexpected solidarity, Frankie, as I have had my deepest, most vulnerable places poked and prodded too. Got the results of my first mammogram, taken by "Sophie," a mobile mammogram machine that came to the university as part of a wellness clinic. Imagine me standing there, shivering in a conference room, naked from the waist up, my left breast hoisted onto a frosty metal plate, my co-workers lined up for lunch next door.

Nice.

The technician said, "You'll get a call if we need to take any additional views," before handing me this goodie bag half-heartedly filled with a Lady Schick razor, a trial-sized deodorant, coupons, and a calendar.

So this morning, I get my updates. Annual weight gain, recorded for posterity; cholesterol numbers, too high (like my weight); mammogram outcome, unremarkable.

Unremarkable?

Dr Brines asks whether I would consider anti-anxiety meds (no thank you) for my "writer's temperament," the same temperament that leaves me smirking at the characterization of any woman's breasts as unworthy of remark in this culture and that leaves her, a woman apparently not in need of Xanax, clinically unmoved.

She exits and I fasten my “Secret Embrace.” Victoria’s Secret, of course. The latest in industrialgrade boob-lifting, cleavage-enhancing technology. First thing every morning this contraption snaps to attention and my body struggles to keep up. Unremarkability scientifically confirmed, thanks to Sophie and Dr Brines, I now know this: The sore spot just beneath my armpit that I was sure was an incipient carcinoma appears simply to be the place where the underwire routinely settles in for the long haul.

I am still turning the word over in my mind as I pull into my driveway and encounter Bridget, my next-door neighbour, taking advantage of what is a gorgeous afternoon. She offers to show me how to prune my rose bushes (new as I am to this concept of gardening) so that they would look, in her words, “more natural” once their blooms were removed. We get to work. Bridget is newly bald and breastless, on the left side at least, and in this unremarkable moment I couldn’t help but recognize the distance between us, wondering whether she sensed my discomfort as we talked admiringly of pink buds and desirable shapes. By the time I put the pruning shears away, I had decided that unremarkable was not only, really, the perfect word to describe my breasts; it is also an apt word, in many ways, for me. I realize that I am relieved to hear someone finally say it out loud.

At forty, I have worked for the last three decades to keep my breasts within socially appropriate confines. Not too high, not too low; not too hard, not too soft. They have really never been so inclined. I’m a little tired of it.

What I’m leaving out is this: In the sixth grade, during Field Day races, Brian Kilgen pointed and told all the guys on the sidelines to watch my boobies bounce up and down while I ran. He brushed past me at the finish line and observed with disdain, “You need a bra.” My nipples chafed, a new sensation; my throat burned in humiliation, a familiar one.

Efforts to usher in an era of unremarkability began that day, a day that ended with a mediocre finish in the three-legged race and a trip to The New Store on Main Street. A plain brown paper bag curled up in my fist, its contents – two 29As – folded up inside. I began to conceal my ever-expanding breasts in increasingly sophisticated cups, revealing them only just so. And I began to conceal my emotions, though I’ve never been very good at that either.

“OK, but why tell this crazy story here?” as Anne might say. I guess because I agree with Anne that your colleague’s lack of curiosity masks his true fear; and more, because your reaction, Frankie, might mask yours as well. The profound boredom, the sucking ennui you describe, is ultimately the response I remember cultivating that afternoon at the Field Day races. Certainly I had been bored before, but I’m not sure I had ever engaged boredom as a defense mechanism until I had experienced the shame of excess, as I did in that moment with Brian. Those two senses are inextricably linked for me. And when I feel bored by someone, which I often do, the fear that gnaws deep within me is that this same person is, at that very moment, finding me unbearably excessive.

What we have done is intellectually excessive and, as a result, my initial response to someone’s skepticism will almost always be boredom. But I’ve learned with all of you that I can’t simply stop there, that I must be curious – even about my own boredom. Shit. Your colleague is right to

point out that what we have done is remarkably unremarkable. There are days when the five of us would have said the same thing, would still say the same thing, but we would be saying it for different reasons; we would mean different things by it.

In both the exchange with your colleague and the moment with Brian lies the expectation that women be remarkably unremarkable – not too hard, not too soft. Just so.

Finally, this response has made me unexpectedly curious. I know, had I told this story around Meg's kitchen table, you, Frankie, would have started taking notes, Meg would have thrown a calzone in the oven, and Michele would have taken our drink orders. But it is Anne who would have been quietly tip-tapping in her corner, only to turn her laptop around as the discussion trailed off to reveal that, in the midst of it all, she had googled Brian Kilgen himself. And what would she have found? A single entry, an elementary school people search, of all things.

How unremarkable is that?

Miss you all big, big like the world,

Beth.

MAKING SELVES AND GIVING GIFTS: MEG'S LETTER

Dear Frankie, Anne, Beth, and Michele,

Your thoughts are humming through my head, as usual, blending with my own: resonating, harmonizing, making me sad, making me laugh, making me think. Holding *The Everyday Writing Center* in my hands, I feel as if I am holding a snapshot, a distillation of your intellects and hearts – 132 pages (Frankie, your colleague miscalculated in more ways than one) representing our academic work and its absorbing challenges. How to explain to those who think it a friendship breaker, the stories of laughter, insecurities, life crises, and mutual encouragement that are the bedrock of our collaboration? These exchanges are the ways we're all trying to stretch those limits of imagination. Anne and Beth, you both talk about stories and their importance to us, and I've been revisiting Jerome Bruner's *Making Stories*. He says we need to "tell the event" in order to understand it and ourselves; in fact we actually make ourselves in the telling to others.¹⁴

Who we tell those stories to, who reflects and challenges them, deepens their meaning, is the most important part of all. We've found in each other the antidote to your colleague, who can't hear or understand, whose habit of mind can't engage with difference.

What does it take to form a group of storytellers? Remember when I told you about sharing some of our process with the tutors? I told them stories about meeting at conferences, where we challenged each other's ideas, played pool, visited karaoke bars, worked through problems and built that initial foundation of collaboration around the basic principles of teaching we all believe in. The stories of these personal moments, though unremarkable, give clearer insights into the ways you all shaped me both intellectually and emotionally. Remember that first meeting in

January 2005? We brought gifts for one another, a ritual that continues even now, and Beth's was a little teleidoscope, a faceted wooden dragonfly eye. We delighted in how it broke everyday images into endless new patterns, and appreciated its significance to our project. Looking back, I could not have imagined then the variety of ways we've helped each other "see" our lives as writers, as friends, as inhabitants of this world. I think about this gift often.

The WE of this collaboration, the real community of practice where each of us believed in ourselves and the others, came from the hard stuff, places where our writing and our personal lives presented us with challenges seen and met through those borrowed eyes, each lens creating the teleidoscope that informed this project.

Could your colleague, Frankie, possibly imagine giving over his authority as a writer, or his uber-story of what it means to author? What he would have done with the hard revisions, work that felt like loss but somehow ended up as possibility? Remember that May meeting when, after another writing marathon, we decided that you and I needed to scrap much of what we'd just written? After the others left, you had some time before your plane, and we went horseback riding. In the car, we commiserated a little about losing what we'd written, but we started figuring out how that material might work for another project. The collective five was beginning to push us into writing more, into working together beyond the book. This is the other kind of gift-giving that characterized our work, the nurturing of each other as writers. And then, the life revisions – illnesses, hurricanes, career changes, name it. Each time, the four filled in for the one.

There was, and still is, the sustained caring that Michele and Kami write about (in *First Person 2*). There's the peloton that Anne talks about, really the hallmark of our work – each giving those gifts to the other when needed, each picking up the burden when a life became unmanageable.

By the time we had our last group meeting, we were in the rhythm of the peloton, each leaving with individual tasks to blend ideas, to trace the threads of our argument, to give the book one last polish.

My last writing session was with Anne. Since you all weren't there, and most of you haven't visited her place, let me take you along, although as Frankie says, memory's a funny thing and the day comes back mostly in images.

We meet on a warm morning in Anne's third floor apartment. It's high on a hill, and there's a wonderful cross breeze occasionally rifling the papers on the dining room table. The work goes smoothly, not like the early days of fits and starts. We quickly divide up the tasks – "OK, how about if I write a more on-the-ground segment here about what the tutors did?"

"Great, I'll tie together that piece with Schön."

We write separately, we switch off, Anne takes the lead, I take the lead, alternately riding in the draft, we write over one another's shoulders. It's the last time I'll work with any of you in person on this book, and it's an emotionally mixed experience. Everyday would soon be out, but the places at the table would be vacant. I think about how we've connected each other's ideas to our own, how we've written about possibilities, how we've talked each other down from the ledges

of impossibilities. And how, because of you all, I try to listen and hear better, to write better, to teach better. I've seen how these lenses, these different knowledges, can blend and riff and blend again. I think about how I'll miss all of you, even though we'll still talk, still email, still see each other now and then. It's just that we won't be doing this, *this* incredibly intimate writing together.

Then Anne and Frankie email. "Know that presentation we did at C's?" they write, "Let's do an article together." About a month later, I meet with two colleagues in my department, and we outline another writing project.

Like all communities of practice, ours has been viral – we'll work together in new ways; we'll expand the work to include others. There'll be other tables and more collaborations.

Love,

Meg.

WRITING SMARTER: MICHELE'S LETTER

Dear Beth, Meg, Frankie, and Anne Ellen,

I have been reading your confessional letters – missives that describe your interpretations of our writing group experience. I will admit something to you, with much less artistry: I was not so smart when I met you all and when we decided to write a book together I was primarily funny, but not smart, really.

Someone who knows us both once said Anne Ellen was the smart one and I was the funny one. Anne Ellen took a little offense at that. She wanted to be funny too. So we decided to alternate our roles from day to day. But while writing with our group, I guiltily told Anne Ellen that I was having trouble switching back and forth, especially on Thursdays, a designated funny day for me. Apparently the smart part was trying to take over.

I got smarter doing group work, not like a consistent smarty pants or a genius type. But smarter – I could feel it.

Now it is over and I feel that smartness just fading away. Each morning I wake up and feel less smart somehow.

This unsmartness is in evidence more and more. For example, the other night I ate a can of SpagettiOs with a \$20 bottle of Chianti. I had never purchased SpagettiOs before this month and I had to call someone to ask if I was supposed to eat SpagettiOs with a fork or a spoon. If that is not evidence of basically getting less smart, I don't know what is.

Another example is that I let an attractive saleswoman talk me into a newspaper subscription. This was for a not very good newspaper but I signed on anyway because she said I looked smart.

If I was even a little smart the day the saleswoman spotted me at the grocery store, after reading this newspaper every day, I don't feel very smart at all.

I also started to read on airplanes. I read only the *New York Review of Books* because I thought it might make me smarter. I did feel something while moving at 30,000 feet above you all. But once I got off the plane, I felt that smartness seeping away with each step I took toward the baggage claim.

You may think: how could she so brazenly have chosen a scheduled funny day, a Thursday, to write this letter? Well, you will have to forgive me. I guess I am just not smart enough to know how very serious this subject of co-authoring is.

With almost all my love,

M.

P.S. I also have to admit that this genre has me quite constrained. I don't want to play post office. You all know how much I like to write endnotes. How do I do that in the epistolary? I think I found a way. Post Scriptum.

P.P.S. According to Jan Kreidler, "Authors may be considered trickster writers if their lives and work cross cultural boundaries and confuse the distinctions set by the presiding dominant institutions. When speaking of a writer or work as 'trickster,' scholars are referring to the spirit of cunning and duplicity necessary to survive in a hostile cultural landscape."¹⁵

Yet Franchot Ballinger writes that "the one boundary Trickster does not cross, cannot cross, is the boundary of self, a 'transgression' necessary for community. In spite of himself, Trickster encourages us to see the world through the collective social eye and thus to see beyond the individual self."¹⁶

P.P.P.S. My pal Catherine Hobbs wrote in her book, *The Elements of Autobiography and Life Narratives*, that "The best writing and the most intense development in writers often comes out of a collaborative process."¹⁷

P.P.P.P.S. According to a website on letter writing etiquette: "Don't use a postscript except in very friendly letters."

P.P.P.P.P.S. According to Marcia Baxtor Magolda, "the learning partnerships model is a foundation on which all community members express themselves and build on each other's knowledge for the journey toward self-authorship."¹⁸

P.P.P.P.P.P.S. In case some of our more sophisticated (and smarter) readers don't know what SpagettiOs are, there is a whole website dedicated to this taste treat.¹⁹

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