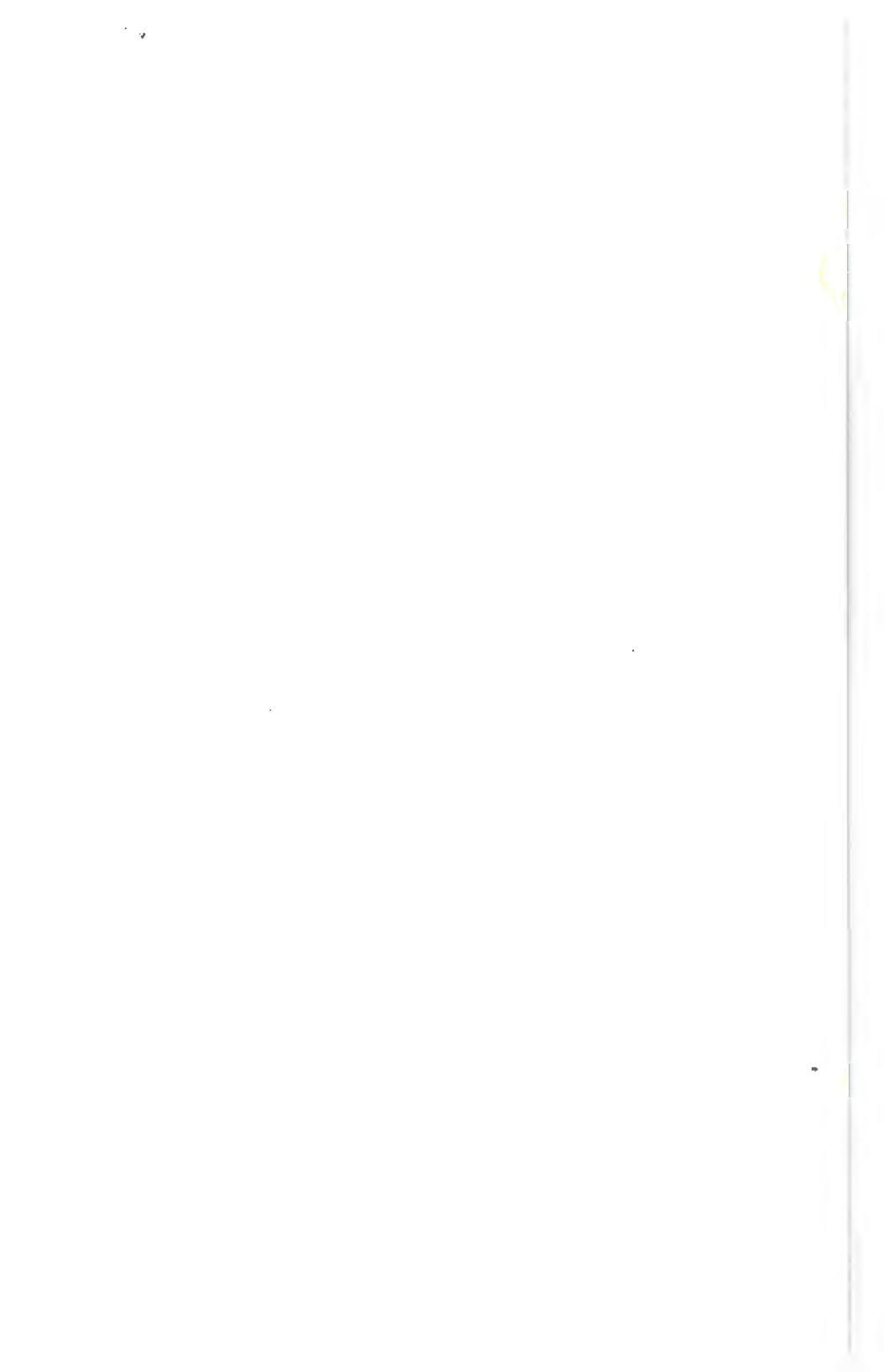


A GATHERING OF VOICES



2005 • 2006



A GATHERING OF VOICES



An Anthology of Student Writing & Art
Whatcom Community College
2 0 0 5 • 2 0 0 6

This anthology is the product of an Outcomes project to assess student learning and critical thinking.



Suzanne Clothier
Ascending the staircases
Mixed Media/Collage,
16" x 14"

Acknowledgements

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Jeffrey Klausman

Art Editor and Cover Design
Karen Blakley

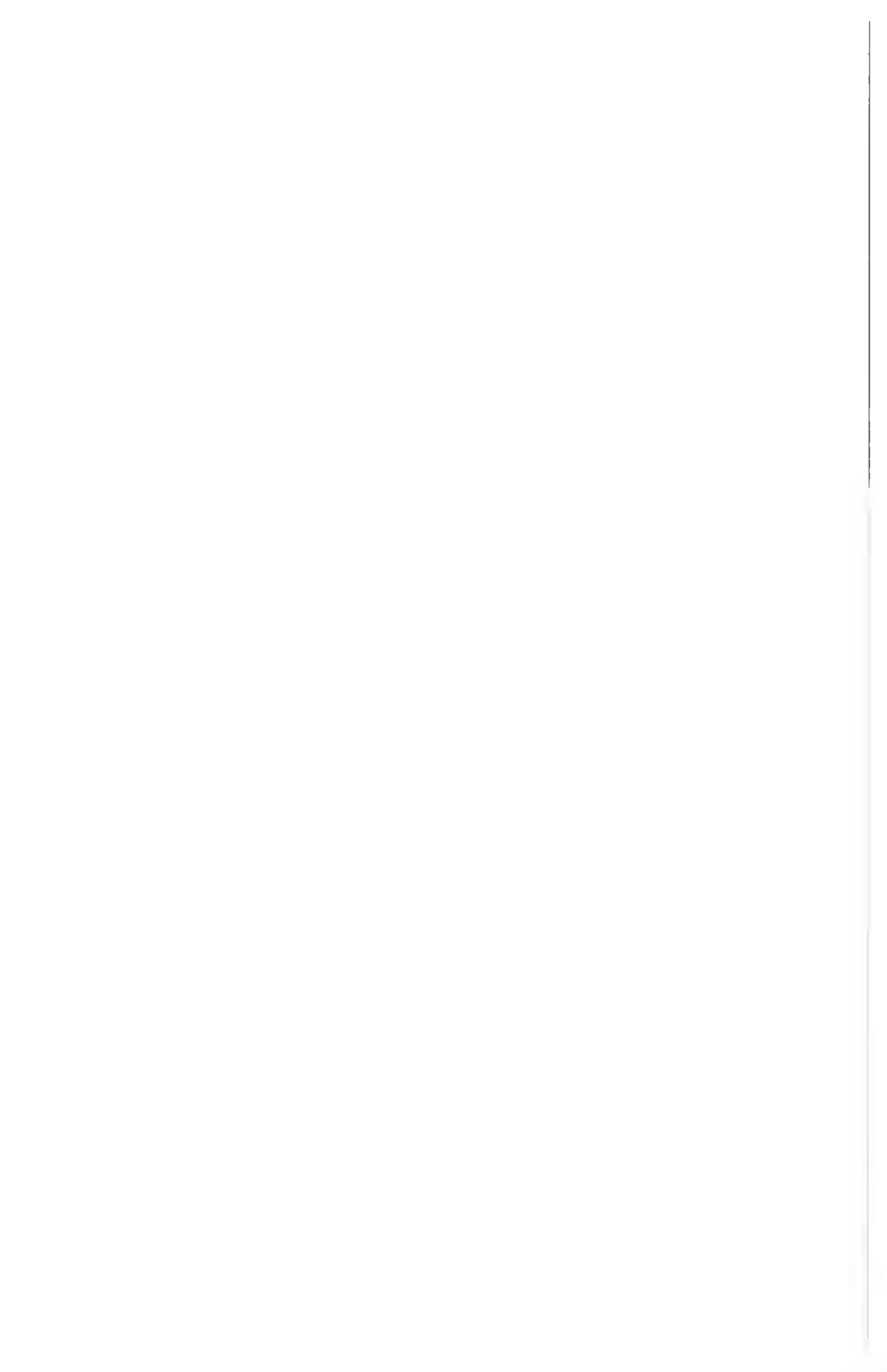
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The Copy-Duplicating Staff

With special recognition to the instructors
whose students' work appears in this anthology:
*John Gonzales, Jeffrey Klausman, Kate Miller, Brian Patterson,
Tere Pinney, Tara Prince-Hughes, Kathryn Roe, Bob Winters,
Judy Harlock, Pam Richardson, Rebecca Blair, Caryn Friedlander,
Karen Blakley, Ene Lewis, Jeanne Broussard*

Submissions for A Gathering of Voices are collected throughout the year from students across the disciplines at Whatcom Community College. A Gathering of Voices is funded by the Outcomes Assessment Project of the college. For information, contact the Editor at 360-676-2170 x3327 or e-mail at jklausma@whatcom.ctc.edu. Thanks to everyone who has had a hand in making this anthology a success!





Heather Barrett
Bras for the Cause
Digital art, 6" x 6"

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Introduction

Katie Chugg

“I believe I have nothing to say.”

“I don’t think I have anything to contribute.”

“I have been told my opinion is wrong. How can my opinion be wrong?”

As I write this writer’s words down on a yellow legal pad, my emotions catch in my throat. Tears begin to stream down my face, and I turn my head ever so slightly to look at the writer I am assisting. I am a Whatcom Community College Writing Center Tutor. In this moment, I am moved beyond words, thoughts, or ideas. The writer is expressing something more than just frustration, they are expressing a part of themselves. Many times I have questioned my skills or my ideas, but I have never voiced these concerns to a total stranger.

As a stranger, I have been able to work with writers across the disciplines, from different backgrounds, and from different countries. I have been shaken to the core of my being by student writing. I have also been shrouded in the grey area of academics. I have become a voice for the institution and yet I am still a student.

Inside Whatcom’s walls I have seen the gathering of voices. I have witnessed many writers’ journeys as they find their academic paths. I have seen these students raise their voices as they pursue their passions. These voices have called for reform. They have called for understanding. They have cried out in frustration. They have remarked on change. These voices have transformed and inspired us. These voices have compelled us to argue or agree, and have helped lead us to draw different conclusions.

These conclusions have been shaped by our responses to student and academic writing. We all interact with writing. Writing shapes us. Writing changes us. Writing consumes us. Writing defines us. Everyday we engage with writing as an ongoing discourse. Before we get into our cars in the morning to journey to Whatcom to get “educated,” we have already interacted with writing. It comes in

so many forms and shapes: email, passwords, papers for class, the news, the radio, the calendar, mail, restaurant menus, license plates, street signs, tags on our clothing, nutrition facts, and so on. We start our days encompassed by writing, and we make our decisions based on how we respond to this writing.

My response to writing and writers is played out within Whatcom's walls. I am surrounded by the voices of many and in this gathering of voices, I have found myself altered. As I read through the pieces collected here, I see similar kinds of experiences and am compelled and inspired.



Colleen Freeman
Self-portrait
Acrylic, 24" x 18"

Lines of Inertia: Taking Control of the Forces

Melinda Ralston

One warm New Mexico day in August, 1997, my sister and I assembled ourselves on the tall wooden barstools around the rich, dark, marbled kitchen countertops of my eight month new custom home. My husband and I were proud of our architectural masterpiece. We put much thought into the layout and design of our two-story, five bedroom dream home, especially the spacious and elegant kitchen. One might think that a home having such elegant attributes might boast a snobbish, stuffy, rum-and-cigars atmosphere, but our new home was a comfortable, family home, boasting more of the quality of construction elements and design accents than that of some upscale homes whose owners simply build to keep up with the Jones'.

To us, this home was our dream home, the home we would retire in—pre-calculating even our then decades away need for a main floor bedroom with foresight into our elder years when stairs would be more foe than friend. The tall, somewhat decorative windows of the kitchen allowed sunshine to pour over the smooth maple cabinets, then onto us as we sat sipping our refreshing glasses of iced tea. The discussion of the moment was a little more tense than conversations of the past.

My sister—two years my elder, a little taller, a litter thinner—had stopped by for a visit, wanting to spend a little more time with us before our house sold and we were off to Washington. She has always been the type of sister who feels the need to give her opinion about how things should be done; of course, she always means to be helpful.

“Too bad the theatre was bought out by the Post Office and you have to sell and move,” she said.

I agreed. It was hard to believe that ten years of hard work establishing the business could be torn away in a day by a capitalist-government-agency whose expansion meant more than our efforts, our goals, and our dreams. But deep down inside I

knew this was a good time for change. Our children, the oldest now entering her high school years, would soon want more freedom—the two other bi-annually spaced children would follow soon after—and New Mexico, with increasing gangs and crime, was not the place for teenage freedom.

“What will you do now,” she asked.

I told her of our plans to sell real estate in Washington.

“What about going to college and getting a degree?” she asked.

I explained our two-fold reasoning behind our real estate plans: neither my husband nor I had attended college and we both felt that starting college at this late age was impossible, we also knew that we could complete real estate school in a matter of months, and obtain a license—we would be back to work.

“You know, it’s because of Mom’s lax attitude toward higher education that none of us were ever encouraged to attend college, don’t you?” my sister said.

I was not sure how to react; time seemed to slow as my finger stopped a water droplet sliding down the side of my glass. I mulled over the statement that had just been made. Why would she say something like this?

“Think about it,” my sister said. “I was living with the Meyers during my high school years, and was frequently asked about my college plans; you on the other hand, living at home, were not. I went to college, and you did not.”

This statement has haunted me ever since.

Decades past the typical age of a college student, I gave this comment some serious examination. While attending high school, I *did* have thoughts of attending college upon completion of high school, but these thoughts were never put into action. Between working an average of 30 hours a week, completing standard high school courses, and spending any free time I had with my—then boyfriend, now husband—seemed to fill my schedule to capacity; my high school years seemed to fly by. Soon thereafter came marriage, then children, then a business—there was no time, there was no *need* for college. When the opportunity to attend college arose for a second time, I still chose another path: I chose to get my real estate license. In my eyes, the *need* for a college education was still not present. Again, I pondered my sister’s comment and raised the question, has my mother’s lax attitude toward a college education influenced my attitude toward attending college, and how

did my mother come by this negative attitude toward institutions of higher learning?

High in the north central plains of Texas sat, and still sits, the small town of Muenster. Going back in time to the era when minimum wage was forty-three cents per hour, and only fifty-five percent of U.S. homes had indoor plumbing, the then sixty-years-young, once-German-Catholic colony has been shaped into this rolling, productive agricultural town. Common to the day, the town was small in population and the vast acreage of farming parcels melted together to form the close community of neighbors. The people of Muenster were natives with similar interests: cattle, dairy, agriculture, farming, and, of course, family. One such family happened to be that of my mother—a family who had recently joined the fifty-five percent of families who enjoyed the use of indoor plumbing. Even to this day, sixty-five years later, when my mother speaks of the farm, her eyes light up as she describes the beautiful red brick farmhouse that my grandfather had built for my grandmother in the early 1940's. An amazing accomplishment, she would add, as these were the years of the Great Depression—*additionally* explaining how the self-sustaining farmhouse in which she was raised hardly noticed these troubling, depressing years. As she stared off into the bubble of her past, she would describe a typical day of her early childhood. The red brick house bounced with energy as the hustle and bustle of the days tasks were in motion: feeding the livestock, milking the cows, rudimentary washing of clothing, preparing meals for a family of eleven, hand washing the dishes, along with other tasks that we, the average individual living in the era of advanced technology, have never been required to perform. Grandmother, a commanding, dark-haired German woman of average stature scrutinizingly watched as each of her nine children tended to their duties. She and grandpa had indeed fulfilled their Catholic responsibility to be “fruitful and multiply.” This was the way of life for my mother up until the time she reached the ripe-old-age of twelve, at which time she would be “shipped,” as she would say, off to boarding school, where, of course, she had to work her way through school.

It must have been a place of loneliness, fear, and unwelcome memories, as my mother never had a good thing to say about the strict ruler-hand-slapping Catholic teachers, the meticulous hands-and-knees cleaning procedures, or the overwhelming time-forever-lost lessons taught. In fact, the only

lessons regarded to with high importance were those of Bible studies—which leads me to further suppose that my grandparents, once again, have further fulfilled their Catholic responsibility of raising children with strong religious beliefs and values; ultimately hoping to mold them into fine priests or nuns.

By the end of my mother's boarding school years, she was pushed onward by the inertia of the era when she joined the convent. By inertia of the era I mean not the specific scientific definition of inertia described as "the tendency of a body in straight line motion to stay in motion in a straight line unless acted on by an outside force" (Dictionary.com), but instead the inertia brought on by a force that cannot be seen; a force that does not have weight. I speak of an inertia that is brought on by forces of the mind: the forces which cause the forward lines of motion *as prescribed by society*.

The concept of lines of inertia have been explored for centuries, as was commented in a wonderful piece of writing "The Education of Henry Adams," a biography by Henry Adams. In this piece, Adams presents lines of inertia as a perplexing problem in which he has given great thought "to find out whether movement of inertia, inherent in function, could take direction except in lines of inertia" (55). What could this mean? Are the forces of destiny beyond one's control? Were the forces beyond my mother's control? Adams argues that one will have control over some, but not all of the forces that direct ones education. For my mother, society's lines of inertia were on target as church held a very strong position in social obligation during this era. Joining the convent meant, of course, additional learning as well as strict procedures and rules—one could be tipped off as to the atmosphere of a convent by the term they use for the people who join: they are considered "inmates of a convent" (New Advent). After two years, my mother came to realize that the full-life-commitment of becoming a nun was not the life she wanted. It was, after all, the life her mother wanted her to have. So what path now? Where else would her lines of inertia take her? Off to college of course.

College was, unsurprisingly, a strict, all-girl Catholic college. St. Mary's—located in the, as she would say, "bitter cold" climate of Cincinnati, Ohio—seemed to produce fonder memories compared to those of the past school years as schoolmates still reunite annually, some fifty-five years later, and talk of the grand experiences of college. Although the years spent at St. Mary's

College did not end with a degree, they were instead another path to choose from along my mother's lines of inertia. The meeting of my father and settling down to start a family was apparently more attractive than completing college and acquiring a degree—a common conclusion for the women of this era.

My mother's educational path has outlined experiences of loneliness, hardship, and time viewed as "lost." Echoes of this path were unknowingly expressed in a statement made to me by my mother. During one of our customary conversations over the distance of geographical space that has come between us, I enlightened my mother as to my well-thought-out choice to attend college and obtain a degree. This brought on a quick, but somewhat anticipated response.

"Oh, you don't want to go to college, you should stay home with the children and enjoy them," my mother said.

The statement seemed to be one that had been said not only to me, but to others over the years. It was not fully logical to my circumstance, as my children had all completed high school and were also attending college. It was a statement made with bias to years of unpleasant educational memories. After all, this was the perfect time for me to spend at college: my children, my husband, and I could all attend college, have a close range of completion, and obtain careers that we could enjoy and make sufficient earnings. We could all enjoy the fruits of our labor together—vacations to foreign countries, holidays spent together, and other chattels that occur with the potentially higher earnings of college graduates.

So now I walk on *my* educational path—the path that I was pushed toward with the unexpected pulling out of the rug from under my once thought securely fixed feet. The path I have come to realize as necessary in my life: necessary because it will allow me to achieve my goals, my anticipated dreams. Although, I must admit, the push toward attending college was not my initial desire, it was more of a demand by today's employment requirements: that demand which says in order to obtain a well-paying position you must have a degree. My initial attitude toward this demand was somewhat negative as I could have been quoted saying, "I already have the skills needed to do the job, why must I have the degree? I don't need impractical classes such as English, geography, or math in order to do my job. This is a waste of time; especially at my age." But deep down inside I knew, or hoped, the degree would open up a vastness of career opportunities, so I enrolled.

While on my new path, my present English course presented a new viewpoint to my educational experience. In reading Adams' biography, I recognized that he critiques the various attitudes a person can have toward their education. Although this piece of writing has a deluge of intellectual, highly-thought-out and relevant information, I would summarize the writing very simply by saying Adams argues that one's attitude while attending college will greatly affect their outcome. An individual can attend college having an attitude that requires nothing of them but completion of the task: to be herded through like the rest of the livestock. Conversely, an individual can gain a rewarding experience from college by absorbing the lessons that are offered: lessons that can make one have a greater appreciation of what education has to offer, and very possibly, result in a much improved individual. In contrast to Adams' argument, my mother's regard to college education insinuates its uselessness—a waste of one's time and effort.

Maybe my mother is right. Maybe one day in the future I will look back and see my education was a useless waste of time and effort. Optimistically though, Adams will be right, and the result of my college education will be equal to the considerable efforts I have put forth; therefore, I will have absorbed more than simple lessons: I will have improved as an individual by opening my mind to new ideas and perceptions.

As I look back over my past full year of college education, I can now see the usefulness of higher learning. I can now see the reason that many employers view a college degree as a highly desired element of one's assets: a college student gains stamina—for to finish college, you cannot be a quitter; a college student becomes literate—for nowhere else will you be required to research, write, and discover oneself in such a subterranean manner; a college student becomes a well-rounded person—for college is the only place in which you will be introduced to, and encouraged to analyze dissimilar ideas, diverse cultures, and various assets of knowledge; a college *graduate* is someone who, if needed, could represent the employer's company with a professional, educated presence.

The college path, for most individuals, is the most direct path to success. As Adams sensibly pointed out, "The world outside seemed large, but the paths that led into it were not many" (36). Our paths are formed not only by our choices, but also by what is commanded, and continually altered, by society's prescriptions for

the period. In the world of college education, it is the student who chooses whether they want to follow like cows being led to water, or to hold the reins and lead their own education, therefore making it a truly useful and educational experience.

Naturally, our caring parents teach and guide us to do what they have determined, through their own experiences, to be the safest and most fulfilling path to take. As I now sit sipping iced tea in my cozy Bellingham abode, I think of the comment made by my sister, essentially blaming my delayed education on my mother. It is now clear to me how my mother has come by this negative attitude toward institutions of higher learning, but I don't feel that this attitude has influenced my delayed attendance at college. I feel that my delayed attendance was brought on by both inertial and controlled forces. I can understand what Adams meant when he suggested that one will have control over some but not all of the forces that direct one's education—or life. I now see that my mother took control of her inertial path when she chose to get married and raise a family. I could say that with my decision to obtain a degree, I have taken control over the reins from my mother's educational ride and am now on the way to the greener pastures of my own educational growth.

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Alissa Swank
Self-portrait
Stamp, 24" x 18"

Books & My Mom, My Mom & Me, Me & Books: A Literacy Narrative in Colloquial Voice

Michelle Pavan

I don't think that there is anything that had a bigger impact on me as kid than books. My mom's books. For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by my mom's book collection. Her books are one of the earliest things I even recall. I think that probably every room in our home—any home we had over the years—held a bookcase. At least one. My mom had so many books that, at any given time, there were piles of them lying around all over our house, waiting patiently to be shelved. She brought books home so fast that no matter how often we'd buy bookcases, we couldn't keep up with the stream of books she brought. She brought books home so fast, she couldn't keep track of them all. She'd end up with two, three, sometimes four copies of the same book. She got her books from various places. Some from book clubs. Some from book stores. Some from thrift stores. Some from the internet. Some were given to her. Some she found. There were no requirements for which ones she would keep or buy. They didn't have to be a certain type. Didn't have to be in English. Didn't have to be interesting. Didn't have to be anything but books.

My story with language begins with my mom's story with books. My grandparents shaped my mom's views of reading, and she shaped mine. I can't tell you about my story without telling you hers. In many ways, they are different parts of the same story. As a little girl, my mom loved to read. I don't know why, but she did. Read anything and everything—the same way she does now. The thing is, her dad was a strict businessman. He thought that business—and making money—were the only things worth spending your time on. He didn't read, and he didn't think his kids should either. At least not for anything except school. He was the kind of man who thought that someone with their hands in their pockets was lazy. He had no patience for people unable or unwilling

to work. You may already have figured it out, but my mom's love of reading didn't quite mesh with her dad's ideas on the subject. He used to tell my mom, "If you're reading, you're not working." If she was caught reading for fun, she got in trouble. So my mom found ways around it. She took to getting up in the middle of the night and reading by whatever dim light source she could find. Sometimes the nightlight in the bathroom, sometimes the crack of light coming from under her bedroom door. To this day, she's convinced that this is the reason for her bad eyesight.

I heard this story a lot growing up. My mom wanted me to know how lucky I was to be able to read as much as I wanted. She wanted me to appreciate a right that she didn't have as a kid; it's understandable. But she didn't just want me to appreciate books, she wanted me to love them, like she did. She never pushed them on me, though—she just made them fun. Essential, even. There were few questions I ever asked my mother that she didn't consult a book on. The simplest questions would be looked up in a book. Not because she didn't know the answers, just because she wanted to show me how much knowledge I could find in their pages. Once, I asked the inevitable question: "Mom, where do babies come from?" No sooner had I said it than she drove us to the library to get a children's book on where babies come from. And lo and behold, we found one there. There really *was* a book on everything, after all.

When I was young, my mom would read to me. Now, I know that many parents do this, and it may seem very average. You have to understand, though, that my mom's reading was anything but. When she read to me, she would purposefully mess up the way she pronounced things. She would exaggerate most of the vowel sounds as she read. So, if she was reading the word "apple," she would probably say it something like "ay-puhl-ee," with hard vowels. Of course, I would giggle and correct her, thinking that she didn't notice her mistake. She later told me, though, that she was trying to get me to hear the way words are spelled. If I heard all the strong vowel sounds, I would know which letters were in the word. It seems strange, but I think it really worked. I never had much trouble with spelling growing up. And maybe that was because of her odd way of reading to me and maybe it wasn't. I like to think that it was.

I don't know exactly how or when I learned to read. I know that I learned at a pretty young age, but I can't recall an exact "a-ha!" moment with reading. I don't remember when I first started

to see words on a page, instead of symbols that I didn't understand, but I do remember a time when I was *trying* to see words. I was at the library with my mom. It was a big library in South San Francisco, the city we lived in at the time. It had a gigantic children's section, with a wooden playhouse built to look like a train. I used to love sitting in the second story of the train, pretending to drive it. Every time we went to that library, the train was the first place I wanted to go. My mom, not one to worry, would let me wander the children's section (which had its own room) by myself, while she went to do her own browsing.

Not yet being able to read, I was very much a "judge a book by its cover" person at the time. If the book didn't have pretty pictures or shiny doodads, I wouldn't touch it. But looking at the pictures got boring after a while, and I would soon begin to search for my mom. As you might expect, I usually found her sitting at one of the library's big round tables, sifting through the giant stacks of books she had grabbed. One of these times, I got a little jealous as I was watching her read. I was tired of looking at pictures, and I wanted to read, too. So, I decided that I would just learn. Then and there, I went and found a neat-looking kids' book and brought it back to my mom's table. I planted myself next to her and started scanning the pages with my eyes. I secretly wondered whether my mom or anyone else knew that I couldn't really read and was just pretending. I stared at that page and those words with all my might. I was sure that if I mimicked my mom well enough, I would be able to read, too. I tried to spend as long on each page as she did. Even though I started to get antsy, I tried to stick with it. But after a few minutes, I started to have serious doubts about my technique. Needless to say, I didn't learn to read that day.

Eventually, I did learn to read, though. And once I knew how, I was off and running. No stopping. I didn't just want to read books: I wanted to read anything and everything I could. Magazines. Cereal boxes. Road signs. Shampoo bottles. It didn't matter what it was. But I didn't just want to read things: I wanted to read them out loud. I bugged my mom to no end about how to pronounce this or that word. I wanted to get them all right. She said I had always been a quiet child, before I learned to read. Go figure. After that, my mom didn't read to me much. Not because she didn't still want to, but because I wouldn't give her the chance. If we were going to read a book, it was going to be me reading it. I don't think she minded it, though. She always encouraged me,

when it came to reading. I still remember the days when the book fair would come to our school. They always gave out those Scholastic catalogs, with all the educational books in them. Those were my favorite days. I would rush home to my mom, catalog in hand. She would sit down with me, and we would pick out the best ones together and then order them. Sometimes she seemed even more excited about it than I was. (And that's a lot of excitement, let me tell you.) I think that those were her favorite days, too.

My mom taught me a lot of life lessons through books. The variety of books she had was endless. Romance novels. Crime thrillers. Technical books. Textbooks. Medical books. Law books. Literary classics. Old books. New books. Books of world records. Shiny books. Flawed books. Books about the history of the universe. Even books devoted to songs about tobacco. "Why would a person ever want less variety?" I'd wonder. That's how I learned to appreciate differences. That is how I learned open-mindedness. I've never even been able to have a favorite book. It's completely opposite to everything my mom taught me about them—and, consequently, about life. The knowledge of one tells you nothing at all; the knowledge of many tells you everything.

My mom has always been strongly against censorship of any kind. She's the person you see on the freeway with a bumper sticker that says, "Everything I need to know about life I learned from reading banned books." And the lesson I got from the banning of books was the most important of all. People who try to silence others are not trustworthy people. And, usually, if there is a thing people don't want you to know about, that is exactly the thing you should question. This is how I learned safety. As a kid, it might have been annoying that I asked so many questions. But, then again, I never got in car with someone who offered me candy. And as an adult, I don't accept anything blindly. I think I'm better off for it.

Even feminism is something my mom helped me gain through books. Part of it came from having literary role models who were adventurous, smart, proud, and female. But I also just plain read a lot, and it showed when I finally started school. My reading and writing scores were very good. When there were reading groups, I was always in the highest one. And because of how confident I felt about these skills, I never felt the need to hide my mind. I never felt like I wasn't as good as the boys, or like I shouldn't have just as much right to speak up. I didn't feel that my

worth rode on my beauty. Other girls might have been prettier, but I was good in school. Everybody has their own strengths. I don't phrase my statements as questions (the way they say women are taught to do), and I've always been assertive—both in school and out of it. My mom gave me the power of words, and it has never occurred to me not to use them.

In high school, reading and writing were my saving grace. The ability to get away from reality through books and to vent through writing my frustrations about life (the way I was treated by others, my feelings of loneliness, and those beauty races that I daily lost) were what got me through high school intact. When my mom's ten-year marriage to my step-dad fell apart during my junior year, my mom and I moved into an apartment, and I continued going to the same high school. The apartment was in a different city, though, and it took me half an hour to drive to school every day.

When my mom got a new boyfriend, I got pushed to the side. After the divorce, my name had been at the bottom of my mom's "to-do" list. Now, it just wasn't on it. When she moved to northern Oregon to live with her boyfriend (now husband), I stayed in our apartment in southern Washington. At age 16, I lived alone for nine months, in a city where I knew no one. My mom gave me my own credit card so that I could pay for things, and she paid for the rent. But I very rarely saw her, and she only sometimes called. Meanwhile, I was a copy editor and staff writer for my high school newspaper. As the gap between my mom and I got bigger, I threw myself into working on the paper. I built my day-to-day life around it. I spent all my time in that newsroom. It was a place for me to be safe and happy and needed. And at that point in my life, it was a very valuable place. Those of us on staff often stayed and worked on the paper 'til 11 at night, when the janitors kicked us out. Some of my best friends came from the group effort we put into writing it. I don't think I was the only lonely kid that newspaper saved.

Now, I'm in college, and in one of my classes, we've been reading a bunch of articles on language. There's this one article by a woman named Barbara Mellix that really made me think. In her article, she talks about how she and the people around her spoke two different languages when she was growing up: black English and standard English. One thing she says is, "Not until years later, as a college student, did I begin to understand our ambivalence toward English, our scorn of it, our need to master it, to own and be owned by it...." (343). That really made me realize something. One thing

that drives a wedge between my mom and me now is the fact that I'm in college. And when I write e-mails to her in "proper" English, when I use words like "whom" or tell her that I'm writing a paper in "colloquial" voice, I can feel exactly what she thinks of me. For her, I think, it's a mix of pride, shame, and resentment. All at once. Even though she is a well-read woman, she never went to college. She never had the chance. And she's had a lot of hard times in her life because of that. She is happy that, as the first in our family to go to college, I'm going to be able to do things that she couldn't. I think she's proud of the fact that she's responsible for my love of knowledge, but I think she also feels left behind. Betrayed by her own knowledge, and frustrated by mine. Like when I try to explain something I'm learning in class and she can't understand it. And sometimes I feel ashamed of my knowledge. Sometimes, when I know she doesn't understand what I'm saying, I want to wish it away. I want to be able to say the things I used to say—to just have a simple, unburdened conversation with her. One that doesn't leave us both feeling discouraged and divided.

Today, it's clear that I've grown up to be a very different person than my mom. Sometimes I think it makes us both sad. But, I think that books are one thing that will always bond us—a thing we will always be able to share with each other. In many ways, I'm exactly the person she taught me to be: independent, open-minded, curious, and questioning. I still consult books whenever I'm looking for an answer. Even to a simple question. I still enjoy books more than almost anything else—I can't even bear to sell back my textbooks. I still think words are the neatest thing ever. And I still like to read aloud to anyone who'll listen. I've already started a library of my own that I hope will rival hers someday. Sometimes my mom tells me that I'm "too smart for her now," and seems sad about the little things that got lost when her daughter grew up. Like looking at Scholastic catalogs with her, pronouncing words wrong to teach her to spell, and taking her to the library with the train in the children's section. But I don't think these things ever got lost. I think they're with me every day. They are there when I apply to universities. They are there when I work on an essay, with a dictionary by my side as I write. And they were definitely there when I decided to become an English teacher so that I could share with others the passion she shared with me. No, I don't think those little things were lost at all.

Works Cited

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Annie Patrick
Untitled
Charcoal, 23" x 18"

Matthousen

Robyn Curtis

“Nature said, all great things must wear terrifying and monstrous masks in order to inscribe themselves into the hearts of humanity.” — Unknown

I thought God to have a facetious sense of humor to let the sun shine so brightly on this day. I was standing in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by fields and clear blue sky as far as the eye could see, and I was so scared. The sun gently touched down on two looming towers, the whole stone mass acting the part of a rain cloud in my fairytale picture. I had only a vague idea of what I might find behind the enormous solid wood doors in between the towers. The open doors seemed to me to be the entrance of a lion's den. As I approached, I gazed, dumbfounded, at the symbol of a madman looming above the doors, a symbol that still brings chills to most humans, the symbol of Adolf Hitler.

“Welcome to Matthousen... a Nazi death camp,” our guide stated. He was with us for only a short few minutes to explain a few things about the camp and then let us wander. “This is the entrance to Matthousen, and very few prisoners left the camp alive,” he explained morosely.

Entering with a group of friends, I found myself looking down a short but wide street that contained four long wooden buildings lining either side. Each building was one story, shabby and plain. The towers stood above them like ancient giants, unbreakable and steadfast. As an ardent student concerning issues of the Holocaust, I always had a desire to see first-hand what I had learned about in my text books. My blood pumped with excitement as we entered, but for a fleeting second I wanted to turn back.

Our guide continued, “On the left are the barracks, and on the right are the official buildings where the officers stayed, and that building is the crematorium. You'll note the sign above the door, which reads, ‘exit.’ The officers were known to tell the prisoners it was the only way out, so when the prisoners were sent there, they actually thought they were finally going home. After a while the

prisoners understood; when a group was sent 'home' the chimney came alive and the sky became tainted with billowing black smoke."

Suppressing a wave of nausea, I listened as he continued, "I ask that you please walk to the middle of the street to the table made of stone, which is covered with small rocks... please take two. While you walk around and learn the history of what went on here, leave one rock at a place where you felt moved. The other rock is for you to keep, to remind you that no matter what is happening in your life, someone has suffered worse. The rock quarry where the prisoners labored is down the path. Once you approach the steps, please be careful, as they are nicknamed 'the stairs of death' for a reason. Thank you for coming here, and I hope you leave with a new perspective on the Holocaust."

It was as if the soles of my shoes had melted to the pavement, like finding a treasure map but knowing I had to go through a horrific gauntlet to get there. I was nervous beyond words. It seemed everyone else was too, but we languidly migrated to the slab of rock in the middle of the street to retrieve our two stones. I plucked two from the huge pile of assorted rocks and walked to a building on my right where a film was to be shown before we continued further. We were directed to a small classroom-sized space with desks where we sat for the next hour, crying. Open-mouthed and gaping in awe, our glazed stares were fixated on the screen as the history of this particular camp unfolded. We were now ready to see for ourselves where thousands were tortured and killed.

Without words, everyone apparently had the same thought, that our time here was a personal journey to venture by oneself, and we all split up. I wanted to see the quarry first. As I walked the length of the street that turned onto a treeless dirt path, I could tell I was on a bit of a hill that was elevated far above the stretching landscape and still illuminated by the mid-morning sun. I walked for a few minutes before I saw the quarry. The side of the hill I was walking on sloped abruptly into a huge pit that had been formed. The path turned into a long flight of stone steps that numbered a few hundred, winding up the side of the hill. Today, there is grass as well as trees covering most of every surface bordering the stairs and pit. I can imagine that it was slightly more barren when the camp was in use. Not knowing the horrors contained in the location, one might very well bring a picnic lunch here to spend the day daydreaming.

The scene was viewed differently once I learned that the prisoners were forced to stumble up and down the stairs holding boulders above their heads that were taken from the quarry below in order to move them to a location elsewhere in the camp. The prisoners were lined up in rows of five so if one of them lagged, it would be easy to detect, and if one of them fainted from their weakened state of starvation, they would knock everyone over on the way down, causing a domino effect which would sometimes kill 200 people at a time. Thus, this structure was appropriately named, "the stairs of death." If the guards were bored they would bring up a line of people single file, to the top of the cliff overlooking the quarry, and force them to push the person in front of them over the cliff, even grouping families together to make it more entertaining for the guards.

Walking back up the path to a section that is devoted as a memorial, I saw statues, sculptures, and walls with memorabilia: pictures and deliberately placed piles of rocks at the foot of each. It was these little piles of rocks that moved me, divulging the exact spot where people had been washed over with the magnitude of anguish that many victims forced into this humiliating situation faced daily.

The barracks, which was my next destination, looked as though a child could have built them. Upon entering I was faced with one very small room with two slightly larger ones on either side. The smallest of the three was the makeshift bathroom, a few holes that had been cut out of a wooden bench. The other two rooms, approximately 10x15, feet were each occupied by bunk beds where people were crammed like sardines with 50-100 people per room. There were words written and scratched into the walls, "God has forsaken us," "Let it end," and "Never forget." Again, the light shining in from the small windows was deceiving, as it seemed contrary to the dark dismal atmosphere that was continuing to gnaw incessantly at my state of mind.

The camp was encompassed by either stone walls lined with barbed wire or a thick mass of electric fence lined with barbed wire. The prisoners' first job every morning was to collect the bodies of those who had committed suicide by throwing their scantily clad skeletons on the electric fence. There were also the bodies of those who tried to escape and were simply shot. Driven to madness by the intense labor and lack of food, suicide seemed an easy way out. Roll call was next on the agenda, and the prisoners were lined up for

hours sometimes—a cruel joke, because by the time roll call was thoroughly completed, several had dropped dead from exhaustion and the guards would start over.

Food consisted of portions such as five spoonfuls of a pathetic broth every 3 days, which was not enough to survive on for very long. That may very well have been the point. When the camp was eventually liberated by Americans, the soldiers broke down and cried at the shells that were remaining of what were once healthy, whole people. Some liberators tried to give the prisoners food without knowing that it would be too much for their malnourished bodies to handle and many would die from the soldiers' good intentions.

I shuffled across the street. My body seemed like a separate, numb entity from the reeling of my mind and the staggering of my broken emotions. I stood in front of a building on the right side of the street, the one labeled in a language I didn't speak, but knew it read "Exit." The entrance was located at a lower level, and a few steps down was a heavy door with a very small window of thick glass. I entered what appeared to be a large shower room, with shower nozzles below a low ceiling that was completely made of cement. This shower room was actually a gas chamber. I had a feeling of claustrophobia while enclosed in a room where so many innocent people entered and an equal number were removed, lifeless, minutes earlier under the impression that they were getting cleaned up to go home. I was unprepared for the stench. So many years had passed and, yet, the thick air threatened to choke me. I couldn't help but think the room was filling up with foul, squalid gas or ancient ashes.

There was a door opposite to the one I came in which led me to another room, a stained cement table acting as a centerpiece. Slightly inclined at one end and with rivets on both sides leading to a drain hole, this table is where biopsies, experiments, crude operations and removal of gold teeth were performed on the recently fumigated prisoners. I could picture blood, streaming down the drains from multitudes of unwilling volunteers of the sick and immoral experiments Hitler had a fixation for performing on humans. Knowing the outcome of his experiments was excruciating pain and inevitably fatal, he would later claim they were all in the name of science.

Upon leaving the grotesque operatory, I was face to face with a monster made of brick, its gaping mouth waiting to be filled

with human flesh to be charred and forgotten. The doors of the oven were open with a metal gurney pulled half way out. It looked as if a person my size would fit perfectly, but learning the guards could cram ten emaciated bodies in at one time was repulsing. A small door was below the large one where the ashes could be removed, and a chimney met the low ceiling where it continued out the roof, high up into the sunlight that would never see this cavernous room. Overcome by the cruelty that had taken place right where I was standing, my steady tears were replaced by silent sobs. I had found a home for my first rock.

I heard panting from around the massive oven and cautiously strained my neck to see my friend, Naomi, frozen like a scared child, hyperventilating, retching, and unable to move. I grabbed her arm and pulled her through the rooms, up the stairs and into the ever-strong shimmering day in time for her to heave her breakfast onto the pavement. She shakily straightened her posture and we embraced. Sobbing, we no longer tried to keep quiet lest we wake the ghosts of a time not so long ago.

I placed my second rock in my pocket and Naomi and I left the camp for our bus. No one had spoken a word, and save the sobs intermittently breaking the silence on our five-hour trip to Austria, we all knew it was a time for personal reflection.

There have been times when I have felt overwhelmed, like the hand I was dealt was not fair or good enough. This event put things in perspective for me. By taking out the small smooth rock and holding it my hand, I feel calmed and even a bit ashamed at times. I may be stressed out, but the existence of the Holocaust victims make my obstacles seem trivial. Seemingly, a whole world away, the imagination can't fathom what occurred in that concentration camp over sixty years ago. I can't forget, and I won't forget. I still carry my rock.



Yung Jun Cho
A man
Pastel, 24" x 18"

Transcendence by Association: An Analysis of "A Blessing"

Jason Keedy

Presenting the ineffable elements of existence in a way that is both tangible and agreeable is one of the poet's highest aims. In "A Blessing," author James Wright delivers abstract themes such as transcendence and timelessness into our awareness by way of suggestive diction and a gentle harmonic interplay of both concrete and abstract meanings. Upon a cursory first reading, we are encountered with a relaxed, quite understated pastoral interlude: travelers take a detour from the highway to stop and admire a couple of ponies grazing off in a field. Though this literal event may not bring an audience to any degree of enlightenment in itself, Wright manages by way of careful placement of simile and symbol to knit a complex web of associations. His use of soft sounding words act as an open invitation that enchants the reader, allowing for the deeper working themes to integrate into the psyche. "A Blessing," with subtlety and a concise vision, subliminally transports us beyond the borders of logic and into a nebulous world of discovery and rapture.

From the title we are immediately given the "what" of the poem. With the word "blessing" having the denotative meanings "to make holy" or "to sanctify," the scene opens on a quite mystical note. By associative deduction, the reader gathers that what is to follow will be a kind of divine initiation; a momentary, spontaneous experience of grace. The first line offsets this rather other-worldly sense with a very ordinary, albeit suspenseful, roadside visual. By beginning the poem with "Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota" (1), Wright establishes an exact place of orientation. Anyone could draw up a visual of what it looks like to be right off the highway, a few moments before reaching the city limits: an unexceptional landscape comes to mind, almost somber in tone. The careful, leading nature of this line is but an introduction ushering us towards the most impressionistic line of the poem: Wright casts a spell when he writes, "Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass" (2);

immediately one is flooded with impressions both denotative and connotative. Literally, twilight is referring to the time at which this occurrence takes place; figuratively, a slew of associations like ambiguity and obscurity come to mind. There also comes with twilight, a sense of magic and otherworldliness. Wright personifies the approaching dusk as it "bounds softly forth on the grass." The wording conjures up an image of a cloudy, human-shaped figure leaping lightly across the field, a harbinger of the shrouded delight to come.

With emphasis being placed upon "the eyes of those two Indian ponies" in line 3, we are given a concrete image from which to draw a reference point. By addressing the ponies with the familiar sounding "those two," Wright implies something: it is as if we should recognize these particular animals. By identifying them as such, Wright lends the poem a timeless quality; the poet as medicine man is sort of stirring up the pot that is the collective unconscious. Line 4 finishes the previous line's thought, by adding on to the mysterious, almost enigmatic tone established previously. Since we know that eyes can't actually "Darken with kindness," we must look for meaning of the phrase in context: we are in the midst of an almost supernatural occurrence, a happening distantly familiar in its shadowy imagery. Though the line is actually announcing the coming of dusk, one cannot help but associate a sense of warmth and invitation permeating from the pony's eyes. This image, along with "Twilight" from before, further establishes a sense of enchantment and silent delight.

Lines 5 and 6, with the use of "they" and "gladly," carry on the sense of informality and graciousness. Wright's use of "gladly," along with "welcome" in line 6, subtly personifies the ponies. We logically can't know if they are actually glad to welcome their human guests, or if they're excited by the prospect of food! By way of this personalized diction, the feeling of timelessness and familiarity is carried onward. This aspect, along with a magical theme, is reinforced with the phrase, "out of the willows." It's as if, like apparitions, these night creatures materialize suddenly out of the shadowy forest. The term "willow" is of multifaceted interest in this context. The root comes from the Celtic "sal" and "lis," which mean near water. As a symbol, it has long been associated with dreams, spells, and other enchantments. The willow tree is also prominently associated with two major Greek mythological figures: Orpheus, the Greek god of poetry, was renowned for his descent

into the underworld; Hecate, a sort of intermediary between this world and the underworld, is known for her advice to those crossing from life to death. From these associations, the water element included, we gather that Wright is working with such themes as spiritual initiation and preparedness for the sacred; also he is lending the story a sense of journey and emotional exploration.

In line 7, a visual, as well as a tactile sense of imagery is displayed in the phrase, "we step over the barbed wire into the pasture." Here, using "barbed" to signify danger and the difficulty of passage, Wright employs an active visual to imbue the happening with a rather textural feeling: the scene brings to mind the associations that come with the mention of the sharp, metallic object, as well as an acute dissonance upon its contrast with the luxuriant pasture. By stepping over the man-made fence, and into the pony's realm, the narrator and company have seemingly stepped into a vaguely healing, slightly mythical realm. The suggestiveness of line 8 further conveys the sense of traveling into a world usually inhabited by other beings. We find that this field is "Where they have been grazing all day, alone" (8), with the word "alone" being placed at the end for emphasis. We could fuse this with the use of "welcome" and "kindness" from earlier to surmise that the ponies were indeed relieved to have them as company.

The phrase "They ripple tensely," conjures up fascinating images. By contrasting "ripple" with "tensely," we have the suggestion of restrained jubilation. The phrase, "they can hardly contain their happiness / That we have come" (9,10), lends to the association of a welling up of emotion. Wright's persistent usage of personal pronouns such as "they", "there", and "we", adds to the familiar, almost reunion sort of nature to the meeting.

With "They bow shyly as wet swans," Wright again draws upon water imagery. Along with "willow" and "ripples," you begin to appreciate the poet's understanding of deep symbol: water has long been associated with religious ceremony, such as baptism; as well it has long been used to symbolize the emotions and the fluidity of feeling. The simile used here: comparing the pony's almost courtesan-like bow, to a swan gracefully pulling out of the water, adds more polish to the theme of natural elegance and beauty. The imagery of the bowing ponies, along with the arched necks of the "swans," leaves a prevailing sense of unity, a oneness between lovers. As if to reinforce these associations, Wright asserts that, "They love each other." We feel this section of the poem resonate

with the power of devotion and faith. Through the direct experience of selfless love, the narrator is able to speak from the heart with complete conviction.

In the pronouncement that "There is no loneliness like theirs" (12), we see the writer so moved that he connects with an insight into their nature. The paradoxical usage of "alone" and "loneliness," dramatically signifies a meaning just the opposite of the typical connotation one would arrive at: the loneliness he speaks of is love. Wright uses this hushed, rather dramatic sequence to express the truism that two souls in love live for each other and each other alone.

The use of "munching" and "young tufts of spring," along with describing how the ponies are "At home once more," leaves one with a sense of security. Wright is using association here to establish calm; with subtle suggestive diction, he is tying together past imagery and manages to relax the reader both in mind and body. Even with the final mention of "in the darkness", we don't get the sense of foreboding that would come automatically; rather, we feel comforted and warmed by the looming prospect of shadowy possibilities.

In line 15, we find the author moved to "hold the slenderer one" in his arms. By using adjectives typically reserved for human kind, Wright is gradually building the bridge over the gap that typical separates man from the so called beasts. He is compelling us to shed the typical way in which we usually see the world and to contemplate the ways in which to become more attuned to nature. Making this connection all the more personal, the narrator refers to the pony as "she." This reference seems natural, as if we are shedding formalities and arriving at a shared space of mutual recognition. Line 17 acts to present the culmination of these ideas with a tender display: the pony has walked over to the narrator and "nuzzled" his hand. Wright's use of "nuzzled" in the tradition of past diction like "tufts" and "munching" acts to carry on the themes of tenderness and poignancy. Though they do leave us with touching visual images, there is also a subtle textural quality that emerges. In some strange, unknowable way, we can feel these words resounding deeply inside of us. Could it be that Wright has found a way in which to touch our heart?

In the understated "She is black and white" (18), we could gather that she is actually colored this way; however, in lieu of the context in which it appears, one can't help be associate an

uncomplicated nature to the pony. Unlike the netherworld uncertainty that surrounds the scenario, the pony remains constant, relatively unchanged. We could surmise that this is the teaching for which the man has crossed over the "barbed wire": throughout life's changes and complexity, there is an essential part of us that is timeless, a part of us that remains the same throughout.

Wright's personification of the pony's hair in line 19, contrasted with the primarily delicate phrasing thus far, leaves an almost violent impression. With ordinary, literal language, it would be very difficult to describe the sort of enlightenment experience that is taking place; Wright breaks from his restrained tendency so that we too can identify, and even empathize, with this ceremonious event. The use of "hair falls wild," in conjunction with "the light breeze moves one to caress," forms more tactile imagery; even the word "caress," with its sssss sound, is reminiscent of wind and whisper.

Wright's use of simile in comparing the delicacy of "her long ear," to the "skin over a girl's wrist," reasserts the feminine theme that has been lingering throughout. His interest in alluding to this quality is well warranted: we associate mystery, tenderness, and receptivity to the feminine side of life. I believe that this is one of the archetypes in which Wright has been mining the depths for. The mystical feminine resides beyond the logic and restraints of formalized, linear experience; therefore, it is up to the poet to work as a conduit through which we may learn these buried secrets.

Lines 22 through 24 tell of a sudden realization Wright has directly afterwards. As in lines 11 and 12, Wright breaks from concrete narrative and suggestive diction to make a somewhat bold and insightful declaration of emancipation: "Suddenly I realize / That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom" (22-24). Rationally, we know that there's no possible way one could actually leave one's body, which makes the use of "if I stepped" all the more challenging to our intellect. The use of "break" and "suddenly," give the moment a sense of extrication, of a being delivered. In ending with "blossom" we can denote a sense of maturity or a blossoming. The tension created between the violence of "break" and the delicate nature of "blossom," helps to trumpet Wright's rapturous initiation into the transpersonal realm.

James Wright's "A Blessing," awakens one to the degree of nuance and symmetry a poet must master in order to produce such a telling and sublime result. The poet has taken a fairly simple, everyday type of scenario and produced a work which touches on

some of the more ineffable elements of our existence. His stark, descriptive phrasings make for a solid foundation, beneath which he delves to explore the subterranean world of shared symbol. Wright's use of suggestion, figurative language, and potent imagery help to conjure up associations not easily accessible through rational thought. With weighty symbolism and straightforward storytelling, Wright manages to translate a presumably abstract experience into a teaching vessel full of wisdom.



Erin Gustafson
Succession of the Oppressed
Mixed Media, 16" x 14"

Still Standing

Diana Hughes

SETTING: The scene opens with a group of four tourists and one guide touring the National Museum of Judeo-Christian Art, in Toledo, Spain. In the background a janitor sweeps the floor.

GUIDE: Good afternoon. My name is Joseph. I am a Professor of history and a local artist here in Toledo and I will be your tour guide for today. Okay, here we are in front of one of the best and oldest examples of the assimilation of the three major religions and cultures of Spain during the Middle Ages. Founded by an influential member of the Jewish community in the fourteenth century, Samuel Halevi Abulafia was also an advisor and treasurer to the Christian King, Pedro. This synagogue combined both Eastern and Western architectural styles. Intending this as his private house of worship, Halevi used both squared off and horseshoe arches along with the best artistic influences and techniques of the time. The mosaics, writings, geometric and floral designs alternate with one another to complete larger visual images; they are used in unison to create spectacular images. Given to the Christian monarchs, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, in 1492, the synagogue was turned into a priory and a church. During the eighteenth century, it housed a monastery, in the nineteenth century, a barracks, and then it became a monastery again for most of the remaining nineteenth century. In 1877 it was turned into a National Monument. Many renovations and restorations later, this former synagogue became the National Museum of Judeo-Spanish Art under the control of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture. The multi-ethnic presence in the art and architecture reflects a level of tolerance not usually associated with Medieval times.

STUDENT: Are those Arabic inscriptions on the wall?

GUIDE: (pointing above him) Yes. In fact, if you look to the left and right, you can see it changes from Arabic to Hebrew to Latin and includes the local vernacular, Castilian.

MUSLIM: (looking puzzled) That's a verse from the Koran, isn't it?

GUIDE: Yes. And the Latin and Hebrew inscriptions are from the Bible, particularly, the Book of Psalms. This is a perfect example of the cultural assimilation I spoke of earlier. Three distinct religions represented under one roof.

STUDENT: How could that happen? Didn't the Jewish congregation object to the Latin or the verse from the Koran?

GUIDE: Well, at this time in Spain, there were a lot of translating and copying of ancient Roman and Greek texts going on. It wasn't unusual for educated citizens to speak Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin because they were involved in the translation process or simply by living and working next to people of different faiths. The atmosphere was full of new learning as people were exposed to new ideas and directly involved in the preservation of previous cultures.

JEW: We should also consider what political decisions impacted the design. I mean, Halevi may have chosen to include Arabic and Latin to appease the rulers and their peoples. Or it may have been financially advantageous to include the others at the time.

STUDENT: So is that tolerance or manipulation? You know, just playing the game in order to accomplish a goal.

MUSLIM: In the Muslim world, the government usually dictates the levels of tolerance. In some countries, there is more negotiation with the rules and in other, more extreme or fanatical countries, the laws are more rigid. I would think that the levels of tolerance in Spain were relatively high at the time for this to be taking place.

STUDENT: Well, if the iconic rule of Islam was ignored at times, it must have been high. I see human and animal representations where, according to Islamic law, there should be none. This seems contrary to what I know of Islam.

GUIDE: (excited) Exactly. In fact, in 1009, fanatical Muslim Berbers from North Africa used such examples as proof that their fellow Muslims lacked piety and destroyed the palatine city of Madinat-al Zahra; the palace was left in ruins. This fueled the civil wars that eventually dissolved the caliphate, which was the office and dominion of the head of Islam.

CHRISTIAN: I'm surprised that this survived; especially when you consider the track record of most Christian rulers. They usually conquer, destroy, and rebuild in their image with little respect for what previously existed.

GUIDE: True, but in Spain there were several Christian Kings that not only tolerated, but accepted and encouraged the preservation and use of the cultures being conquered. For example, Christian King Alfonso IV built new libraries and added to existing ones while the Archbishop of Toledo employed countless translators and began the officially entitled, "School of Translators." There was a conscious effort made to preserve the cultures conquered.

JEW: I have heard the argument made that because the three religions stem from Abraham, they are all "Peoples of the Book." In this way, it could be viewed as real tolerance. Yet, I am surprised that the Jewish congregation didn't view the assimilation as counter to the preservation of traditions.

GUIDE: Surprisingly, with all the persecution that the Jews had experienced up to this point, their culture did survive with their traditions intact. Even more surprisingly, once they absorbed Arabic and Christian influences, they still maintained their own culture. In fact, some critics argued that the amount of assimilation allowed the Jews to become more Hebraized than other Jewish communities.

STUDENT: It's interesting to me that the Middle Ages in Spain seem so different than the Middle Ages in the rest of Europe. The influx of ancient teachings and texts, by way of the Muslim world, must have encouraged the free exchange of ideas and allowed for a more tolerant view of others. Or maybe it was mere distraction that posed as tolerance. Either way, it seems an apt model to study for parallels to the present.

GUIDE: (Nodding in agreement.) Which is why understanding the past is so crucial to our future. Some people even claim that this period in Spain was a mini-Golden Age and a necessary precursor to the upcoming Renaissance. The argument is that without the preservation and translation of ancient Roman and Western works, Western Europe may not have been exposed to them as early and in the way they were. The separateness of East and West was side-stepped as the Muslims brought in the learning from Byzantium to Spain by way of North Africa. Certain educational restrictions weren't applied to Muslims as they were to Christians, and this impacted the new learning on this new peninsula. For example, in the field of medicine, Muslims advanced knowledge much more than those who were forbidden to dissect and study cadavers, like the Christians and Hebrews.

STUDENT: There doesn't seem to be any side-stepping of separateness in today's climate. It seems like the more separate we become, the less tolerant. No one seems to care about learning from history like this. If it doesn't directly affect them, they don't want to hear about it. It's just another way for people to absolve themselves of responsibility and remain in their separate worlds. Yet, there is still a distinct separateness of East and West in the twenty-first century.

JEW: (almost interrupting) Historically, the Jews have not only been separated from others, but have chosen to separate themselves in order to maintain, preserve, and respect traditions. Separation has been used as a survival tool for Jews.

STUDENT: It seems the more closed off and homogeneous cultures are more separate and also less tolerant.

CHRISTIAN: Of course, and the more heterogeneous societies are more tolerant. But, did you think about how much less crime and psychological dysfunctions there are in the more homogeneous societies?

STUDENT: No, I didn't, but that makes some sense to me. There are fewer unknowns to worry about when you have fewer freedoms; especially if you are born into them, instead of having those freedoms taken away. But do you really think that people understood the benefits and drawbacks of living homogeneously at the time?

JEW: Maybe. But I doubt that was their impetus for such a way of life. The Jewish separateness often stemmed from a desire for purity and tradition, in accordance with Hebrew law. Historically, we have been through so much that maintaining any cultural identity has been a challenge. A strong and separate community has been the best way to assure our survival as a race and as a culture. It has proven effective and efficient.

STUDENT: (turns to the Jew and warily asks) So, would you feel comfortable worshipping in a synagogue like this: with Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin inscriptions above you?

JEW: (without hesitation) Absolutely. I would have no problem with it. If you believe in God and believe God is with you, it doesn't matter where you are.

CHRISTIAN: I agree. The verses from the Koran might be problematic for some, but ultimately, it would just be a building. It wouldn't keep me from praying. Is it the same for Muslims?

MUSLIM: (hesitantly) Yes and No. Yes, because it is possible to pray

anywhere and no, because Muslims build mosques as an assertion of unity with the divine. But I suspect the same is true of Christians and Hebrews as well. This would be a good example of the government dictating what is acceptable. In a more conservative country, a Muslim could enter a church or synagogue, but they wouldn't. They would be worried about someone seeing them and associating the act with conversion. Conversions are not allowed; once you are born Muslim, that's it. You are a Muslim until your death. With a more liberal government, there would be less fear associated with the act, but conversion would still not be allowed. Conversion often means death.

STUDENT: (surprised) Even today?

MUSLIM: In some countries, in some instances...yes. It's just as we were discussing earlier. When you live in a more homogeneous society, there are more restrictions and fewer freedoms. In contrast, when there are diverse peoples living in proximity to one another, in a more heterogeneous society, tolerance becomes a necessity for living.

STUDENT: Oh, so to survive, in relative peace, fewer restrictions and more freedoms become a pragmatic solution to living together. And when tolerance is the law of the land, it is no longer a conscious choice. Is that really tolerance? (Silence)

JANITOR: Good question.

STUDENT: So, if it's okay to pray in a building like this one, why don't more exist? If the United States has a level of tolerance that people seek out, why do we remain so separate? I wonder if it would help to emulate these designs elsewhere. Anyway it seems obvious that the politics of the time allowed for the mixing of cultures in Spain during the Middle Ages.

GUIDE: And at the time, it was even encouraged. Spain, formerly known as Iberia, and before that, Andalusia, retained these early influences long after they were expelled from the continent. It was a rare time in world history that these three major religions and cultures succeeded in thriving alongside one another. From about 711 to 1492, Andalusians lived together, absorbing each others cultures. They considered themselves Andalusians as much as Christians, Jews, or Muslims for over seven hundred years. The amalgamation of the various cultures can be seen all over Spain, but the significance of the religious toleration is alive and well on these walls.

STUDENT: As much as you have all said that you would or could pray in a building like this, would you ever put your energies into creating one like it?

CHRISTIAN: I don't think any one in my church would put their money towards including Arabic and Hebrew inscriptions on the walls. Having a building that belongs to one faith is the status quo. I guess it would come down to whether the building already exists or if it were to be built.

JEW: I think that because this building is so old and has such a rich history associated with it, worshipping here would be more acceptable than building a new one with the same representations of a mixed culture. I don't think any of the three major religions would put their time and money into a multi-ethnic, inter-faith building project.

STUDENT: Hmm. Maybe if we saw more Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin along with English in our everyday lives, the cultures wouldn't seem so foreign. There is some truth to the axiom that people fear what they don't understand. The problem is that people have little to no desire to expose themselves to what they fear: whether valid or not.

GUIDE: That's a reasonable theory explaining why it was easier for the cultures to mix than it is for them today. Exposure to new and different administrations, art, architecture, clothing, dance, food, literature, music, and science didn't scare Andalusians because they were already familiar with the customs, languages, and peoples of various cultures. Assimilation seemed a natural evolution to the growing pains that Spain went through.

STUDENT: Well, it's amazing that this example has survived. I would've thought that the future conquerors would've destroyed any representation of religious freedoms or tolerance. I wonder how much longer it will endure and at the same time I'm disappointed that its physical manifestation of assimilation and tolerance has taught so few so little about the possibilities of human cohabitation. (Sighs and walks away; everyone looks up to the inscriptions before moving on)

JANITOR: (sweeping where everyone stood, he smiles up at the wall and whispers) You're still standing, aren't ya' girl?



Nana Okawara
Self-portrait
Digital art, 8"x 10"

The Writing on the Stall

Colleen Freeman

During a break between classes, I hurried to the women's bathroom, dodged into the first stall and closed the door. There on the back of the door written in black permanent marker was the bold statement, "Think for yourself, question authority". 'Right on', I thought to myself, enlivened and empowered by this reminder to be consciously and critically aware of what is happening around me. A few days later, this statement was followed by the response, "No, question everything. Question yourself?" which amplified the previous statement as well as my conscious awareness of the world *and* of myself. Within a couple of days, there was yet another response. This time however, the initial statements were met with sudden and direct opposition: "Question anything and God will be the answer!" It was this statement that compelled me to whip out my pen and ask: "Isn't God the question not the answer?"

This interaction illustrates a conflict that occurs frequently in our society: the conflict between questioning and not questioning. We see this conflict in religion, in politics, and in our everyday lives. We question—our environment, our situation, our views, and the views, environments, and situations of others – because we want to find meaning, we want to find answers, and we want to know the truth. When we do not question it is often because we think we know the answers and are so content with the answers we have that we don't want to trade them in for other answers—even if those answers are closer to the truth. Sometimes we don't question because we don't *want* to know or because we think our judgment is somehow inferior. Many people feel more comfortable and secure when they think that they have all the answers; others are content only with the truth, even if it means not knowing all the answers. Many people feel trapped by conclusions that other people have reached and need to arrive at their own conclusions. Others feel freed by having a predetermined set of answers that allows them to live their lives confidently, knowing—based on the answers they have been given—that they are not making any mistakes.

Numerous problems arise when we do not question. By not questioning the world around us, we are accepting a static existence in a partial reality. Questioning allows us to shift and change as our world shifts and changes, gaining not only a complete view of reality but also a complete view of ourselves.

In his essay "The Banking Concept of Education," which addresses how education — by presenting knowledge rather than stimulating thought— creates an unconscious and controllable public, Paulo Freire describes the world as "a reality in process, in transformation." In a world that is constantly changing, if we do not question and thus continue to function in an unchanging realm of thought, we will be incapable of actively participating in our own lives. Freire notes that we, too, are "in the process of becoming" and are uniquely conscious of our incompleteness. Because of the incomplete and transformational qualities of both humans and reality, Freire reasons that continuous learning—and therefore questioning—is absolutely imperative.

Lao Tzu, author of the *Tao te Ching*—a series of verses which focus on a centralized theme of letting go of agendas and adapting to rather than trying to control the changes in life, would agree with Freire's reasoning and would assert that the way to ensure continuous learning and questioning is to practice "not-knowing." If we think we know — for instance, knowing that God will be the answer to any question one could ask — then we are not open to other possibilities and perspectives and often do not even think to question. If we begin by knowing that we do not know — thus questioning everything, even ourselves — it is much easier to find our way to the truth. For many people, though, recognizing that they do not know is uncomfortable and even frightening. Lao Tzu describes fear as the greatest illusion. Fear can cloud one's thought so that one no longer thinks logically or rationally. "Whoever can see through all fear," Lao Tzu counsels, "will always be safe." The feeling of safety that we create *because* of fear is merely a false curtain of protection. This false sense of safety can cause one to be shallowly overconfident and can also cause one to remain in a closed, comfortable, and static zone of action and thought.

Plato describes such a zone in his essay "The Allegory of the Cave." In Plato's cave—which is representational of our world—prisoners are chained so that they cannot move nor turn their heads, forced as such to focus on the shadows of themselves

and other objects that are cast by firelight onto the cave walls. The prisoners confuse the shadows with real people and objects, measuring and observing these shadows until they become the basis of the prisoners' entire reality. When a prisoner leaves the cave and goes "up to the light" that prisoner will see—once adjusted to the brightness—that shadows are merely reflections of real people and objects. Freire would describe this exit from the cave as "the point of departure": the instance when consciousness that has been submerged emerges and we begin to intervene in and question our reality. Liberated prisoners gain the freedom to see "things as they are" as well as "freedom from [their] own ideas"—freedoms that Lao Tzu names as the mark of taoist masters and moderate individuals.

A week went by with no new additions to the discourse on the stall door before I received a much-awaited response. "Pathetic," it said, "we are all pathetic." Perhaps we are. We all do it: take things for granted, make assumptions, get stuck in a rut, stereotype others, or simply go about our daily lives—it is easier to follow than to lead, bad habits die hard, and change is difficult. But without questioning perceptions, assumptions, assertions, and conclusions, we become lost within—rather than conscious of and connected to—life. If we start from a position of knowing all the answers we will have no reason to question anything and if we hold on to our ideas and opinions indefinitely, without continued consideration, we will cease to grow and change along with the world—thus becoming confined in a partial reality. Questioning is vital to conscious existence in an ever-changing world, driving our reality and ourselves toward transformation and, ultimately, completion.



Dina Stein
Feet by Lamp
Pencil, 12" x 8.5"

I Blame the Revolution

Heather Davidson

I was the youngest one at that joint that night. There was a line, probably fifteen people, and I was in the middle. But they were all ahead of me. Way ahead. If all the lights were out, though, nobody would have known it. My story was every bit as deep. Like a secret, or an ocean—places where age didn't matter. The man in charge reeked of patchouli. He told me I'd be fine, and then told me who I would follow. After that guy was done, I felt relieved. All he had brought was a guitar—and an apparent thing against John Lennon's "Imagine." I had brought a goddamned ocean. While he was busy hacking those words and notes to hell, I was busy imagining Lennon flipping in his grave. Then I was up. I walked towards the masking taped 'X' on the floor. The microphone looked scarier than my dad on a whiskey binge. My blood was hot and anxious, my hands shook. I stood in the light and watched the smoke dance with the silence above the heads of all the people. Who were these people anyway, and why was I about to tell them who I was? Like they'd care. It was my turn though, so I couldn't stop now. I breathed in a mouthful of the noxious air and let the silence cover me. Like a sheet. Rain. Cancer. It crept up on me. Then . . . I dove in.

Just like that, I had thrown down my first slam. I was fourteen, and the crowd was floored. The clapping smacked me, like as if to say they liked my pain. At least it was good for something. Fuel for a newfound fire.

I was published for the first time less than three months later. A short piece about the time I had my jaw wired shut. I was nine then, and I ran into a skillet that my dad was swinging at me . . . oops. It broke in two places- my jaw, not the skillet; and I couldn't talk because my face was swollen and the wires were tight. I'm pretty sure I thought I was dying. I was wrong. I was just living through another event that does one of two things for someone: creates seeds for writers, or prompts thoughts of suicide. Not that I haven't tended to both at some time or another- I just came to

enjoy the voice more. My step-mom still cooks in that skillet, but suicidal thoughts are just too quiet.

I knew that wanting to be a writer—not just a writer, but a poet no less—was a far cry from my dad's recommendation that I join the Air Force. He was sure that a little more discipline would fix me right up. Save me from myself. I knew that just the *word* poet would piss him off . . . let alone the *life-long goal*. So I went out of my way to bring it up one night. And then there was Silence. Earlier that week I had told my step-mom that I was dating a girl in my creative writing class. . . . Apparently she had shared that with my dad. Fuel for the fire. Everything about me was wrong, he said. It was a quick verbal flogging, served up with a greasy side of guilt. He told me to be sure and send him a post card from skid row, so he could show off my accomplishments. I told him to fuck himself, and then ran like hell. In the quiet of my room, the anger and tears fell out of my pen instead of my throat. The sound of my hand thrashing against the paper was like a heart beating—the only life in the room was on paper. I HATE YOU. I'M NOT SCARED. NOT OF STREETS. JUST OF YOU.

Fifteen came, and my journal and I hit the road. Lots of great writers had been On The Road. It was exciting to meet that freedom. To really want to live. Nothing came with me that I couldn't stuff into a black trash bag and my backpack. I left with a quarter of my wardrobe, half of my notebooks, and all of my scars. I caught the city bus, and headed for the farthest place fifty cents away. Not one of them opened their mouth, but every passenger said something to me that day. What's in the bag? Do your parents know where you are? Are you okay? I didn't answer anyone. I just laid my head on the warm glass, and watched the cars pass by as the sun set in my desert home. Riots broke out inside of me. I reached for my notebook, and pulled the stop cord to get off. The ding of the bell was the only sound inside that bus. And there was a revolution rising up inside of me. Somewhere deep, I was growing inside.

I walked down the railroad tracks past the bus depot for about a mile, opened the notebook I had been carrying and sat down. I wrote about the desert—likened it to my dried-out spirit. I bloomed in that desert. Something about the southwest—it gets to you. You learn to see differently. Almost nothing that you'd call beautiful at first sight blooms in the desert. The sage brush fades into the blowing background of dust. The pine trees ooze sap to

deter greedy hands. The cacti seem to be telling the naked eye to stay the fuck away from them. Not so soft, they say.

The thing about the cacti though is this: Those same plants can feed and heal. And teach. Unless you're prone to looking at things that way, all they do is make a nice picture for a postcard. That's what got to me in the desert. That it's all in how you look to see—not what you look at. That, no matter what I set out to write, I ended up looking at those cacti—and seeing myself At first glance being, shall we say, stand-offish; then all of a sudden a veil lifts and we see that there is some potential in there! I didn't say a word out loud that night, my first night *alone* alone, but my poems fell out. Loud.

In the next few months I wrote about everything that had ever taken a swing at me. On paper, I never had to duck or dodge . . . just stare it all down and wait for the force to take me. My memories became words, my story poetry. And sometimes, I found those poems hurt worse than the broken jaw. Or heart. But in a weird way, they were liberating. It was as if, in writing it down, I was gaining a voice. On paper, I cried. On paper, I screamed. On paper, I was in control. There's therapy for you—save your money (because you'll really need it now) and just start writing. So that's what I did. My writing saved me from myself. It was the one thing that could never be taken away from me.

I hitchhiked to a Rainbow Gathering which, if you don't know, is like a traveling commune of smelly hippies—and my backpack got lost. I say 'lost' because I am still not sure if it was stolen, or if I had smoked just a little too much pot and walked away from it. At any rate, hippies are usually pretty good people so I did find my bag later. Of course, my *bag* was gone. . . . Again—not sure if that was someone else's doing or my own. The only other thing missing was a can of spam. It had been the only food I brought with me. All I could steal from the gas station, stolen from me. There's karma. Oddly enough, I wasn't worried about starving. The way I looked at it, the hippies would not let me starve. I was mostly just thankful that my notebook was still there. But the thing is that they could have taken the notebook—every page—and not taken a damn thing from me. It was all inside, and I would write it again. And again and again and again. In fact, I am still writing it. My bag of pot had cost twenty-five bucks that time around, but the words in my notebooks—I have had to pay my whole life to have those.

After the Rainbow Gathering and jumping some trains, I ended up back in Santa Fe. It was strange and new to me, the light on that place—like rays in some Jesus painting. I don't think that I ever saw it like that before. Shining—like full of possibility. There were so many free press 'zines and things for me to be a part of. When I wasn't busy looking for a safe place to sleep, or worrying about where to get the five bucks I needed to buy a beanie and some ramen noodles, I was dropping off submissions. Sooner or later, I was bound to be uncovered. It just so happens that it was sooner. I was published three more times in my fifteenth year. Now, anyone who doesn't write for passion would think that publication without a paycheck was a waste of time. Not so. There is something empowering in seeing your words in ink, splattered across a page that you know someone, *anyone*, was bound to see. I blame the revolution inside of me for this view. Because of it, I wasn't scared anymore. . . . It gave me the strength to dig deeper.

After digging for a while, I found that I sounded most powerful when I stuck to things I knew. When I wrote about the stars and angels and flowers, I felt like a fraud. I had no business there. So I wrote about what it feels like for a flower to die—wilting, rotting. I wrote about angels being mothers whose little girls were being raised by whiskey-binging fathers. In my poems I unmasked stars, forced them to show their true identity- as empty promises. I cursed them in my poems. What had they ever done for me? This was the writing that brought me back from the edge. Poems saved my life by letting me say what I needed to. By letting me tell my story without fear of a vicious backlash, or broken bones. How amazing, to feel like I was holding a royal flush when, in fact, I had been dealt a shitty pair of twos.

Now, when I travel back to fourteen—when Kurt Cobain was a demigod, when my hair was like cotton candy, when I couldn't see straight—it seems so far away. When poetry was a newfound fire, instead of a pencil on autopilot. My voice has grown and runs like those railroad tracks I used to walk, straight back to where I come from. I remember when Kurt shot himself in the head. I was glued to my MTV for three days, crying, like I had lost a personal friend. There I was, a disciple of the School of Hard Knocks, watching the head master blow his brains out on cable television. So it's true then—if you're good enough to be heard, you will stop wanting to scream. . . . And if you stop wanting to scream, no one will want to listen anymore.

But it wasn't that long ago—not so far away. Every day I feel the blood pump through me, the life jump out onto the paper. I have carried the lessons I picked up along the way with me, as one does, here to right now. I fled the desert to grow in my northwest home, and brought that wisdom with me. For example, I know I would duck if a skillet was coming at me. I still don't trust hippies. A cactus holds more inside than most would venture to see. And I still remember to tell the world that I am not done screaming. That I am alive . . . that revolutions are *st///*rising up inside of me.



Dana Dryg
Wine grapes
Digital illustration, 8" x 9.5"

Taboos and Cultural Differences

Sandra Vuolo

Toward the end of Deaugni Beugre Francois's lecture on the various ethnic masks with explanation of the forms, make-up (costume, wearer and associate), and functions, he was asked if the belief of a particular taboo that he had mentioned still was believed currently. The taboo referred to certain masks during distinct rituals that should not be seen or touched by women.

His explanation, which he attempted to clarify as thoroughly as he could, was that he and others of Africa who commingle among Westerners somewhat frequently, are aware that beliefs such as this taboo are viewed as superstitious nonsense by us. How deeply his experience of Western civilization affects his personal view of his own culture, he didn't express. Yet he did say that when he is in his own community, he knows that these beliefs are part of his upbringing and intertwined with everyday interactions. If one of these taboos are broken with the community, the ramifications to the abusers happen in such ways that rationally cannot be explained. Sometimes even death is the result.

Although sacred masks with their taboos seem exotically different from religious and cultural practices in the United States, a human commonality of supernaturally infused objects is not unheard of. My husband grew up in the Catholic church, and though not a practicing Catholic, his mother was and is. She sends us magnets for our refrigerator of Mary, Mother of Jesus, magnets that are blessed by her priest. My husband doesn't throw them away, "Just in case," he says.

His reluctance to disregard the objects—out of fear of some spiritual or physical consequences or sheer bad luck—as well as his religious and familial beliefs seem not that much different than what Francois was trying to explain. This behavior of my husband, to my view, is superstitious and in this regard it feels as if we are from entirely different cultures.

The various combinations of nuclear family interactions, infused with religious indoctrinations, are isolated cultures on a certain level. When relating to the outside world, such as the work

environment or school, different belief systems butt up against each other. For example, I was raised in the Christian Science religion, mainly known for relying on God for physical healing. This belief system must seem to not only my husband but also most of the rational world with its advances in and dependence on modern medicine as from another planet. A popular American comedian, who was raised by a grandmother that was a Christian Scientist, described her upbringing visually: "She stood at the door with a declaration of God's power of healing from her mouth but a bottle of Pepto Bismo and a spoon in her hands." Although this was described affectionately and with humor, it depicts the effects of contradictory belief systems that can take place when one is indoctrinated in one view yet lives in a culture that overwhelmingly accepts an opposite view.

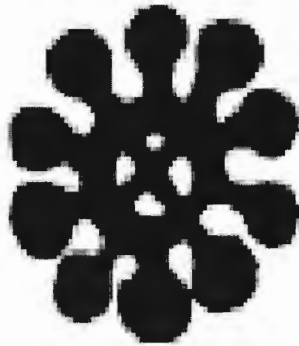
In regard to my upbringing, I too have experienced that which is assuredly explained within the context of my faith, but that same explanation would not be satisfactory to others. And though my husband won't speak of it, probably he has had similar experiences. The old adage "until you've walked in another's shoes" seems to be a wise council in dealing with different cultures, their beliefs and behaviors. Self-righteousness and imposing will are contradictory to an open mind. Communication, combined with an eagerness to learn from others' differences and allowance for those differences might be personal goals worth adopting. As Francois implied, he's seen some things not so easily explained to an "outsider."



Antonio Gonzalez
Zoo poster series
Digital illustration, 7" x 4.5"

The King's Eye: An African Folktale

Trish Rasavage



The King's Eyes: It is believed that nothing can be hidden from a king because the king has many informants (eyes). The symbol teaches the need for wariness and vigilance, and as a warning to desist from dubious activities.

and drink from a nearby pool that makes me wise. Then I can spin my intricate web. But going into the forest is dangerous. Only the strongest survive."

"I am very strong," said the prince.

"Not strong enough," said the spider. "But if you did drink from the pool, you would have wisdom beyond your years and that would make the king very proud."

"Well, I am going," said the prince. "Tell me where it is."

The spider described the location of the pool and the prince went toward the forest. On his way, he passed an elder he hadn't seen before. The elder followed him, sensing trouble. The prince entered the forest and immediately heard a strange voice.

"You will never find your way out."

Long ago, there was a young prince who longed for adventure. The prince at times had a restless spirit. One day he decided to walk at the edge of the dangerous forest. He knew he was fine as long as he didn't enter and disturb the spirits.

After walking by many trees, he came upon a spider web that was intricately woven.

Stopping to look at it, he heard a voice.

"Do you like my web?"

"Yes," replied the prince. "How do you weave it so fine?"

"It is very simple," said the spider. "I go into the forest

"Who's there?" called the prince.

A tree danced in the wind.

"You'll never find your way out," the voice repeated.

Shaking and standing but at the edge of the forest, the prince could not move. Just then the village elder pulled him from the forest.

"What are you doing? It is not safe in the forest. Haven't you been told not to enter it, that there are many bad spirits about?"

"Yes, I have," said the prince. "But the spider said that if I drink the water from a nearby pool, I will become very wise and make my father proud."

"You should be wise enough already to know not to listen to that trickster," said the elder. "Knowledge comes from growing, learning, and listening to one's elders. That is what will make your father proud."

"How will I know what to listen to?" asked the prince.

"I will make you a symbol that you may wear around your neck. It will be of your father's eye. The center will have in the middle an X to remind you not to listen to dangerous ideas like those of the spider. You will be reminded to be wary of such talk and not let your guard down when you hear it. Having his eye close by will also remind you of how your father, the king, wants you to behave."

The boy prince kept the symbol close and having learned his lesson, gained the knowledge he sought.

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