

Writing Anthology



Gretna Writing Project Institute
Fall 2016

In the Gretna Public School district the practice and teaching of writing is held in high regard. Gretna teachers in all grade levels and across the curriculum have long worked together to discover the best practices in writing instruction and assessment through research, experimentation, and collaboration. The fall of 2016 brought an opportunity for Gretna's secondary teachers to devote three hours per week to the pursuit of these tasks as participants in the Gretna Writing Project Institute.

Gretna has offered an annual embedded writing institute to its k-12 teachers for several years now, but the 2016 class opened the doors to new territory when three science teachers joined the six English teachers participating in the institute. Together, these nine educators spent invaluable hours discussing the field of teaching and the craft of writing.

Three small writing groups, made up of three teachers each, were a welcome respite in the hectic shuffle of teaching every week. Personal writing projects that were developed during the institute include poetry collections, a playscript, several chapters of a novel, professional research and writing, and even ancestry work. Samples of this dynamic work are contained in these anthology pages.

All in all, the 2016 Gretna Writing Project Institute was time well spent. Hopefully we will see even more departments working to incorporate writing into their lives and courses as they are increasingly represented in this powerful program.

We hope you enjoy these excerpts from our valuable time together.

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Directory of Writers

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Novel Excerpt:

“A Beautiful Sleep”

“It wasn’t so bad, really.” Attempting a laugh, she jokes, “I guess we should have tried those trees after all, huh?”

She stretches out on the grass alongside the keep wall, catching her breath and allowing the sun to warm and dry her still-dripping sneakers. The prince gingerly sits beside her, casting a wary eye at the now calm moat.

“I must confess Milady Saoirse, I find myself out of my depths once more in this fearsome situation. Never before have I encountered such horrors as we are forced to endure once and again.” He hesitates, then seems to gather his courage and continues, “As I small child, I heard many a tale of the slumbering princess and the men full of valor who sought to wake her. I believed, in the deep expanse of my soul, that I would surely be the one, fearless victor to reach her side and awaken her from the pallor of repose that has enshrouded her for many a century.”

Edmund pauses again, swallowing back his words. She holds her breath as she waits for him to continue, sneaking a quick look at his face. His expression is one of defeat. Finally, she can’t bear the silence any longer.

“Edmund, look how far we’ve come! We’re so close now. Look, I don’t know why I’m here. I’d never even heard of this sleeping girl until I met you. But I know we can’t give up. I thought, for years maybe, that those roses would never let up. But I kept going, night after night after night. Now that we’ve gotten this close to the end, I feel like, together, we can face what’s next.”

The prince seems heartened by her words; he gives her a small smile. “As you say, Milady. We must bolster our spirits and continue ever onward.” He clambers back to his feet, looking at the sky as he does so. “It appears the clouds are gathering.”

She shivers from the sudden chill in the air as the billowing, violet-tinged clouds blot out the warmth of the sun. She, too, stands, looking up in time to see a jagged, lavender bolt spark from the clouds.

“Let’s try to get closer to the wall; maybe it can shelter us a bit. Remember that last lightning storm?”

They huddle close to the wall and slowly make their way past the tangle of brambles and rose stems that grow closely over the side. Eventually, they come to the gatehouse with its closed drawbridge heavily entwined by more thorny rose stems, cobwebs filling in any gaps.

She sighs deeply and the prince looks back at her with a questioning brow. “Well, we made it over that moat; but I’d forgotten the drawbridge is blocked too. Can we get through? I really don’t like the look of those clouds.”

The sky above continues to darken; the lavender streaks flashing down at regular intervals.

Prince Edmund draws his sword, still shiny and unmarked despite its many adventures, and thrashes at some of the stems. “Milady, I do believe we should have the fortune of locating a smaller portal through which to pass. The gatehouses of which I am familiar have such a passage to allow for ease of entrance.” His sword strikes through the branches and clangs against what sounds like iron. “Aha! I have found it!”

The prince swipes triumphantly at the remaining stems and cobwebs to reveal a smaller door. Just as he makes one last sweep with his arm, the lightning flashes, blinding them with a purple haze, and the wind tears through the briars, rattling the branches and pulling at the cobwebs. She feels the leaves tangle in her hair and thorny stems whip and cut at her face.

“Quickly, Milady Saoirse!” He grabs her hand and, knocking at the handle with the hilt of his sword, he opens the door and pulls them through. The thickset stones of the castle wall muffle the gale, offering them a respite from the storm.

“Edmund, we’re doing it! We’re almost there!”

Moving swiftly now, they jog along the passageway and enter the courtyard of the castle. Although the clouds still gather above them, rumbling with thunder and flashing lavender bolts of lightning, no rain falls from them and the fierce wind is blocked by the thick walls. Only a few briars peek over the edges of the walls that surround the castle and its keep. The rest of the courtyard is clear of any obstacles. At least she believes so, until she looks more closely, her vision clouded by the overhanging gloom.

“What... is that?” Unable to express what she thinks she’s seeing, she turns to Prince Edmund. “First bodies in the moat, and now this?”

“I fear, Milady, that your eyes do not deceive you. It is as you see before you.” In a sudden and uncharacteristic fit, Edmund appears to tremble. “Curse this deplorable castle! What wretched and abominable being could impose such bedlam on so many?”

What lays before them is, at first glance, simply the armed guards ensconced in their rusty suits, asleep perhaps. But as they draw nearer, they discover that the guards can no longer be considered guards. As their armor has oxidized in the weather, so too have the men inside

decayed over the years, centuries even, they stood watch upon the castle. What lies inside their suits of mail are nothing but skeletons. She shivers violently as they move past.

“What do you think we’ll find inside the castle?” *If we even make it that far.* “Do you think that sleeping girl has ended up like this?”

“I fear to even consider the end, Milady. We must rally forward with the hope that whatever enchantment binds this land has also protected the princess from the decay we see before us.”

They slowly pass by the skeletal guards, picking their way across the yard that’s littered with fallen helmets and shields, bones intermingled with swords. Quiet creaks and clanks fill the air.

“Edmund! Did you see that!” She points to where, she’s certain, one of the guards almost imperceptibly appears to have turned its head. “They’re moving, I know it! Just like those horrible corpses in the moat.”

“Milady Saoirse, be at peace. It is surely just the wind.” His attempt to reassure her does not, as she senses the skepticism in his voice.

You have to get ahold of yourself! You’ve made it through worse than this, so get it together! Straightening up, she begins to step closer to the prince. Just as she does, however, she feels something grasp at her shoulder. Swallowing hard, she looks behind her. There, its bony hand clenched tightly on her shoulder, stands the broken skeleton of a guard. One sleeve of its armored suit is missing, and its helmet dangles at an angle across the empty eye sockets. Before she can speak, even think, she sees more movement beyond the guard. Gathering in the yard is a bony army marching side by side in a direct advance. Their scarred and timeworn suits of armor

light up with purple streaks underneath another flash of lightning, and a high-pitched whistle fills her ears.

She awoke with a jerk, feeling the bony grasp still on her shoulder. Her nerves in a frenzy, she brushed sharply at her sleeve, certain she would touch the skeletal fingers clenched tightly there. Peering around the edges of the seats, worried now that someone might be watching, waiting for her, she heard another sharp blare of the train whistle. The conductor walked past her, looking askance at her sweaty brow. “End of the line, miss.”

Blaine Christen

English Faculty

Ancestral Memoir

Leo Christen

Leo Christen probably jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge on the 11th day of March in 1956. His car was abandoned in a parking lot near the bridge with an apparent suicide left on the seat. The note, addressed to his wife, said: "I'm sorry, Dear. I cannot go on any longer. I love all of you. Take care of the babies. Love. Chris."

No body was ever recovered.

Leo Christen was born on June 23, 1926 in Custer County, Nebraska. The second of five children born to Theodore and Julia Christen, Leo grew up in a seemingly normal life during the Great Depression and World War II.

After graduating from high school, Leo eventually found his way out west to California. On November 6, 1949, he married Grace Chiarenza and they started a family in San Francisco. Their first daughter, Darlene, was born on November 26, 1954, and two years later, Karen was born on February 21, 1956. Leo worked as a salesman for a San Francisco area bakery.

Eighteen days after the birth of his second daughter, Leo Christen disappeared. News articles from the day state that his wife last saw him on Monday, March 11th when he went to work. Police officers found his car on Wednesday, the 13th, in a parking lot near the Golden Gate Bridge. A missing persons report was filed shortly thereafter.

Leo Christen was a gambler and most of the Christen family believes it was his ultimate downfall. His wife Grace admitted that just before his disappearance he had lost at least two paychecks betting on horse racing.

Carl Christen, Leo's youngest brother, spent part of a Summer with Leo and his family and even traveled with him on his bakery sales route. Carl said that Leo would make random stops to use the phone or to "talk with a guy." Sometimes money would exchange hands.

It seems very likely that gambling was at the root of Leo Christen's problems and that jumping from the second most popular site in the world for suicides would be a logical conclusion.

However, much like an old episode of Unsolved Mysteries, the story doesn't end there.

A few days after Leo's disappearance, the family was notified that a man matching his description was picked up for vagrancy in Reno, Nevada. Leo's two brothers, Leonard and Carl Christen, who had been in San Francisco to help search for him, drove immediately from San Francisco to Reno to identify the man. Upon arriving at the police department, the two brothers learned that the man had been released just minutes before they arrived. Police said they had held him as long as they could.

The trail went cold in Reno and San Francisco and Carl and Leonard returned to their families in Nebraska.

Police in San Francisco had closed the case as a probable suicide, but Grace wasn't willing to give up. Grace returned to Reno one more time about a month after Leo's disappearance. She canvassed the city of Reno showing pictures of Leo in casinos, bars, pawn shops and cafes. Two leads produced a glimmer of hope. In a casino, a cashier claimed to recognize Leo's face. The cashier said he had tried to cash a check with her in the casino, but didn't have any identification. She turned him away.

A construction company in Reno actually had a Leo Christen who worked for them briefly, but had quit a few days prior and didn't leave a forwarding address. Grace searched as long as she could, but had two babies to return to in San Francisco.

No further evidence ever surfaced that Leo Christen was still alive. Theories, rumors, and legends have persisted over the years. Some family members believe that Leo jumped from that bridge and died. Others believe that he faked his death and went into hiding. Some suggest that a man with a gambling problem could never truly disappear on his own, that eventually his debtors caught up with him. Some believed that his wife's family, the Chiarenzas, natives of Sicily, may have made Leo an offer he couldn't refuse.

His parents, and later, his brothers would occasionally circulate his personal information on the off chance that something (he) might turn up. In the past sixty years, nothing ever has.

Grace Chiarenza Christen died in 2011 at the age of 80 years. To the end, she never completely gave up on her husband. She never remarried, but invested her life in her two beautiful daughters, Darlene and Karen. Grace's funeral services were held at St. Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco. It was a small service attended by family and friends. However, toward the back of the church sat a lone man unknown to anyone. After the services, the two sisters, Karen and Darlene, made their way toward him, but he abruptly left the church before they could speak to him.

Probably just a coincidence. Probably just someone who wandered in off the street. Probably not the closure Leo's daughters were looking for. Probably best to believe that Leo Christen jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge on March 11, 1956.

Matt Johnson

Science Faculty

Personal & Professional Writing

In the Intro to Engineering Course, I get a room full of students who have an interest in Engineering. I want to succinctly give them my thoughts on what an Engineer is.

What is Engineering?

In an 1828 charter of the British Institution of Civil Engineers, engineering was defined as the “art of directing the great sources of power for the use and convenience of man.” Nearly two hundred years later, this definition is still germane.

Engineers design, build, and maintain the structure of civilization. Every field of engineering produces tools harnessing nature for the benefit of people: Computer engineers combine ‘ones and zeros’ to allow people to play Pokémon Go; mechanical engineers employed by Con-Agra allow the efficient production and distribution of food; civil engineers design reliable lighting systems for stadiums; geological engineers work with communities to provide cost-effective solutions to groundwater contamination.

All of an engineer’s work is rooted in nature. Unforgiving laws of nature cannot be dismissed: “Corrosion never sleeps,” or more eloquently:

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose.
They do not teach that His Pity allows them to leave their job when they damn-well choose. - Sons the Martha (Kipling 1907)

Within nature’s boundaries, engineers strive for the epithets efficient, cost-effective, reliable. ‘Waste’ is the most despised concept for an engineer. Every portion of a process is scrutinized, looking for ‘waste.’ A by-product in a process is seen as an opportunity. Waste is evil, but finding a use for the by-product transforms the evil waste into a valuable commodity. In this way an engineer is better than an environmentalist. The environmentalist finds a problem and yells, “This is wrong!” The engineer finds a problem and resolves it.

Engineers are adults within society. They tell clients, government, fellow citizens, “No, and this is why...” or “Yes, and this is how....” They do not always tell people what they want to hear; they tell people what they need to hear. Engineers are also children within society. There is a youthful exuberance in collaborative and individual work—especially if the problem is something new. There is a sense of play from employing their creative muse. There is also a deep satisfaction in doing something that makes a difference.

To become an engineer, they will travail through many challenging courses: calculus, differential equations, chemistry, physics, statics, dynamics, fluids, solids, materials, thermodynamics. (And then use the material very rarely.) These courses are designed to give the engineer a foundation in the laws of nature, and the tools to work within nature. Those that finish the gauntlet spend endless hours making sense of the material; their reward is an occupation that demands even more hours. Those that enjoy the profession don’t pursue

money, nor power, nor fame, they pursue the satisfaction of a hard job, done well. They become the people who design, build, and maintain civilization.

Raise ye the stone or cleave the wood to make a path more fair or flat;
Lo, it is black already with blood some Son of Martha spilled for that!
Not as a ladder from earth to Heaven, not as a witness to any creed,
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their common need.
Sons the Martha (Kipling 1907)

The Sons of Martha

THE Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part;
But the Sons of Martha favour their Mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart.
And because she lost her temper once, and because she was rude to the Lord her Guest,
Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without end, reprieve, or rest.

It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and cushion the shock.
It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care that the switches lock.
It is their care that the wheels run truly; it is their care to embark and entrain,
Tally, transport, and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by land and main.

They say to mountains, "Be ye removed" They say to the lesser floods "Be dry."
Under their rods are the rocks reprov'd - they are not afraid of that which is high.
Then do the hill tops shake to the summit - then is the bed of the deep laid bare,
That the Sons of Mary may overcome it, pleasantly sleeping and unaware.

They finger death at their gloves' end where they piece and repiece the living wires.
He rears against the gates they tend: they feed him hungry behind their fires.
Early at dawn, ere men see clear, they stumble into his terrible stall,
And hale him forth like a haltered steer, and goad and turn him till evenfall.

To these from birth is Belief forbidden; from these till death is Relief afar.
They are concerned with matters hidden - under the earthline their altars are
The secret fountains to follow up, waters withdrawn to restore to the mouth,
And gather the floods as in a cup, and pour them again at a city's drouth.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose.
They do not teach that His Pity allows them to leave their job when they damn-well choose.
As in the thronged and the lighted ways, so in the dark and the desert they stand,
Wary and watchful all their days that their brethren's days may be long in the land.

Raise ye the stone or cleave the wood to make a path more fair or flat;
Lo, it is black already with blood some Son of Martha spilled for that!

Not as a ladder from earth to Heaven, not as a witness to any creed,
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their common need.

And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessed - they know the angels are on their side.
They know in them is the Grace confessed, and for them are the Mercies multiplied.
They sit at the Feet - they hear the Word - they see how truly the Promise runs.
They have cast their burden upon the Lord, and - the Lord He lays it on Martha's Sons!

This piece is a personal rant about STEM. It bothers me that it is a catchphrase used by people/organizations to get support for their 'pet projects,' but has little to do with helping students. It bothers me that the naysayers deriding the American education system never get called to defend the data they use.

I am sick of STEM

STEM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It has commonly been used in education as a tool to leverage resources promoting courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The mantra for STEM education: American students are falling behind the rest of the world and we will not be able to compete globally. This is a crisis. We must do something to get more students interested in careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

We are told that we are lagging behind the rest of the world in mathematics and science. To this I respond: When has America ever led in mathematics and science? (The answer is *never*.)

One method of comparing national performance in mathematics and science is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). This assessment started in 1995 and is given every four years to students in participating countries. My observation has been that when the results of TIMSS are released, there is a flood of letters-to-the-editor and opinion pieces about how poorly the United States is doing in mathematics and science. There is never any good news out of these reports.

I have issues with the TIMSS. First, the way the data is presented is not conducive to looking at trends. The title of the assessment is *Trends* in International Mathematics and Science Studies; but only by tedious data mining can I find the trends. Second, the trend for the United States has been positive. The 'mined' results are shown below.

Year	U.S. Score	Highest Score	U.S. Rank
1995	500	643	27 th
1999	502	604	19 th
2003	504	605	15 th
2007	529	607	11 th
2011	541	606	11 th

The doom-and-gloom essayists deriding American education don't show the data from the TIMSS as a trend. Why would these essayists misrepresent the data? Money and power. If you are

screaming about a problem, philanthropists and governments will fund your work and give your group authority to ‘fix the problem.’

Further, I would like to know why our ‘class ranking’ in the world matters. Measuring success by comparison always leaves people dissatisfied. I would rather ask, do our students have the skills to do what they want to do in life? Our energies would be better spent on focusing on the actual needs of our students, instead of a manufactured mathematics and science crisis.

Returning to STEM, I think teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics is important *to those students who want to learn about them*. Mandating, pressuring, or tricking students into areas that don’t interest them is wrong. The STEM mantra has little to do with helping our students be successful in life; it has a lot to do with channeling money and power to those screaming loudest about a STEM crisis.

Occasionally life hits us with days that are ‘deaths of a thousand cuts’—nothing terrible happens, but it seems that a lot of little annoying things pile up. With this piece I wanted to investigate how I handle ‘yucky times.’

History as Therapy

“Four wounded in shooting outside San Francisco school,” “Israeli forces kill Palestinian assailant,” “ISIS to wield chemical weapons in Mosul fight.” The headlines consistently scream of tragedies. I have allergies. I am failing my students. The car has a fluid leak. I have lost a crown and now need to spend time and money for dental work. Am I a being a good father? Husband? Teacher? Employee? Sometimes my life seems a house-of-cards built on a shaking foundation.

It is easy to sink into the “blue devils” or “let the hypos get such an upper hand.” Or worst of all see the darkest portions of Hamlet’s soliloquy: “to be, or not to be.” Is depression a real disease? Is it a genetic condition passed on? (My mother thought my father had suffered from depression—it is a subject ‘talked around’ in family discussions.) Or is it a frame of mind that we all experience? I don’t know; all I know is how I sometimes feel.

Dealing with melancholy, my source of comfort is hidden in the above paragraph. Two-hundred years ago, the “blue devils” was a cliché for despondency or melancholia. People would have a “fit of the blue devils” to explain anti-social actions or feelings of moroseness. Herman Melville’s Ismael in *Moby Dick* would go to sea when the “hypos get such an upper hand.” The “hypos” was slang for hypochondria, an illness that could not be explained or morbid low spirits. Hamlet’s soliloquy was a person self-examining suicide.

The history of people being caught up in fits of blue devils give me comfort. It is not schadenfreude, but comfort in feeling that I am not alone in despondency—there is nothing ‘wrong with me,’ my feelings are normal. I get more comfort from these persons than from impersonal statistics: “1 in 6 Americans suffers from depression.”

I also find I can quickly lose the overwhelming despondency by looking at history. I find role models whose situations put my tempests safely in a teacup. We have all survived the Great Recession. When the news would get me down, I would read about the Great Depression, the Panics of 1907 (and 1893 and 1873 and 1857 and 1819 and...). The bad news tsunami was placed in perspective. People in the past had survived much greater devastation—I won’t let this bother me. When I hear the “country has never been so divided” or about violence in cities, I recall the 1863 New York City draft riots or the Nike Riots (532). I am concerned about the current situations, but I won’t allow events to control my emotions.

If I start wallowing in self-pity, it is not hard to find examples of real people in real situations that make any personal tragedies pale to insignificance. My current reading has been focused on Napoleonic Europe. I have found several authors whose narrative is very personal. I find myself understanding and empathizing with people two-hundred years in the past and I am humbled by their sacrifice, sense of duty, and perseverance. In addition to the role models, I find myself lost in the story. (Is this my version of escapism? I hope not. I don’t think I’m escaping from reality; I’d rather picture myself using my time to keep the real-time world in perspective.) The “blue devils” still occasionally grip me, but history lets me keep them in perspective. History gives my house-of-cards a stable foundation.

As explained in the opening paragraph, this is a stream of thought that I followed.

Government and Education

In a recent staff meeting, our principal implied that honoring group's request would violate the separation of church and state. This has led to a stream of thought: What is the separation of church and state? Are schools part of the 'state'? What is the purpose of schools? Why did government begin to sponsor education?

Looking at the current mission of the federal Department of Education (ED), I find its "mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." The current ED was formed in 1980 in from the Department of Housing, Education and Welfare (HEW). HEW was formed in 1953. The current mission of the Department of Education doesn't do much for me. It has lots of nice words and sounds like it's from a Scott Adams *Dilbert* cartoon—if they randomly threw the word "quality" into the mission statement, I would be convinced that Scott Adams wrote it as a joke.

When did the federal government first take an interest in education? From an internet search, I find the Department of Interior had a bureau of education in 1868. Its mission or purpose was

[t]hat there shall be established...a department of education for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems and methods of teaching, as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country.

This seems more to my liking than the current mission statement. The federal government shall collect data and make it available to the States and Territories. It is implied that the States and Territories would use any best-practices from others to make their schools more efficient.

Why is the federal government even worrying about education? The Constitution does not mention education or schools. I find the first federal document mentioning schools was the Northwest Ordinance (1787). Article 3 is interesting in defining the purpose of schools.

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

I like this: Encourage education for "happiness of mankind."

At the outset of our nation, schools were to be "forever encouraged" to promote for "good government and happiness of mankind." One hundred-years later, the federal government

was tasked with collecting data to promote the “establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems.” Today, the federal government enforces levied requirements on schools for “preparation for global competitiveness.”

I keep coming back to “happiness of mankind.” Government promoting schools and education as “being necessary to...the happiness of mankind.” I teach because I want my students to have the skills necessary to be happy. I think they got it right in 1787.

Tammy Johnson

Science Faculty

Essay & Poetry Writing

My thoughts early Sunday morning while feeling a bit overwhelmed taking care of grandma! My classmate, Liz, had just written a funny piece about holiday stress and her humor was just what I needed!
Tammy

After listening to Liz's pre-holiday piece this past week and noticing that our family stress-o-meter was on its yearly rise, I thought to myself, I know just what to do – I'll write about it and include a lot of exclamation points when I'm being very emphatic! And run-on sentences are sure to help along the way, too. Feeling all stressed myself, I thought, "It's nice to know I'm not the only one!" There are a couple of subtle differences between our two situations, however, that I'd like to point out.

I don't happen to get that "odd pain in my back." Instead, I have a tendency to get a banger of a headache that radiates from my tight shoulders and back of my neck up and around to the front of my forehead and eyeballs. The kind where I want to place my thumb and pointer finger onto my closed eyeballs and give them a push. Mostly because I'm certain that if I don't, they're liable to pop out. The kind of headache that screams – "What do you mean we only get four days off for Thanksgiving! That's nowhere near enough time to get all of the stuff done that I need to get done!!!" Not so different, Liz and I, just the body parts that are screaming!

The second difference was that for the first time in many, many, many, years the people we should visit now are only a short distance away. Hallelujah! For the first time since 1997...

We aren't flying back from Maui, where the success of the flight was looked at as some competition measured against an imaginary bar we had set for ourselves. We're weird like that! If we could do it from the Maui airport to Omaha's Eppley in 12 hours or less, and still had all three of OUR kids in tow AND our luggage was intact it was a great flight!! We'd smile jubilantly down in baggage claim like we had just crossed some finish line, or strutted around like smug game show contestants smacking the buzzer, yelling "TIME" then raising our fists in the air, screaming "WINNER"!

Also, we aren't driving 8+ hours from Champaign, IL to Omaha, or God forbid, Fremont which added an additional hour of drive time with three reeeeeeeally tired and cranky teenagers and two equally stressed adults. We all knew that each time we made this trip we'd be pushing for that record setting 7 hours and 15 minutes, mark. It dangled out there. That one "perfect storm of a trip" where everything coalesced and the travel gods smiled kindly on the Johnson mobile. It hung over us, no taunted us, because we knew that "on a good day" from our doorstep to my sister's in Omaha when the traffic and state patrol were cooperative it was possible. But throw in that occasional ice storm from the strip between the Quad cities and Omaha and the drive could

slow to crawl. Inevitably as we tallied each car that had skidded off into the median or jack-knifed semi on the shoulder or up the embankment, someone would always bring up that one harrowing Thanksgiving trip home. Yes, THAT one! That one trip where traffic was bumper to bumper and everyone was going 80 – 85 mph. The one where nobody gave up their position in the left lane because if you did you'd never be able to get into it again. The one where we all prayed that nobody flinched because we knew if somebody did, many of us were not going to make it home for Thanksgiving.

And we aren't cruising the 5 ½ hours from Wentzville, MO to Omaha. The shortest trip of the three, by far, but still filled with annoyances along the way. Yes, Missouri has some of the cheapest gas in the country, but not fixing roads in exchange for low gas tax is not always a good idea. The pot-hole laden I70 could do a number on even the most rugged vehicle traversing it. And does I70's exceedingly narrow lanes and teeny-tiny median even qualify it as an interstate? Really? We would have gladly paid more in gas tax if a little more concrete would have just been poured somewhere along the way. Too many semis on the all too narrow lanes makes for a dangerous situation. And one we're glad to be done with.

So with our drive time cut to 45 minutes, max, we're pretty darn happy! Sorry Liz!

Since hubby started working for a family owned operation, we have a lot to be thankful for, but that also means the holiday time off is going to look a little different. Not the regular corporate "four days off for Thanksgiving with lots of vacation time in case you want to take extra days as well" holiday. More like, you have Thursday off but we'll see you on Friday bright and early holiday. So hubby is going to work half his Friday hours on Thursday morning and half on Friday morning. WHAT!?! Work on Thanksgiving Day? It's AG for crying out loud. There aren't crops in the fields right now, for Pete's sake. There goes the stress-o-meter up a few notches!

The cooking and baking have also crept front and center in my brain. I love to cook holiday meals and bake for the holidays, but agree with Liz that it can be a bit stressful considering the time for preparing and eating in relationship to the clean-up time! We went grocery shopping already and have most of the necessities for a well-trimmed Thanksgiving meal, but there are still a few last minute items that need to be picked up. Since my mother-in-law is now here I want to make sure she has a pleasant holiday. Not her expectation, mine! But still, I know she hasn't been with family for a holiday for a long, long time so I think this is the least I can do. And we don't know how much longer she'll be alive, so I say bring on the stress! I don't think it will be anything that pumpkin pie and cool whip can't take care of!!

Wifi how I hate you, let me count the ways.....

I hate how you let me down today, how I expected – no needed – you to be working and you weren't

You let me down like a stretched out bra during an intense running workout

that starts out semi-supportive but then droops more and more with each added drop of sweat

You let me down like that brand new string of Christmas lights

that only lights up half the bulbs when first plugged in

You let me down like the underground sprinkler head

that froze in the winter but you don't find out until it's turned on in the spring gushing gallons of water straight into the storm sewer

You let me down like my wipers on a rainy morning

that only moved two inches before coming to a halt against the very wet windshield

But then I got the wiring fixed that ran the wipers

And the sprinkler head so it would spray nicely

And returned the string of lights that only lit up half the strand

And bought a new sports bra

So surely the wifi will work and all will be well with the universe

And I sat down

And touched the keyboard

And then.....nothing.....

Wifi how I hate you, let me count the ways.....

I wrote this series of haikus as a way to work through my mother-in-law moving in with us after a debilitating stroke.

Mother-in-law ill
Beyond the allotted time
She'll finish with us

Called today – had time
The ring sounded so distant
No voice answered me

WAIT – I'm not ready
October wasn't the plan
I still need more time!

She wants to go home
But knows she can't return there
Can't care for herself

She'll come home to us
Open arms in Nebraska
Maui – our shared past

We'll talk of beaches
The sun, blue ocean, laughter
Aloha spirit

The initial lab analysis of 2016 turned in by my freshman Physical Science students provided fodder for an early poem.

The Expirement

It was a gradual decent
The temperature started coming to a slow.

The water was cooling because of the cold from the ice
The ice is begging to melt!

The water in the test tube lost heat rapidly at the begging,
then gradiduly dropped.

The temperature slows down and becomes less cold
As the ice releases the cold energy the water consumes it and makes the water cold.

Near the end of the expirement the ice was neatly melted...
It has nothing cold to keep it cool!

The temperature started "coming to a slow".

Weight Watcher's revolt
Points, Points plus, now something new
Why the constant change?

The Law of Conservation of Mass*

I love food and it loves me
So much so that it chooses to stick around

It loves to hang around my stomach
where it's warm and toasty all day

It loves to hang around my thighs
friction increasing with each added pound
but doesn't work to burn off anything

It loves to hang around my boobs
swaying so much more than last year
and certainly more than four years ago

Those who lose weight easily don't realize
it has to go somewhere
and so it comes to me

Damn laws of nature!

*Matter can neither be created nor destroyed just changed from one form to another.

Jennifer Long

English Faculty

Poetry

The Circle S Boise Western Suit Coat

For \$139.99 you can get the whole suit at Shepler's in chestnut, heather, or charcoal, but the lean pleated pants are usually abandoned for Wrangler jeans instead. The coat, though, is a staple in closets across the county, popular for its suede-look front panels and polyester arms long enough to reach from shoulder to wrist, from planting to harvest, from weddings to Easter services and funerals, too, of course, when it is matched with wide brimmed hats and boots that were polished that morning but made dusty again in the gravel shuffle from truck to church.

Later, after *On Eagle's Wings* and *Because He Lives*, after the dignified dabbing of eyes and the laying of roses, those coats will stand helpless behind their women puffed up like stoic ghosts, holding pans of cookies and lattice topped pies, hiding the grief they will hold inside. The men won't know what to say but they know what to do: help with the harvest that has been left behind, shovel the widow's snow in winter, and keep those suit coats hung clean and straight; so durable, so dependable they can wear them right into their graves.

Braids

I pull the comb through her hair
strand by auburn strand
grateful to feel her steady breathing
as she leans against my legs
neither of us a beginning or end
but one warm wordless body
as in those thousand moments
we passed skin to skin, her knees
pulled up into my emptied breasts
her sweet milky breath on my neck
the only thing that mattered in the world

Cross-stitching

how she must have ached
hunched over the evenweave linen
alone and counting stitches
five children asleep
her husband gone again

bread rises on the table
the cat pulls at a tumble of floss
near dawn he stumbles home
her fingers bleed
the pattern is set

Most Days

I stop to answer the door, call for the girls, grab at the dog before he gets out, fail, chase the dog down the front steps, fall, get back up, run down the block, wave away a honking car,

grab the dog, carry him inside, hear the baby cry, change the baby, nurse the baby, answer the phone, promise to pay just as soon as we can, call my husband, leave a message, grab

my notebook, write a grocery list in it, check the thawing beef in the fridge, throw out the unused produce, vow to stop wasting produce, worry about the kids' diets, worry about my weight, worry

about my husband's blood sugar, worry about losing him to diabetes, worry about losing him to anything, pray to God to let me die first, doubt the existence of God, contemplate the cosmos,

choke back a fear of being lost in the vastness of space, hear the baby again, change him, sit down to read him a book, try to remember who I meant to be, but I can't.

In the Fourteenth Year

The night before my hysterectomy
we laid together in the dark hush
of our bedroom, whispering dreams
for the children we love so fiercely
and wondering about the ones we
would not know.

Hours later you held my hand
and walked beside my rolling bed,
both of us keening like ghosts;
the red, rubbery wound of my
absent womb wailing, too.

Near dawn I tried to stand
but failed. When I could walk,
my first steps were to you.

As the passing promise of my body
pooled like a sea at our feet,
together we grew old, at once.

Kiley Luchsinger

English Faculty

Drama Excerpt

Scene 7: An Inquiry with the Psychiatrist

Dr. Dean and Henry have just finished their next session. Dr. Dean helps Henry up.

DR. DEAN: Henry, you've done a really great job today. Thank you for talking to me!
Tell Boo that it was good to meet him, too.

HENRY: Thank you, Shawna.

MARIE: Henry, baby, why don't you go sit and play with Boo on the chairs? I need to talk to Dr. Shawna for just a little bit, okay?

HENRY: Okay. Come on, Boo! *(Goes to the side. We can see him playing.)*

DR. DEAN: How's everything going? You look... worried. Is everything okay?

MARIE: I'm not so sure I want to do this anymore. We've been allowing Henry to bring Boo along wherever we go, but Boo, he... he seems to know things.

DR. DEAN: How so?

MARIE: *(Ignoring DR. DEAN)* I mean, I know I'm supposed to allow his creativity to run its course, and I'm all for supporting that. I don't want to stifle my child's creativity. But this is getting very difficult for us, Doctor.

DR. DEAN: Marie, Marie... Slow down! What is getting difficult for you? What has been happening?

MARIE: Doctor, I... I... I once had a son named Beau. He was about Henry's age when... well, there was an accident. At the park. He and Mark were... and then Mark..., well, Beau is no longer here.

DR. DEAN: Oh, Marie, I'm so sorry.

MARIE: But part of me thinks he *is* here! We've never taken Henry to the park. We've never even mentioned it! Yet all of a sudden he wants to go to the park, Harmon Park specifically, and says it's "Boo's" favorite thing to do with Mark. And he always plays cars with Henry. Beau loved playing cars. Absolutely loved it! I had never seen an interest in cars from Henry before "Boo" came along.

DR. DEAN: Okay, well...

MARIE: And not only that, last night, I just got this feeling that... that Beau was sitting with me. I had just kissed Henry goodnight. He had fallen asleep in my arms, and as I set him down, I just got the most eerie, yet peaceful, feeling. It was calming. This can't be real, right? I have to be going crazy, right?

DR. DEAN: Well, Marie, I...

MARIE: I mean, after Beau's... passing... I was in a pretty big depression. But I got myself right out of it because I promised I wouldn't let Henry down as a mother, no matter what. And I...

DR. DEAN: Marie! Tell me, what does Mark think about all of this?

MARIE: Mark? Mark. Who knows what he thinks. We don't talk much.

DR. DEAN: Why is that?

MARIE: I don't know. Ever since Beau... we just seem to struggle with communicating.

DR. DEAN: What happened with Beau, Marie?

MARIE: (*Struggling*) Mark. He bounced the ball too high. He knows how excited Beau gets when playing. He knows Beau doesn't think straight when he gets so excited. It's my fault. I should've made them get away from the street. Why were they so damn close to the street? I had just had Henry, and I wasn't thinking clearly. It's all my fault.

DR. DEAN: Marie, I'm sure it's no one's "fault." It sounds like Mark has been having a hard time with Beau's passing, as well. Is that right?

MARIE: Who knows?

DR. DEAN: Listen, Marie. I would really like to talk with you and Mark about Beau. Did you see anyone after his death?

MARIE: No.

DR. DEAN: Well, I believe it's very important that you two come back in here, so we can discuss a few things.

MARIE: Okay?

DR. DEAN: As for Henry, I'm not sure that he's seeing "Beau" or an imaginary friend. Here's what I do know: Many people believe imaginary friends to actually be something more spiritual. Children have been said to be more open to the spiritual world, so some people believe imaginary friends to be spirit guides that watch over and guide children, while others believe imaginary friends to be actual angels.

MARIE: Okay...

DR. DEAN: However, the most common spiritual belief about imaginary friends is that these friends are actually deceased relatives. Spirits. Sometimes they come back to spend time with children, and sometimes they have a message.

Now, I don't know if it is "Boo" or "Beau," but I do know this: You need to let this play out. Let this journey take its course. You may find that Boo is not here for Henry but is, instead, here for you and Mark.

MARIE: For me and Mark? This is all just too much to take in.

DR. DEAN: Allow yourself to be okay with this. In the end, this "Boo" might surprise you.

MARIE: Okay. Thank you, Doctor. Henry? ... Boo? Time to go, boys.

They Exit.

Scene 8: Saturday-- The Big Fight

MARK is sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper sipping on his coffee.

MARIE is sipping her coffee while gazing out the window. HENRY runs into the room.

HENRY: Mama! Daddy! Can we go today? Can we?

MARIE: Good morning, Henry. Calm down, calm down. What is it you want to do? Where do you want to go?

HENRY: The park, Mama! Harmon Park! Boo wants to go, and I want to go on the slide!

MARIE glances over at MARK. He doesn't look up, but he is frozen.

MARIE: Henry, Honey, I'm not sure we can make it there today.

HENRY: Mama, please! Boo really wants to go, and we never go to the park! Please, please, please!

MARIE: How about you go get your shoes on, and we can go play outside in the backyard?

HENRY: No! We want to go to the park! Please! Mama, please!

MARIE: Henry! Go change your clothes, and put on your shoes. We'll talk when you get back out here.

HENRY: *(His head down.)* Okay, Mama... *(He exits.)*

MARIE: Mark, what do you think? Henry has never been to the park, perhaps we can...

MARK: No.

MARIE: Mark...

MARK: Absolutely not.

MARIE: What is your problem?

MARK: You know what my problem is! Why are you so willing to go back there? I am not going back to where it happened.

MARIE: I don't *want* to go back there. But how does Henry know about Harmon? There's something going on, and we need to figure it out.

MARK: I don't want to figure it out. I don't want to think about any of this. I don't want "Boo" hanging around us anymore, and I don't want to go back to the place Beau was killed. Why would you even consider this!?

MARIE: Because something is happening here; don't you see?! I think Boo is Beau!

MARK: It's not possible!

MARIE: Then how do you explain...

MARK: I don't know, okay?! I don't know!

A beat. They both calm themselves down.

MARIE: Listen, Mark. I think we need to go back there. I don't want to go back there, but I think we need to. If not for Henry, for us.

MARK: Babe, I... I feel nauseous just thinking about it.

MARIE moves toward him. She places her hand on his body--their first real, tender touch in five years.

MARIE: You can do it. *We* can do it. If we don't, Henry is not going to leave this alone. There must be some reason he wants to go.

MARK think for a beat.

MARK: Fine. Let's do it.

Liz Rhodes

English Faculty

Essay & Poetry

1. MY PURPOSE: Practice stream of consciousness, then make it readable.



On Ireland

Way back when in the 1970s The Dating Game had a special Irish theme as St. Patrick's Day was nearing and while the first couple was sent to Dublin the other couple -- imagine their surprise -- was sent to O'Neill, Nebraska, the Irish Capital of the state, none other than my home town though I can't say that O'Neill's Irish heritage helped to define who I am but I can say that because of the celebration on March 17th, St. Patrick's Day is my favorite holiday to this day.

At the center of the town square known as "The Stoplight" because for a long time it was the only stoplight in town the Irish dancers kick off the festivities with the same jig they've been doing for 40 years to the tune of "The Washerwoman" (you'd recognize it) on what is no kidding the world's largest shamrock. They step dance off and here begins the parade with the American Legion followed by Pat Fritz carrying the flag of Ireland. Phyllis from Boston thought seeing the green horse was a metaphor for having one Guinness too many at the pub but 'ol Pete Matthews proves the phrase to be literal as he canters down main street on his green horse, Sean Fagan. Both the man and the horse more than happy to oblige those who are in Dugan's bar calling them inside and the only revellers who don't go to pet Sean Fagan's nose are Karen Murphy and Art McClanahan because they're busy playing something that barely sounds like "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" on a beat-up trumpet and a

toilet-lid-turned-drum and everyone knows including them that any resemblance to the Irish ballads they continue to play is purely coincidental.



Back on main street just a hop skip and two cloverleaves from the Blarney Stone where they're serving corned beef and cabbage is Scott Poese reporting live from what the townsfolk know to be always beautiful downtown O'Neill where on this day in March the weather can be 30 degrees and snowing or 89 with a blistering sun. Scott took over KBRX from his dad and sounds just like Gil of yore who loved it when the tractor procession passed by and had their 15 minutes in the spotlight not to be

confused with The Stoplight. First John Deere and then another John Deere -- sprayer combine

plow and planter and why in that order is anybody's guess. We then round out the tractor eternity with a line from Massey Ferguson, highly favored by Leo Gokie whose farm gets more rain than anywhere else in the area and don't let anyone tell you otherwise because he'll hold fast to the fact that if Harvey Tompkins records he had a drop on his place Leo says he got two drops. If you've lived in O'Neill for more than fifteen minutes you know to say "oh okay."

After the parade you might want to clog into the Eagle's Club for a green beer and to dance a jig but don't tarry too long because Mass is starting soon at St. Patrick's Catholic Church just north of the shamrock where every year you can hear the tune "God Bless St. Patrick, the patron of our church" that makes one wonder if someone actually thought that was a good song or if no other song exists about the man himself who drove the snakes out of Ireland. As much as the almost-sober congregants love St. Patrick they rejoice at the end of Mass not only because it's finally over but because we all get to sing what has to be the most beautiful song in all of Holt County as we lift our voices together as one *in the lilt of Irish laughter you can hear the angels sing.*

Everyone and I mean everyone is your best friend in O'Neill on March 17th and if you don't believe me go and spend the day with the Celtic bunch and I assure you *when Irish eyes are smiling sure they[ll] steal your heart away.*

2. MY PURPOSE: Write a poem. I have found much inspiration from Fr. Val Peter's quote, so I am including it here with a picture from my EQUIP.



"Anyone can sit back at the seashore and be inspired because it shouts at you... so do the mountains. *But the prairie only whispers.* You must listen closely and not miss the message."

(Fr. Val Peters, former Director of Boys and Girls Town)

Retreat

I come here not with any goal in mind
other than to find myself.

The endless horizon, the grasslands, the trees alone in the distance
Speak to me of the person I know I once was.

Wide open plains with muted hues lay tranquilly before me,
Unguarded, unafraid, and unspoken. Be still, they say.

Trees, barren and stalwart, refusing to be buffeted against the wind,
Exhale their serenity, breathing into me their balmy breezes.

Leaves purposefully let go and come to rest at my feet,
Unpretentious and unashamed, causing the grip within me to release.

Shadows of dusk hint that night will fall just as day has come:
with eternal and rhythmic constancy and the grace of renewed life.

Unassuming and accepting, the great expanse whispers to me that I am home
and I am free.

Spencer Stednitz

Science Faculty

Essay & Poetry

The real me

They say that in order to be loved you must let people in.

Let them see the real you.

Be Vulnerable.

I am not sure I am ready for that.

Emotions are so raw.

If I really let them in, what will they find?

What will I find?

It's hard to be seen

Most of what makes me, me is deep beneath the surface.

I have a hard time letting people in.

I am afraid of what they will find.

Will I say something so stupid that I'll never live it down?

Will I act in a way that makes them angry, afraid, annoyed?

It's easier to keep people at a distance,

They can't hurt you that way.

Only letting them know what's on the surface.

Never letting them meet the real you.

Never really living, just going through the motions.

It's hard to live this way, surrounded by people, but completely alone all the time.

Wondering what each day will bring.

Holding in all your emotions,

calculating each conversation,

hoping that someone will break through,

and

find the real me.

The journey

Every day we are given a series of choices,
decisions that define us and the direction that we go.
Sometimes it's the decisions that are made for us
That helps shape our personalities.

I think back to when I was young.
I moved when I was 12 from civilization to the middle of nowhere.
I had no friends and struggled to survive middle school,
But I learned ...

Independence

Hard work

Dedication

A career as I found

Help from my teachers and coaches.

I hated that we moved away, but looking back,
I know that God was preparing me for my future.

As I venture out on my journey
It's dark, pitch black, difficult to see
I wonder what is lurking in the darkness
I wonder what path will I find?
What path will find me.

My life in knots

My father was a great man. He was humble, kind, generous and had a confidence about him that you understood just by talking to him. As I remember my father, I think back to the way he was with me. Now let's set the record straight, I didn't make it easy on my mom and dad. I had a knack for pushing people's buttons, and I could really get under my sibling's skin, which created problems for my parents. I was not a good listener and usually thought I knew better anyway. I had my own plan for doing things and didn't want to hear another way to do it.

As I think back throughout my life for memories of my dad, I struggle to come up with a lot of them. I wish I had more time with him. My dad died on September 29th, 2002. He was 52. I was 24. I was just starting to learn what it meant to be an adult. I still have questions that I want to know, but am not sure where to turn to. I have people I can ask, but it's not the same as asking your dad.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was a wide-eyed, 21-year-old about to start student teaching and my father is going to teach me how to tie a tie. To this point in my life, my relationship with my father was very interesting. Like I said we didn't always see eye to eye on things, and I would witness his temper from time to time at home. So when I asked him to teach me how to tie and tie, I wasn't sure how it was going to go.

It wasn't like he yelled at me, he would sometimes yell when he was frustrated at the situation. I find myself doing the same things. For example, my parents had just bought a car from a friend that my dad works with, so it was new to us and he had it for like two hours, maybe and I was to pull this new to us car out of the garage and move around a parked car at the end of the driveway. No big deal, right? As I was turning the wheel to make sure I would get around the parked car, looking backwards the entire time, not paying attention to how far the car was moving to the left, I hear a crunch. I had managed to destroy the front quarter panel of the car and damaged the garage all at the same time. He didn't yell, at least I don't remember him yelling, but the frustration that you could see in his face as he must have been screaming silently inside his head, come on!

Back to the tie. When we started he took the time to explain each step so that my tie would look like his when I finished. He started by showing me that the skinnier part of the tie was to go to my left, the wider part on my right, and that I should adjust the length to make sure the tie would be the correct length. He said, "I am heavier than you are, so the skinnier part would have to go lower for you". He then showed me that the

fatter part of the tie goes over the skinny part and to the left, up from underneath and over the knot. He showed how to put my finger in the tie to hold my place. We stopped for a moment and he showed me how I could pull on both ends to make sure the knot was tight. He then continued by pulling the larger part around the back of the small end and to the right, then up and over the knot again. If done correctly, you can see the shape of the knot start to take place. Another good place to stop, so he checks how I did, making sure that the knot had a good foundation before finishing putting on the finishing touches. Now comes the hard part, you have to wrap the larger part of the tie around the front and up from underneath. From there you use your thumb and finger to create a hole and pull the larger portion through.

It was like he was teaching me how to be a teacher in one simple lesson of our everyday life. Those who are teachers know that student teaching is the only form of real education about teaching, a trial by fire on how to be a teacher. I was fortunate, I got to see real teaching first hand from my father. I didn't think of him as a teacher until I started writing this, now it's clear to me that I learned how to teach by watching my dad teach me. I took the same approach to my teaching, take your time, make sure they have the basics. Check to see that they understand what you are saying before moving on and the most important, practice, practice, practice.

With great instruction from my father, I started to tie my tie. I was terrible at it. I kept making the same mistakes over and over, rushing through the process, because I saw him do it, so I instantly thought it would be easy. At least my dad made it look so easy. To my surprise, my dad never got frustrated, not even once. He was calm the entire time, no matter how long it took me, he was patient and didn't raise his voice once. He never seemed frustrated. To this day I look back at that moment. This is my favorite memory of my father. I choose to wear a tie every day to work just so I can remember him, that moment, and his patience with me.

I wonder how am I with my girls? Do they remember the good or will they remember my temper?

Parenting is hard work. There are many days where I wonder are my kids listening? Am I doing a good job? I have two girls, Olivia who is eleven, and Adyson who is ten. As I reflect back on my own relationship with my father, I can't help but ask, what is my relationship like with my daughters?

I have my father's temper. I try to work on it daily, and it's a struggle. Some days are good and some days are bad. I have been told many times that they will remember the

good and not the bad, but as I look back I only remember the bad. With my dad I remember both and I know that the good was great and the bad was for a reason, to make me see what he was saying. Many times I think back at those conversations and wonder why I didn't listen, why I had to do things the hard way. It reminds me that the many lessons we learn are not realized in them moment, but many years down the road.

1:1 will it save education?

Today, the internet was not working. To be clear it was some mumbo jumbo about the dchap or whatever that means. Do technology people actually just make up words and acronyms to explain to people that they think they know what the problem is, when they actually have no idea what's wrong. The real reason that this makes me irritated is that we are supposed to go 1:1 next year. Give every kid a laptop and enhance their learning through meaningful presentations or engage their brain to a level never before measured without technology and the wifi goes down. Tell me this, what will we do next year when the technology doesn't work? Will we sit there and stare at each other? I know what you're thinking, you teach now without the access to technology, clearly you can do it when the wifi goes down. But how many of us will be able to teach without our computer once we rely on it for daily instruction? Think about how often we use the printer or what happens when the printer is not working and we need to have a worksheet or quiz printed at the last minute. Teachers of a different era would say "just write it out".

I believe that we will become so dependent on technology in the near future, that when it goes down, we won't know what to do or how to teach. (I had a back to future moment here. Do you think the Cubs will win the world series like they predicted in the movie? I hope so.) My prediction is that teachers will be so far removed from the ways of old that we won't remember what it was like to teach without the technology. Think of how far we have come in the world of education. There was a time when the computer was a shiny new toy to enhance the learning of our students and it has helped, but if you take it away, many of us panic and spend at least five minutes trying to make the technology work before we improvise into plans B and C.

To continue my original rant, this idea of giving the kids a laptop isn't going to make them better students, like all of a sudden student A goes from barely passing a test to getting straight A's because we gave her a computer. It doesn't instantly make the students work harder or study any longer. The same problems will exist in education with the same students because certain individuals don't really want to learn, sorry. They want to see how far they can push the institution of education around. I have heard that it will enhance the motivation for some students, and maybe that will be true, but it is not a cure all for what we see on a daily basis. Our oppositional defiant students will still create the same problems with a computer as they will without one. Don't get me wrong, I am excited to see how this new fad will help me reach more of my students, but I am cautiously optimistic. Let's see how year one goes.

Patrick White

English Faculty

Stream Of Consciousness Essays

Stream of Consciousness - September 27, 2016

The students work on something I prepared for them, and I just told them that it's not busy work. It feels like busy work. They're busy, and they're working. Working for the weekend. That was random.

They appear to be working hard. They're leaning over one another's desks attempting to each be a part of the group. I feel like this activity is effective, but it's hard to know.

How ironic that I sat down to write this stream of consciousness piece and nothing is coming to my mind. Is that irony? I never truly know. I say that situational irony is present in the greatest cliffhangers of all time. Vader is Luke's father. Voldemort is on the back of Quirrel's (Google knew I spelled Quirrell wrong. Apparently it has two l's. How does it know?!) head. Aren't those just cliffhangers? Sure the character and audience both are surprised by these outcomes, but is that even the definition of situational irony. Sometimes the definition is one way, sometimes it's another. Stupid internet.

I just lied my way through an explanation of dramatic irony with an example of a horror movie. The killer appears behind the killee (is that a word?) and the audience is aware, but the victim is not. When explaining this type of irony, I always include both genders, but we all know that women are the victims in these schlock fests. I forced myself to use the word schlock. It felt stronger than scare. I hope you think so too.

Pause.

Killee is definitely not a word. Shit. I just searched killee on a school computer. Obviously, I'll be arrested immediately for searching a word similar to "killer." I get it Google spellcheck, you holier than thou technological wonder, killee is not a word! Tell me something I don't know. I don't know much about...well, a lot of things, but for some reason whales come to mind.

I'm ridiculous. I can't write this every week, can I? I have plays and stories in my brain, but little to no time to devote the attention to those potential projects. What's humorous is that this feels like a potential project. Yes, it's disjointed, choppy, sloppy, silly, and semi-crazy, but that works for me...and is me. I'm hungry. Coincidentally, my e-mail bell just rang, so I am reminded of Pavlov's dog. Metaphor. I'm also reminded of *The Office*. Remember when Jim gives Dwight an altoid every time Jim turns off his computer. (Altoid should have been capitalized. And killee is still not a word. Stupid zig-zaggy red line.) I just tangled with the need for the repetition of Jim or the use of "him." Him felt confusing because it seemed in reference to Dwight, but maybe that's just me.

These students never have thoughts like that. They only have one thing on their minds. Get it done. That's probably why Larry the Cable Guy is so popular. Haha That's a good final line. I just nodded in approval of that line. The kids probably think I'm crazy. I should probably check on them.

Stream of Consciousness - Tuesday, October 4, 2016 10:41 AM

Where the hell did all these papers come from?!

I clean my desk one day, and the next, it's messy again. That's a universal thing that all teachers experience, right? Oof. I feel like I'm trying too hard on this piece already. Breathe. Be calm. Let it flow naturally.

Today, I had my students practice grammar by using games that were designed for elementary students. It's not that I think their mental capacity is currently at the elementary level, but I do feel that English teachers have been reteaching these concepts for years, and it always feels like we're starting from square one.¹

It scares the hell out of me that I need to start over year after year with these kids. The concepts are not that hard...for a twenty-six year old.

Also, can someone please tell me how I'm supposed to make grammar engaging? So far my best bet is a quiz show style game that encourages them to use their smartphones or a snake that will eat the proper "to be" verb if you tell it to. Freaking brilliant. Talking through things on the board doesn't seem to be enough, and I'm hopelessly bored listening to my own voice while talking through these concepts. I can't even imagine what they're thinking.

Today in class I actually played a video of me reading the notes aloud because I didn't want to say the same thing five times over. Lazy? Maybe. Worth it? Absolutely. But what I learned is that if I don't stay chipper throughout the day then my 7th period² is getting a very different performance than my 1st or 4th. I came to a conclusion about "my performance" after listening to my voice a few times today. It was boring. It was not engaging. To be fair, it was 6:30 in the morning when I recorded it, but still, it concerns me that each class isn't always getting my best. Yesterday, I leaned against my board while I spoke because I was so tired.

Let's talk about level of engagement for a second. The greatest irony of all is that teachers are some of the worst audience members at professional development seminars or conferences because we're great thinkers. Well, I am.³ I'm sure you are too.

¹ *What the hell does square one mean? (I looked it up. Square one means the initial stage or starting point. The origin of the phrase comes from "the use of numbered squares in some board games." That makes perfect sense, but did you all know that? Boom! Educated!*

² *I hate using the word period. It's not that talking about periods bothers me. I'll buy tampons for my wife any day, but I'm afraid it bothers others when I say that instead of hour.*

³ *Not conceited.*

We also are social creatures for the most part. Why wouldn't we be? We constantly talk in front of a group of students about things they barely care about. Are we insane?⁴

I laugh every time I whisper to a colleague during PD days because this is behavior that I would snap at a kid for. Why is that?⁵ I don't honestly have an answer to the previous question. Hell, I get so pissed at students when they start giggling like prepubescent⁶ teenagers. I do that kind of crap all the time because I appreciate what the person up front is saying, but maybe it could be spiced up a little with my hilarious asides. Pretend like you don't relate to that; I dare you.

My mind is suddenly black.⁷ My mind is blaNk. It only took three stream of consciousness pieces, and I'm empty. How depressing.

⁴ *Too many questions. Too many questions.*

⁵ *Damnit. Too many questions I said.*

⁶ *That's definitely not how you spell that word. I think a p comes after the u.*

⁷ *Haha I just wrote black instead of "blank." I was going to say that "my mind is suddenly black." Damnit. I did it again. Seriously, I did. Clearly, I have something deep beneath my white bread exterior that needs to be unleashed.*

Stream of Consciousness - Tuesday, October 4, 2016 1:59 PM

CLOWNS!!! Screw grammar, screw Kahoot, screw school. Today is all about these motherfucking clowns. Where's Samuel L. Jackson when you need him? Can't you imagine the hit feature film, "Clowns in a Town." "I've had it with these motherfucking clowns in this motherfucking town." It's honestly poetic.

Unfortunately, these kids are losing their damn minds with every new bell that brings them in. I try to "squash the rumors," but these kids won't listen to reason. They'd rather spout phrases like "Clown Lives Matter" and "Stop Clowning Around, Mr. White." To be fair, those are both pretty great. However, the best/worst line I've heard today was from a student who could barely get it out without laughing: "Mr. White, would you say that things have gotten out of CLOWNtrol." I shook my head at the kid then shook his hand. It's just been that kind of day.

Should I be worried? I tried to promise the kids they'd be safe, but then I backtracked because I can't lie to the kids. I told them that I didn't know with 100% certainty that they wouldn't be attacked by clowns, but I was pretty sure. I didn't use a percentage like 90% because I thought that too was unfair. Their reactions to that were priceless.

Now they're accusing me of being one of the clowns or acting as a clown sympathizer. Great. Now they are aiming their finger crucifixes at me like I'm the antichrist. This is my life. Thank you, clowns.

Stream of Consciousness Piece for October 25, 2016

I'm exhausted.

I stayed up late last night watching a documentary about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It was great, and it made me more confident in my choice for president. I won't reveal who I'm voting for, but I will say this: Did you know that Donald Trump doesn't actually manage many buildings with his name on them? He's a promoter, not a leader. Also, he starred in commercials with Grimace⁸ and his ex-wife Ivana during heated legal battles.⁹ The documentary also made it clear that he's had his eyes on Washington for many years. He forced Meatloaf, Lil Jon, and Starr Jones to say that they would vote for him for president in a scene from *Celebrity Apprentice*.¹⁰

On the other side¹¹ is Hillary, a woman who pushed aside her aspirations to get her husband elected. Had she not done that, she'd probably be the ruler of the universe.¹² Her story is incredibly sad, when it's broken down, but she never expresses sadness. That's impressive and terrifying. This election is unprecedented.

Hillary's choice makes me think of my own relationship. Am I holding back my wife? Does she want to live in Gretna, Nebraska, or does she have aspirations not yet explored. It's hard to know. She says she's happy, but part of me thinks she wishes she was in a bigger city, but that's contradictory of her personality because she's introverted, so perhaps I'm only speculating.

Speaking of speculating, I'm worried about a friend of mine. I don't know if she's happy. She constantly is putting herself down, and she is always complaining about her husband. "I can't go to that because he said this..." It's sad, but I don't know how to help her. I talk about it at home with my wife, and I'm quite sure that my wife is starting to get annoyed, but I can't help it.¹³ She's my friend, and I worry about her all the time. I talked to another friend about the situation, and it put me at ease because I thought I was starting to imagine this behavior. It was not imagined. It is very real.

⁸ *The big purple goober from McDonald's.*

⁹ *That's weird, right?*

¹⁰ *That is real. He really did that. Then he made a joke about firing them if they didn't want to vote for him. I'm glad my principal didn't do that to me in the interview for this job. That would have been awkward. I'd vote for him though. Not Trump, my principal. Darnit. I revealed my political affiliation. Please don't talk to me about Benghazi and the e-mails now. I'm well aware of both of them.*

¹¹ *I don't like the phrase "on the other side." It seems informal and meaningless.*

¹² *Tell me I'm wrong. I dare you.*

¹³ *She's not really. I'm constantly worried I annoy my wife because I'm usually talking about superhero movies, but I'll cut myself off and she'll tell me that I'm not annoying her and that she loves me for me. But a woman can only take so many conversations about Ant-Man, right?*

Wow, this piece really went off the rails. First, it was about the election and the documentary I watched last night¹⁴ then it was about my wife and her perceived aspirations, and finally it focused on my friend and her relationship with her husband. Don't ever say that Patrick White doesn't take people on journeys with his writing because you'd be lying.

I remember when I was going to write a poem about my experience as a young teacher, who is constantly trying to be cool.

¹⁴ *My wife and I also watched John Carpenter's Halloween last night. I don't know which was scarier, the documentary or the 1978 horror film. Zinger! (I just attempted to put a footnote on a footnote. Note: You cannot.) I think I should write for a political satire show.*