

# Institute Anthology

Summer 2020

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Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project

Facilitators:

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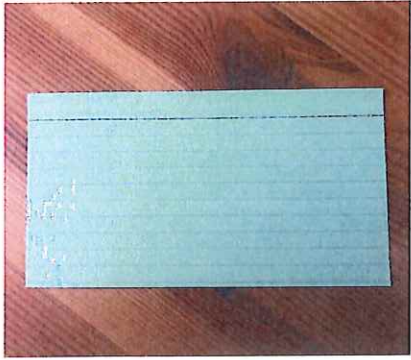
# Writer's Objects

Virtual Gallery Walk











A stack of seven 3D books of varying colors (blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, blue, red) arranged in a slightly offset manner. Each book has a title written on its front cover. The background is dark grey with a vertical line of small white circles on the left side.

*Awakening in the Dream*

The Power of Your Subconscious Mind

THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

Power of Habit

MODERN MAN IN  
SEARCH OF HIS SOUL

Understanding the  
Dreams You Dream

*Think & Grow Rich*

DREAMS by Jennifer Archie

Tears are a clear liquid secreted from one's eyes when they cry or their eyes are irritated. They are there to protect our eyes, help our bodies reduce stress, and allow one to show emotion. This past Christmas, the tears were flowing like a waterfall with a smile unexpectedly all because of my quirky, go with the flow, "wild child" cousin.

We were all sitting around, spread out among the warm house with lights shimmering in every direction. The food was laid out in one long row that wrapped around in an L shape from the window all the way past the fireplace. At the end was a huge table full of sweets and treats that were already being picked on by the children. Everyone was laughing and engrossed in multiple conversations that filled the home with a light hum. All of the littles were running up and down the stairs, giggling as they chased each other around.

Before we knew it, we heard my older cousin's high pitched voice shout for all to hear "Alright guys, we need all of the Aunts and Uncles to come to the table around Aunt Sue." As my dad and his siblings made their way to the table, they looked around at each other with confused and puzzled faces not really knowing what was going on. Just as curious, I rushed over to hear what she had to say. My cousin called over a few others who drew in close with small bags in their hands and smiles that reached up to their ears. Once they were all seated, she began again "Now, we know it is a family tradition that each God-child exchanges gifts with their God-parent every year." She pointed to the others holding small bags and continued, "We all know that this has not been an easy year for any of us, but more importantly, you guys. Aunt Eileen was very special to all of us and is missed more than ever. But you all lost your sister, and this is the first Christmas without her by your side."

My mind was reeling, remembering the message my cousin had sent a few weeks ago with a picture of the bags saying, 'your dad's personalized gift is in!' I had been so confused as to what she meant because she was not his God-child. As I stood there taking every word in, things were starting to piece together now. One by one, they began to pass out the bags to each of the Aunts and Uncles as tears were already sneaking out in the now silent room. Once all the bags were in their hands, she asked them to open them up all at once. The Aunts each pulled out a silver bracelet and the Uncles each pulled out a leather key chain.

While they began looking closely at their gifts, their emotions came pouring out. My cousin kept going in her comical voice "I know you all don't take me as someone who is sentimental, but I will tell you that I save every single card that someone gives me." "Just ask Kev, I have boxes full" she said with a smirk as she gave a look to her husband who just rolled his eyes. "I went back and took out the card that Aunt Eilleen gave me for my wedding day." Getting lost in her speech, she mumbled on, "I don't know if you all knew this, but there are these really cool places that can take your actual handwriting and put it on anything you want. Anything! It was easy to pick a bracelet for the girls, but I really struggled with the guys." Now I was the one making faces as I wanted her to get on with it, even though I knew where this was going. Beaming, she continued "We wanted you to have a piece of Aunt Eilleen with you always, so each of your gifts says 'Love, Eilleen' in Aunt Eilleen's handwriting. I just had them take the Aunt part out of course."

If you aren't already bawling your eyes out, I can tell you that in this moment, I was. Losing someone is never easy for anyone, but it hurts just that much more when you are very close to the person and see them often. My grandparents passed away when my dad was very



young and from that moment on, the Aunts and Uncles did everything they could to keep us together to see each other at least once a month if not more. My heart truly melted this day as I held my dad's keychain in my hand and brushed my thumb across her handwriting. It wasn't the clip itself, or even the handwriting that was so cleverly printed on this piece of leather. It was knowing how much pain my dad and his siblings were in and watching as my quirky, go with the flow, "wild child" cousin took something so intangible and brought it to the family that day. Pure Love.

West Chester University: PA Writing and Literature Project  
Writing Institute Summer 2020  
PWP 597 – Teacher As Writer  
Personal Narrative  
Robyn Chegwiddden

### Doggie Mornings

\*dog tags jingling\*

\*shuffling on carpet\*

Riff!

Those are my alarm clocks these days. It starts with Scratch's dog tags clanging against each other as she scrambles to get herself on all fours. As the eldest dog of the household at the ripe old age of 19, she controls my sleep schedule. Lemmy, the new pup in the house, is her watchdog and lets me know when she has awakened every morning – usually around 4:30am. I'm glad that I'm a morning person because I don't mind all that much when the dogs wake me up so early. They don't care if it's a Saturday, holiday, or if I've been up late the night before. When they wake up, it's time to go outside and serve them breakfast. And if I don't comply, I'll have a mess to clean up and a husband who'll complain the next day that he didn't get enough sleep the night before.

And so it goes every morning – jingling of her dogtags, soft barking from Lemmy – that rouses me from my beauty sleep. I put on my morning attire: slipper socks, Adidas slippers, and a hoody then pick up sleepy 16 pound Lemmy as I open the bedroom gate into the hallway where Scratch is trying to figure out who and where we are.

"Wanna go outside, Scratch?"

Mostly deaf and blind with a body riddled in arthritis and joint pain, she manages to creep down the seven steps and out the door where she waddles to a spot on the walkway to do her business. No leash necessary. She's not going anywhere fast. Lemmy and I stand and wait.

"What she doin' out there, Lemmy? Is she goin' poops? You've gotta wait your turn. Here she comes."

Slowly, I push open the door so as not to knock her down since she likes to stand right in front of the door. Waddling from side to side, she crosses the slippery aluminum threshold and onto the rug.

"Good girl, Scratch!"

Lassoing his bright orange leash around his neck, we're ready.

"Ok, Lemmy. Let's go!"

Lemmy always thinks we're going for a walk. Yeah, that's exactly what I want to do at 4:30 in the morning standing outside in the cool air with my pjs, slipper socks, and sandals on!

But he doesn't know. He's a puppy. So we quickly run up the walkway – well, he pulls me up the walkway like a sled dog – and I halt him at the top, urging him to "go outside."

The tricky part is when we come back inside. I carry Lemmy to the back of the house behind a gate. He can certainly walk by himself – I'm not babying him – but I have to be careful so as not to erupt the beast mode from inside Scratch. Even though she is old and cannot see

well, that doesn't stop her from trying to attack any dog that may get close to her or her food – no matter how far away the dog is. If she can smell it, it's in trouble. It's a good thing she doesn't have a strong sense of smell, either. Lemmy is literally a few feet away from her sometimes, and she has no idea where he is. Other times, he's on the couch sleeping away, and she comes barreling down the steps from the hallway in full-on bark mode.

Carefully placed gates throughout the house keep our geriatric dog away from our hyper pup. It's quite hysterical – until she lunges towards him. Then it's downright hilarious! She is so slow-moving that her only chance of reaching him is by sliding across the floor! Lemmy would like nothing more than to play with Scratch but she'll never have it – believe me, we've tried!

At 4:35am, Scratch only gets a Tums for her geriatric stomach and a treat to satisfy the beagle inside of her when she returns from the great outdoors. She would love to scarf down her highly-nutritious breakfast, but we've been down that road before. If I feed her whenever she wakes up, she has learned to wake up a bit earlier each morning. I tested this theory out – the hard way – and I learned that 3:00am is too early to feed any dog breakfast. So now she knows that it's too early for a hearty meal if she only gets a treat.

Lemmy also gets a treat, and then we snuggle up on the couch together to try to get a few more winks in before the day begins. That is always short-lived because Scratch needs my attention every 15-20 minutes – like a snooze button that I keep hitting. Since her paws can't grip the surface anymore, and her joints can't support her 18 pound frame, she slides into front splits or scurries around the floor like a drowning child. Sometimes she gives up, splits across her centerline, and rests for about 15 minutes. When she tries to regain her position again on the surface, she scratches it up, panting to get to a secure piece of flooring. We've invested in several Five Below yoga mats and Ollie's bath rugs which add a



nice touch to our midcentury style home and provide enough grip for Scratch's slippery paws. But she always seems to find that small piece of exposed wood flooring that pulls her down like quicksand. And that's when I leave the warm couch and the curled up Lemmy to rescue her and carry her to safety.

When she finally gets tired of this repetitive search and rescue, she will fall asleep in the upstairs hallway until about 6:00am. At that point, my second, gentler alarm clock goes off. This time, it's the faraway jingling of her dog tags, and perhaps a whoosh down the carpeted steps, that gets me up for the day. I let her outside again, and she returns to find a fresh bowl of water and another bowl filled with an assortment of fish, medicines, a drizzle of olive oil, and a sprinkle of fennel seeds to help with digestion. Yum-my!

Lemmy gets a fat cup of dry food and fresh water. He's a simple pup and doesn't care that Scratch gets so much food attention because he requires every other type of attention from me. Sometimes I spoil him with a tablespoon of Scratch's wet food. Sometimes. He eats a whopping four cups of dry food a day with several handfuls of treats in between. Scratch, on the other hand, only eats about two cups of food each day – and most of the time, she doesn't even eat all of it. It won't go to waste, not if Lemmy has anything to do with it. He'll steal her food any chance he gets – usually when we forget to close the main gate that divides the house in half.

As Lemmy noisily eats his food, I sneak in some time for myself to wash up, grab a cup of coffee and a couple slices of homemade bread that I've made the day before. After Scratch has done her business one last time (hopefully outside) before retiring for the day to her "bed," Lemmy snuggles up next to me – no, in my lap – as I open my laptop, coffee in hand, to start my virtual learning day ~ 6:30am. And there we sit for about three hours or so until "Daddy" wakes up.

As all good ol' dogs do, Scratch spends most of her time sleeping the day away. She can do that – she's retired from the business of being a dog. Long gone are the days of 13 mile hikes, squirrel hunting, and rolling in dead animal carcasses in the woods. Here to stay are long, unsteady walks from her bedroom to the kitchen, hunting for her long lost treat crumbs, and rolling on the ground when the sun gets in her eyes.

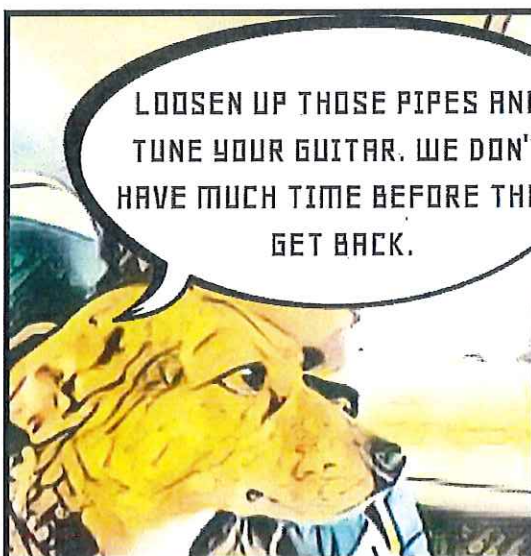
But our Lemmy is a puppy, and he wants to run amok around the house chewing up anything that is remotely like a chewtoy – shoes, socks, tissues. If he can tear it up, then it's a chewtoy to him. Lemmy is our newest dog – straight out of a South Carolina shelter. After losing our 16 year old terrier last August, my husband and I weren't sure if we could ever be ready for another pup. The loss seemed unbearable at the time. My only relief was visiting puppies at a local shelter. These dogs were almost always medium-large dog breeds, even though we were in the market for another terrier. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, I attended a puppy "meet and greet" to give some lovin' to the adorable, adoptable doggies. Little Lemmy was climbing around the informational table that chilly day. If he didn't knock over a display, I might not have seen him, and I certainly wouldn't be writing about him now. But he caught my eye and my heart all in one look!

Those warm fuzzy feelings are not what I sense before me at 6:30am. Instead, I encounter a drowsy puppy forcefully pushing his way into my lap and almost toppling my laptop onto the floor as I try to start it up. But I do see an adorable squinty-eyed face peering out of the blanket once he settles down.

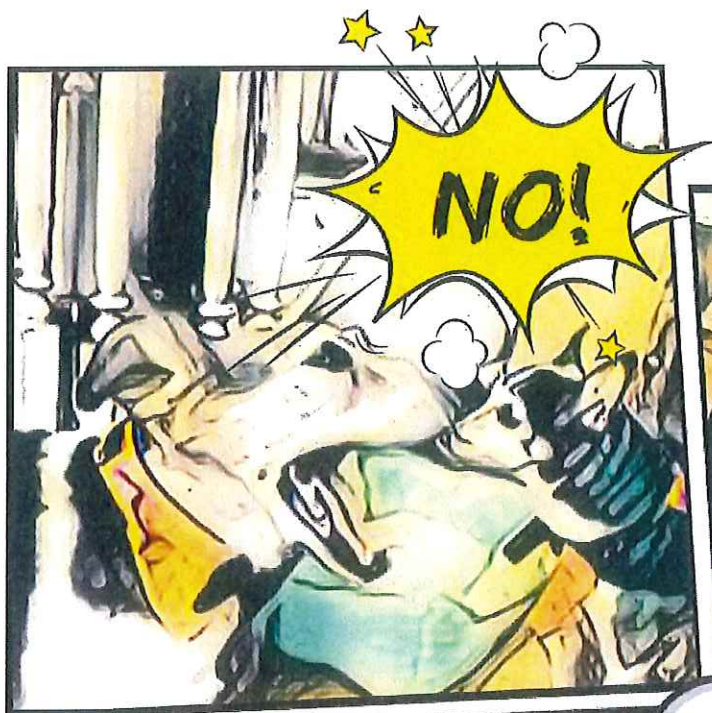
I get a brief hiatus from Lemmy's muscular 16 pound body while he gets some morning snuggles from Daddy. Then it's back under the covers and onto my lap for the rest of the

morning while I continue to respond to students' comments, parents' emails, and colleagues' texts.

These doggie mornings are the story of my new virtual teaching life.







ROCK 'N ROLL, SANDY! WE'RE NOT PLAYING ANY OF THAT OLD FOGIE CRAP!



WE NEED A DOG ON BASS. CAN SHE PLAY ANYTHING BESIDES THE SAXOPHONE? WHO HAS A SAXOPHONE PLAYER IN A ROCK 'N ROLL BAND?



OK, GUYS. LET'S WORK ON THE SET LIST. I DEFINITELY WANNA DO THE ORIGINAL I WROTE, A "SNACK IN THE DARK."

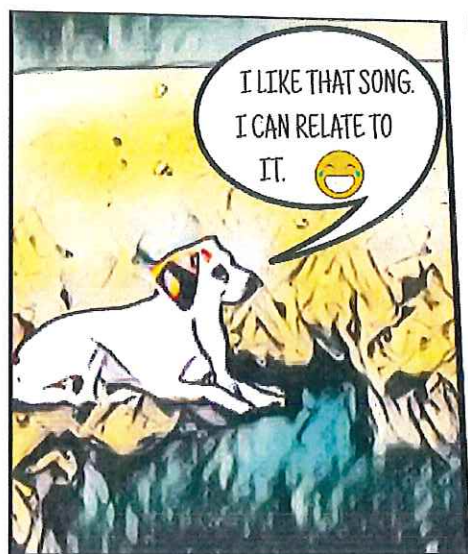
"Hungry Like the Wolf!" by Duran Duran. Makes me hungry just thinking about it...



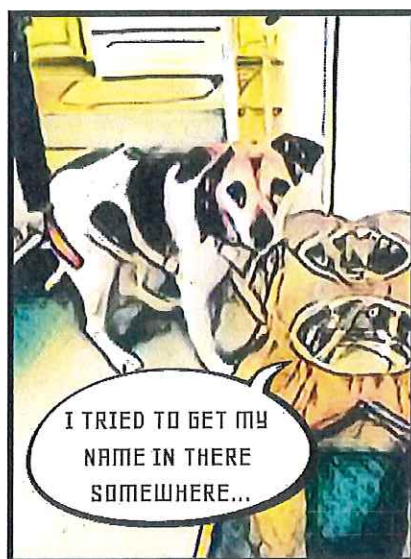
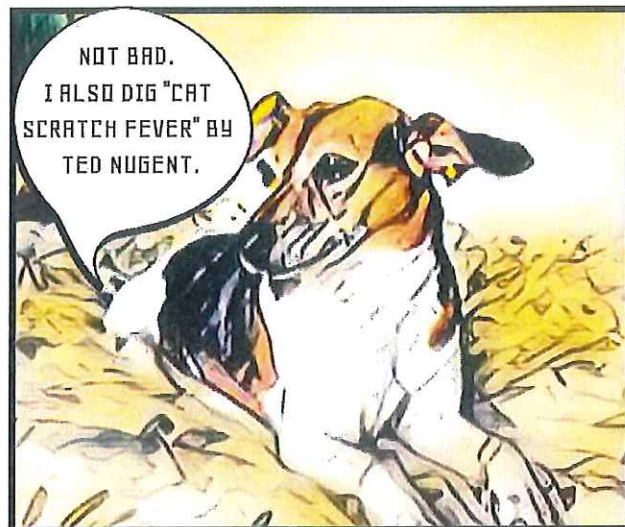
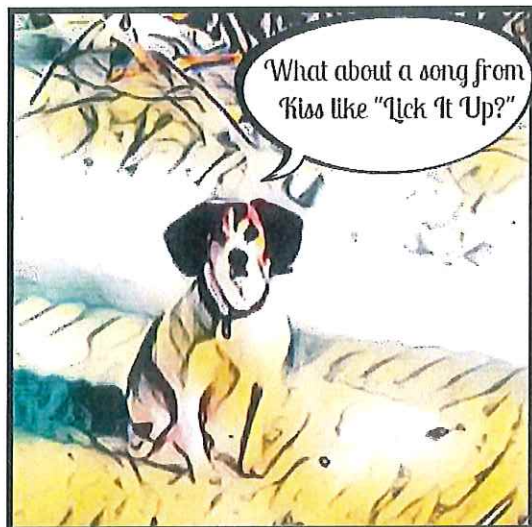
WHAT DOES EVERYONE ELSE WANT TO DO?















You ain't nothin' but  
a hound dog!



I'M NOT A  
HOUND DOG!



YOU SURE BARK  
LIKE ONE!



AT LEAST I DON'T  
SUGGEST STUPID SONGS!



No, dummies! I was  
suggesting the Elvis  
Presley song!

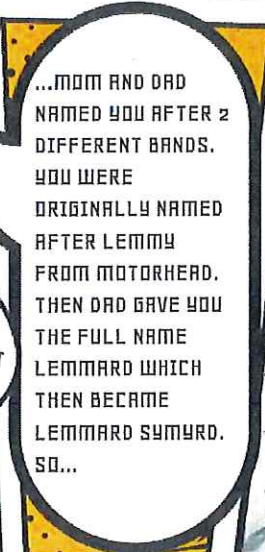
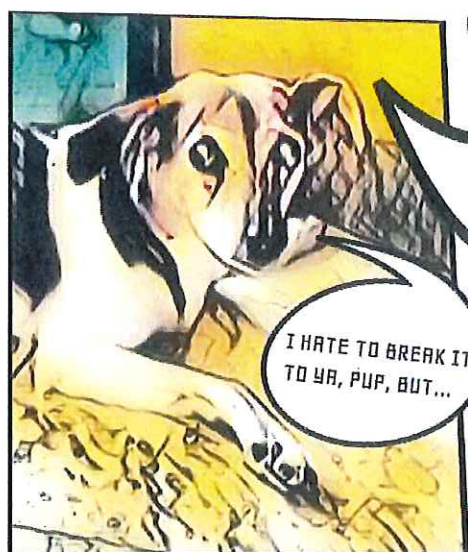
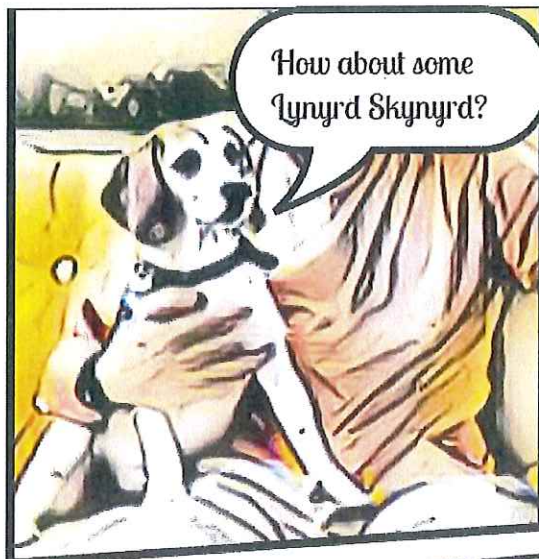


SO YOU DON'T  
WANT TO ADD  
JOURNEY'S 'LOVIN',  
TOUCHIN',  
SQUEEZIN'?



HEY! KNOCK IT OFF!  
LET'S STAY FOCUSED ON OUR  
SET LIST - SONGS EVERYONE  
CAN AGREE ON!

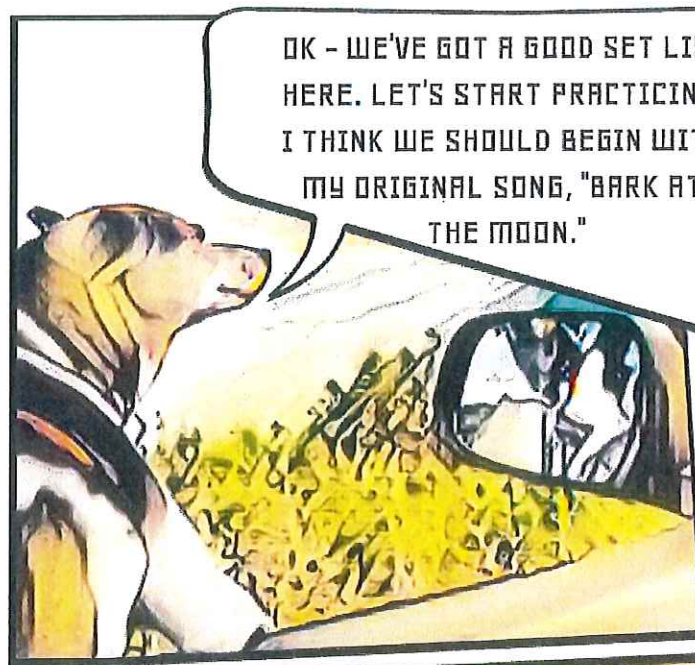








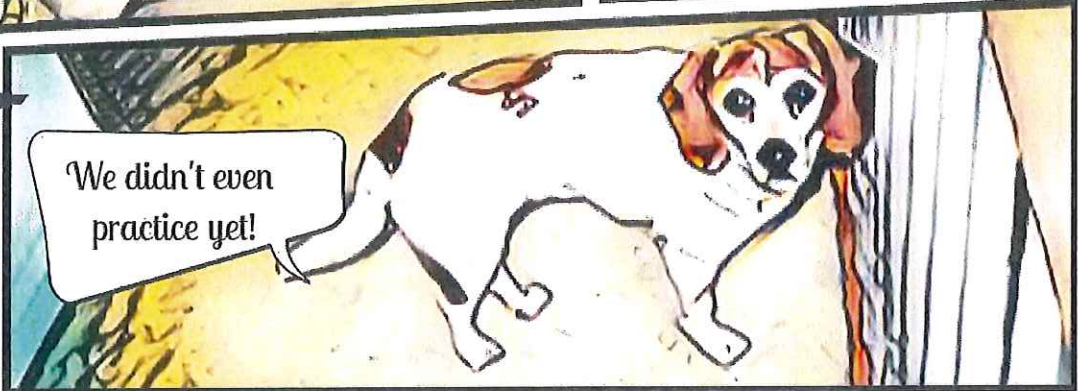




OK - WE'VE GOT A GOOD SET LIST  
HERE. LET'S START PRACTICING.  
I THINK WE SHOULD BEGIN WITH  
MY ORIGINAL SONG, "BARK AT  
THE MOON."



WE GOTTA GET OUT  
OF THIS PLACE!



We didn't even  
practice yet!



MOM AND DAD ARE  
HOME! UGH! WE'LL  
HAVE TO PRACTICE  
THE NEXT TIME THEY  
GO OUT.



HI, DADDY!



**Stephanie Collins**

**PWP 597**

**Personal Narrative**

### **Seventy Minutes**

It is 1:40 pm and time to go outside. I always feel a sense of relief when it is time for recess- recess means that I have almost made it through another day. Christopher bolts out of the doors and heads straight for the swings as usual. The swings and a row of tall trees serve as a makeshift border between our playground and the surrounding neighborhood. If you walk closer you will find a short trail that leads right to backyards and the street. My favorite paraprofessional Lori and I chat about the day as we watch Christopher swing from a distance. It is refreshing to give him space for a few minutes of his day as he requires constant verbal and hand-over-hand prompting to participate in activities. As we begin to walk closer, Christopher suddenly stops swinging and heads towards the trail. I pick up my pace as he starts to disappear in the trees. Calling his name in a panic, I reach the end of the trail to find that Christopher is nowhere in sight. I am two months into my first year teaching and just lost a student.

A million thoughts and questions start to race in my head as this realization hits me like a ton of bricks. How in the world could he be so fast? He can't even say his name if someone finds him! Am I going to get fired? How could I be so careless? It's 1:58. I run to the office in a fog to tell them that Christopher is missing while other staff members continue to search the neighborhood. The secretaries tell me that I need to be the one to contact home. This seems like my first punishment. My shaking hands dial while my



me. She's our speech therapist and a familiar face to Christopher. We walk in slowly while the police stay outside. I hold my breath, unsure of what to expect. Christopher is in the living room of the empty house. His shoes and socks are thrown around the room. As soon as he sees us, he sits on the couch and covers himself with a blanket. His feet must be cold. I look around. The freezer door is open, a chair pushed up against it. There is ice cream on the top shelf that Christopher couldn't reach. Smart kid, I think. Time to go. Christopher fights, scratches, headbutts. He cries and makes sounds, yearning to communicate. You are safe, we say over and over again. We ride back to school in a police car. Christopher continues to scratch and cry. He can't ride home in his van because he is being unsafe. His dad picks him up, avoiding eye contact. I don't blame him. I wouldn't look at me either- I failed at my job today. One final glance at my watch. 2:50. I did not keep Christopher safe for seventy minutes but he is safe now.



# THE SEA ISLE TIMES



JULY 2014

## MOTHER WITNESSES DAUGHTER'S FIRST KISS WITH SUMMER FLING

Daughter was mortified beyond belief

**Corner of 58th Street and Central Avenue** -- After a fun night out at the Dead Dog Saloon, Brian Collins, 29, was walking home his new summer fling to her house on 59th Street. Stephanie Tyl, 24, was thrilled. "What girl doesn't want a cute boy to walk her home late at night?" said Stephanie. They stopped a block short of her house to share their first kiss. "I didn't want anyone in my house to see us, especially my mom. She tends to be up at weird hours." Blushing, Stephanie quickly said good night to Brian and ran inside without making a sound.

Stephanie's worst fears were realized the next morning during breakfast when her mother, Janice Tyl, began telling a story about what she witnessed at 3:30 that morning. "I went outside to the deck because I heard the sound of flip flops coming down the block. It was so loud! That's when I saw a girl outside. I swore it looked like she was making out with the street sign pole!" said Janice. It was then that Stephanie had to admit that she was the girl and that she wasn't kissing a pole, but a man standing at 6 feet-4 inches. Janice and the rest of the family couldn't believe what they were hearing. "This is very unlike her!" said Janice.

Recalling having to make her confession, Stephanie said, "I wanted to crawl back into bed from embarrassment. So much for making sure to stay one block away!" Her family members teased her relentlessly about "making out with a pole" for the rest of the weekend. Despite the humiliation of her mother witnessing her first kiss with Brian, Stephanie remains hopeful that their fling will develop into a relationship as the summer goes on. "We'll see what happens. At least I will have a funny story to tell either way," Stephanie said.

**Eventually**

You are so smart

I don't tell you often enough

I get that chaos in your brain

You are so my child

You'll get it

Eventually

I know there is a method to the chaos

Perhaps there's not

Yet

There will be

You are so my child

You'll get it

Hang in there

Always strive for your own best

The chaos in your brain will get better

Perhaps it won't

But you will control it

You can do anything

I don't tell you often enough

You are so smart

## Just Two Weeks

As I peek into the living room, I see that my son AJ is still in his green Snoopy pajamas, playing on his iPhone and wrapped up in his favorite blue blanket . There is evidence on the table that he has had breakfast since his yellow cereal bowl is empty and there is a trail of milk droplets. Such a typical start to the day when you are raising a child who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

I hate to be the bad guy, but I yell, "AJ, get online and get started on your school work."

I'm not prepared to accept the fact that I'll be working from home for more than two weeks. Preparing my office to be my classroom seems like a daunting task. After all, my office has mostly been taken over by my son for the past three years. Right now my desk is a collection of artwork from AJ, bills I need to pay, hobby books on gardening, and the occasional romance novel. I'm busy figuring out what in the world I should be doing, but I'm thinking that I should make sure my son is completing his work. I feel neglectful as a mom.

AJ, voice quivering says, "Mom, I don't have the book I need."

I hear my son's voice crack and I can picture the tears rolling down his cheeks before I even get into the next room. He has made such great strides since his father died five years ago. Coupled with the fact that he holds so much in, I feel as though I haven't been as available as I should be, or as often as I need to be. But, I hear that voice and I hustle.

"AJ, look at me. Take a breath," I say calmly. I'm literally breathing with him and my breath is his. I say, "Most kids don't have the book. You weren't told to bring the book home on your last day of school. Your teacher linked the pages in her Google Classroom."

It's difficult to be calm, but I've had years of practice. After his father's death, I learned to be very in tune with my son's feelings. I know he has his father's grin when he is happy. When he's sad, he looks like he lost his best friend; and when he's focused he has a look of determination like a dog that won't let it go of its bone.

I want to roll my eyes and ask him in my typical sarcastic tone if he read the entire email from his reading teacher. However, I know in this new way of learning I can't yet expect him to be totally independent, so I quietly stand and wait with arms folded as he scans through the pages on his chromebook. I see his body relax and morph into the child I know so well.

"Oh, now I see it," he says, as he glances up from the computer.

I hear the relief in AJ's voice, which brings the tension down in my shoulders. Thank goodness I took a break from responding to my work email and looked at what my son needed to do for the day. It's difficult to keep him organized without the routine and structure of school. I might have panicked with him and exacerbated the situation. Mom for the win, this time. He relaxes back in his spot in our comfy recliner and resumes his work. I head back to my chair in the dining room. The sun streaming in between the curtains blinds me as I settle back in front of my laptop. Neither one of us are in the "ideal spot to work." But, we were told it will be just two weeks. This will work, for now.



# I am...

Kimberly DiBiasi

June 26, 2020

WCU, PWP 597

Anthology Piece #1

## I am From Poem

I'm from televisions creating laughter through the house.

I'm from frying pans sizzling on the stove and placing dinner plates on the plastic covered tablecloth.

I'm from the red brick house where everyone is welcome and where entertaining family and friends is commonplace.

I'm from electric rollers to curl your hair, jean jackets all year long and monogrammed apparel.

I'm from freckle faces and annual family Christmas parties with Santa bringing presents for all the kids.

I'm from where the fear of bad luck for all of eternity made you take every superstition very seriously,

And where the only time you open an umbrella in the house is to do the Mummers strut.

I'm from where a hug is the only appropriate way to say hello and loud voices don't mean we are fighting.

I'm from Sunday family dinners with the entire family,

Where the amount of food could feed an army.

I'm from where the red sauce on pasta is called gravy and you cannot have coffee without some type of cake!

I'm from two loving parents, who prayed very hard for a child to complete their family.

## I am...

I'm from family vacations being just the three of us, and having my parents' undivided attention.

I'm from being blamed for everything that happened in the house, because, really, who else could it be?

I'm from being accountable for every action, decision, and mistake.

I'm from love, sometimes tough, that meant being a leader, and never a follower.

I'm from where family is the most important. They will be there for you in good times and in bad; to laugh with and cry with; where help is only a phone call away and at any given time, a family member might show up at your doorstep; where trips to Disney have become a bi-yearly tradition, because everything is more magical in Disney; and where home is anywhere mom is!

Kimberly DiBiasi

June 26, 2020

WCU, PWP 597

Anthology Piece #2

### Disney World 2019

"Mom, take my picture with the Mickey pumpkin!" I heard Olivia yell as she ran to a light post near the front of Cinderella's Castle in Disney's Magic Kingdom. My heart was exploding. I know it is so cliché, but it was such a magical night. Everything and more than I had hoped for, had happened. "Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party" was fabulous; worth every extra penny (about \$450 extra, so lots of extra pennies). As I took that picture, I saw the magic in Olivia's eyes. She was living her best life and that meant the world to me. We walked towards the exit of the Magic Kingdom, knowing we would be back in two days, but we still took another look at the castle. As I grabbed Olivia to squeeze in one last selfie, she grabbed my cheeks and kissed me. I don't know how I was blessed with such a sweet little girl. We took the most perfect selfie with the castle in the background, and as I stood up, Olivia pulled me closer and she whispered in my ear, "Thank you, Mommy. You made this the best night ever! I loved every minute."

We are that "Disney" family. In Olivia's short six years here on earth, she has been to Disney World three times! It is our favorite vacation place. We start planning our next trip on the flight home. It is a sickness, but one

that I love. Going to Disney gives me memories that last a lifetime, but the planning and build up to the trip is just as great. When we go to Disney, it is the five of us: my husband, my daughter, my parents and me. We love experiencing this all together. As an only child, I was very used to going on vacation with just my parents. We were extremely close and I enjoyed my time with them. When my now husband came into the picture, he was included on these family vacations. Fast forward many years, and now we have our own only child and want to establish these family vacations with her.

My mom and I have taken the reins of planning the trip. We get the "Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World" book, plan with our travel agents at "Magical Travel," and buy a new binder to organize all of our plans. We love it!

We have made the Disney trip a bi-yearly summer vacation. Yes, I know Disney in the summer is not ideal, but it is what works. My husband and I complain about our lack of flexible vacation time, because it means jealously liking other people's posts on social media about Disney's annual holiday celebrations. Don't get me wrong. I love being a teacher and so does he. We love having our summer vacation and time around Christmas to travel and spend time with extended family. But as my daughter is getting older, I was getting jealous about missing one particular holiday celebration in Disney World. Alex and I went to Disney for our honeymoon. It was the fall, over Thanksgiving, so we were able to experience a Christmas celebration in

Disney World. I loved seeing Disney decorated, but knew Christmas time would be way too crazy to go with our daughter. But...maybe a different holiday celebration would be fun...maybe Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party!?

As we began planning our August 2019 trip, I found out the dates for the Halloween celebration in Disney World would start in August! I was speechless. Would I be able to make the date work with the start of the school year? Would I even be able to get tickets? Little did I know, my mom had already talked with the travel agent and purchased tickets for the five of us. Imagine my excitement when I called the travel agent and she told me that we already had the tickets ordered and paid for! I could not stand myself. My husband is a huge Halloween fan. It is kind of sad, but as a child whose parents were divorced, he viewed Halloween as one holiday that was fun and not stressful about splitting time with his parents. I was going to try to keep our tickets a secret from him...that did not work. Anyone who knows me, knows that I cannot keep a secret.

Going to Disney involves planning, but also getting some essential outfits. Being there for the "Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party" meant costumes. Celebrating in August in Florida, I knew it was going to be extremely warm and Olivia wanted to be Jesse from Toy Story. The real costume was not going to work. She would melt. My family did not want to do a whole matching thing. It is funny, because we are "Disney people," but we



are not wear-matching-Disney-shirts people. Olivia was able to convince my parents that we *needed* to wear Halloween shirts. I found a Jesse t-shirt at the Disney store, and Olivia was thrilled. She was going to wear the shirt, shorts, and her red cowboy hat, but she wanted Jesse's boots. I struck out a bunch of times shopping for them, but just before we left I happened to find a pair of red Jesse sparkly boots at the Disney Store. I lucked out that they got their Halloween inventory just in time for our trip.

"Mom, can I take off the last chain?" Olivia yelled. The countdown chain that her and Nannie made together was complete. It was time to leave. When we arrived in Disney it was a Tuesday, but the party was on Friday, so for three days we enjoyed our trip while the anticipation for the Halloween party grew. Each day we went on rides, took pictures with characters, and ate delicious treats in the most magical place on Earth. I still am not sure how Olivia gets mom to go on the rides with her, but they do! Dumbo, Peter Pan's Flight and The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh are their favorites. Each night we talked about how much fun we had that day, and how excited we were for Friday.

The August sun pounded down on me, as I stepped off the bus in front of the Magic Kingdom. I'd never celebrated the holiday quite like this before. My family and I walked toward the entrance of Disney's Magic Kingdom and soaked in all of the sights and sounds of the first night of Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party! In under 20 minutes, we were through

security, had taken pictures of all the Halloween decorations in and around the entrance to Main Street, and were following a large crowd of dressed up trick-or-treaters down an alley behind the Main Street stores under a banner that read, Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party! We each got a bag for candy, and went to a few stations to collect M&Ms, bite sized Snickers, Starbursts, and Skittles.

We raced to Fantasyland to get in line for the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. This is one of Olivia's favorite rides. As we raced to the line, Olivia just froze. "Look guys, there is zero wait time to see Cinderella, Rapunzella, Tiana and Elena. Can we please go?" Alex and I looked at each other, there was no question about it, of course we could go. Mom and dad were right behind us. They would never miss a chance to see her so excited. We went right through the line and got to meet the princesses. Olivia is a HUGE princess fan. She has seen these princesses before, but she couldn't wait to see them again. Cinderella made a fuss over Olivia's boots. We walked out and Olivia said, "Mom, did you hear Cinderella loved my shoes? She loves shoes! Remember she lost her shoe and then got it back again when Prince Charming found her?" I just love how she loves the princesses and really believes in the magic of Disney.

The night was going so well. We had seen the princesses by surprise and went on a few of the "big" rides. I knew that there was a dance party going on at Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café. I hadn't told Olivia about any of the

details of the night beforehand, because I wanted it to all be a surprise. I knew she wasn't going to be happy thinking I was making her stop and go eat, but we had to get there quick. Olivia wasn't thrilled, but she went walking into the restaurant and again she completely froze. "Oh, my God! It's the Descendants!" I felt the tears roll down my face, because I could just feel the joy coming from her little body.

It was the DescenDance Party. Olivia had just started watching the Descendants movies a few months prior, and the newest movie, Descendants 3, had premiered on her birthday. She couldn't stand herself. She saw the cast members dressed up in Descendants costumes and dancing to the songs from all three movies, she looked like she'd just walked down the stairs on Christmas morning. We ate dinner, while she danced for a full hour. She was a hot sweaty mess, but couldn't be any happier.

The night continued to get better and better. After the dance party, we watched a lights and fireworks show in front of Cinderella's Castle, stayed for the Halloween Parade, which was led by the Headless Horseman (riding a real live horse), and stopped to buy a few souvenirs on Main Street. It was a magical night that I will always remember.



*ALL ABOARD!!**OCD Station**Danger on the Track**Driving Cabin**Caboose*

MANDY DUDEK

# TRAIN OF THOUGHT

*Since 1984*

## Dear OCD,



It's time for a talk. I'm exhausted. From the moment I wake up you've already started with your abuse. You tell me to go heat up my coffee and grab two, only two chocolates, for that is what I will eat until lunch. You tell me to heat up my coffee only to remind me of the smudges on the microwave which led to stray marks on the stove and subsequently the floor, and before I know it, I've reheated the coffee five times, each time for 45 seconds.

We are at a crossroads in our relationship. If you can't shape up, then kindly ship out.

When you first came around, about as young as I can remember, you continually pushed me to do my best. You made me feel alive and productive and helped me to view all sides of a situation, even if the sides became a dodecagon instead of a triangle. You always encouraged me to keep on going, even on the days I just wanted to give up. You made me feel like the deeds I did or the jobs I accomplished were worthy, even if a 1-page reflection was required and you made me write 5. You provided me with a sense of self-satisfaction and pride that I could not get from others.

BUT THEN,

the good days became few and far between as your demands for perfection grew stronger, LOUDER! Our relationship now centered around tension and anxiety and I struggled to meet your impossible expectations. Countless nights were spent wide awake thinking of ways to quiet your penetrating demands and make you proud, but nothing worked!

I tried journaling about you - FAIL, talking about you to lessen the burden - FAIL again, and trying to tackle the impossible, but even with the effort and tenacity of 100 football teams, nothing stopped your selfish demands.

This was when I saw you for who you really are. An ego maniac who had me wrapped around your poisoned claws of perfection. You stole from me what wasn't yours.

You stripped me bare of all the things and people I valued most and erased the things that made me uniquely ME. You saw my passion for life, my drive, my desire for success and selfishly manipulated those things to make me detest my own self. You saw my desire to help others and you made it your life's mission to target my vulnerabilities. Npw, not only you, but those closest to me, have used and belittled my existence when the need fit.

But guess what? I may be tired, but I am DONE!

[ALL ABOARD!!](#)[OCD Station](#)[Danger on the Track](#)[Driving Cabin](#)[Caboose](#)

MANDY DUDEK

# TRAIN OF THOUGHT

*Since 1984*

Your efforts were phony, calculated only to drag me through the next series of neverending mind games.

Did you HEAR me this time? I AM DONE with ALL of your incessant demands at any and all times of the day, the false sense of pride and security you gave me, the challenges that were impossible yet I completed them with only words of "you could be better" or "it could be better" are finished. You will no longer dictate the story of my life. You are no longer invited to even be a bystander because we both know you won't be able to resist the narcissistic control you have over your victims. You've been fired.

There's a new author in town and it feels mighty good.

Sincerely,

Your former mind, body, and soul slave, Mandy

The Book of Virtues tells us, "If God had wanted man to fly, He would have given him wings." Where was this inspirational proverb as I was trapezing through the air like a Cirque du Soleil performer, only *without* the gracefulness and ease, but coupled instead with clumsy, almost delirious footings? Needless to say, wings would have proved VERY useful on this particular day.

Heat licked at my sunburnt face, coiling around my limbs like a hooded serpent. The air felt thick like soggy chicken noodle soup, and the asphalt smoldered with a disorienting filmy haze. My glands felt like large gumballs waiting to be given the chance to swirl down the transparent tube after a child begging his parents for 25 cents to insert into the gumball machine. As I glanced at my cousin and friend, I knew that complaining would not be tolerated today. Joey had trained laboriously, knowing that today's event would be an arduous undertaking. Judging by her dominant stance at the starting line, so had Sarah. Swallowing deeply, I force-fed all of my insecure worries and fears about the day's obstacles into a dark, cavernous abyss in the back of my mind.

With stiff appendages, I slowly began the quarter-mile trek to our first destination.

"This doesn't seem so bad," I thought to myself as I viewed the monstrosity that lay before me. At the onset, it seemed more fun than physically grueling. However, as I awkwardly ran across the oversized inflatable a few minutes later, I drew an important conclusion: 22 years of dancing does not mean that your balance will sustain over uncertain terrain. The first obstacle was tricky, but helped to affirm my position in the event. Navigating the "Smash Wall" after running another quarter-mile had my muscles screaming for a quick, sudden death.

People began whizzing past me as if their very lives were at stake. My heart had begun to pound with such intense force, I was convinced the whole Wilmington Blue Rocks stadium could hear it.



PARALYZED?? I began to demonstrate extreme signs of distress and was visibly aware that my parents had arrived on the scene. Questions were being hurled at anyone wearing a hospital uniform like a Quarterback trying to make a first-down play. My parents did their best to downplay the situation, but my optimism from earlier was quickly replaced with despair. I was resolute that I would never walk again.

Instruments poked and prodded my body for what seemed like days. Conclusive test results showed multiple concussions, a lacerated leg, and damage to my cervical, lumbar, and thoracic regions of my spine. My vision was impaired and I was slow to respond to fine and gross motor tasks.

But... I was NOT paralyzed! The doctors and surgeons explained that during my initial crash, the concussions had signaled major distress to my nervous system, which was responsible for the seizure type fall that occurred when I attempted to stand hours earlier. I was henceforth categorized as a "Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)" patient. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) defines a traumatic brain injury (TBI) as a disruption in the normal function of the brain that can be caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or penetrating head injury. A TBI can cause a wide range of functional short- or long-term changes affecting: thinking (i.e., memory and reasoning); sensation (i.e., sight and balance); language (i.e., communication, expression, and understanding); and emotion (i.e., depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness).<sup>1</sup>

That summer was marked with long, arduous treks to Bryn Mawr Brain Trauma Rehabilitation Center where I spent countless hours, multiple times a week, learning how to "re-train" everyday motions such as eating, visual and spatial awareness, and walking. The physicians and physical therapists were patient and understanding, but being the Taurus that I am, I was completely motivated and determined to get back to my old self. I grew frustrated with minor improvements and longed for

three-hour gym sessions and my memory to come back. While my long-term memory is permanently affected due to the amount of trauma I endured, my body has come a long way since that day.

Elation and gratitude are the words that come to mind after speaking with my team of doctors. I had a long road of recovery ahead of me, but that seemed insignificant to the most powerful words that were ever spoken to me, "You are NOT paralyzed." What had started out as an innocent, carefree, athletic event with family and friends, had become the most terrifying day of my life. From that day forward, as soon as anyone mentions registering for an adult obstacle course, I immediately cringe at the memory of my catastrophic encounter with Wipeout's famous Big Red Balls obstacle event.

West Chester University: PA Writing and Literature Project

Writing Institute Summer 2020

PWP 597 – Teacher as Writer

Multi-genre Poem

Karen Friel

## Explore the Ocean

This is a paired poem, where two voice read alone and as one.

**Peaceful**

**Polluted**

**Mysteriously vast**

**Massive waste**

**Shimmering blues and greens**

**Swelling trash islands**

**Home for countless**

**Habitats at risk**

**Endless Ecosystems**

**Endangered species**

**Our Ocean**



## **ARG! Welcome to the Academic Code by Matthew Kruger-Ross**

The Academic Code is much like the pirate code, made famous recently by Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean movie franchise. There was a very real Pirate Code, a collection of rules and guidelines authorized by very real and historical pirates. But, the version referenced in the popular movies are always mentioned at interesting plot points. Some are crucial to the story and storyline, others are there for comedic value. One such rule contained in the pirate code is the rule of "*Parle*" -- anyone prisoner captured by a pirate may utter the call "*Parle*" (French for "to speak") and is, according to the Pirate Code, to be delivered to the captain of the ship to be allowed to speak.

In the first or second movie when a secondary or tertiary character references something that must be done according to the "code" (now the shorthand for "Pirate's Code" within the world of the Pirates of the Caribbean movies) it becomes obvious that the "code" isn't some sort of hard fast and set rulebook. As Captain Barbossa (seen at the right), Jack Sparrow's (image above) some-time nemesis notes: "The code be more of guidelines!" That is the spirit that I want to draw upon by naming this the Academic Code -- more of guidelines and heuristics than set in stone rules.

Why even write something like this? In short, because when I first became a graduate student there was nothing like this to guide me along my journey. (There are other books and resources, to be sure - see this page for some of them.) I had to figure things out, as it were, piecing together the rules of the game. I broke some along the way, figuring that forgiveness was the same as permission. Over my time now as a professor and teaching graduate students over and over again the ropes of this ship called graduate studies in education, my hunch is that I've amassed a pretty thorough understanding of the Academic Code.

Everything contained herein should roughly adhere to educational studies (including, broadly, K-12 education, teacher education, educational leadership and policy, higher education, student affairs, and so on). However, rather than treating anything I say as gospel, the reader must compare the guidance with the expectations and guidelines set by those important stakeholders in their respective fields.

What's challenging, however, is these unscripted and often ephemeral norms aren't just written down anywhere... they're in the journal descriptions, the biographies of book editors, the subtext within call for papers, and the academic drama of thesis and dissertation defenses.

These notes are not the gospel. But I hope it is a decent set of guidelines that might be helpful to you -- a "code".

## The Coin of the Realm: Being an Author by Matthew Kruger-Ross

I'm not sure where this phrase comes from, but *coin of the realm* seems to be about it. No one told me - although it was obvious - that at least 40% (more than a third and a quarter, but I'm on the fence on if I want to take the strong '50%' stance) of being an academic, of being in academia, is being an author. That's it. That's one of the big secrets.

(And, as an aside and throwback to metaphors, academic as author is an enormous one!)

If the best way we have figured out how to get information and knowledge *inside* us is reading, the best way to get knowledge out is *writing* (and speaking, too).

In secondary and post-secondary education we write 'papers' - a nondescript term that drips with the regrets of youth. We do it because we have to, others have made us, we have to write a research paper because 'one day' we'll need it - or at least the skills. I can still recall random facts about tsunamis - the very first research paper I ever had to write in middle school. We still had to use card catalogues and I had to write my drafts by hand based off of note cards. But look how it stuck with me...

Writing is what we've got such that we have a special name for it as a profession: author. In existentialism terms folks say that we *author* our lives. Consider, for a moment, how the root shows up in other works: *authority*, *authentic*.

In graduate study we write to express our ideas, to synthesize new understandings, argue for our way of seeing and conceptualizing our concerns. In the transactional sense, *someone* has to write all the stuff we end up reading.

But it never occurred to me in the beginning (and it is a shock to many graduate students) that seeing ourselves as authors can help shift our way of being toward writing itself. As academics, as scholars, *we are authors*.

Kristen Mascitelli

June 25, 2020

WCU, PWP 597

Same Beginning Poem

### If I Didn't Row...

If I didn't row, I wouldn't understand that success doesn't happen overnight.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't accept that setbacks can help us grow as individuals.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't value the power of teamwork and working together for a common goal.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't push myself physically and mentally beyond my limits to achieve a dream.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't recognize that consistency and perseverance leads to continual progress.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't appreciate the beauty of sunrises and the tranquility of nature.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't realize the importance of prioritizing responsibilities and balancing life's daily demands.

If I didn't row, I wouldn't aspire to be a better version of myself everyday.

If I didn't coach, I wouldn't have the opportunity to encourage others to see their true potential on and off the water.





"It's very hard in the beginning to understand that the whole idea is not to beat the other runners. Eventually, you learn that the competition is against the little voice inside you that wants you to quit." ~ George Sheehan

There have been many small moments in my life that have shaped who I am today. Whether they were positive or negative, I have learned from each of them. My mindset continues to evolve in my professional and personal life. Determination, hard work, and goal setting are several that define me. Crossing the finish line of a marathon is one of those defining moments. To some, that may not sound like a big deal. Thousands of people compete in marathons all around the world every year. To others, this may seem like an impossible and even crazy goal. And for me, I never thought I would consider, train and eventually run 26.2 miles myself.

November 17, 2013 was the day I achieved the unthinkable... crossing the finish line of the Philadelphia Full Marathon! 26.2 miles. 4 hours, 45 minutes and 49 seconds. A 10 - 11 minutes a mile split. I had spent months training for this one moment. Online running plans, new sneakers, a fancy handheld water bottle, flavorful gel snacks, various trails paths, questionable weather conditions... a training plan designed for success.

So many thoughts cross your mind when you set out to achieve an idea that seems unachievable. As thousands of runners lined up in their designated color corrals at 7 am on a chilly November morning, I remember

being excited, but nervous. Proud of myself, yet self-doubting. Calm, yet jittery.

As the announcer pumped up the runners with upbeat music and positive vibes, a distinct memory jogged across my mind. I remembered joining the rowing team in high school barely being able to run for more than 5 minutes without gasping for air. I remembered trailing behind on countless runs during practice. I remembered self doubting my athletic ability. At that point in my life, I did not realize how powerful an individual's mindset can be on achieving a goal. And as that fog horn echoed along the Parkway, I snapped back to reality and reminded myself that I was more than ready to crush this goal.

The first two hours felt like a breeze. Spectators were gathered on every street cheering enthusiastically and holding motivational signs. Music from small bands and blasting radios filled the air. I clearly remember zooming past the Art Museum which was mile 13.1, the halfway point, and feeling amazing. My best friend and I were ahead of our goal pace and just running on this high of excitement.

That feeling of being on top of the world came to a halt 5 miles later. Reality kicked back in. I was mentally and physically exhausted! I wanted to give up, quit, try again another day. My legs were as heavy as bricks. My arms felt weak as they continued to swing back and forth. However, with the

constant crowd support through Manayunk and along Kelly Drive, I somehow found a trace of inner strength to keep going.

And a half mile before I crossed the finish line, I spotted one of my biggest cheerleaders - my brother. He hopped over the fence and jogged alongside, just repeating how proud he was of me. As I took those final strides towards the finish line, I kept whispering to myself, "I can do this!" With that final step across the finish line, my sister was anxiously waiting with her homemade poster, yelling her heart out, and snapping pictures of this priceless moment.

So why is running a marathon a big deal? This goal was never about being the best or fastest runner. The only person I was competing against was myself. As a teacher and now a high school rowing coach, I always share this story with my students and rowers. I'm not bragging about the fact that I ran a marathon, especially since I finished 7,866 out of about 30,000 runners. I share this small moment of crossing the finish line to prove that the impossible is possible. And while there will be setbacks along the way, you can achieve your goals with the right mindset and belief in yourself.

Candy Heist  
By Kelly Metzler

You'd think someone would say something. Anything. I mean, I had literally waddled out of the store.

My brother was the one to blame. As always.

The 7-11 cashier's counter was directly in front of the candy aisle; I could see the rotating cherry and blue raspberry Slurpee slushies quite clearly next to the pimpled blond teenager flipping idly through a magazine while waiting for customers.

I'd gone to the 7-11 to watch my 10-year-old big brother play the Asteroids video game, also hoping for a chance to try, once again, to remain alive against Centipede. I didn't. Of course.

After his spirited success against the aliens, we wandered over to gaze longingly at the candy aisle. The King-size Hershey's bars were particularly tempting, but we had only brought enough quarters to die once on the video games, so all we could do was stare.

Seeing and feeling my disappointment, and I'm sure some of his own, my brother shared with me the most exciting news I'd ever heard.

"You know, Kel, all the candy on the bottom row is free."

"Really?" I asked, eyes lighting up like cartoon fireworks. "Why would they do that?" my five-year-old self questioned.

"They put it down low," he said, as he motioned Vanna White-style to the penny-candy on the bottom shelf of the candy aisle, "so that the little kids can reach it easily. To make them happy." His angelic face beamed at me with convincing truth.

Such logic. What idiot would contradict that thinking? The store people must be geniuses.

I decided to load up the candy in any way I could. Not only did I stuff my pockets, but I tipped up the bottom of my ratty Strawberry Shortcake t-shirt to fill up with chocolate footballs, Sixlets, root beer barrels, lemon drops, Tootsie Rolls; you name, I got it.

I waddled nonchalantly right past the apathetic clerk and through the doors out into the parking lot beyond.



My brother, helpfully, took a handful of candy to eat for the two-block walk home.

Once inside, I had to work fast. My mom was the type to ration candy, one-a-day style, from Halloween to Easter and Easter to Halloween. She would be home from the factory soon and I would be out of luck.

Jeff skimmed another round of candy before disappearing into his Atari-filled afternoon.

When the screen door finally announced my mom's arrival, I had only managed it half-way. I knew the stomach ache would arrive not long after the lecture, but I felt pleased nonetheless.

Shifting emotions passed like clouds over her face, from shock to concern to chagrin, perhaps even a little fascination, before landing finally on anger as her gaze swept over the mounded candy pile and sprinkling of wrappers dotted around the table and coloring the floor.

"Kelly Michelle Riley!" she shouted. Uh-oh. All three names. "Where did you get the money for all that candy?"

With all the innocence of a younger sister, I replied, "Oh, didn't know you? All of the candy on the bottom row is free!"

The slam of the screen door after my brother's hasty exit was the only indication I had that perhaps he had not been truthful with me.

And so there I remained, alone, left to count up the candy wrappers from the consumed treats, bag up the uneaten ones, and count out all the pennies from my piggy bank.

We returned to the store, me dragging my feet this time carrying the sweaty plastic bag, to disclose my heinous crime to the adolescent cashier who tried to look as if he cared about my 83-cent felony.

On the return trip home, my mom's lecture bounced off my reddening ears. I'm sure she said all the things a mother should about honesty and mistakes and lessons we learn, but really, all I learned that day was not to trust my brother.

### Five Things I Will Miss About Minnesota

1. No one there looks at me funny when I say “hotdish” or “uff-da” or “soda.” They all know that “casserole” is a stupid name, “uff-da” can mean anything from “wow” to a curse word, and “soda” is just the right word for pop.
2. No one there asks, “What do you mean it’s hot in the summers?!” Really? I mean, I know the media shows the cold temperatures and they are not wrong--several times school was closed because the busses wouldn’t start--but it *is* the land of 10,000 lakes. What do you think happens with all that humidity? I mean, besides the mosquito breeding ground.
3. No one there has to specify “ice” hockey. There is a lot of ice, more so than grass; we play hockey and that’s the only name you need to know. You do, however, have to specify what kind of fishing you intend to do--fly fishing, dock fishing, boat fishing, or ice fishing. I guess fishing is also pretty important, what with all those lakes.
4. No one there questions my Twins gear. They DID win the World Series. I went to the parades, twice, in 1987 and 1991, proudly waving my Homer Hanky. My mother even let me skip school and ride along with my brother downtown.
5. But most of all, no one there knows me, all of me, anymore. My father is gone, my mother is gone, and my brother is gone. Minnesota no longer holds the people I love or a reason for me to return.

Katie O'Neill

MultiGenre Paper

Where I'm From Poem

**Where I'm From: The Pocket**

I am from alleyways that pass as streets;

From Devil's Pocket Food and Spirit and Thai Square Restaurant.

I am from pothole filled streets, lined with cars that are parked haphazardly, bumpers  
touching, two wheels perched up on the curb;

From the constant drilling, beeping, and hammering sounds of new construction in the  
wee hours of the morning.

I am from orange lilies

That bloom breathtakingly for one beautiful week each year.

I am from neighbors smoking cigarettes on their front stoops and friendly chats that  
transform into spontaneous gatherings in the middle of the street,

From Cat Man and Parrot Man, and Joe and Harriet too.

I am from dragging overflowing trash cans and recycling bins out front on Sunday nights  
and

running on the crowded Schuylkill River Trail each night after work;

From spending long hours working in the Veolia factory before trekking home to nearby  
families.

I am from the legends of children being so poor that they would steal from the Devil's  
pocket and tales of "ruff and tuff" residents that took no mercy.

I'm from Ireland and first generation immigrant families never leaving their home in The  
Pocket,

From Grace's burgers and one dollar beers at Callahan's;

From the streets that are never plowed, even in a blizzard;

From moving trucks that need to back down the street to fit and Uber drivers  
complaining endlessly of "ungodly" narrow streets;

From the empty lot at the end that used to house an abandoned factory, recently  
demolished to reveal an unparalleled view of University City and the Schuylkill River  
Trail.

For how long, we do not know, but for now we look, we dream, we wonder, we  
appreciate this unique and special place that welcomes us home.



Katie O'Neill  
PWP 597  
Narrative Writing

### Monday Morning Pep Talk

I am not that sure a full second even passed between when I hit the green call button on my phone and when I heard the squeaky yet confident “Hello?” that greeted me on the other end of the line. I had known about this call for three days now. In fact, I had been the one to suggest it and schedule it. There had been multiple emails exchanged back and forth about it. I had even typed a short list of bulleted talking points to prepare for it. Yet, there I sat, speechless. The only thought that came to mind was *yet another item to add to my ever growing list of “Things They Don’t Teach You in College.”* This moment was inspiring what seemed to be entry number one thousand: “How to Talk a Child Through Distance Learning During a Pandemic.”

Lucky for me, Oliver was far from speechless, as always. “Miss O’Neill? Is that you?” he enthusiastically inquired through the phone. Just the sound of his voice brought me back to reality. I put on my Miss O’Neill pants and did what I do best. I put on a brave face, pushed my worries aside, and made a connection with my student. “Hey Oliver! How are you, buddy? How was your weekend? Did you and Holly do anything fun?” If I closed my eyes tight enough, I could picture myself standing outside the colorfully decorated door of Room 18 with my mug of lukewarm coffee in my hands and a tired smile on my face. This is where these types of conversations typically transpired between Oliver and I. Yet, we weren’t in the hallway of Sabold Elementary. Instead, we were miles apart with no promise of a reunion in sight.

I also already had all the answers to these questions that I was asking Oliver. His mom had been keeping me up to date via our frequent email exchanges over the past few weeks. I knew that Oliver was having a hard time with distance learning, hence the phone call. His weekend had probably been rather boring, as all of ours were, without any sports to watch or social events to attend. Oliver and his sister Holly were constantly fighting, quite a contrast to the adoring big brother and wide-eyed, admiring little sister I typically saw at school. As always, however, Oliver did not disappoint with his responses. He candidly chimed in before I could even finish asking my questions, as he always did.

Oliver always had a story to tell, usually without anyone even asking. No matter what we were learning about, Oliver had a personal connection. You better believe he was going to share it, even if the appropriate time had passed. The daily tallies of “Hey, Miss O’Neill” callouts typically topped twenty for Oliver alone. On this day, almost on cue, Oliver started chatting away. “Well... I’ve mostly just been playing Fortnite and Minecraft, but I did go for a walk with Will (another student in our class) the other day while he walked his dogs. Don’t worry, I walked on the other side of the street! Oh yea, It was Rose’s (another student in our class) birthday this week so we did a drive by celebration for her. Oh, and then I spent some time at dad’s house. That’s about it, though. And Holly? She’s fine. She’s been working hard too.” An outsider listening to this seemingly one sided conversation would have thought *This kid is doing great! There is nothing to worry about.* Me, however, I was not fooled.

On the outside, Oliver is a confident, friendly, outgoing boy. He excels in school and in sports. Everybody knows Oliver. I often refer to him as “the mayor of the fourth grade.” He walks down the hallways greeting everyone he sees, constantly breaking our expectation of silent

hallways. His sweet smile and an innocent “I was just saying ‘Hi!’” elicit a smile and a free pass every time. On the inside though, Oliver is different.. He lacks confidence, has difficulty focusing, becomes easily overwhelmed by his family situation, struggles to maintain friendships, and puts an immense amount of pressure on himself. Without even seeing him, I knew the latter Oliver was the one I was speaking to on the phone. Even as he talked about seemingly fun activities, at least as far as quarantine was concerned, I could hear the downturn in his voice. Although I couldn’t see him, I could picture his emotional state perfectly. At that moment, I would have given anything to reach through the phone and give Oliver one of our famous fist bumps.

My initial purpose for calling was to help alleviate Oliver’s difficulty with writing and quell the frustrations his mother was experiencing at home. Oliver’s aversion to writing was no news to me. In fact, I had been pretty open and honest about my concerns during our parent-teacher conference that took place merely two days before school closed for Covid-19. Like most parents, Oliver’s mom was seeing her son’s writing struggles now more than ever. “It’s worse than I thought,” she wrote in one email. Also like most parents, she was losing her patience by the second. It seemed that even her expertise strategies and vast experience as a high school English teacher could not do the trick here. She was throwing in the towel and begging for help. However, within seconds of calling Oliver, I knew that writing was no longer on the agenda for our conversation. It no longer mattered.

As I listened to Oliver talk, I minimized my bulleted list of talking points, leaned back in my chair, grabbed my mug of hot coffee and listened. I just listened. Oliver needed to talk and talk is what we did- for nearly fifteen minutes! My nine year old self would have been mortified,

awkward, and uncomfortable to talk to my teacher on the phone for a single minute. Heck, as a thirty one year old teacher I still felt awkward. Not Oliver, though. I am not even sure which topics we covered during those fifteen minutes, but I do know it was what we both needed in that moment of time, more than either of us would have ever guessed. With each passing minute, I felt myself growing less tense and my smile widening. Although not physically reunited in person, I was back with my student, back where I belonged.

Eventually Oliver and I made our way to talking about his school work, and we put a few changes in place for his distance learning plan. I had learned early on that the key with Oliver was the buy in and the sense of ownership for his work. Simply sharing a Google Doc with him that contained all four writing prompts for the week, rather than one new prompt each day, completely changed his perspective. “Can I brainstorm right on here? Can I do a draft and then you can comment on it before I submit it? Can I make a web on my doc? Did you share this with anyone else? How did you do that highlighting thing last week with your draft?” Seconds before, I could barely get the kid to write more than three sentences for his entries, and now he wanted to generate ideas, organize his thoughts, make revisions, receive feedback, and maybe, just maybe, submit a second draft? I found myself speechless again.

As I wrapped up my conversation with Oliver and simultaneously typed a follow up email to his mom, I found myself asking, “Same time next week?” I am not sure if it was for my sake or for Oliver’s, but I knew that I needed more of these Monday morning pep talks in my quarantine life. I was craving student contact more than I had even realized. So much so that I picked up the phone and checked in on three more students that morning. Not all of them were as prepared as Oliver, but all of them responded with enthusiasm, appreciation and laughter, so



much laughter. Each call also ended with the promise of a follow-up call the next week. “Same time, same phone number” was quickly becoming my new Miss O’Neill catch phrase. With each call, my smile grew, my anxiety eased, and my heart reminded me of why teaching is not just an occupation. It is a lifestyle. I am sure there will be countless additions to the “Things They Don’t Teach You in College” list over the next few years. In fact, there will probably be many more during this virtual learning experience, alone. One thing is for sure, though, many of life’s most important lessons cannot be taught, planned or read about. Sometimes, you just need to put the notes and agenda aside and seize the moment, just like Oliver does.

Michelle Ruiz

Writing Institute

Anthology Piece #1

25 June 2020

### Millennials and Their Plants

"When are you having kids?" is a question I've come to dread and seems almost unavoidable now that I'm thirty, almost married and as close to financially stable as I'm going to get at this stage in my life. It's a question that I've learned to deflect or walk away from, but it's a question that never seems to go away.

Why have kids at this moment in my life when I can have plants? Plants don't scream, cry, throw things, demand my constant attention or make me have to leave work early. Sure, I might have to clean up soil after repotting a plant or I might have to deal with a pest issue that involves some washing. And sure, I do have to water them and fertilize them every so often, but in no way are they close to the responsibility level of having a child and in no way do I feel ready for that just yet. It turns out I'm also not the only millennial who feels this way.

Many other millennials face the "when are you having kids?" question often from family and friends who do not understand the childless, married later in life, career focused lifestyle many of us have chosen to live. Interestingly enough, as this lifestyle has become more common, the house plant industry has taken off. In only the past few years, the U.S. sales of house plants have skyrocketed by almost 50%. To understand this number, that means the sales of house plants currently sit at around \$1.7 billion according to the National Gardening Association. Some argue that this is because millennials have actually replaced children with plants and that plants have become the new 'pet'.

Who can blame them? Plants offer the ability to travel and embrace spontaneity more than pets or children could ever allow. Millennials are also still able to care for something and nurture it's growth, but they don't need to worry about rushing home to feed it or make sure it didn't have an accident on the rug. This means more hours can be spent at work and the possibility of going to Happy Hour is always an option.

Spending a weekend away also becomes much less complicated. There's no need to get a pet sitter or worry about planning child friendly activities at your destination.

The accessibility of plants has also made buying them much easier. The idea of getting plant mail has become a very popular scenario for many plant buyers. Companies, such as "The Sill" and "BloomBox" help make these shipments happen. Some companies even pot your plant for you and ship it so you don't even have to get dirt on the rug. For those that also are convinced they have a greenthumb, "The Sill" even has a line of "Can't Kill It. Just Try." plants that lure hesitant future plant parents in.

What has really launched millennials head first into the plant world is the strong presence of a community on social media. From coordinating plant swaps to browsing thousands of online groups for buying/selling/trading or even for plant support, there's something for everyone. Social media influencers have even become a large part of the online plant world, which has turned owning plants into a trendy and desirable hobby. Individuals such as Amanda Switzer, who created "Planterina," or Summer Rayne Oakes who built up her "Homestead Brooklyn" brand have created empires for themselves, which all started on social media. They have inspired so many to quit their jobs, open a nursery and sell plants themselves, which most plant obsessed individuals would say is their dream.

In a world where jobs are demanding, hours are long, and the motor constantly seems to be running, it's no wonder millennials have chosen to stop and smell the roses.

Michelle Ruiz

Writing Institute 2020

Anthology Piece #2

25 June 2020

### Personal Narrative: The Wedding

Weddings are supposed to be beautiful occasions where families get together and celebrate the union of two wonderful people. Some people spend their entire lives planning for the perfect day. They think about the guest list, the seating chart, who their caterer will be and what floral arrangements will work best. Many consider it to be one of the best days of their lives. Sometimes, however, weddings don't fit this fairy tale mold.

At 18 years old, I was the maid of honor for my sister's very spur of the moment wedding. Did I choose this role? Did I want to be her maid of honor? Absolutely not. We weren't close and I wasn't ready for so much to be thrown at me at once, but since I was her sister, it was an expectation that I fill this role. I realize years later that I was meant to be a buffer for a catastrophe I never saw coming.

We planned the wedding very quickly, and by we I mean she planned it quickly while I just stood there nodding and agreeing to whatever she said. She had everything sorted out within three months. I was both impressed with her and just as equally terrified. She was in pure bridezilla mode and no one was going to get in her way. You were either on Team Bride or you weren't invited to the wedding anymore. There was absolutely no inbetween. On her wedding day, she was willing to burn as many bridges as she needed to make sure it ran smoothly. I knew I was part of the firing squad, but I never imagined who the victim would be.

As we lined up to prepare for the procession down the aisle, everything hit the fan. My sister, who had initially planned to walk to the altar alone, decided to make a change of plans. She asked her soon-to-be father-in-law to walk her down the aisle, which did not bode well for my mother. She was enraged and it was clear she felt betrayed. They immediately engaged in a screaming match. My mom felt she should have been the one to walk her down the aisle. My sister didn't care and even said to my mom she no longer wanted to be a part of her family. I remember standing there having no idea what to do. It was the most paralyzing feeling. I knew I should have stopped them and tried to talk sense into them, but I was 18. I had my own problems to



deal with and I was honestly terrified of my sister. She was never nice to me and might still be the most judgemental person I've ever met. I wouldn't have gained anything by getting involved, but I think the expectation was that I put out these fires. I just didn't have an extinguisher so the flames continued to grow.

In hindsight, expecting an 18 year old to mediate between my recently widowed mother and my unstable sister was ludicrous. Her soon-to-be father-in-law should have stepped in and realized the inappropriateness of the situation. Instead, he just stood there like my sister and mom were having an argument over paint colors. It's hard to respect a man who doesn't see the gravity of a situation right under his nose. Walking my sister down the aisle wasn't his right and he should have known that. He had known her for six months. At 18, I cringed at the idea and still cringe at it over a decade later. None of this mattered, however, because my sister still got her way. My mom was escorted to sit in her seat and told to put a smile on her face. Meanwhile, I stood in the procession line wishing I was anywhere else but at this wedding.

As we each walked down the aisle and lined up on the altar, I could see that my mother was seething. Being someone who has a very difficult time sitting back and letting things go, she was a ticking time bomb. The minister, being blissfully unaware of the turmoil brewing, had everyone rise for my sister's procession. As the music played, she walked through a sea of people arm in arm with her soon-to-be father-in-law. Once they were at the altar, he asked the question that I had been dreading. "Who gives this bride away?" At this point my mother, like a bat of hell, flew out of her seat and ran in her heels to the front of that room all while yelling phrases that I think everyone who was at that wedding remembers very clearly. They were along the lines of, "NO!" "No, I will not let you give her away." "This isn't right." "How dare you do this." "Your father would never approve." During all of this, I hid not only behind my bouquet, but I also hid behind my sister's bouquet that I was somehow holding. "It couldn't get any worse," I thought to myself, but once again I was horrible wrong.

My sister's father-in-law refused to let my mother be involved and my sister's brother-in-laws forcibly made my mother sit back down. I should have done something. I should have dropped both bouquets and stood up for my mother, but instead I stood there in horror over the entire situation. That paralyzing fear kicked back in again. From here, it only got worse. During the "Does anyone have any objections?" part that I really think they should have just skipped in the ceremony, my mother got up one last time to speak her peace. She