English Composition Program
Department of English
Award Ceremony
March 6, 2012

University of Miami
College of Arts and Sciences
Coral Gables, Florida

Award Winners

Eighteenth Annual Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest

Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest

2011-2012 Contest Chair:
Danielle Houck

English Composition Program Director:
Zisca Burton

English Composition Senior Administrative Assistant:
Clara Maroney

Contributing Judges:
Alisa Be
Eric Behrle
David Borman
Zisca Burton
Danielle Houck
Joanna Johnson
Susan Leary
Matthew Meltzer
Martha Otis
Charlotte Rogers
Lauren Petrino
Josh Schriftman
John Wafer
Katharine Westaway

Booklet Design/Cover Photograph:
Roxane Pickens

Congratulations to the students recognized for excellence in University of Miami Composition Program writing assignments. Composing strong academic writing is challenging and rewarding work; the Audley Webster Memorial Writing Contest, now in its 18th year, provides the chance to find and celebrate strong student work.

Many students submitted their essays and the judges faced the difficult task of carefully reading and selecting the best work. Essays are judged without student names; the judging process creates dynamic conversation for the judges on what makes effective and outstanding student writing.

Seeing so many extraordinary essays reminds us of the extraordinary work happening all year throughout the Composition Program—spanning students, graduate students, the University Writing Center, and Composition Program Lecturers. The resulting intellectual intersections and real world applications continue and grow long past a semester's meeting time.

Thank you to all students who submitted work, to the judges, and to Clara Maroney, the Composition Program Senior Administrative Assistant, for her invaluable role in the contest.

Sincerely,
Danielle K. Houck
Composition Program Lecturer
Audley Webster Essay Contest Chair, 2011-2012

Audley Webster—The Professional

by Charlotte Rogers

Seventeen years ago we selected the first winning essays of the Audley Webster Writing Contest. These yardsticks of quality writing from the University of Miami's first-year writing courses continue to identify the highest standards.

How fitting, then to boast this name: Audley Webster! Webster's years of teaching composition at our University convey a working definition of the professional.

First, Webster felt responsibility to a larger educational goal: "Love of teaching," believes daughter Dr. Susan Webster, "and broader—imparting knowledge." He loved sharing knowledge and rational thought with all his students. Like several American cultures, he "believed that the greatest gift is the gift of learning, and that that gift is not complete until it is passed on."

Second, he made expertise his specialty. He developed skills necessary for both his job and beyond, kept his knowledge up to date, and taught the individual as that individual learned best. Pictures remain of Webster sitting with a student, both concentrating on polishing that clear sentence. Did he succeed? Testimonials offer evidence: "He made instruction so clear," and "He really cared that I learn to write," assert two U.M. alumni. Evidence came, too, in the Monday newspapers wrapped in quotable quotes of the NFL or NBA week's hero, his former students; evidence remains in market plans of U.M. students in businesses both national and international; and evidence appears in clear writing and persuasion in legal briefs filed by former students, periodically remembering and using Webster's standards for rational thought.

And his was a personality of candor, honesty, courtesy, and respect for human dignity in all relationships. Many teachers of writing remember his advice—about both life and writing. That advice included the professional attitude and optimism. He could relate a narrative—often personal—to sharpen a point. For example, Dr. Webster, his psychologist-daughter, remembers when meeting students their saying, "Oh, you are the feminist daughter."

Fourth, Webster in his quiet, dignified, and confident manner, earned the respect of both students and faculty with his high values and principles. Even before joining the U.M. faculty, he helped bring about equality through diversity on campuses. He lived the belief of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of the individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

These four professional qualities—and more—continue to remind us all of the highest standards in both teaching and imparting knowledge.

CONTEST WINNERS

**Writing entries appear as originally submitted, with no additional editing.*

Instructor Reflections—Martha Otis on Nicholas Kunz

When Nick Kunz told me about the paper he was going to write, and that he was going to make himself the subject of his own experiment, I gave him an enthusiastic go-ahead. Resolved: he would unplug himself for a full month from as much technology as he could. No Facebook, no computer except for word processing, no cell phone, no TV. No radio. Now that was getting into the spirit of the class: we had started the semester in English 107 reading essays by Walker Percy and Annie Dillard. Both authors exhort readers to pay more attention to the details and texture of everyday life, and to thereby recover a sense of wonder, curiosity, and sovereignty over individual experience.

Still, I was not prepared for the revelations in this critique of his generation's technology-related addictions. The thoroughly engaging voice -- sincere, urgent, and yet wry and humorous -- delighted me. Mr. Kuntz incorporates compelling research, and yet he makes his own big discoveries regarding life unplugged, all the while telling an important story. Nick goes to the heart of how we make meaning in our lives. One might say that he made an admirable recovery, worthy of Dillard and Percy, and exemplary in our ENG107 class.

English 106/107 • Spring 2011
Writing about Science and Nature

For your final paper this semester, you will do an inquiry into something that fascinates you. All semester, reading and discussing the pieces in *Best Science and Nature Writing 2008,* you have been encouraged to develop criteria for what makes good science writing for the general audience. Using these criteria, you can write about anything – even if it does not fit our "science and nature" theme. Remember the two triangles: ethos, pathos, logos; argument, protagonists, cinema. Make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. "A" papers will be very strong in higher order concerns: they will start and end with critical questions, they will offer *ideas about* your findings, and they will leave the reader unable to easily make the same old assumptions about this topic.

Disconnected: My Break From the On-Demand World

Nicholas Kunz

ENG 106/107 • Martha Otis
Spring 2011

"It is impossible to get any work done around here!" I yelled to my roommate as I finally started to write a paper for my Business Ethics class. I had originally planned to start the paper at eight o'clock, right after dinner when I would be full and ready to work. Eight o'clock rolled around and still Microsoft Word sat unopened on my dock of icons. That icon would remain unopened for the next three hours, and then it was open to a blank document for another hour more. It wasn't until midnight that I finally began work on my paper. What had I done for the last four hours? Absolutely nothing. I browsed 39 different web pages, sent 27 text messages, listened to 34 songs, played 5 games of FreeCell, and read 4 emails. Which is essentially nothing because out of all of that I remember not a single piece of information from any of the websites, messages, or songs. I don't even remember if I won or lost the games of FreeCell. Those four hours of my life went by in the blink of an eye, and I had nothing to show for it. It was at that moment that I realized that technology might be having a less than beneficial effect on my life.

When I thought about it further I thought that maybe this same thing was happening to other people in similar situations. I did some research and found a vast assortment of books and articles about the downside of being "plugged in". It seems as though a vast counter-culture is growing, and it is trying to separate from this new world that is ever-increasingly ruled by technology. A key persona in this burgeoning movement is Susan Maushart, author of *The Winter of Our Disconnect: How Three Totally Wired Teenagers (and a Mother Who Slept with Her iPhone) Pulled the Plug on Their Technology and Lived to Tell the Tale*. Her book describes a six-month long hiatus from electronics that she and her family undertook. During this hiatus everything that had a screen was banned in the house. Throughout the six months she noticed that without the demands and distractions of technology, she and her family became far closer and picked up a variety of hobbies from cooking to learning to play an instrument. She says in her book: "The hypothesis… that six months without screens would cause us to reconnect with 'life itself'—binding us together as a family, propelling us outward and upward as individuals – has been confirmed so often and in so many ways"

(Maushart). Her story and this quote more specifically sparked something inside of me, and I felt that, like her, I needed to get away from my technological distractions.

So I decided that I would take a break, a hiatus of my own in which none of my entertainment would come from a screen. No phones, no Internet, no television, no video games. For the next month I decided to live in a world without instant access; a world in which entertainment had to be experienced and couldn't be found in a Google search. My peers had deemed the task impossible and they laughed when I told them about my project. They asked me hundreds of questions pertaining to what technology I could use and what was prohibited. It was decided that my academic needs required a computer for writing papers and Internet assignments. Aside from this one exception I would refrain from all entertainment technology. I did not, however, live like the Amish: I allowed the use of light fixtures, refrigerators, microwaves, etc. The goal of this project was not to go back in time but instead to disconnect from this world of instant gratification.

On the 21st of February at midnight I turned off my cell phone and locked it away. I changed the background on my computer to a white screen and deleted all my icons except Microsoft Word. Then I shut down my computer and went to sleep; it was the first night in almost 5 years when I didn't have a cell phone resting beside my head.

The first week brought with it the first challenge of my endeavor: Boredom. Boredom, as I quickly learned, is one of many things that technology cures. The thing is, while technology may be the thing that cures us of our boredom, it may also be the thing that creates that boredom in the first place. The stimulation that technology brings about causes the brain to enter a heightened state of activity that when it is over leaves the individual feeling worn out or even depressed. This phenomenon has gotten so bad that Motorola has even coined a new term: "microboredom" to define those periods of time roughly 1-5 minutes long when people experience boredom. Everything today is about fighting boredom: there are games on your phone, text messages, Internet browsing. What people don't realize is that boredom can be a beneficial thing; it allows your mind to wander and refresh itself. During this experiment there were many times when I found myself doing nothing and amazingly enough I kind of liked it. To have a moment to yourself to think is an aspect of the past that we have undervalued. Those that can effectively channel that boredom into something productive are far better off than those that constantly race to escape it.

One way in which I overcame my boredom without the use of technology was reading. Over the course of the month I read seven books, totaling over 2000 pages of written material. When reading, the mind creates mental pictures of the scene and the imagination is left to roam free. The brain is far more active while reading than it is watching television. A study done by Herbert Krugman using an EEG machine showed that television watching elicited "a preponderance of slow-waves (alpha, delta, and theta frequencies) whereas the… EEG during

reading involved little slow wave activity and considerable high-frequency or beta activity." (Tupper 99). To explain: the speed of the waves in brain activity roughly correlates to the amount of attention that is being put forth; so higher frequencies of brain activity means higher levels of attentiveness and lower frequencies have the opposite meaning. This point becomes more important when thinking of the monumental shift that has been occurring from written material to television and the Internet. It is no surprise then that as technology exterminates print media there will be a decrease in the overall level of brain activity. Take for example the news: more Americans than ever turn to the television news instead of the newspaper. A study published by the American Sociological Association shows "a… decline in vocabulary at all or most educational levels in the United States in recent years was closely related to a… decline in newspaper reading" (Glenn). During my month of no technology I read the newspaper and I can say now that I am far more up-to-date on current events and world affairs then I would be from watching the news or just browsing on the Internet. The newspaper brought the conflicts in Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan to the forefront of my attention. The written word, especially when put on paper, is an intensely personal connection with not only the information but also with another individual. When you read to yourself it is as if the author is writing for you and only you. His or her work takes on a voice of its own and engages you in a way that no Internet webpage or newscast can. The written word brings with it an air of exclusivity, but the technological world today is about all-access, and this has bled over into the social world.

Being disconnected for even a week in today's world can have drastic social effects. An event that made this incredibly clear to me was the Charlie Sheen interview that hit the Internet the week I went on my hiatus. If you haven't seen the video, it is basically Charlie Sheen spouting utter nonsense at a confused news anchor on a weekday morning talk show. But since that day everyone has been talking about this Charlie Sheen video, reciting quotes such as "I'm not bi-polar, I'm bi-winning". I, being without technology, didn't see the video and so instantly became socially irrelevant for the few days that followed. This presented a rather interesting look into what social interaction has become in this technology-driven world. Social power now rests in the hands of the person that can recall funny sayings or lines from a movie or other piece of social media. Everyone can be funny in today's world; know the entire dialogue to the movie *Anchorman* and you're a comedic goldmine. While seemingly unimportant in the context of teenage humor, it presents a rather terrifying look at the nature of individuality and creativity in the modern world. Kanye West puts it best when he asks us: "Do anybody make real shit anymore?" while sampling a Daft Punk song.

By the second week of my hiatus the positive aspects of my technological exclusion began to be apparent. Once I got back from class I had nothing to do but my homework and reading. Instead of spending hours and hours on Facebook or Stumbleupon, a web browsing add-on that searches your interests, I actually

went straight to work and completed my assignments on time. I became far less likely to procrastinate on homework and writing projects than when I had so many options for entertainment. This in turn led to one of the most interesting aspects of the whole experience: the abundance of free time I had suddenly come upon.

It is not until you take away all the little time-wasters in your day that you realize just how long that day is. Before I would spend hours mindlessly surfing the Internet, and time would fly by. During this experience I felt like I had an abundance of time. Not only did it feel like there was more time in the day, but also I could remember exactly what I did that day. It wasn't as if hours just vanished into a computer screen; they actually consisted of real things and real experiences. One day coming back from class I decided to lie down by the lake in the grass. In that thirty minutes on the sunlit grass I felt more tranquil and at peace than I had in a long time. There is something inherently amazing about doing nothing but living.

In the world today we are faced with a constant stream of information; we walk with headphones in, eat in front of a television, and even do schoolwork with music playing in the background. Our brains are constantly being surrounded with new information and we might not be able to take it all in. Letting your brain rest is one of the key steps in learning, and it is pivotal in our retaining of knowledge. Scientists at the University of California San Francisco have found that:

> When rats have a new experience, like exploring an unfamiliar area, their brains show new patterns of activity. But only when the rats take a break from their exploration do they process those patterns in a way that seems to create a persistent memory of the experience. (Ritchel 1)

When you are being constantly bombarded with information every second of every day your brain doesn't have the necessary downtime to process new information. This can lead to a lot of what we pick up around us going unnoticed in the constant stream of information, making learning incredibly difficult for this generation. Memory works as a process of three stages: encoding, storage, and retrieval. It is in the storage stage that information is learned, and that stage consists of short-term and long-term memory. In order for information to be stored long-term (more than thirty seconds) the information must be rehearsed. When rehearsal is not practiced, the information is not stored for any significant amount of time. For instance the web pages I visited in my attempt to write a business ethics paper were not learned because my brain didn't have the time to store the information into my long-term memory. A new webpage had loaded on the screen before my brain even had a chance to fully store what was in front of it. It might be that the increased rate of ADD and ADHD among our nation's children is not a medical epidemic but a technological one.

The third week was the week when I began to crave technological stimulation. There were a few days in that week that I had a strange urge to play a video game. But the worst day during that week was that Thursday. I have four classes on Thursday so I didn't expect a great day, but the lack of technology really made the day that

much worse. I had an engineering lab and there was a mix-up with our lab report from the lab before. I had to run back to my dorm to fix the problem and my lab partner had no way to reach me. Amongst other things going wrong I had to redo the entire lab report and rush back to the lab all to receive a 10% grade reduction for tardiness. Had I been able to use technology, my lab partner would have been able to tell me about the mix-up and I could've fixed it beforehand. But as it played out I ended up having a rather terrible day. The worst part came when all I wanted to do to end that day was listen to music, and couldn't.

Technology is very comforting to us, in that it allows us to drift off into a magical place in which anything is possible and everything is at our fingertips. I turn on my computer and instantly I can see anything, I can be anywhere. I can hear music from Seattle, listen to a lecture by a Harvard professor, watch a TV show on-demand, or see a picture of the Scottish countryside. Instantly my brain is abuzz with activity, neurons are firing everywhere and my Dopamine levels spike through the roof. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that among other things interacts with the reward center of the brain. It provides feelings of pleasure to reinforce the activity that triggered the release. Over time, you begin to associate your computer or your phone or whatever technological device you prefer with that spike in Dopamine, and that behavior is reinforced.

One of the ways this manifested itself was in my use of my cell phone. My phone vibrates in one quick motion whether it receives a text message or an email. Most of my emails were just junk, so I really didn't care that much when I received one. But when I received a text message, that genuine request for immediate communication, my brain lit up like a Christmas tree. It was as if someone, miles away, had thought about me and really desired my attention. It is a feeling of belonging that comes with very strong emotional ties. And as my neurotransmitters became increasingly attached to my phone, I began to notice a surge of excitement every time my phone would vibrate. This grew to a point that I had to disable this notification for emails, because every time I looked at my phone and found that the buzzing was for an email and not a text message I became very upset. It escalated even further so that even when my leg twitched and I thought it was my phone I became unhappy. I had trained myself to listen for the reward indication, and like the classical behavioral studies of B.F. Skinner I became stuck in a variable-ration reward schedule. "A variable-ration schedule is a schedule of reinforcement where a response is reinforced after an unpredictable number of responses." (Cherry) This schedule is incredibly strong and hard to break because of its ties with Dopamine activity in the brain, as a study of reward schedules using monkeys shows.

> Dopamine is closely associated with reward and addiction. The gradual increase in dopaminergic signaling in the presence of uncertainty… could explain laboratory findings that animals prefer variable reward schedules over fixed ones. (Jones 332)

I, like many of my peers, had become trained to respond to the stimulus that was a cell phone notification. Many

technological devices work on this premise; it's the reason video games and text messages are so addictive. They supply you with a reward, but since you never know exactly when it is coming you become permanently alert. Think about how often people check their Facebook profiles waiting to see if someone commented on their statuses or posted on their walls. Facebook is the number one Internet site averaging 1,439,926,022 hours of usage per month worldwide (Compete.com). Considering that the average lifespan is only 613608 hours that means that roughly 2500 lifetimes are spent every month on Facebook. If that isn't an addiction then I don't know what is.

The fourth week of my technological hiatus coincided with Spring Break, and I was back home in Orlando for a majority of that week. In this week I learned the hard way the most important benefit of technology: communication. And by communication I do not mean a Facebook status telling your friends what you are doing that very second. I mean the ability to make plans and communicate ideas to people that are not in your immediate vicinity, as in making plans for how to get home during Spring Break. The US Postal Service, try as they might, is just not quick enough to get a message to Orlando and back in time to facilitate plans within a week's time. So to say that my trip home was stressful is an understatement. If my dad hadn't decided to just drive down and pick me up I might've never made it home for that week.

However, while communication across great distances is hindered a great deal by a lack of technology, communication across relatively short distances is not hindered that much at all. For instance, when I was back home I got to see all of my friends, whether it was by going directly to their houses or where they worked. If any of my friends wanted to see me, they simply came and saw me. There weren't any half-hearted text message conversations that were sent back and forth while going about our days. Once my friends found me we actually talked, and it was kind of an exhilarating experience. Suddenly there was so much to talk about; I genuinely did not know what they had been doing for the last three weeks. And when we talked, we actually talked. I didn't pause to check my phone for text messages from other possible conversations I could be having. There was just one conversation, with the person or people right in front of me. It may seem like a trivial thing, but coming from an age bracket that according to a study averages 1,742 text messages per month, (Nielsenwire) having only one conversation at a time is a crazy experience. It enables you to be entirely in the moment, to understand and respond with complete focus and attention. In a way that is very similar to the phenomenon of boredom: technology creates the problem that it is used to solve. Technology has diminished our capacity to hold a simple conversation. When you can talk to everyone at the same time, how can you possibly focus on one person?

While I found that the conversations I was having with my friends and family seemed more real and meaningful, I also found that when I was not with them I felt a very strong sense of loneliness. When you go from being able to talk to someone at all times to suddenly being cut off from the world, you feel isolated and alone.

This struck me the worst on my last day at home. All of my friends were busy that night, and usually that wouldn't bother me because I'd have a phone and could text or go on the Internet or do something else that could distract me for the night. But that night I had nothing, and it felt absolutely terrible. I couldn't talk to anyone, I couldn't do anything in my house, and I felt as if I was the only person in the world. A study performed by Robert Kraut et al. showed that "greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in participant's communication with family members in the household, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their depression and loneliness." (1017) This study rated loneliness and depression on a five-point scale using a survey method for gathering their data.

For this generation, with access to just about anything at any time, being alone and without entertainment is a scary experience. I do not think my feelings were because I was alone, but rather that I knew I was alone. It was the lack of available distractions at my disposal that was the scary thing. Go to a coffee shop some time and see what people do when they are alone. The first thing they reach for is their cell phone. *Did anyone text me? No. Any Emails? No. I guess I'll just play a game for a few minutes then until one of those first two things happens*. We've plunged ourselves into a virtual world that if we find the physical world too boring or scary we can just plug in and forget all about it. I agree that everyone needs an escape once in awhile, but when that escape becomes the first response to trouble there begins to be a problem. What I experienced during that last night at home, that is the problem. Without technology to distract us, the world brings itself fully to bear on our minds, and the truth is scary. That without all our hundreds of Facebook friends and television shows we are just human beings, and we are incapable of being in two or more places at once. And we are unable be alone in our own heads.

In this month that I have taken off from technology, I have learned a great deal about technology's effect on the modern world. The problem is not with technology, but with how we use it. We use technology now as an aide, a tool, or more frequently a distraction. That we constantly must be distracted results in a plugged-in existence. Our desire to be constantly plugged-in is merely a symptom of a grander social problem: Devaluation. In a world in which all knowledge is at hand there is value in nothing. Something contains value because it is scarce. If diamonds were as prevalent as pebbles they sure as hell wouldn't be worth as much. No one has ever spent a lifetime trying to turn gold into lead. Value is in the unattainable. What we want most is what is hardest to get. The Internet flips this entire system on its head. There is no use in learning the history of the Roman Empire because it is a Google search away. Now information is something that is readily available to everyone. Anyone can know anything! What use is there in being smart anymore? What is education good for? Because we realize that there is no value in information, we strive constantly to assign value to things that wouldn't be worth anything otherwise, elevating these things to statuses of importance. Take a look at Facebook and see how the word "friends" has changed in just the last few years.

Before it meant a close group of people that you know well that would be there for you when you needed them. Now it only means a huge amount of people that you might have talked to at one point or another and that more than likely would not help you out in a time of need.

Not only do we try to add value to external things, we try to add value to ourselves. The most pointless process in the world is uploading a Facebook status. No one cares that you are eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich right now. Nobody. We glamorize ourselves in profile pictures, tag ourselves in posts; it is becoming ridiculous. We try to make ourselves appear as we would have the world see us: it starts when you are a kid and slowly you build up this virtual persona that is on display for the world. Everything you do is suddenly important. Driving to school? You should text it, tweet it, change your Facebook status, maybe even snap a few pictures to tag yourself in later. Nothing is sacred for this generation. Even our innermost thoughts and feelings we pour out onto the Internet, expecting some sort of relief.

This new age is characterized by personal freedoms that we have never before encountered. We have the power to reach out to every corner of the world and affect the lives of others in ways people before never could have imagined. There are so many options available to us that we become encumbered by the weight of all of our possible choices. The world has suddenly opened up to everyone, and how we use it is to find out what Snooki is doing on Twitter. We need to rethink our use of this technology. Most importantly we need to learn to separate ourselves from this technology. We cannot live our lives permanently attached to a Blackberry or iPhone. This month has given me a unique insight into the world without technology, and what I saw actually wasn't that bad. I suggest that you try it some time. Unplug, disconnect, and take in the world without headphones or a television screen. It just might surprise you how much you like it, and eventually you might begin to not care about Facebook statuses, tweets, or tagging your pictures. Because the real world can't be found on any computer screen.

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Instructor Reflections—Joanna Johnson on Vanessa Lara

When I read Vanessa's paper for the first time I learned something new, and that is surely one of the hallmarks of any piece of good writing. We had looked in class at feminist film maker Trinh T. Minh-ha's ideas on the female postcolonial identity, and we had discussed the narrative voice of Shabine the sailor in Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott's mini-epic poem "The Schooner *Flight*." Both these texts are already rich repositories of ideas, where reading and rereading affords the reader something new each time. But Vanessa considered how Trinh's ideas could specifically help her to understand Shabine's complex and contradictory persona, and she posited her own theories about that persona. What you read here is the final product of those ideas. Vanessa's first drafts were much looser attempts at trying to find her own ideas; later drafts attempted to find a stronger voice. The finished product, then, is testament to the value of this student's willingness to revisit her writing over the course of several weeks. Not least, considering just seven years ago Vanessa did not speak any English at all, this essay is quite formidable for its insight, its fluency, and its innovation. Vanessa is a remarkable scholar, and her essay shows great intelligence and originality. I am delighted she has received this recognition of both.

English 106 • Fall 2011
Postcolonial Writing

This essay should build on class discussions and work produced in the summaries that you have written with your writing groups. While you should always employ a scholar's habits of mind and good writing practices for your essays, the writing objectives specific to this assignment are 1) to read and analyze one text through another and 2) focusing—using ideas in one text as a "lens" for the other. This is the beginning of what we might call "putting the texts in conversation with each other." While the authors in question are not addressing each other, *we* as scholars attempt to make them speak to each other. This involves you reaching some understanding of what is implicit and explicit in the text.

Write an essay using some of the ideas from either *Orientalism* or "Not You/Like You" as a "lens" to examine *Things Fall Apart,* "The Schooner *Flight,*" or any other text you wish (if you use your own text make sure to clear this with me). Your essay should have some kind of idea or make an argument about the texts in question. How does the critical article illuminate your understanding of the primary text? How does it make you see the text differently? What kind of "lens" is the article providing for you in order to look at the text? You will not want to include *everything* each author says (part of the job of this assignment is for you to identify for yourself key passages and ideas to work with) but you should give a sense of the scope of the texts you are using. Do not be afraid to acknowledge what remains bewildering to you, despite your own close reading.

Pay close attention to the organization of your essay—there might be several different tasks that require different sections. One of these tasks might be a short, focused summary.

Are you "X," "Y," or "XY"? : Devising Identity Through Divergence

Vanessa Lara

ENG 106 • Joanna Johnson
Fall 2011

An identity is not discovered, but rather, created. It is redesigned everyday and is in incessant change and evolution. The exposure to differences, that is, situations we are not accustomed to, alters our thoughts, influences our actions and ultimately, if let, aids in the development of our identity based on the new perspectives such exposure fabricated. However, as postcolonial filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha denotes in her speech "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," "many of us still hold on to the concept of difference [as a] tool of segregation" (372), meaning that we rely on what sets us apart to determine our character and separate ourselves from others. She further considers how many of us use that same concept "to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences" (372), conveying that we usually feel either superior or inferior to others based on our origin and gender and tend to classify ourselves based on these essences.

In Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*," the narrator Shabine is no different. He first classifies himself as "just a red nigger who love[s] the sea" (346), as if being so is typical and expected. Even the fact that he uses "just" to describe himself indicates a slight feeling of modesty and, perhaps, of inferiority regarding his being. Curiously, the name Shabine itself is a "patois for a red nigger" (346), suggesting that even his name is the epitome of ordinary. He compares his actions to simple things like "the wind" (347) and "like a stone and nothing more" (345), showing us that the image he has of himself is that of an elementary man who lacks complexity and depth. This coarse idea Shabine has of himself authenticates Minh-ha's argument that "hegemony works at leveling out differences" (372) because he grew to believe that he was a "red nigger" and "nothing more" due to colonization. His colonizers instilled that divergence was defective. Thus, Shabine initially thinks that how we are gauged is substantially affected by the differences we impose – either physically or ideologically – forming in his mind a notion that his identity is a stem of others' crude sentiments rather than of his own tenacious convictions.

For instance, Shabine illustrates himself as a man with "rusty hair and sea-green eyes" (346), which would generally signify that he is a mix of races. Because the colonizers father his

eye-color genes while his hair had already been an existing trait in his land, it is safe to assume that the texture of his hair can be represented as "X" and the color of his eyes as "Y". In that, it is compelling to notice that he describes the former as "rusty", as if deficient or weak, and the latter as "sea-green," an elaborated and subjectively beautiful adjective. This brief description leads us to believe Shabine sees the colonizers as superiors, possessing a status he will never attain. As Minh-ha states, we often learn to believe that "X must be X, Y must be Y and X cannot be Y" (371) and, therefore, promote the concept that difference is quite appalling.

Another exemplar where Shabine sees himself as subservient is when he says that he loves the trees with "an inferior love" (354) because he names them as "green 'casuarinas'" or "cypresses" (353), compared to how the colonizers call them "Canadian cedars" (353). Shabine fails to see that his unconditional love for the trees is just as pure as others'. He, again, perceives his form of care for the plants as menial because he has the mentality that "Y" stances are fitter. This illustrates how Minh-ha's theory that hegemony works "at standardizing contexts and expectations in the smallest details" (372) is plausible because Shabine finds himself comparing his views to those of the colonizers even in the simplest episodes.

Curiously, Shabine is convinced that we need to be part of his culture to see the world like he does. When he says that "we [his people] live by our names and you would need to be colonial to know the difference" (353), he sounds confident that the only way we can truly understand him is to be like him. In this instance, Shabine is "X" and is grouping us as "Y," just like the colonizers did to him and his people. This leads us back to Minh-ha's concept of difference being "a tool of segregation." Shabine's colonizers implemented their authority as if only then their modernist culture could be respected and understood, segregating Shabine and assuming his ways were unrefined. Now, Shabine is, in a way, dissociating us by assuming that we can only understand his culture and point of view if we are alike. This pontifical train of thought supports Minh-ha's visualization that "there are differences as well as similarities within the concept of difference" (372), because although Shabine is unalike his colonizers physically and culturally, he is homologous in that he sees differences as a means of separatism. He is not solely "X" anymore. Now, he displays a bit of "Y" in him.

Furthermore, Minh-ha analyzes how, due to fear of deviating from the norms dominance has implanted, we explicitly attempt to distinguish ourselves from others. In addition to partitioning us from him, Shabine describes himself as being "nobody" or "a nation" (346), disproving the aforementioned concept that he possesses no intricacy, for he suggests he can be either just "a patois for a red nigger," like the rest of his people, or be the product of a conjunction of ideas, leading him to form his own, original essence. While his dogmatic colonizers led him to believe he was inferior – reinforcing Minh-ha's arguments that power is indeed exerted based on race and that we do use the concept of difference as a "tool of segregation" – Shabine learned that

even though he could never be solely "Y," he could embrace both "X" and "Y" and build a pristine identity.

Eventually, Shabine concurs that divergence is not necessarily deplorable; it just depends on how it is perceived. He even solicits: "What does it matter that our lives are different" (354)? When he asked, he was in love. He had stopped caring about differences then because they didn't seem to matter. In correspondence, Minh-ha suggests that in order to uncover the aforementioned "leveling of differences," we need to resist thinking that such concept lies in "the simplicity of essences" (372) and deviate from this habit we tend to have of generalizing disparities like cultural values since "difference should neither be defined by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture" (372). Whether male or female, Black or White, none of it should be a determinant of who is "X" and who is "Y". Nevertheless, what dictates the importance of difference in the first place?

Minh-ha answers that very question with another: "the question of subjectivity" (373). To Shabine, difference stopped being an issue the moment his personal feelings saw matters from an altered perspective, suggesting that our idea of polarity is distinctively influenced by our point of view and our choice to make such concept important or not. We choose if being a male or female, or being Asian or European, is pivotal based on our "subjectivity." We choose whether or not to index one another as "X" or "Y".

Thus, Minh-ha proposes that we use the concept of difference "as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance" (372), encouraging us to use said differences to reform ourselves and try to break free from the adamant norm. Shabine does that through his secret poetry. His writing is a "tool of creativity" in which he expresses his hidden feelings and finds his haven. Such privacy is essential to him, who believes there is "no cleft rock where [his] soul could hide" (Walcott 349). When writing, Shabine is not "X" or "Y." He is just Shabine, the "just a red nigger who love[s] the sea." When he passionately reveals that poetry is "who [he] loved first" and "the one thing [he] owns" (354), we finally understand how important it is for him to break free from an assigned category and how his treasured words have become a vital part of his essence.

Ironically, Shabine complains his words are "all them [colonizers] bastards ever left [him]" (350). So he owes his precious poetry to colonization. The colonizers gave him his beloved words, therefore they contributed to who he is: neither "X" or "Y," or perhaps a little bit of both. After all, difference "is that which undermines the very idea of identity" (Minh-ha 372). Shabine is a mixture of "X" and "Y," thus "XY." He embraced both values and designed his own. Therefore, our choice to use difference as a "tool of creativity" or a "tool of segregation" is perhaps one of the best indicatives of who we are, regardless or race, color, gender, or age.

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Instructor Reflections—John Wafer on Paulina Pecic

Paulina wrote, revised and re-worked this essay after she and the rest of her colleagues read and discussed five essays by scholars and two memoir essays in a new field of academic inquiry: Disability Studies. Without exception, every student has experiences to write about. No wonder – those with all types of disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States—more than, for example, Latinos, or African Americans.

Paulina cites G. Thomas Couser in her essay that often those with a visible disability are given "master status" for that difference. But Paulina's "master status" here is awarded for her incredible writing talent that shows in this essay. She brings her readers into her experience using thick description and vibrant, concrete details. Yet her essay also contributes original knowledge to this academic field by helping to disentangle disability from the myth, ideology and stigma that often accompanies social interaction. Paulina's personal voice weaves and integrates with her insightful, critical thinking that extends and complicates the intellectual conversation of this important topic in our diverse, democratic society.

English 106 • Fall 2011
Exploring Normalcy

Welcome aboard our inquiry train "into one of the fundamental aspects of human diversity" (Couser 401). You have now been introduced to some concepts in the academic field of Disability Studies by reading and writing about G. Thomas Couser, Mark Mossman, Lennard Davis and Paul Longmore. You also have read and thought about how Stephen Kuusisto and Emmanuelle Laborit have "have initiated and controlled their own narratives in unprecedented ways and to an extraordinary degree" (399).

For this exploratory essay, write about an experience of your own in narrative form … one where you bring the reader into the story as much as possible (thick description, showing details, character development, setting, analysis, riveting introduction, insight, etc.) defining – if necessary and when necessary, key terms or concepts from the readings that bear on the story you have to tell.

Hence, you not only have to write about your experience, but eventually bring to your essay an extensive examination of your experience using Couser, Davis, Longmore, Kuusisto and/or Laborit as sources to draw on. Remember this is not merely an argument paper, where you attempt to prove something right vs. something else wrong. Wade into the uncertainties. Write about them. Neither is this essay just only a narrative or story; you should critically examine your experience in a reflective way the above authors do. Call this academic, creative narrative non-fiction. Bear in mind that being academic does not mean being remote, distant, imponderable. Being personal here means bringing your judgments and interpretation to bear on what you have read and experienced and then write hoping to learn that you never really leave yourself behind - even when you write academic essays.

My experience in the past is that many folks write pretty nice pieces on a personal experience, and begin to write some reflection or thoughts on that experience. But in order to write a paper that includes some of the parameters of English 106 writing, you've got to move your writing and ideas beyond the story-telling stage. More effective analysis, then is going to be of an external kind. That's where the other readings come in. What kind of issues do the five authors you have read so far does your experience evince? You decide, and it is that kind of examination of your experience that will make you're a paper a suitably intellectual one. Writing in this class isn't just a finished product, it's a way to actually find out what you're thinking as you write.

Blessing in Disguise

Paulina Pecic

ENG 106 • John Wafer
Fall 2011

I remember being nine years old and very, *very* confused as I sat there in the archway, gawking at the inconceivable scene before me— the bright fluorescent lights of the kitchen glowing unnaturally on my mother's face, her usually inviting blue eyes closed, brows furrowed, hand against temple, lips agonizingly tight. All I remember of my Dad in that moment were the salty streams of pain rolling down silently from his eyes— a rare occurrence I'd come to know by that age. My dad *never* cried.

"What's wrong?" My squeak of a whisper diverted their attention, but only for a moment.

In my mother's sigh, I could hear each of her heartstrings snap, one-by-one, like a broken harp. "It's your baby brother. Peter's been diagnosed, too."

Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a form of Muscular Dystrophy that manifests itself as different
"Types," is a somewhat-inconsistent, case-by-case, *progressive* neuromuscular disorder, genetically inherited, that by definition gradually weakens the motor muscles of those it affects. My brother and I both share a rare hybrid of Type 2 and Type 3. And yet we share much more than a mere diagnosis.

Growing up with SMA has certainly presented both its challenges and— dare I say —benefits. Let's not kid ourselves! One of the best advantages is getting to watch crowds of sweaty, sunburned tourists and their screaming-at-supersonic-frequency-over-their-melted-ice- cream children follow you with wide eyes and dropped jaws as you smile, wave, and move to the front of the theme park line with the rest of your "wheelchair-companions." And I'll admit, I also get a kick out of my personal button for opening doors in the residential colleges, especially from a distance, where I can watch unsuspecting victims do double-takes as though The Force really is more than just a fictional, space-magic invention of George Lucas.

But it's not all fun and pranks. *Living* with a disability, especially a visibly apparent one like SMA, means *learning* to adapt. Physically. Mentally. Socially. None come without the others, and none come easily. Fully adapting requires a certain level of humility. When I'm at the salad bar, desperately trying to pull a "Mr. Fantastic" in an effort to reach the taunting little cherry tomatoes, which practically snicker in shallow triumph as their invisible eyes roll at the sight of

my outstretched tongs, sometimes all I need is a reality check. I can't reach the tiny devils. Physical adaptation? Have someone else *grab* the tomatoes for me. Mental adaption? Not being afraid or *embarrassed* to admit aloud that I need assistance and to ask for that assistance. There's even a bit of social adaptation required in speaking out to a *total stranger* for help with a simple task that most other people would do themselves.

Such requirement for adaption may be what ultimately leads to the differing societal "values" of the "disabled minority" in comparison to those of the "nondisabled majority," such as "self-determination, interdependence, personal connection, and human community" instead of "self-sufficiency, independence, functional separateness, physical autonomy" (Longmore 350).

Now, don't get me wrong, independence is a key part of maintaining my "normalcy" in the midst of abnormal circumstances... but so is wisdom. If I can't reach the tomatoes, then logically, I shouldn't let fear— or pride for that matter! —get in the way of requesting help. On the other hand, in a society that glorifies such traits as "self-sufficiency" and "functional separateness," I wonder whether the non-disabled majority will ever come to know the merit of the standards at the other end of the spectrum. Can a "normal" child, growing up with the religion "survival of the fittest" ever learn true philanthropy and care for *others* instead of themselves? Study or fail.

Make millions or work at McDonald's. Win or die. Conform or be shunned. Darwin himself, albeit unintentionally, contributed to this mindset of eugenicists:

> Darwin's ideas serve to place disabled people along the wayside as evolutionary defectives to be surpassed by natural selection. So eugenics became obsessed with the elimination of "defectives," a category which included the "feebleminded," the deaf, the blind, the physically defective, and so on. (Davis 7)

With this philosophy, a different body— a *weaker* body —is viewed as lesser in value than the strong body, the "normal" body. Am I ironically then among the rare privileged, to whom suffered experience has shed the light of morality? Might my disability, as viewed from this perspective, somehow serve as a blessing in disguise?

Such inevitable mental adaption is often accompanied by (if not a direct result of) momentous social adaptation. As a curious and imaginative little child less than eight years old, though I subconsciously had *some* notion of the fact I was unlike most able-bodied kids my age, I never quite realized that it mattered. Perhaps I hadn't yet fully understood just how "different" I was, especially after attending a summer preschool for children with disabilities, where I'd learned to assume that being in a wheelchair was just another physical characteristic. Some boys and girls had red hair; others had blonde. Some had blue eyes; others had brown. Some could walk; others used wheelchairs. I guess that's why I was so surprised by my parents' reactions when Peter was born, only a few months before I turned nine. He would just be another kid in a wheelchair. *So?* ...Little did I know, of course, that I would get an even louder wake up call

later that same year.

Not only do some people consider the disabled and abnormal to be "defective," as suggested by Davis' cited material above, but in my own experience I've learned that sometimes these people, either out of fear or mere discomfort, simply don't like associating with those who are different than they are. It was a particularly cruel summer, both in deed and in temperature! A sweltering July—one month before I would begin the third grade. My kid brother Peter had just been introduced to the world a month prior, and I'd been perfectly ecstatic. Nevertheless, cuteness can only distract one from the monotonous eating-sleeping-crying-pooping life of an infant for so long. Before I could say "peekaboo," that eventful June had come and gone, and our favorite neighbors the Drurys were finally home from their annual vacation to North Carolina. Victoria, my able-bodied younger sister by just fourteen months, and I made up two-thirds of a friendship trio with Mackenzie Drury, who was "eight-and-a-half" like me. Afternoons with Mackenzie usually involved tea parties, in which we'd fill Victoria's collectible, miniature, china teacups with apple juice. The three of us also played dress-up games, where I was almost always borrowing Mackenzie's old Halloween costume to be Queen Amidala ruling over Naboo, fit with crimson robes too long for my arms, yellow cords torn and unraveling, and a plastic faded semicircle of what was supposed to look like her hair. Still, far superior to those activities were our neighborhood adventures, which, to put quite simply, required a backpack.

On one particular not-*too*-scorching mid-July day, Mackenzie had invited us to meet up with her for one of those adventures. Without hesitation, Victoria and I grabbed our empty knapsacks and crammed them until they were bulging at the seams with Beverly Cleary books, a broken compass, a plastic Fisher-Price pocket-knife, a couple of half-naked Barbie dolls, a spy machine (which was really just a battery-deprived tape recorder from the 1980s), a journal for documenting missions, binoculars, and pink glitter pencils with rainbow gel pens. The three of us agreed that the adventure, which on this day had been classified as a spy mission, would take place at Mackenzie's house, right across the street from ours. Victoria bolted there ahead of me, and I remember trying to keep up, powering my creaky magenta manual wheelchair with trembling, weak little arms. By the time I'd crossed the street, I could see that Victoria and Mackenzie were already making their way down the sidewalk, past several houses. "Hey, guys! Wait up!" I squeaked, but while Victoria glanced back momentarily, Mackenzie just kept walking.

It wouldn't have been so traumatizing if I'd caught up to them, and we simply continued playing together like always. No, that was my *expectation*. The *reality* was that when I reached "headquarters" (nothing more than a shady olive tree) to find Mackenzie and Victoria chatting away, they suddenly decided to head back to my house. "But I just got here!" I whined in protest, jerking my tired arms. Mackenzie only shrugged in apathy and left anyway, Victoria following close behind like a puppy desperate for a dog treat.

I was only eight years old. I'd asked for nothing more than a summer

friend, someone to come over and play with while my mother was either sleeping or nursing Peter. But all I got was abandonment, quickly succeeded by the pains of betrayal and loneliness. No doubt it was a difficult lesson to learn, especially at such a young age, but I certainly got it drilled in me on the following day, when Mackenzie only invited Victoria over to her house. Still, what hurt more than the abandonment, the betrayal, and the loneliness, was the realization. The epiphany. Mackenzie was *not* "The Girl with Freckles." Victoria was *not* "The Girl with Green Eyes." But I *was* "The Girl in the Wheelchair." This was my "primary defining characteristic," my "master status" (Couser 531).

While I may not have fully understood that as an eight-year-old, looking back on the experience now, it's easy to see that my disability was "*more* fundamental than racial, ethnic, and gender distinctions." In elementary school, girls usually sat with girls, and boys usually sat with boys (lest they exchange cooties!). Exclusion and segregation based on cliques was and still is a typical part of growing up, but I did not necessarily experience them the same way most people tend to. My exclusion was not based on a *social* clique. Children did not shy away from me merely because I did not bring Barbie dolls to recess. Mackenzie and my own sister (possibly without even understanding their actions) did so because I was already part of a clique by default: the Handicapped clique, which they could not relate to. Their behavior, therefore was not so much based "on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy" (Davis 4). As "The Girl in the Wheelchair," I was *inherently* different.

Accepting that *exterior label*, at least initially, meant understanding that others would not always accept *me*. In retrospect, however, that outlook paid off in the sense that I could be confident in whatever few meaningful friendships I did form in my later years, especially during middle and high school. People weren't always welcoming, what with the intruding stares and obvious apprehension to approach. That was a fact. So those who did welcome and accept me as "Paulina" and *not* "The Girl in The Wheelchair," I treasured. In fact, most of those few were a part of, at least in Paul Longmore's terms, the "nondisabled majority" (350). But not all of them.

Flashes of color passed us by at what seemed like light-speed; the grass beside us was intangibly disintegrating into a blur of green— the asphalt, a puddle of gray —with nothing but clear blue skies overhead. As my ears tuned in to the monotonous "rumble rumble" of the wheels beneath us, the rest of the bus remained eerily silent. A dangerous blend of doubt and fear brewed in the pit of my stomach, threatening to boil over at any moment. I could feel the needles of thoughts poking, prodding at my already-on-edge brain. "What if this is a bad idea? What if I don't make any friends? I've never been alone before." Of course, I'd only been lying to myself with that last one. I'd always been alone. Sure, my family back at home had "been there" for me, and yet, from my ten-year-old perspective, not a single one of them had ever truly endured my path of abandonment. But then, this was summer camp.

As the bus gradually slowed and choked to a stop, the ear-splitting

expulsion of air from the brakes caused me to tighten my jaw with even more apprehension. I'd arrived; it was too late to turn back now. The first thing I remember was the blinding light of the sun, reflecting as a mirage off the heat-stricken white sand and into my eyes so that I really had no choice but to squint. And with my sharper vision came a piercing wave of surprise— Wheelchairs! Just like mine! Other children in black, metal contraptions! All around me!

Perhaps I wasn't alone after all.

That had been my experience with the Muscular Dystrophy Association's annual summer camp for kids with different diagnoses of MD. It was the first place I'd ever experienced a sense of that "disability culture," which Longmore describes in detail: "[D]isability-based cultural studies...can uncover disabled values, explain the social/cultural construction of 'disability' by the majority culture, and critique dominant nondisabled values" (351). Just as I mentioned earlier, as a member of the disabled community, I have come to learn that it's *okay* to rely on others for help, even in a society where interdependency is so often frowned upon. Shouldn't we as human beings be *willing* to lend a hand anyway, instead of generally viewing the world through a self-serving mentality, lest we ourselves fall? Haven't we rather fallen as a *result* of being incompassionate? In a society that consistently breeds the belief that "It's All About You," have we forgotten who we are? The very word *human*, as defined by the 2011 edition of Miriam-Webster's Dictionary, means "susceptible or representative of the sympathies and frailties of human nature." The term itself is derived from the Latin adjective humanus, which translates to "philanthropic, understanding, or *sympathetic*." How sympathetic is the nondisabled majority? How *human*? What have become of those "values?"

In Longmore's statement previously cited, I believe that he may also be implying the concept of "[disabled] heart speaks unto [disabled] heart." Because so many of us have learned to adapt to our needs in similar ways, the process becomes a normal, rather *expected*, part of our "culture." Our different attitudes on life in general are accepted among one another because we *understand*. At MDA camp, neither the staff nor my fellow campmates stared intrusively as my own counselor and I (each of the campers had a personal volunteer to assist them daily) made our way clear across the damp sidewalk to the restrooms, noisily dragging my wheeled shower chair along with us. The view was not new or unordinary to them because they lived the same experience and many others like it, every single day. This was just the sort of "culture" that fed the bond between Peter and myself. Naturally, as the oldest sibling, I've always had that sort of nurturing maternal attitude toward my little brother, constantly wanting to protect him from the cold cruel world. I remember how my heart would rip apart every time I found him alone in his room crying quietly to himself. It started when he was roughly about the same age of reason I'd been. Life is a painful, burdensome thing to ponder when you're eight years old. "Why did God make me like this?" he would ask, bringing tears to my own eyes as I recalled asking the same questions. "Why don't other kids invite me over?"

He and I have a united perspective of life itself different from that of most of our peers, or even our family members— Victoria, and even my parents! While they may feel the heat radiating from the flames, especially when sometimes witnessing the unfair treatment of Peter and myself, they have nonetheless never quite been *burned— branded* by a black, wheeled instrument of mobility. Defined externally. *Handicapped*. Peter and I share a bond far greater than just a common diagnosis; we face similar troubles, similar obstacles, similar goals for the future, even similar lessons learned. But with my life experience already almost nine years ahead of his, perhaps he will be given the chance to not necessarily learn from my mistakes— for getting hurt was often times inevitable —but to be strong, knowing that among many of the same struggles, *I'm* still here. Maybe he depends on me. Maybe I depend on him. Maybe the "normal" majority of society, whether its members realize it or not, depends on "abnormal" people like us…

Maybe.

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Instructor Reflections—Martha Otis on Jennifer Rodriguez

I am always thrilled when a student of mine chooses to write the lived experience of the body and make it relevant to intellectual life. What I admire so much about Jen's paper is the way it starts so intimately (one might even say unlike ballet), from inside the body and its feelings, and moves outward until it finds the context, the body of knowledge, and the critical vocabulary with which to analyze the "Pain is Gain" ethos of ballet. This paper throws a bomb into dance pedagogy. It takes a brave soul to question so rigorously doctrines exercised into ones very limbs. Ms. Rodriguez's inquiry leads to a few uncomfortable conclusions concerning the unnatural lines of classical dance and its point of view outside the body, which is to say the very aesthetic and premise of ballet. (Ms. Rodriguez calls this, rather brilliantly, the "attractiveness of perversion.") In few places outside the dance world will one find a greater love for, or embarrassment over, the human body -- the sublime moments it offers, the corporal betrayal of will. I would guess that Ms. Rodriguez still loves ballet, and finds it beautiful. But she takes a match, and finds the wick, and sets off a slow explosion.

English 106/107 • Spring 2011
Writing about Science and Nature

For your final paper this semester, you will do an inquiry into something that fascinates you. All semester, reading and discussing the pieces in *Best Science and Nature Writing 2008,* you have been encouraged to develop criteria for what makes good science writing for the general audience. Using these criteria, you can write about anything – even if it does not fit our "science and nature" theme. Remember the two triangles: ethos, pathos, logos; argument, protagonists, cinema. Make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. "A" papers will be very strong in higher order concerns: they will start and end with critical questions, they will offer *ideas about* your findings, and they will leave the reader unable to easily make the same old assumptions about this topic.

Dance: A Graceful Deterioration of the Mind and Body

Jennifer Rodriguez

ENG 106/107 • Martha Otis
Spring 2011

The Mind

The lights shone dimly concealing a small object positioned center stage on the 42-foot barren dance floor. I did not even question the peculiarity of the scene as my friend Ashley and I carelessly strolled into the dance studio engaged in a meaningless conversation. We were eager to satisfy our hunger with the lunch we had just stepped out for. But as my eyes adjusted to the absence of the usual lighting, I realized what the object was, froze in my tracks, and felt the hunger immediately flee my body. My ballet teacher, Mrs. Rebeca, had placed a scale in the middle of the stage. As we turned in the pursuit of an escape, the lights flipped on, the music sounded, and from the corner of the room Mrs. Rebeca instructed us to assume a position next to the barre.

Ashley and I immediately scrambled to shove our lunch into our dance bags. We had to accept the fact that we would not be eating for approximately another two hours. My burrito had earned its name of the "pregnant" burrito: rice, black beans, grilled peppers, chicken, salsa, cheese, and guacamole all wrapped up in a warm tortilla that, in total, weighed approximately one and a half pounds! A burrito that big was not easily overlooked and Mrs. Rebeca certainly did not miss it.

"Jen!" she called to me, "Center stage! And uh, bring your lunch!" "Damn it," I thought. She pointed to the scale and asked me to place the burrito on it: 1.4 pounds. I removed the burrito and took its place on the scale. "113 pounds," she told the class, "and if you add that burrito, you're almost at 115." I heard some gasps, saw some heads shake and I was overwhelmed with an urge to devour my lunch to further portray my indifference to my weight. Yes, I was probably one of the "bigger" girls in that room but that burrito was worth every calorie and it wasn't like I would not work it off in ballet class anyways!

Mrs. Rebeca was a 50-year-old retired professional ballerina who was five foot five inches tall and weighed 95 pounds. She thought she was fat, so imagine what she thought of me. "Here it comes," I thought as she opened her mouth: "When you're an elephant on pointe shoes, you put more stress on your body and therefore give yourself a greater risk of injury!" She sounded like a broken record. But even though I had heard this statement over a hundred times

before, it affected me differently as it was now directed to me. I began to question its legitimacy.

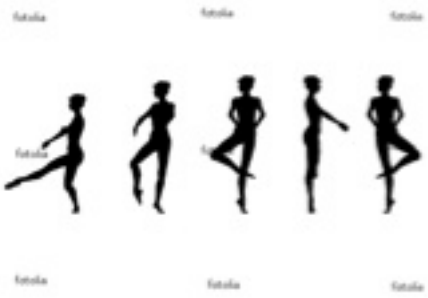
I quickly scanned the room to find that almost every "skinny" dancer was wearing some form of brace around a knee or an ankle, tape to support an arch, or a band around the waist. I tried to explain to my teacher that the cause of injury in dance was certainly not a weight issue, in fact, I reported from some research that: "Published data on classical ballet dancers indicate a relationship between dance injuries and low body mass index (BMI). Dancers with a BME <19 spent more days off dance due to injury compared to dancers with a BMI >19" (Twitchett). The skinny dancer certainly

epitomizes the image of a ballerina but cannot possibly be as strong as a dancer with more weight: "The Australian Ballet justifies their position of taking on the finely built dancer is that this body type is more suited to ballet as it has fewer risks of injury" (Meredith). It would make sense that a healthier individual would have more endurance, strength, and energy to perform rather than a malnourished person, but my stubborn, old-fashion dance teacher dismissed the facts I provided her.

Most of us were already injured in some way or another and no one made a big deal about it. If I went to school with an ankle brace, my friends would have asked if my ankle was okay; however, at dance, everyone's ankle was hurt so it never attracted any attention. As dancers, we had been programmed to ignore pain; so naturally, we did not notice our bodies were actually deteriorating. Dancing is more commonly an image that begins in the mind that reflects on the body. It is the art of making everything look graceful and effortless on stage. Mrs. Rebeca always told us that muscle memory would develop from ballet and would keep our bodies looking good especially when we get older but all we hear about is people complaining about problems that derive from an activity he/she did when he/she was younger. "Most dance teachers believe that ballet preserves the body especially in the aging years. However, for an art that practices such grace and control, at times it seems as if it does more harm than good to the body" (Yiannis & Athanasios). Paula T. Kelso confirms that proper instruction of technique in dance or any sport would prevent the deterioration of the body: "An awareness of these factors will assist dancers and their teachers to improve training techniques, to employ effective injury prevention strategies and to determine better physical conditioning" (Minton 56).

<u>The Ankle</u>

"ATTACK IT! ATTACK IT!" Mrs. Rebeca screamed at Ines. She had the solo of the white swan in our dance recital and had to perform 32 perfect fouettés (a continuous turn that involves the whipping of one leg around the body) on pointe. It was routine for the rest of the class to



chant the number of the turn Ines was completing but we never reached '32' because Mrs. Rebeca would make her stop and start over at the sight of the slightest flaw.

"27, 28, 29—" POP! Just like that, Ines was on the floor wailing and grabbing her ankle.

"Ice it now, ice it when you get home, take a hot bath and then ice it again before you go to sleep; you will be fine tomorrow" Mrs. Rebeca said—as I predicted.

"I can just do the turns on my left leg now," Ines replied standing up as if the pain had disappeared.

"Oh yeah and mess up the other one too right?" I thought out loud. "THAT'S DEDICATION JENNIFER! AND YOUR SARCASM IS NOT APPRECIA-TED!" Mrs. Rebeca yelled at me. She then turned to Ines and said "No sweetie, go sit out and ice your foot." What my teacher called dedication, I called stupidity. I do believe you can do anything you set your mind to, but there are limitations. I had a hard time believing that Ines would be fine to dance again tomorrow.

Even if she did have a miraculous recovery there had to be a reason why her ankle gave out under her, why after training in ballet since she was three years old, her ankles were still not as strong as they should have been. It was interesting to me—in retrospect, after having done some research on the topic—that just by standing the wrong way we could potentially put ourselves at risk of frequent ankle sprains. Proper foot control is important for anyone, including dancers, to perform everyday or sports-related tasks. Dr. Jack R. Giangiulio, a sports physical therapist who specializes in therapy for dancers, defines proper foot control as the ability to hold your talus bones in neutral positions, otherwise known as, the subtalar neutral position, [which] is when you can stand without your feet rolling-in (hyperpronation- shifting all your body weight onto the inside of your feet) or rolling-out (hyper-supination—when your arches lift too high shifting your body weight to the outside of your feet).

Dr. Giangiulio told me that the improper foot placement could either be developed from the moment an infant first learns to stand up or can be developed through the repetition of incorrect exercises. In the case of most dancers, improper technique or the lack of reinforcing the correct technique is usually the problem. I could clearly recall Mrs. Rebeca always telling us "don't roll on your bunions," but I never knew what that meant. She had not taken the time to fix our feet individually to enforce the proper technique. Improper foot control leads to incorrect positioning of the knees, hips, and spine. The muscle memory of this incorrect foot placement creates a greater risk to dancers for other locations on their body and for those who develop issues as he/she ages. And so, years later, "the bad technique develops into a bad habit and the individual becomes too comfortable to try to change" (Gordon 54). The power of the dancers mind kicks in and replaces finding a solution to the problem with the question if it appears to work then why change?

<u>The Knees</u>

Mrs. Rebeca likes to compare us to animals. Girls she considered overweight were called elephants, as tall girls were nicknamed giraffes. The

"giraffes" are the strongest jumpers due to the length of their legs and for pure entertainment purposes Mrs. Rebeca made us perform a series of jumps simultaneously to see who could jump the highest so she put on a quick-tempo piano piece and we began. I tried out-jumping the tallest girl in the class: Jordan. She had about a good six inches on me but with each leap, the difference grew smaller and smaller. With each leap, her face grew more distorted as well and finally she just stopped all together and looked down at her right knee. It was abnormally shifted to the right and she pushed it back into place and went for an ice pack.

Jordan forcibly gave herself hyper-extended knees, which is the when the knees pass their normal straightened position and bend backwards. Why? Because it creates a pretty line in pointe shoes. The combination of her hyperextension and the fact that the ratio of her leg muscle strength is disproportionate—the calf muscle overpowers the shin, or outer thigh overpowers the inner thigh—caused the dislocation. "The joint that compensates the most is at the highest risk of injury because it is under the most stress; in the case of dancers it is usually the knee joint" (Kenneth 26). "Ballerinas typically have the problem where they over-work their calf muscles and outer thigh muscles through barre exercises. These muscles grow to dominate their counterparts: the shin and inner thigh muscle. The result, after a great deal of pressure, is the dominating muscles pull the knee and ultimately dislocate it from the joint" (Kenneth 42). "After dislocating a knee, the tendons and ligaments may heal but they have been stretched to a point where one must be cautious in every action [he/she] conducts for the rest of [his/her] life" (Stuttaford 166). The risk of a second, identical injury is heightened. To avoid the disproportion-ate muscle ratio, dancers should alternate between classes like ballet that strengthen the calf and outer thigh muscle, and classes like modern and tap, which strengthen the shin and inner thigh muscles; however, according to Dr. Giangiulio, most dancers don't know this until a problem has occurred and they seek medical attention from him.

<u>The Hips</u>

Rachel Martin, Mrs. Rebeca's star student began auditioning to major dance schools which involved many applications and pictures of her arabesque (A posture in which the body is supported on one leg, with the other leg extended horizontally backwards). She had abnormally amazing extensions, especially for her arabesque but she had cheated. Rachel dislocated her hip in order to have surgery and she paid extra and convinced the surgeon to shape her anterior hip bone in a way that allowed her to extend her leg higher. When she fully recovered and returned to dance, she was out-performing everyone in her lifts. We all knew something had happened; who returns from surgery

with improved performance skills?! When one or more of the muscles in the hip are injured, they tighten up to protect themselves producing a spasm. Muscles in spasm will abnormally pull on the hip joint making the hip joint less flexible and causing irritation, which in turn causes tendonitis and pain. Although there is medicine to relieve some pain, the problem will not be cured; in fact it will be prolonged. The longer the problem exists, the worse it gets and it causes other muscles to spasm. After talking to Dr. Giangiulio about Rachel's surgery he noted that the surgeon most likely widened the socket for the joint in order to allow her to be more flexible in those areas. I was shocked and upset when I found out what she did; Rachel had altered her body to become a professional ballerina. Mrs. Rebeca on the other hand praised her and told us all we should work to get extensions like Rachel's. The key word she missed, however, was "work" for those extensions; Rachel purchased hers. Mrs. Rebeca had us all sit in a butterfly position against the wall and had another girl stand on our legs to push them to the floor, forcibly stretching out our hips. Rachel's surgery limited her in other classes besides ballet. Modern style dance requires a shortened hip socket because it is a style of dance that exposes the natural limits of the body. Rachel unlimited herself in extensions from ballet but she created a hardship for other forms of dance. Dr. Giangiulio also claimed that this change could possibly lead to arthritis later or some other form of injury. If you consider it this way, a larger socket gives more room for the joint to move or be dislocated. Rachel most likely did not consider the lifelong effects of her surgery. She was living in the moment, and allowing the image in her mind consumes her body.

<u>The Spine</u>

It was about two weeks before show time. Our bodies were tense and exhausted from countless hours of rehearsal. We all had the new and popular t-shirt from the gift shop; it read "I can't, I have rehearsal." Teresa, our modern teacher, who was in her mid fifties, decided to have us do floor barre exercises in an *attempt* to relax our bodies. Our feet were perfectly pointed towards the ceiling but Teresa was yelling at us about something else: "Your spine MUST touch the floor! Why are you arching your lower back?!?" she yelled at me. I planted my lower back to the floor by rotating my pelvis upward. "YOU JUST LOST YOUR HIP-

PLACEMENT" she shouted at my adjustment. I spent a minute trying to figure out how I could get my back to completely touch the floor while keeping my hips aligned and I just could not do it. "It's not possible" I half whispered to her. I wish I had kept that comment to myself because she spent the rest of the class harassing me about how I don't put forth as much effort as I should and how I am not as dedicated as everyone else.

While dancers may have an unnaturally straight spine, it still is not straight enough to lie flat on the surface of the floor. It is not anatomically possible to do what Teresa demanded us to do. When studies were released on how humans cannot physically lie down with a flat back, I put her on the spot. "It is actually good that our spines have a natural curvature because it relieves stress placed on it and on our hips" (Minton 122). Ballerinas take the spine and go from one extreme to another: they attempt to have an uncommonly straight spine when balancing and it actually applies mores stress to the ligaments and bones; or they attempt to arch it to stress causing levels. Particularly in *Pas de Deux*, when a male dancer lifts a female dancer into the air he holds her by her spine and she arches backwards, creating a beautiful curved line, or basically, an image.

The Body

In a ballet dancers mind, the image on stage is all that matters. Lines, extensions, turn-out, choreography—it all must be unblemished. The mentality of a dancer is basically to be skinny and to brush off pain. Mrs. Rebeca used to walk around as we did warm up at the barre, randomly pinch all those who had small love-handles, and say "If you can pinch an inch, it's too much!" Dedication and the passion to dance are supposed to heal all injuries and solve all problems according to my dance teacher. Rather, dance teachers should update themselves frequently on therapeutic techniques and incorporate them in class to strengthen dancers or simply put more emphasis on the basics and warm up to *prevent* unnecessary harm to the body. Professional dancer Edward Villella articulates the failure on emphasis of basic warm ups in his autobiography *The Prodigal Son* when he states "Not only did I know next to nothing then about warming up and prepping myself to dance, I didn't know how to care for my body after a performance… I gloried in every ache. The pain was satisfying. I thought it meant I was working full out and was well on my way to greatness. It was wonderful to go home each night practically unable to walk" (54). A dancer can convince his/her audience that pain does not exist. Pain, however, should be acknowledged rather than ignored because it could prevent an injury, or the severity of an injury later on. My theory on damage and the corrosion of the body of a ballerina stems from two places: poor teaching of basic techniques in dance schools, or the forgetting of the basic techniques as more advanced levels of dance open

up to an individual.

In any case, ballerinas focus on making every move look easy, and pleasurable when in reality, the choreography and movements may be quite difficult. Each move requires a lot of effort and this generally has been accepted as the norm. The attempt to train the dancer's body in this way has led to the misconception that interfering with muscle action is useful, that "binding the flow" builds strength. Eric Hawkins confirms this when he says: "The notion that the body is trained to move well through effort, through work, through domination, through "making the movement happen," through the tightening of muscles in order to do the movement, is common to theorists in academic ballet" (64). Since appearance or image is usually the most important thing to a ballerina, movements end up being forced which lead to injury. Eric Hawkins suggests if the primary concern of ballet dancers was to eliminate tight, unfeeling muscles, tragic injuries could be prevented: "'Free flow' movement instead of 'bound flow' movement is needed to allow muscles to feel and move effortlessly based on the subject of the responsive body. 'Free flow' creates a new, healthy, and truly beautiful dance" (81-82).

Mrs. Rebeca must have a point about muscle memory and the preservation of the body because she is still in great shape for being 50 years old however, she suffers pain in her calves, ankles, arches, and hips because she said she stopped dancing. The deterioration, in her case, began when she danced and accelerated after she stopped. She has spent countless hours telling us about the competition in the dance world and her life as a professional. A further error in dance technique is the attractiveness of perversion. If teachers emphasized proper technique, the number of qualified professional dancers would increase. I can't help but wonder if some teachers choose to maintain the outdated teaching methods to prevent excessive competition in the professional world.

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Instructor Reflections—Susan Leary on Julie Roldan

In "The Reward," Julie Roldan recalls her difficult journey to find a name and a treatment for a serious and unrecognized medical condition she developed as a freshman in high school. It is a perceptive reflection of her own recovery and a beautiful tribute to her father, whose support she likens to Neurofeedback, a neurotherapy she tried that stimulates new, healthy brainwaves each time the brain successfully solves a computer puzzle. It is these kinds of unlikely connections that characterize Julie's writing and demonstrate her originality and complexity of thought. Through her analysis of shared sandwiches, trips to the movie theater, and waterside conversations, she shows how the mind works to transform grief into individual will, how suffering instills a sense of deep personal history, and how the meaning of ritual might be redefined itself. Whether or not Julie's rituals with her father are still "performed," they continue to be reenacted in her writing. Julie writes with purpose and conviction, and it is through this voice that she shares her reward with the reader.

English 105 • Fall 2011
English Composition I: Ritual Assignment

In his essay, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," Renato Rosaldo **redefines "ritual" as "*a busy intersection . . .* of distinct social processes"** to help him understand the Ilongot practice of headhunting. When the headhunters explain that "rage, born from grief, impels [them] to kill" (588), Rosaldo at first cannot grasp their anger, and he draws on theory to understand the meaning behind the ritual. But this "reasoning" is exactly the problem: when anthropologists remove emotions from studies of death and ritual, they "conflate the ritual process with the process of mourning, equate ritual with the obligatory, and ignore the relation between ritual and everyday life" (597). For Rosaldo, the ritual experience is not self-contained; **it is not separate from other events and feelings that inform our lives before and after the ritual is performed: our day-to-day activities, varying emotions, and interactions with others become part of the ritual**.

For this assignment, you are asked to extend Rosaldo's project and **to develop an original argument about how a ritual of your choice functions as a "crossroads" where different life processes meet**. The ritual does not need to be from your own immediate world of experience, such as a family or campus ritual, but it does need to be one you can speak to with authority. In your analysis, you will need to explain **how your ritual plays out over an extended period of time**. **What life processes—activities, emotions, or people—overlap before, during, and after the ritual moment**? What is gained, lost, or complicated through these intersections? What do they reveal about the values of the people, or "culture," who engage in this ritual? These are the kinds of questions you will need to ask yourself to determine the direction you would like to take in your paper. Whatever you decide, be sure to **analyze at least 3 different intersections** within the ritual you have chosen to explore.

The Reward

Julie Roldan

ENG 105 • Susan Leary
Fall 2011

A doctor's visit is not commonly thought of as an outing to look forward to. Unfortunately, as a fifteen-year old, doctor's visits were the only outings I experienced. I developed a very serious medical condition at the end of my freshman year of high school. Although it was serious enough to prohibit me from being able to participate in daily activities, it was unrecognizable to conventional medicine doctors. Without a specific diagnosis, it was difficult to find any type of reasonable or logical treatment. The nameless condition gave me symptoms of persistent nausea, vomiting, dizziness, migraines, change in appetite and more. Shockingly, the worst part was not these symptoms, but the anxiety that developed because of my lack of ability to overcome them. My attempts to go to school consistently resulted in failure. My attempts to get treatment resulted in failure. My attempts to simply hang out with friends resulted in failure. This same failure was unintentionally emphasized as my frustrated, hard-working mother complained and punished me for not being able to overcome my physical disabilities.

It was around the same time that I began a new therapy when my father took over the duty of taking me to the doctor. Through this therapy known as "Neurofeedback," I had electrodes attached to my head while a computer "game" was displayed in front of me. The selected "game" was anything from a puzzle that needed to be finished or a rocket that needed more fuel to fly through space. I controlled the game subconsciously with my brainwaves. When my brain was doing what it was supposed to and my body was relaxed, I was rewarded with a quick beep and progress in the game. Then my brain would continue to strive for the reward, and thus continue to make healthy brainwaves. This therapy helped me in the long run, but what helped me the most were the surrounding events of the actual doctor's visit. My father designed a new, positive weekly outing. He removed all fear, pressure, and disappointment through a series of repeated endeavors that rewarded me similarly to the way the actual therapy rewarded my brain.

The relationship between my father and I was distant for most of my life. By distant, I mean we were literally not in the same state. When I was younger, he continuously traveled for his job and worked endless nights and

weekends. The times he would come home were the highlights of my youth. One can only imagine my excitement when he told me he was going to start taking me to therapy. The fact that he would take off a day of work to spend with me, made me feel prioritized. Because he had the entire day off, we were free to do anything after my therapy finished. I had a few hours after each session in which I would feel really well, but I was still not able to handle the stress of eating in a public restaurant. My father would take me to the deli next door to order a sandwich "to go." Without having to face the anxiety of dining in, I wanted to return to the deli every week after therapy.

My father knew the easiest way to avoid my fear of disappointment was to remove pressure altogether. After we ordered our sandwiches, he took me to a spot by the water in old town Alexandria, Virginia. We would sit and eat in pure relaxation, which gave me a glimpse of healthiness and provided hope through its natural refreshment. It was unlike the solitude I experienced at home because instead of feeling quarantined, there was openness. Looking out at the water, seeing that this world is larger than my own personal bubble, I began to envision how many other people were suffering and the strength they must possess. My father and I would discuss these other people and soon come to the conclusion that there was only one thing separating the strong from the weak. This "thing" was purely the people themselves, and their failure to acknowledge that perseverance comes from within. It became clear, although some may believe differently, that we decide our own destinies. During our weekly lunch sessions, my father helped me understand that I had the power to make a decision. My decision would either lead me to give up, or initiate optimism by fighting to become healthy again.

The best way to generate motivation is to go out and attempt to achieve something of personal value. Even with the realization of my power to fight for the future I wanted, I was having trouble grasping it without a tangible grain of success. It was obvious that I was lacking any sense of accomplishment. I was struggling trying to teach myself subjects like trigonometry and European history. I was forced into giving up my passion as a highly competitive pianist and had to quit the cross-country team. With all this sudden loss, I experienced a great deal of grief. It was not a typical form of the emotion, for I was grieving my own life. I had lost the life I had known when I was healthy. All ties with friends and teachers were lost because they did not believe I was actually sick (another unfortunate by-product of not having a diagnosis.) For a while, I lost belief in myself.

My father saw this sense of loss in me. Wanting to give me a sense of worth by providing a new attainable goal, he came up with the idea of simply trying to sit through a movie after we ate our sandwiches. Thankfully, it was usually the middle of the workday so there was hardly anyone at the theater. He would drive us to the theater and let me choose what I wanted to see. By having the power to choose, I felt more in control. Before we walked in, he would tell me if I needed to leave or if I felt sick we would just walk out, no problem. This small statement gave me relief by

eliminating the usual social pressure of people wondering why I walked out of a theater mid-movie, or the obligation to explain my embarrassing condition. For once, I had nothing to lose. If I did have to leave, he would smile and hug me. He would tell me that he was not fond of the movie in the first place, so he was happy that we did not have to sit through the whole thing.

Frustration was replaced with grace and love. Instead of feeling like a failure, I looked forward to trying again the next week and feeling supported. The new goal that he set was finally reachable, which not only brought my confidence to an all-time high, but reinforced my motivation to get better. The wall of fear that I had built purposely to keep myself from letting anyone else down was replaced with a foundation of courage.

If I did well in the final endeavor of going to the movies, we would go to Starbucks as a treat. I was not able to get regular coffee, only non-caffeinated teas. My father would order the same thing. His consideration gave me a sense of normality. I was not the only one that went to Starbucks and did not order coffee. He would never allow me to feel even minimally ostracized in a "normal" atmosphere. Because I was not experiencing the least bit of an average teenager's life on a day-to-day basis, this was essential in the survival of my depressive state and lessening some of my grief.

It may seem somewhat dramatic to use the term "survival," but in the years I suffered through this condition alone, this is exactly what it was. On the way home from the doctor's visit outing, my father would explain to me that he understood this and he knew I would overcome. The drive did not signify the end of the ritual, but instead it was the last opportunity for me to learn and discover the truth of the actual strength I held. It was my father's effort to get the very last ounce of perseverance out of me for that day, which would last until the next week when the ritual was repeated. He would play relaxing music, sometimes from Mexican artists. He would then tell me stories of my grandmother or, "Abuelita." He would tell me how she suffered and brought her four sons to the United States with no money and barely any English-speaking experience. He would tell me how she suffered specifically so that he would have a better life—so that I would have a better life. Then he would tell me that the same strength that got her through hardship was in my blood. He would instill in me a pride in my family and a determination to never give up, not for me but for her. There's something to be said about changing the will to try from a goal of self-fulfillment into a tribute to someone that risked her life for you. These stories my father told me further strengthened my will to endure through an obligation of respect to my grandma's fearless dedication.

The rewards of hope and motivation were added to the greater support and bond I found with my father. He realized very quickly that the detrimental effects on my life through his demanding job outweighed the luxuries that it provided. After months of seeing how I benefited from this new way of going to the doctor, he retired early from his long beloved career in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He traded in his invigorating role in the government to stay home with me and take me on a

weekly trip to the doctor, the deli next-door, the picnic table by the water, and the movie theater.

Rituals naturally bring families and friends together. Everyone crowds around the dinner table for Thanksgiving, around the big tree for Christmas. These rituals bring everyone together for a few hours or even a few days. Then, everyone resumes their lives as they had lived them before. The togetherness aspect is somewhat short-lived. In contrast, my father's creation of a ritual with me would permanently change the family dynamic by bringing out the empathetic side of my mother. The empathy did not originate from a closer relationship with her at first, but alternatively a step back. My father's ritual relieved her from some responsibility. Without a cloud of increasing frustration, my mother was able to see that I was not defying her. Unlike before, she understood that I was genuine in my efforts to overcome and stopped blaming me for my failures. My mother would soon put my word over all other assumptions. If a doctor said there was nothing wrong with me, she researched a new one. Her extensive research became only one of countless positive contributions to my life. The collaborative support from my family was the final element leading me to dominate over this debilitating illness.

Neurotherapy ended up being somewhat helpful to my condition, even if the effects were temporary. I learned that in a medically alternative outlook, as opposed to the traditional "theory of diseases," there are three parts to achieve optimum wellness. The three parts are physical, chemical, and emotional. Each have an equally sizable role and are completely dependent on each other. My father's ritual completely and positively turned around the emotional component, a necessity for my recovery. He would ultimately instill in me the greatest reward, a perseverance that I have been able to carry over into every aspect of my life. The same perseverance that has brought me here today, writing this essay at the University of Miami with an almost non-existent high-school record; the same perseverance that I will use to get into medical school and become a doctor; a doctor that will show this same perseverance to children who are without hope.

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