

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOMENT



**FREEDOM**

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*"Egypt, January 25," poster designed  
to look like an Egyptian car license  
plate, referring to the first day of the  
revolution.*

Tamara Pinkas

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# COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOMENT



Volume Twelve  
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## Editors' Notes

Ellis Goldberg, our opening essayist, arrived in Egypt on January 16, 2011, two weeks before he was slated to begin teaching political science at the American University in Cairo, and just as the political unrest that would soon topple the Mubarak regime came to a head. In an email to a friend on January 26, the day after massive Police Day demonstrations in Tahrir Square, he wrote, "This is turning into a big deal. Hard to know and I won't have Internet very regularly for a while. Don't worry, but this is turning into a massive protest and nothing here will be the same again. Demonstrations called for Friday." Internet and international cell service were taken down by the government that Friday morning, January 28, hours before hundreds of thousands of Egyptians gathered in Tahrir once again to protest and demand "bread, freedom, and human dignity." A Middle East specialist with over 30 years experience visiting and working in Egypt, Goldberg witnessed the demonstrations firsthand and documented his observations and insights in a blog titled Nisralnasr: Occasional Thoughts on Middle Eastern and U.S. Politics (<http://nisralnasr.blogspot.com>).

In what has come to be known as the Arab Spring, protests across North Africa and the Middle East have brought regime change to Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and major or minor government concessions in Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco and Syria. Violence has accompanied change, notably in a Libyan civil war and in government crackdowns ongoing in Syria at the time of this writing. Although mid- and long-term outcomes are unclear, we are inspired by the thirst for freedom manifest in these events. At home we witness political protests by the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as the war in Afghanistan dubbed Operation Enduring Freedom endures in its eleventh year and a presidential election looms.

Against this background we present this freedom-themed twelfth volume of The Community College Moment. Among other topics, our contributors address political, academic, economic and artistic freedoms, freedom and interdependence in relationships, the mind of a condemned and incarcerated freedom fighter in a far-future world, and the bittersweet freedom of a child on his first solo outing in the snow.

*Russell H. Shitabata and Ben Hill*  
*Community College Moment editors*

## ESSAYS



Those who profess to favor freedom,  
and yet depreciate agitation,  
are men who want crops without plowing up the ground.

Frederick Douglass



# Two Reports from Egypt

*Ellis Goldberg*



## **Sunday, February 06, 2011, Meandering Around the Midan**

One important aspect of Midan al-Tahrir (popularly known as Tahrir Square) yesterday and of the demonstrations up until now which has struck people who live here and may not have been so widely reported as the brutality against foreign reporters by pro-government thugs is the remarkable organization, cooperation, and good nature of the people demonstrating for change.

First let me break for a bit of humor before going on to make the necessarily ponderous academic points. People have been cleaning up in the wake of the huge amounts of trash left behind whenever hundreds of thousands of people come together. And inevitably as garbage is bagged it mounds up. Smack in the middle of the Midan was a huge pile of garbage bags awaiting removal. Some anonymous wag had posted a sign on top: "site of the new building of the National Democratic party" in reference both to popular understandings of the ruling party (it's a corrupt pile of garbage) and to its need for a new headquarters (since the old one was burned in the first days of the protests).

More impressive, as a segue into my main topic here, let me describe waiting to get in to the Square. Thousands of people were milling around at the western edge of the Qasr al-Nil bridge where there was an extremely narrow opening in an otherwise impressive row of soldiers behind barbed wire and a tank. At that point the crowd was funneled, single-file, toward officials examining identity cards and patting people down. I was standing with another American and we were discussing, in English, whether to go in. As we decided we would, suddenly somebody behind us shouted out in Arabic "Move on up, there's plenty of room ahead," which struck me as hilarious because it's exactly what the conductor tells you when you board a more or less equally crowded bus. I broke out laughing as did most of the crowd around us.

I've read accounts by other foreigners of their fear and mistreatment in the midst of the protest demonstrations, especially on the first day, so I'm not going to say that the protests have just been one big happy outing for everybody. One account that I read is indeed frightening and sobering and I'm sure it's an accurate description of what the writer experienced in the area around Talaat Harb Square.

My own particular experiences have been different but I also have to admit that I've been more careful than I would have been 40 years ago (doubly so since I have a transplanted kidney and have absolutely no desire either to take a blow to the abdomen or to spend a night or more locked up and away from my medications). It's also very clear that

the government is playing on xenophobia, but this has some popular resonance. So I'm sure that the people who called in to the government television channel last night fully believed what they were saying about hearing people giving orders in English or distributing leaflets in foreign languages about how the demonstrations should go.

Yet the atmosphere inside Midan al-Tahrir on what the demonstrators called the "Friday of departure" was exhilarating. The experience of having to move to the back of a crowded bus is a common one in Cairo. It's unpleasant, hot and stuffy. It's also not uncommon in such situations for women to be harassed, for pickpockets to ply their trade, and for people to be annoyed and annoying.

One thing that has been different in Midan al-Tahrir for most of the week (and again I can't speak to reports of quite different behavior) has been the remarkable calmness, openness, and tolerance by large crowds of Egyptians. Completely covered women carrying children marched alongside chic young women dressed in shirts and sleeves and men with the traditional peasant robes and business suits and everything in between. Not only was Egyptian pluralism on display but nobody—from *Azhari shaykhs* (university-educated Islamic religious figures) to young hipsters—voiced any criticism of anybody's else dress or looks or presence. It's been widely remarked among Egyptian women I know at any rate that they haven't been bothered, subjected to harassment, or even had anybody try to work his (or her) fingers into a handbag.

One reason this is important, of course, is that it shows how remarkably the events of the last week and a half have united as well as divided Egyptians. The other reason, though, as many Egyptians (but relatively few foreigners as far as I can tell) have noted, is that it shows that Egyptian spontaneous activity in the absence of a cruelly repressive state is not chaos but order. Again, I don't wish to romanticize the Egyptians: people here are not cut from some different cloth as other human beings and people here can be as petty and as mean-spirited as people anywhere else. But what the events of the last ten days show is that Egyptians, like Londoners during the Blitz, can rise to the occasion. In another post I'm writing about a more intellectual discussion among Egyptians about these issues but for now I want to focus on behavior in Midan al-Tahrir and the streets.

There was certainly violence in many parts of Egypt in the past ten days and while much of it was inspired by the government, it would be wrong to think that all of it was. Where the political movement was centered, however, there were relatively high levels of spontaneous cooperation and tolerance. Many people here think it has been reinforced by the so-called popular committees that have played so important a role in safeguarding neighborhoods (such as my own) from violence and looting. What one Egyptian friend after another has remarked is that people who previously didn't talk to each other (for example, the butcher and the attorney or the plumber and the professor) have suddenly



found themselves spending the night together with a common task and engaging in long (but not necessarily always political) conversations.

One Egyptian colleague has referred to it as indicative of much higher levels of “social capital” than any realized Egypt had. Given the absence of bowling alleys, choral societies, and cooperative local political endeavors (which had been completely foreclosed by the state), this spontaneous cooperation or social capital seems to arise from mysterious sources and will, no doubt, be the subject of many an American doctoral dissertation.

I’m not going to weigh in on that subject except to say that, once again, it’s clear to me that the role of emotion and human solidarity has so completely eluded American social science (of both the rational choice and the postmodern persuasion) as to convince me it needs to be rebuilt from the ground up.

I will conclude with this thought. Whatever we think we know about taking power out of the hands of the autocratic hierarchical state (you can call this democracy or local self-government or popular participation), people who live near each other need to be able to deliberate (talk to each other) and make decisions together with both the authority and the responsibility for their own lives. That Egyptians could not do this is something the highest officials of the Egyptian state have long maintained. What the pluralism of the demonstrations has shown is that it need not necessarily be true. Indeed for the last ten days it has not been true that spontaneous activity here apart from the state is disastrous disorder. In this profound sense, Egyptians feel they have changed the world they live in.

### **Tuesday, February 08, 2011, Spontaneity, Democracy and Change in Egypt**

Even Tom Friedman and Roger Cohen have noted the presence of a remarkably tolerant and plural atmosphere inside Midan al-Tahrir. They and other foreign observers have also noted elements of self-organization inside the Midan. What they haven’t noticed, and probably haven’t really known or understood, is how events in the streets and neighborhoods of Egypt, as well as in the Midan, reflect a basic argument about democracy, people’s control over their own lives, and the possibility of self-organization. This is a debate with a long and even boring history in political philosophy but it’s also been an academic and a practical debate in Egyptian life.

There is a kind of constant referendum on trust, and for much of the past two weeks Egyptians have been saying they trust each other more than they trust the hierarchical state. The state meanwhile has been trying to get Egyptians to feel less trust in each other and a correspondingly greater need for the instruments of coercion and organization in the hands of state officials. But this isn’t just a question of how academics can re-imagine ordinary behavior. Egyptians have been talking about these questions: what would happen if the coercive state withdrew from society for a long time?

On an early Fall day in 1987, two prominent political activists and amateur historians who had known each other for at least a quarter century had a falling out at an obscure academic meeting and the echoes of their dispute are, surprisingly enough, being heard in the squares of downtown Cairo, in its salons, and even in an interview between President Hosni Mubarak and the famed reporter Christiane Amanpour. Tariq al-Bishri, a prominent jurist and the author of several important meditations on contemporary Egyptian politics, had been invited to a conference on historiography. Another participant, the late Ahmad Sadiq Saad, had been a prominent Communist leader in the 1940s, but by the 1980s had spent years as a factory manager in the state sector and was writing his own books on the roots of Egyptian authoritarianism.

Al-Bishri was already an extremely well-known and controversial intellectual because he had just re-issued an earlier study of the Egyptian politics in the period between World War II and the 1952 military coup. When first published, the book lauded the role of the secular left and especially the communists, but in the second edition (which had then only recently been published) Al-Bishri appeared to have transformed his vision completely. In a lengthy and self-critical introduction, he repudiated his former praise for the left and argued that the Muslim Brotherhood, as an expression of authentic Egyptian society, was both in practice and principle the dominant political force in Egypt before 1952. The clear implication was that they, unlike the communists and the secular left, still deserved to be.

Many of al-Bishri's former friends felt betrayed that a prominent jurist and a member of Egypt's highest administrative court should have turned on the left and the secular liberals with whom he had long been associated. Sadiq Saad recognized, however, that al-Bishri had posed another, even deeper, challenge to the Egyptian left and, somewhat to al-Bishri's dismay, he pointedly referred to it. Was al-Bishri really endorsing, Sadiq Saad asked, spontaneity as a political principle? Didn't he understand the dangers of romanticizing the activity of the masses along with the idea that they could somehow participate directly, without intervening organizations, in politics?

Sadiq Saad was referring to an older debate about revolution that raged in early twentieth century Russia and that had come to dominate the thinking of communists and revolutionaries around the world by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not least in Egypt. "Spontaneity" was an idea sharply criticized by the revolutionary Communist leader Lenin. Initially it referred to his perception of the danger to the ultimate success of the revolution of allowing the masses to pursue their own interests as they perceived them. In such a case, he argued, you might get anything from trade union activity that reinforced the capitalist system to ordinary liberalism to violent attempts to impose racist (and in the context of Czarist Russia viciously anti-Semitic) conceptions of community on society. Far better,



Lenin said, for there to be an organized political elite—professional revolutionaries—to provide leadership to the disorganized and ultimately untrustworthy masses.

Wasn't Al-Bishri proposing that the political elite, whether professional revolutionaries or not, follow rather than lead the masses? Wasn't this a dereliction of duty by intellectuals? And besides couldn't it possibly lead either to political quiescence or to the imposition of even worse forms of political domination on society than the Egyptian regime then in place? What al-Bishri went on, in later articles, to expound was a notion of the devolution of power down from the state into society at the expense of the power of the centralized government. He has continued to link this vision to the success and size of the Islamic movement.

Fast forward a quarter century to a moment when the largely spontaneous participation of the Egyptian masses in politics has profoundly dizzied the hierarchy of the state. Midan al-Tahrir may be the center of where Egyptians are acting out this debate but it's not the only place. For the first two weeks of these events there have been some acts of terrible violence (especially in the countryside and some of the adjacent suburbs) apart from the unleashing of thugs on the demonstrators and the people. But there have also been remarkable acts of civil society ascendant, including people lining up in queues, engaging in intense and political conversations about the meaning of events as they occurred, and displaying a remarkable openness to each other.

Obviously it's not going to be possible to organize the life of 80 million people through spontaneous activity for a much longer period of time, but this is why the issues raised by the protesters are so crucial to the future of Egypt and why the government is so anxious to forestall them and focus on limiting all change to the provisions of the constitution relating to elections.

There are, it seems to me from talking to Egyptian friends, two crucial aspects to the demand that Mubarak go. One of these is the demand that Mubarak himself go; the other is the demand that the presidential system that has been built around him in Egypt (but whose roots lie in the Nasser period) also goes. The Egyptian presidency is, according to Egyptian scholars, one of the most powerful ones in the world. The president has very wide powers of appointment and direct decision making. The curfew was, for example, decided by President Mubarak in his capacity as "military ruler," a position which is more encompassing than, for example, President Obama's role as commander in chief. The president also has a range of other powers, primarily embedded in his right to resolve conflicts between branches of government and government institutions. Imagine, for example, that in a conflict between the U.S. Congress and the Administration over funding a policy, the president (rather than Congress or an independent judiciary) was empowered to decide and then impose a decision.

When President Mubarak told Christiane Amanpour in a television interview that the alternative to him was chaos, he was also commenting on this long debate. He was saying that without the existing hierarchical apparatus of the central state, Egyptians themselves would be incapable of social cohesion or coherent economic activity. Because Mubarak himself was out of the country for over a month last year while undergoing still mysterious medical procedures in Germany, it is clear that the country actually can get along without his person for a while. But whether those people in authority can get along without the presidential system or the existing president is a completely different question than whether Egypt can.

The demand that Mubarak go is a demand to change the system of the presidency. But the system (including both its corrupt and also its simply repressive elements) is centered in a person who also is empowered informally by all the actors to make decisions resolving their conflicts. If the system had to choose between Mubarak the person and the presidential system, it would probably choose the latter, but the top officials would prefer to retain both the person and the system.

Ending the state of emergency, freeing the media, guaranteeing that the youthful protesters not be punished, opening up other sections of the constitution for change, and electing a new parliament that can itself then enact further change are not important just because they allow a veneer of liberal democracy over an otherwise highly centralized political system. They are important, and I believe the government knows they are important, because they are likely to be steps in the direction of taking power out of the hands of the central bureaucracy and placing it in the hands of Egyptians locally. This would not be spontaneity, but it would be a lot closer to real local self-government.

There is no doubt that, if Egyptians could make more decisions about how to live in their own communities (or even governorates and cities) it would have both positive and negative characteristics. In some places it might lead to abuses based on membership in religious communities; in others it might lead to a florescence of creativity. But it would be a set of conflicts Egyptians would finally be able to have about how to live with each other and if the constitutional authorities I know had any impact, it would be subject to some substantive limitations given the existing (but completely formal) constitutional commitment to equality of citizenship.

Free elections should be held and they do matter. But they matter (I think) primarily insofar as they allow Egyptians to regain control over their own destiny in an admittedly imperfect way. They matter insofar as they help to take power away from a handful of individuals at the center of state apparatus and place it in a multitude of other hands. The debate in Washington DC about Egypt has, as far as I can tell, overlooked this particular dimension of what is happening here.



# The Bluff: Exactly What You Think It Isn't

*Siskanna Naynaha*



He drove the company Chevy while I wrapped my toes in duct tape and balanced a steaming Egg McMuffin on my lap. It was 6:15 a.m. Early even for him, who'd always been one of those dreaded "morning people." He didn't want to be there much. That was clear. And I could drive myself over to Guildford easily enough, just 45 minutes on the highway from our new house in West Hartford. But chances were I'd never be able to drive myself home again. I needed the ride. Baby-man burred and clucked in the back seat, looking like a rooster at daybreak, his tall shock of fiery red curl puffing up proudly in the air.

We arrived at the starting point of the Bimble's Bluff 50K just in time for the pre-race info session, which I kind of heard, at least in part. I stood too far away from the organizer, aka Mr. Bimble, considering this was my first "ultra" event along with my first time on the Bluff, but I caught the bit about tape colors — tied to trees at various intervals to mark the trail and temporarily switching from pink with black stripes to bright orange somewhere around halfway. Baby-man waddled to and fro on the fringe of the circle runners had formed. His dad stood watching silently, his brow furrowed beneath the brim of his too-tight beanie, hands shoved deep in his pockets.

The group ambled outside, making last-minute adjustments to outrageously expensive technical clothing and gear. There had been a steady downpour of cold New England rain most of the previous day and night, but the morning was clear and sunny. I kissed the Baby-man and his dad goodbye amid the flat clang of cowbells coming from somewhere behind us. Perhaps they were heralding an auspicious ultra? It didn't matter, really. We had shown up for the race, and no one quits at the starting line. So dutifully, at 8:00 a.m. sharp, we were off — somewhere around 195 individuals and 22 relay team members — for our confrontation with the Bluff, billed enigmatically as "exactly what you think it isn't."

While I was born on the eastern border of Oregon, I was raised and lived most of my life in Idaho. Like many Idahoans I've spent a lifetime building a province known as The West in my imagination: it's marked by hippie eateries, alternative rock bands, Big Sky, Blue Mountains, and an occasional gold rush. Also in this place in my mind, there are identifiable running trails. These are reasonably well-defined trails that have been tamped down to a hard dirt pack by bikers, hikers, runners, dogs, and horses — à la Boise foothills. It's lovely really, and you should join me there sometime, in my head or in real life.

Connecticut, however, does not respect the vision of The West, much less a proper running trail that I carry around in my head. The first two miles of the Bluff were basically a

hodgepodge of ups and downs, stream crossings, boulder scrambling, and jagged rock of mixed sizes covered in a perfectly camouflaging blanket of new-fallen leaves. At the first creek I hopped up onto a big boulder, but before I got a chance to lower myself down to the stream I slipped and fell on my ass. Call me naïve, but this was all kind of a surprise to me. Still, I remained optimistic and assumed that after a few miles things would mellow out and we'd all be able to start running in earnest.

Then I twisted my right ankle, hard, for the first time. People ran around me glancing over their shoulders to ask if I was okay. I worried for a minute, hobbling along, trying to "walk it off," and soon enough my ankle loosened up. Slowly, I started to jog again until I picked up the pace close to something like what I'd been running before.

And so went the next seven to eight miles. I was feeling great when I cruised into the second aid station at ten miles. I chowed down on some PB&J and bananas as I thought almost cheerfully about the next 20 miles. That was practically cake. 50K? Bring it on!

In this delirious state of mind, I hit the trail again, and immediately found myself climbing what was labeled, in a fit of morbid humor, "The Escalator." What a hilarious treat, rife with nagging analogues from real life. Like work, where new projects seem to breed like particularly fecund little rabbits that never seem to die or go away. Or marriage, with its constant mincing and cajoling and finagling. *Honey, would you please...? Do you think you could ...? What do you think about ...?* Have you ever noticed how hard it is to climb an escalator that's not working? I don't know if it's psychological trickery or attributable to relative step height or what, but if an escalator breaks it messes with the fabric of your being when you try to climb it.

So, it was a four-legged scramble all the way to the top of the Bluff. I, alas, am only equipped with two legs. I spent part of the time scraping my way upward with my hands in the dirt, and part of the time standing partially erect with both arms pinwheeling backward as my body stubbornly refused to disobey the law of gravity. Look, I had just run ten miles, and I'm not gonna lie: it was a real struggle to the top. But once I was there I was rewarded by the most scenic vista I'd encountered since my move to the East over a year before. There was a picturesque little lake (or big pond) directly below the Bluff, and the old white colonials surrounding it sat placidly surveying their own reflections in the glassy water. The houses themselves were framed by rustic old barns in an array of browns and burgundies, and beyond that stretched miles of New England's famous autumn foliage in toasty shades of crimson and gold dotted in between by still-fading greens. In my three years there, which careened by with frequently terrifying speed, I learned how cold those idyllic tableaux could feel from the inside. Those of you from New England may take exception, though I suspect that, secretly at least, you'll also agree.



Arguably, however, “The Escalator” was not even the most difficult part of the six-mile stretch between Aid Stations 2 and 3. There were five and a half more miles of tough climbs interspersed with steep downhill littered with the aforementioned camouflaged piles of jagged rock. After a bit, though, I was running alone for the first time in the race and following the pink-and-black-striped tape rather casually, when I came upon a pie plate stapled to a tree with a giant arrow drawn on it in black marker. The arrow pointed improbably straight toward the sky. Opposite the pie-plate-bearing tree was a rock face split by a moderately wide cleft in the stone through which a narrow ribbon of water drizzled, a steady token of the previous night’s storm.

What else could I do? I followed the pie plate. I found some good handholds and hoisted myself up over the ledge of the six- or seven-foot outcropping, then looked for pink and black tape. I found some and started off again, relieved to soon find myself moving downhill again. Unfortunately, after making a short loop around the rock projection, I found myself staring up at the same damned pie plate with the arrow pointing skyward. “Shit,” I breathed loudly. “No way.”

I traversed the rock face again, and this time at the top I stopped to look around for a while so I could locate pink tape that didn’t turn me around in a circle. That was the first and least serious time that I would get lost that day, and I thought certainly that I had learned an important lesson there. I would see it coming next time. Wouldn’t happen again. Not possible. Like when I finished my master’s thesis and gave him a hardbound copy. We’d both worked so hard, made sacrifices so I could finish the program while we raised a young son together. He’d be impressed, I thought, so proud of my accomplishment. He said he’d read it. He meant to, I’m certain. A year went by. Then another year. And another. When I finished the PhD, I didn’t ask him to read the diss. I had learned.

I ran on. Four miles down the trail someone ran by me. I hadn’t seen any of my fellow Bluff travelers since right after the second aid station, so while it always pains me slightly to be passed by another runner, I was happy to see anyone at this point and even more pleased to have someone else navigate the trail for me. Now I could focus my energy on attacking the uphill climbs and keeping my footing. In fact, I was so thrilled that I took off after her in a kind of giddy haze, and I promptly caught my toe on a bulky rock protuberance and really ate it for the first time. The spill left a neat row of pulpy black and blue marks running from my right upper thigh down to my shin, but at the time it didn’t hurt nearly as much as my pride. I caught my breath, pushed back onto my feet, and took off chasing my new running buddy. I wasn’t about to lose her now.

I followed her for the next mile and a half up to Aid Station 3, just passing her before we hit the highway crossing and shuffled in for some grub at 15.9 miles. Here we snacked substantially, I on boiled potatoes with salt, M&M’s, and bananas. We had three hours to

reach the next aid station in order to make the cut-off time of seven hours at the 22-mile mark, and we agreed that this should be no problem whatsoever. We filled our hydration packs and started off once more.

Our party of two was destined to part ways soon, however, and despite the fact that she had a bum knee she lost me on the next series of steep uphill climbs. They told us at the previous aid station that there were still quite a few people behind us, so I was a little disappointed to lose my compatriot but happy enough to follow the next tough-guy who came along. Unfortunately, he happened to pass while I was off in the woods answering the call of nature, followed closely by two women who were picking their way cautiously around the flooded-out trail. I figured there would be many more coming, so I concentrated on maintaining some momentum and just tried to keep them in sight off in the distance. At this point I was following the faint blue streak of Tough-Guy's t-shirt, which I glimpsed every so often through the foliage and alternating streaks of blinding sunlight cut through by afternoon shadows in the woods. There was also the tape, which had indeed switched to bright orange at halfway, but mostly I stuck by the trees adorned with a swatch of industrial-blue paint, since the race appeared to have been following this trail marking for quite some miles now.

I plodded along, often lost in thought. What the hell was I doing out here? It's this thing I have to do, I guess. That I've always done in some form or fashion. This seeking. Seeking a particular kind of knowledge or wisdom, which is how I ended up with a PhD in English, two children with 15 years between them, and a name most people can't pronounce. Sometimes it's seeking the limits of my own strength, that exquisite core of blood and guts that delimits my tiny place on this hurtling blue planet. Seeking some small, hard kernel of truth. Something real. And *this* is as real as it gets: the dull grind of my hip in its pounded socket, worn by 39 years of just-keep-it-moving; the thrum and rush of blood in my ears, which is so loud it threatens my gradually loosening grip on reality, a surge of water that's broken through a poorly constructed dam; the warm sting of breast milk letting down and the building pressure, hot and heavy in my chest as the hours and miles wear on.

I felt myself being slowly dragged back to reality by the leadening of my quads wrought by another long uphill climb. I thought the women at the last aid station had said no more steep hills in this section? But I saw Tough-Guy's blue shirt through the trees up above, so I kept at it, cursing a little under my breath.

Finally, after another half-mile or so of slogging my way uphill, I crested the long incline and found myself atop a giant stone outcropping that looked down on some more densely wooded forest. There was a blue swatch of paint on the ground, directly in the center of the mossy black boulder that crowned the hill, so I started my way confidently



down the other side. At this point I encountered a day hiker making her way up the stone ridge. She was gesturing down the hill and talking at me, so I stopped to see what was up.

"Does this lead back to highway 77?" She waved down the hill behind her.

I shrugged. "I don't know. I've never been on this trail before. I'm just following markers on the trees until I get to the next race station."

"Oh," she said definitively. "Well, you're lost."

What? Talk about your Nutmeg State, I thought. Who does she think she is? She doesn't even know where I'm going. She doesn't even know where *she's* going. "Ooookay," I said, about to book my way down the hill anyway.

"No, I'm serious," she said. "You're with the other runners, right? Following the pink-and-black tape?"

I nodded, unsure.

"Yeah." She started on her way back up the hill. "They all turned off way back there." She pointed up over the ridge, back in the direction from which I'd come, and then disappeared over the peak.

No. Way. I started off down the hill in the same direction I had been going for the past three quarters of a mile or so, when it dawned on me that while I had seen other runners off in the distance (or so I thought), it had been a while since I'd seen any orange *or* pink and black tape. I stopped for a minute to give the dilemma some thought. Part of me recognized, I think, that it would be a good way back before I encountered the elusive pink-and-black tape, and I just didn't want to have to backtrack that far. I'd already run about 18 miles by then, and I felt like I needed to start conserving my energy stores or risk not finishing the race. But then again, what if that trail did lead down to Highway 77, wherever that was? How much further was that? And then would I be able to find my way back? I imagined myself attempting to wave down passing motorists as they cruised by at 90 mph, slurping their Dunkin Donuts "Coolattas," the bassy guitar riffs of Bon Jovi and Poison rattling the frames of their shiny black and silver SUVs while I tried to explain, earnestly, that I was in a 50K trail race and I *got lost*. The dejection felt like a punch to the throat. I couldn't swallow or even breathe without struggling for a moment. I turned around.

As I ran down the other side of the long hill, now sinking in tawny shadows, I chanted what would become my mantra for the next 16 miles or so and the remainder of the day: "Pink and black; Pink and black; Pink and black." There it was, just as I had feared and expected, almost a mile in the opposite direction. I got back on the trail, determined that I wouldn't lose it again. I had to stop a handful of times to meander around a bit looking for the next strip of dangling pink-and-black. Eventually I would find the trail and move on. My tangential adventure and subsequent prudence cost me precious time, and I tot-

tered into the next aid station with barely a 20-minute cushion before the cut-off time of seven hours.

Honestly, when I was approaching that fourth aid station I had begun to wonder if I would make it all the way. If I got lost like that again my time would cut it close. And I was getting tired. Soon it didn't matter, though, because it was eight miles out to the next aid station, with nothing but woods in between. That meant that after a few more miles I was basically committed to finishing the race, since it was only 2.5 from Aid Station 5 to the finish. At that moment I surprised a white-tailed deer, a doe, foraging on the trail. She leapt off to the side a few yards and stood watching sideways, carefully scrutinizing me. Her coat appeared to almost glow in that surreal color of gold that often afflicts evening sunlight. I murmured some assurance that I meant her no harm and tried to keep my pace.

Some miles later I stepped off the trail for a pit stop. In hindsight, why I insisted on removing myself so far from the marked path is a mystery to me. I hadn't seen anyone since Blue-T-Shirt-Tough-Guy way back near Aid Station 3, so whom was I hiding my ass from anyway? And my gratuitous modesty cost me in the end, so to speak. I ambled my way back onto the trail, several crucial yards beyond a well marked bend in the race course, and, following some ancient pink tape (sans black stripes) from some race or logging expedition of yesteryear, I once again ran well off the designated Bimbler's Bluff route.

This time I was running downhill, which is perhaps why I deceived myself into believing that these sad little shreds of tape, the color of faded pink carnations, must surely mark the direction in which I was supposed to be travelling. Until, eventually, I ran into a steel gate that blocked access from a road, across which I spotted a sleepy suburban subdivision, and no race volunteers nor aid tent in sight.

I fumed. Aaaaargh! I turned and started running back up the long hill, huffing and cussing the entire way. I had lost vital time that I needed to make up for now. Another three quarters of a mile or so back I found the painfully obvious markers where the trail veered off the old logging road I'd been running along. In the now perceptibly fading light, I trundled along, knowing that I was a good four miles or so from water (I was out already), from nourishment, and probably from any human company to reassure me.

Unfortunately, it was only a few more miles before I was lost yet again. This time, however, I was chanting my mantra ("pink and black pink and black pink and black!"), and when I lost the trail I immediately circled back to the last verifiable strand of tape. I was in a state of hypervigilance since I had already added a couple of extraneous miles to my first 50K — and the last thing I wanted to do was get lost in the unfamiliar Connecticut woods. In the dark.

I wandered around in a gigantic circle for 15 minutes, roaming back again and again to that last precious bit of pink and black tape, but the next marker eluded me. I called



out into the dusky woods a few times: "Hello! Hello?" At this point I couldn't be sure, after wandering so wildly off course *twice*, how far I actually was from the next aid station — was it one mile? Three miles? Was there anyone behind me to come along and help me get back on track? I hadn't seen another soul in hours. I was about to give up for real and just sit down under that damned piece of tape until someone came looking for me, when I decided to follow some tramped down leaves just a little further around a bend than I had thus far, thinking, *So, that's it. That's it. I'm not gonna make it.* And then there it was. The tape. Dangling innocently from a low-hanging tree branch.

Now I just had to worry about how far I was from the next aid station. The light was still fading, and I was thirsty. About another mile on I heard the familiar clanging of a cowbell. I happily loped toward the sound of the bell and a sweet soul who told me I was only a mile from the fifth and final aid station. That meant I was just 3.5 from the finish. I didn't know if I was going to make the cutoff at this point after all my aimless drifting about. But at least I wasn't going to get lost in the woods in the dark. The sweet guy with the cowbell actually guided me into the last aid station after calling Mr. Bimble on his cell phone to let him know I wasn't dead, seriously injured, or *completely* and hopelessly lost.

At the final, blessed aid station was a motley crew of guys who were all drinking beer and pleasantly happy to see me. (I had apparently started to worry more than just myself.)

"Am I the last one?" I asked.

"Yeah, but just finishing a 50K is a real accomplishment!" one of them boozily tried to console me.

"Damn it," I said. "I didn't want to be the last one."

I became defiant and even competitive at this penultimate moment, which is mildly bizarre considering there was no one left to race against. But now it was *on*, as far as I was concerned. I had to finish and do it strong. They offered me food, which I couldn't stomach anymore by then, and refilled my water bottles while we all discussed the likelihood of me making it to the finish in the final cut-off time, 10 hours from when I began the race. I had 30 minutes left. We also debated the necessity of me borrowing a headlamp from one of the crew in order to navigate the final 2.5, for even within the allotted time it would be dark when I crossed the finish line. They decided the mini-flashlight I had stashed in my hydro-belt would suffice, and told me to run like hell.

So I did. Mind you, now I knew that I would finish the race, but the big question remained: Would I get lost in the Connecticut woods in the dark? My answer to myself was a resounding, "Oh, *ha-yell* no!"

That last little stretch was close to my fastest 2.5 miles of the entire 50K. A few times I had to slow and look around in the dusk while I chanted, out loud, "Pink and black, pink

and black! Where are you, Pink and black?!" But each time, within a few seconds I gained the trail again and took off at close to a dead run.

Hence, I was going along at a pretty good clip when I crested a little rise and looked down to see a guy just standing on the trail below in the growing shadows. I assumed it was another race volunteer waiting patiently for the last runner.

Then, looking up at the blackening sky that still peeked through the tree cover overhead, he said solemnly, "So, do you know the way?"

I thought this very strange since he seemed to be staring directly at a tape marker hanging from the tree right in front of him.

"Um, yeah," I said, "I see two pieces of pink and black tape right here so it must be this way!"

I ran on, admittedly buoyed to an immoderate degree by the fact that I was no longer in last place. I jubilantly bounded up the hillside facing us when it dawned on me, that guy could actually be in trouble.

I stopped and called back: "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I've just got a few cramps."

I wasn't sure exactly how far it was, but I knew I was close enough to the finish to send someone quickly if he didn't follow. I contemplated going back and giving him my flashlight because I hadn't seen one on him, but then I remembered all of the time I had already spent lost out there myself.

"There's more tape up here!" I called down. "Come up this way!"

I didn't know if he followed or not, but I ran on over the crest of the hill. Just a few minutes later I almost crashed into Mr. Bimble as he ran out of the shadows to my left and popped up on the trail in front of me. "This way!" he said, and after a second, "your husband's waiting for you!"

I told him there was one more guy behind me who said he had a few cramps. Mr. Bimble assured me he'd go back. I followed for a minute or two until he pointed me up one final long, upward slope. Just right up there, he told me, was the end. He turned to go back for my remaining compatriot out on the Bluff, and let me go on alone. As I peaked the hill, a small crowd of volunteers, including most of the motley crew from Aid Station 5, my husband, and the Baby-man all stood whooping and hollering and clanging their cowbells like mad.

I couldn't help grinning like a maniac of the highest order. I ran into the finishers' chute as Joaquín screamed ecstatically, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" His dad put him down and he ran across the finish line after me where I picked him up and held him tight with such profound satisfaction. It felt for a moment as though it might crush me, that hard

little kernel of truth, and I felt my world folding neatly back in on itself, like a telescope being collapsed into home position.

A few minutes later the last runner came down the hill. We were numbers 68 and 69 out of 69 finishers, some 126 less than had actually entered the Bluff 50K individually, and the cowbells rang out one final time. One thing I can say with absolute certainty: I was not sold a bill of goods. The mountain, the experience, lived up to its motto precisely: it is exactly what you think it isn't. I didn't fail, but I didn't win either, because it turned out not to be that kind of contest. And in the end, I hurt. But the mountain was not hard on me. It did not care to trouble me. The mountain did not even challenge me. I did that to myself. Most of us trifle with a mountain at some point in our lives. Some tramp leisurely along its rugged trails, warming cupped hands on steaming coffee mugs, gazing serenely at the sepia-toned birds amid brilliant foliage, having just ambled in from nearby parking lots. But trifling has never been quite my style. I had to take the mountain, like a lover. I had to make it mine. And so I had to lose myself in it. From a big perspective, one that's vast, and dark, but all encompassing, this is not sad. It simply is, as the mountain simply is. Impenetrable. Silent. Still. And gradually, little by little, it simply is not.

I climbed stiffly into the white Chevy with the man who is now my ex-husband behind the wheel, and I tried to tell a little of this story as we drove off into the night. My eyelids were so terribly heavy, though, and soon I fell silent. I breathed in the warm air blowing from the dash and watched the blurry red and amber trails made by cold New England rain on the dark highway out ahead.



“If it were done when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well  
It were done quickly.”

## Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the Reinvention of the Human, and *Staying Hungry for Freedom*

*Michael McDonald*



While education can be linked to various conceptions of freedom — the freedom associated with maximizing one’s economic potential, freedom from ignorance, and so forth — this essay will focus on the aspect of freedom that is uniquely associated with education, and the principle I deem paramount above all others: The freedom to become fully and fearlessly oneself. For too long, we have discussed academic freedom primarily as the domain and property of faculty. I believe that this rather narrow definition of academic freedom has led to all sorts of mischief: classrooms where only the instructor or professor, the “subject supposed to know,”<sup>1</sup> speaks, save for regimented — and typically relatively brief — periods, in which students — the subjects supposed *not* to know — are “allowed” to ask questions. This hierarchical and restrictive conception of academic freedom has created what Parker Palmer calls a “culture of fear” (35) in higher education: a culture in which students are afraid to speak; in which instructors are afraid to let students speak, to try ideas and methods that may take us out of our comfort zones; and a culture administrators too often help perpetuate, in part, simply by failing to acknowledge that it exists. Thus, we often find classrooms where, even if instructors and students are willing to entertain a pedagogy more conducive of freedom, the seats and desks, stuck in the inertia of immovability, tend to militate against more open and adventuresome pedagogies.

This is my third year teaching the two-term Shakespeare sequence offered as part of the literature program in the English department at Lane Community College. Because I will be surrendering Shakespeare to another instructor next year (our department wisely has a policy that prevents any instructor from claiming, in effect, a course or sequence of courses for life), it is with a considerable sense of urgency that I seek to account for the special, and arguably unique, quality of freedom that Shakespeare encourages, and that is the most fitting response to his work.

At the beginning of the term, I jocularly warn students that the sense of freedom Shakespeare evokes in me may lead to spontaneous and unpredictable behavior that may seem distinctly non-professorial: While teaching Shakespeare, I am more likely to sing, play the fool, and nearly cut a caper than in any other class I teach. Harmless enough, per-

haps, but what does this have to do with pedagogies that promote the freedom to become fully oneself?

Following the recent death of Steve Jobs, news and entertainment networks repeatedly replayed excerpts of his 2006 commencement speech at Stanford. Having never heard the speech prior to this, I was particularly arrested by its conclusion: “Stay hungry, stay foolish.” For all the encomiums offered to the memory of Jobs, in my view, far too little attention was paid to these words at the time. These four words could just as easily have summed up Shakespeare’s career and achievement as Jobs’. For Jobs, I imagine, staying foolish seemed crucial for creativity and innovation: If we are afraid to look foolish, we become unable to think outside the box; we become too afraid to fail. And every scientist, inventor, and artist knows that, without failure, there is no progress, no innovation, and no freedom. As educators, sadly, a deeply inculcated fear of our own grading system and received methods has led to a condition in which we often, and far too typically, never create situations in which students can fail productively. Despite relatively isolated well-meaning efforts to the contrary, the educational system punishes failure, and thus effectively forbids the foolishness that may lead to failure or innovative breakthroughs alike. Sadly, even when we are ostensibly teaching works that delineate and embody freedom, we often do so in a way that restricts freedom of thought, interpretation, and understanding, and which thus violates the spirit, if not necessarily the letter, of these documents of culture, science, and philosophy.

As a case in point, consider, for a moment, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, less as a document of terror, violence, and uncanny phantasmagoria than a document of freedom. As the play opens, Macbeth has reached the pinnacle of what he might reasonably expect, in life: He has defeated his king’s greatest enemy, been rewarded with a traitor’s title and lands, and appears to have the universal respect of his countrymen. But upon meeting the witches — those “weird sisters” everyone remembers from this play — and hearing their prophecy that, in addition to being Thane of Glamis and Cawdor, he will one day be king too, he is perceived to “start,” and becomes so taken with his vision of a kingly future as to say “nothing is but what is not” (1.3, 143). As Harold Bloom notes, Macbeth may not be Shakespeare’s most intelligent character, but none has a richer, more developed imagination (516). Imagining the prophecy achieved, Macbeth can now think of little else.

As one student aptly noted, in discussing the play this term, Macbeth has complete freedom at this point in the play but, in choosing to make the witches’ prophecy come true, embarks upon a course that robs him of his freedom: In becoming king, the nominal wielder of unbounded power and exemplar of free agency, Macbeth enslaves himself to a monomaniacal quest for cruel domination and unchallengeable rule. Crucially, more-



over, he has seen it coming: “If it were *done* when ‘tis done, then ‘twere well/It were done quickly” (1.7, 1-2; emphasis added). Macbeth *knows* that the consequences of the murderous deed he is contemplating will long outlive it, yet commits himself to be ruled by those consequences nonetheless.

In *Shakespeare’s Freedom*, Stephen Greenblatt recounts the occasion of meeting President Bill Clinton during a White House reception for Greenblatt’s colleague and friend, poet laureate Robert Pinsky, in 1998:

After the speeches, I joined the line waiting to shake the president’s hand. When my turn came, a strange impulse came over me. This was a moment when rumors of the Lewinsky affair were circulating but before the whole thing had blown up into the grotesque national circus that it soon became. “Mr. President,” I said, sticking out my hand, “Don’t you think that *Macbeth* is a great play about an immensely ambitious man who feels compelled to do things that he knows are politically and morally disastrous?” Clinton looked at me for a moment, still holding my hand, and said, “I think *Macbeth* is a great play about someone whose immense ambition has an ethically inadequate object.” (74)

Whatever one’s assessment of Clinton’s moral qualifications, is this not an extraordinary aesthetic judgment to make? Was not Clinton’s own apparent goal and objective of a piece with Macbeth’s? What could be more worthy, or emblematic of high ambition than to become a president or king?

Shakespeare’s answer, though it may not be obvious from reading *Macbeth* alone, is to be a lover, a lover of people, of course, but above all to be a lover of freedom. Macbeth knows, by the middle of the play, that he has exchanged his “eternal jewel,” his human soul, for a “barren scepter” and “fruitless crown” (3.1, 62-71). His crown is fruitless, his scepter barren, because he has no offspring, no son to succeed him but, as always, Shakespeare suggests another, deeper meaning: Macbeth’s crown is fruitless not just in the sense he means it, but because he has gained it by murdering Duncan and, subsequently, many other characters as well. Macbeth’s crown is fruitless because its circle cannot symbolize unity, vitality, and wholeness, but rather merely the hollowness of disconnection.

The image of a barren or hollow crown recurs time and again in Shakespeare’s work. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare’s history of the first deposed king in English history, the newly fallen but suddenly, remarkably self-aware Richard metaphorically states that his life, realm, and crown are subject to a greater monarch still: Death.

For God’s sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings —  
... For within the hollow crown  
That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
Keeps Death his court, and ...

Comes at the last and with a little pin  
Bores through his castle wall, and — farewell, king! (3.2, 155-70)

Where Macbeth turns his back on his considerable moral imagination in deciding to kill the rightful king, Richard achieves his own, rather stunning imaginative insight in recognizing how fleeting and paltry any kingship actually is when considered in light of the inevitable power of King Death.

If his most personal lyrics may be trusted, Shakespeare himself had a keen sense of the true place of kingship, among the good and bad things of this world. At the close of one of his greatest sonnets, number 29, the poet states “For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings/That then I scorn to change my state with kings.” Note that this is a statement not just concerning love but freedom: It is not in possessing the beloved, but in simply remembering her (or his) love that the speaker is possessed of a kind of wealth no king, as king, could hope to own, for this is the wealth of non-possession, the wealth that attends the freedom to love without clinging to any person or object.

This is the freedom, the love, that Henry David Thoreau had in mind when he claimed that a person is rich by virtue of what one can “afford to let alone.” This, in fact, is the problem with seeing education in terms of accumulating knowledge and “mastering” a subject. Education, real education, rather empowers us to make meaningful and useful distinctions, thus developing the wisdom to recognize what we may indeed afford to let alone. And I think that this is what Parker Palmer has in mind, in part, in his argument concerning the courage to teach: It’s relatively easy to practice what Paulo Freire calls the banking method of education, making deposits of information in our students’ cognitive data banks. It’s quite something else, and an abiding challenge, to teach, model, and embody the sort of critical thinking that inculcates a tireless assessment of information and knowledge in order to determine what we can afford to let alone, as opposed to that which we weave to interleave with the fabric of our deeper selves.

Macbeth, and his wife, are tragic figures — and more importantly, worthy subjects for our consideration — because they spend and waste their freedom on an unworthy object. As Harold Bloom argues, Shakespeare remains more modern than we have yet become because we still have not fully realized that kings, princes, and indeed presidents are less free than the student of freedom, the student working to become fully and distinctly her- or himself (xvii-xviii).

In my Writing 122 class, this term, we have been grappling with the difficult ideas and scenarios presented by Harvard political science professor Michael Sandel in his book *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* Sandel discusses libertarian views, along with other classic forms of political philosophy, and it would be natural for the reader to wonder whether my insistence on “the freedom to become fully oneself” has something to do with



a libertarian emphasis on maximizing personal freedom. It does, but the problem with libertarian views, as Sandel points out, is that they tend to maximize the freedom of a relative few at the expense of the freedom of the many. Thus, a libertarian might celebrate the 1% (or more accurately, as Paul Krugman notes, the 0.01%) of Americans who control a disproportionate share of America's financial wealth, on grounds that they have simply better exercised the freedom that the rest of us, the 99% championed by the Occupy Wall Street movement, have failed to properly wield and exercise.

In an age when a leading presidential candidate can confidently assert that “corporations are people,” knowing that the disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision supports and abets this view, we can no longer afford to permit the freedom of the few to usurp and override the freedom of the many. I am proud to teach at a community college, in part, because the very fact that community colleges exist is a reflection and embodiment of the notions of freedom I have sought to explore and articulate throughout this essay. Community colleges exist because, at one time, our society had the collective wisdom to create institutions designed to promote and promulgate the freedom of the many, the freedom to be educated, in every sense of that term, but especially the freedom to learn to become fully ourselves. Will we have the courage to embrace this vision of our mission, or settle for the enervation of disconnection, the enervation that attends merely going through the motions rather than having the courage to teach? Can we afford, can our students afford — indeed, can the very earth afford — a failure to embrace and practice pedagogies of freedom? Let us not confuse the potentially fruitless crowns of privilege — even the rare privilege to work at institutions nominally devoted to the life of the mind — with the true laurels of vitality, the vitality to become co-discoverers, every day, of the freedom to be fully ourselves.

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### Endnote

1. A coinage of the famous, and notorious, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. See “The Mistaking of the Subject Supposed to Know.” Trans. Jack W. Stone. Web. <http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/mistak.pdf>



# Not Just Steps: Student Perceptions of Transcendent Learning While Enrolled in a Community College Dance Course

*Sarah M. Nemecek*



## **Introduction**

The goals of dance education transcend dance. Pervasive among dance educators is a belief in the power of “the work” to promote students’ holistic and integrated understanding of both artistic and individual growth, and to benefit learners in pursuits outside of dance. This study assesses whether students enrolled in a community college dance program perceive that such transcendent learning occurs in these courses.

## **The Role of Dance Education**

Dance performance is rarely the sole focus in a dance artist’s career.<sup>1</sup> Montgomery and Robinson (2003)<sup>2</sup> report that 61% of undergraduates in dance hold jobs other than performance. How do dance educators address complex and diverse student needs? Do students feel that dance curricula are relevant to lives and careers that may or may not include dance performance?

Two premises provide the backbone for this inquiry: 1, the dance classroom provides arts learning of inherent value, and 2, it also provides learning beyond the specific arts content; dance students learn more than “just steps,” and this learning prepares them for life within and beyond dance.

Experts in dance and neuropsychology have teamed up to explore dance’s positive influence on learning abilities. Though still in its infancy, this line of inquiry reveals great complexity in brain activity during dance.<sup>3</sup> Other research shows that students who study dance score, on average, 36 and 15 points higher on math and verbal sections of the SAT college entrance exam<sup>4</sup>, and that participation in high quality arts education improves student imagination, creativity, symbolic understanding, conditional reasoning, critical thinking, collaborative learning, persistence, resilience, achievement, motivation and engagement.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Community College Dance Student**

The students in a community college dance program range from advanced learners headed for dance careers to beginners with limited movement literacy and no previous dance training. Indeed, 82% of students in U.S. public schools do not have access to dance

education, and among those receiving dance instruction, 92% are not taught by a highly qualified educator.<sup>5</sup> So community college dance educators are faced with a compelling question of how to address the needs of diverse students within the confines of dance curricula.

As a beginner enters the dance studio, the amount of information vying for attention is vast: the tradition of removing street shoes as one enters, defining one's "turn out," connecting movement to breath, receiving tactile feedback, dealing with wearing a leotard, all while trying to watch and pick up a movement phrase in a meter of five from a teacher lying on the floor nearby, in order to create a variation of the phrase and perform it with artistic intention and perhaps emotion in front of others. The learning expectation is huge. With experience this all becomes routine, pathways become clearer, attention more direct, and the art of practice is nurtured.

The goal of this study is to show that dance education addresses the needs of *all* students — advanced and beginning, core and elective — by demonstrating that students at all levels perceive that they are learning in ways that transcend the specific dance content, and that these perceptions strengthen with increased exposure and commitment to dance education.

## Methodology

The dance program at Lane Community College was selected as the research population. Lane serves many students enrolled at varying levels and across varying genres of dance. All of the core dance curricula are taught by highly qualified faculty holding MA or MFA degrees.

A total of 255 quantitative surveys were completed by Lane students enrolled in a dance course in the Spring term of 2009, of which 231 were completed appropriately for use in the analysis. Students were prompted in advance that participation was completely voluntary, and that answers would not affect students' grades or instructors' employment. The study was deemed by the college administration as departmental curricular assessment and therefore exempt from the human subjects board review process.

The survey instrument was designed around "Eight Studio Habits of Mind"<sup>6</sup> developed in research conducted by Harvard College's *Project Zero* and presented in *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* by Hetland, Winner, Veenema, and Sheridan. The eight habits are proposed as abilities taught through the process of art education that may be transferable to other disciplines. These were adapted and augmented to form ten "habits" as a basis for assessing student perceptions of learning.

- I. Develop Craft: learning to use and care for tools (e.g. one's body), and learning artistic conventions (e.g. partnering, perspective).

- II. Engage and Persist: learning to embrace problems of relevance within the art world and/or of personal importance, to develop focus and other mental states to working and persevering at art tasks.
- III. Envision: learning to picture mentally what cannot be directly observed and imagine possible next steps toward actualization.
- IV. Express: learning to create to convey an idea, a feeling, or a personal meaning.
- V. Observe: learning to attend to visual contexts more closely than ordinary “looking” requires and attend to auditory contexts more closely than ordinary “hearing” requires; experience detail that might otherwise not be noticed.
- VI. Reflect: *question and explain* — learning to think and talk with others about one’s performance, work, or process; *evaluate* — learning to judge one’s own performance, work and process, and the work of others in relation to the standards of the field.
- VII. Stretch and Explore: learning to reach beyond one’s capacities, to explore playfully without a preconceived plan, and to embrace the opportunity to learn from accidents and mistakes.
- VIII. Understand the Dance/Art World: *domain* — learning about dance history and current practice; *communities* — learning to interact as an artist with other artists (e.g. in classroom, local arts organizations, across the field) and within broader society.
- IX. Transcendent Learning: learning beyond specific course content.
- X. Trust Instincts: learning to attend to and follow one’s own intuitions and instincts.

Twenty-eight statements of transcendent learning were developed and mapped to one or another of the ten habits. For example, the statement “I had to watch closely, so that I noticed important details” was mapped to the habit “observe.” These became 28 survey items in which students rated the congruence of the statement with their experience of taking a dance course using a 4-point ordinal scale (1: *not true at all*, 2: *slightly true*, 3: *rather true*, 4: *very true*).

The sample was disaggregated by core and elective courses. Core courses were defined as those required for dance majors; when the survey was administered these were Modern dance, Ballet, and Choreography. Subsamples of beginning students (Ballet 1 and Modern 1/Movement Fundamentals) and advanced students (Ballet 3 and Modern 3) were also identified for comparison within core courses. Mean responses were calculated for each of the ten habits, as well as for individual items overall and by subgroup. However, since comparison of means is questionably valid for ordinal level data, a non-parametric, two-tailed hypothesis test (Mann-Whitney U test, equivalent to the Wilcoxon rank sum test) was used to identify statistically significant differences.



## Results and Analysis

		1. Not True At All	2. Slightly True	3. Rather True	4. Very True	total	mean	P-value for Mann-Whitney U *significant ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) †near significant
DEVELOP CRAFT (questions 1-6, 18)							3.56	
1.	I worked on developing an understanding of the human body in movement.	4	11	53	163	231	3.62	
	core courses	0	1	14	71	86	3.81	}--0.0091*
	elective courses	4	10	39	92	145	3.51	
	advanced students	0	1	0	9	10	3.73	}--0.5187
	beginning students	0	0	12	33	45	3.80	
2.	It was emphasized that my body is unique.	18	37	72	104	231	3.13	
	core courses	4	12	33	37	86	3.20	}--0.7340
	elective courses	14	25	39	67	145	3.10	
	advanced students	2	0	3	5	10	3.10	}--0.9739
	beginning students	1	8	16	20	45	3.22	
3.	I played with my body's use of time.	8	17	45	161	231	3.55	
	core courses	1	3	14	68	86	3.73	}--0.0366*
	elective courses	7	14	31	93	145	3.45	
	advanced students	0	0	0	10	10	4.00	}--0.0834†
	beginning students	1	3	12	29	45	3.53	
4.	I played with my body's use of space.	5	13	43	170	231	3.64	
	core courses	0	0	10	76	86	3.88	}--0.0014*
	elective courses	5	13	33	94	145	3.49	
	advanced students	0	0	0	10	10	4.00	}--0.3942
	beginning students	0	0	8	37	45	3.82	
5.	I played with my body's use of energy.	3	10	30	188	231	3.74	
	core courses	0	1	8	77	86	3.88	}--0.0818†
	elective courses	3	9	22	111	145	3.66	
	advanced students	0	0	0	10	10	4.00	}--0.5257
	beginning students	0	1	5	39	45	3.84	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	total	mean	P-value
6. I developed habits that showed respect for materials used (e.g. space, equipment).	3	9	58	161	231	3.63	
core courses	0	1	17	68	86	3.78	}--0.0393*
elective courses	3	8	41	93	145	3.54	
advanced students	0	0	0	10	10	4.00	}--0.1972
beginning students	0	1	11	33	45	3.71	
18. I worked with another person (partner/groups).	8	14	47	161	230	3.57	
core courses	3	2	14	67	86	3.69	}--0.0960†
elective courses	5	12	33	94	144	3.50	
advanced students	2	0	1	7	10	3.30	}--0.8219
beginning students	0	2	12	31	45	3.64	
ENVISION (questions 12, 23)						3.65	
12. I was asked to visualize or imagine.	5	17	49	160	231	3.58	
core courses	0	4	16	66	86	3.72	}--0.0889†
elective courses	5	13	33	94	145	3.49	
advanced students	0	1	2	7	10	3.60	}--0.6956
beginning students	0	1	9	35	45	3.76	
23. I was presented with opportunities to see dance being performed.	6	6	34	185	231	3.72	
core courses	0	1	10	75	86	3.86	}--0.1219
elective courses	6	5	24	110	145	3.64	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}--0.7868
beginning students	0	1	6	38	45	3.82	
ENGAGE AND PERSIST (questions 7-11)						3.40	
7. I was called upon to solve problems for myself that arose during class.	5	15	60	150	230	3.54	
core courses	0	3	27	56	86	3.62	}-- < 0.0001*
elective courses	5	12	33	94	144	3.50	
advanced students	0	1	0	9	10	3.90	}--0.1675
beginning students	0	1	18	26	45	3.82	
8. I was called upon to solve problems for a group that arose during class.	23	36	82	90	231	3.03	
core courses	9	15	25	37	86	3.05	}--0.0032*
elective courses	14	21	57	53	145	3.03	
advanced students	1	1	2	6	10	3.30	}--0.1749
beginning students	8	11	10	16	45	2.76	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	total	mean	P-value
9. It was necessary for me to focus on specific information at specific times.	29	43	48	111	231	3.04	
core courses	0	3	12	71	86	3.79	}--0.0040*
elective courses	29	40	36	40	145	2.60	
advanced students	0	1	1	8	10	3.70	}--0.8059
beginning students	0	2	5	38	45	3.80	
10. At times I felt I was asked to persevere, and continue working on something even though it was challenging, difficult, or frustrating.	6	12	49	164	231	3.61	
core courses	3	3	15	65	86	3.65	}--0.3736
elective courses	3	9	34	99	145	3.58	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}--0.4574
beginning students	2	3	6	34	45	3.60	
11. I put forth my best effort on tasks.	1	3	45	182	231	3.77	
core courses	0	1	14	71	86	3.81	}--0.4356
elective courses	1	2	31	111	145	3.74	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}--0.4856
beginning students	0	1	10	34	45	3.73	
EXPRESS (questions 13, 14)						3.52	
13. I worked on developing movement as a tool for expressing myself.	6	20	43	162	231	3.56	
core courses	0	5	14	67	86	3.72	}--0.0769+
elective courses	6	15	29	95	145	3.47	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}--0.2843
beginning students	0	4	10	31	45	3.60	
14. I started to see how details within movement portrayed different ideas.	7	17	65	142	231	3.48	
core courses	0	4	24	58	86	3.63	}--0.1167
elective courses	7	13	41	84	145	3.39	
advanced students	0	1	2	7	10	3.60	}--0.7231
beginning students	0	2	16	27	45	3.56	
OBSERVE (questions 15, 16)						3.56	
15. I had to watch closely, so that I noticed important details.	2	11	51	167	231	3.66	
core courses	0	2	16	68	86	3.77	}--0.1359
elective courses	2	9	35	99	145	3.59	
advanced students	0	0	3	7	10	3.70	}--0.5834
beginning students	0	1	7	37	45	3.80	



16. Listening was crucial, as individual feedback from instructors and musical nuances were not always obvious to the group.							
	10	17	59	145	231	3.47	
core courses	0	3	26	57	86	3.63	}-0.2003
elective courses	10	14	33	88	145	3.37	
advanced students	0	0	5	5	10	3.50	}-0.4179
beginning students	0	2	12	31	45	3.64	
REFLECT (questions 19, 20)						3.07	
19. I practiced talking to others about their performance.							
	20	31	84	96	231	3.11	
core courses	2	6	37	41	86	3.36	}-0.0106*
elective courses	18	25	47	55	145	2.96	
advanced students	2	0	4	4	10	3.00	}-0.5401
beginning students	0	5	19	21	45	3.36	
20. I was asked to evaluate my own performance of a task or material.							
	17	53	68	93	231	3.03	
core courses	2	12	29	43	86	3.31	}-0.0014*
elective courses	15	41	39	50	145	2.86	
advanced students	0	1	4	5	10	3.40	}-0.4842
beginning students	2	9	15	19	45	3.13	
STRETCH AND EXPLORE (questions 21, 22, 26)						3.53	
21. Learning from my mistakes was emphasized.							
	7	39	63	122	231	3.30	
core courses	0	9	21	56	86	3.55	}-0.0028*
elective courses	7	30	42	66	145	3.15	
advanced students	0	0	4	6	10	3.60	}-0.7707
beginning students	0	7	11	27	45	3.44	
22. I sometimes felt unsure but was comfortable enough to try.							
	4	20	41	166	231	3.60	
core courses	1	1	13	71	86	3.79	}-0.0164*
elective courses	3	19	28	95	145	3.48	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}-0.6294
beginning students	0	1	8	36	45	3.78	
26. I was able to focus on exploring and learning, instead of earning high grades.							
	2	9	50	170	231	3.68	
core courses	0	0	11	75	86	3.87	}-0.0037*
elective courses	2	9	39	95	145	3.57	
advanced students	0	0	1	9	10	3.90	}-0.7068
beginning students	0	0	8	37	45	3.82	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	total	mean	P-value
<b>UNDERSTAND CONTEXT</b> (questions 24, 25, 27)						<b>3.20</b>	
<b>24. Historical references were presented, to reveal the context of what I was learning.</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>2.97</b>	
core courses	2	15	23	45	85	3.31	}--0.0010*
elective courses	27	30	36	52	145	2.78	
advanced students	0	2	1	6	9	3.44	}--0.3481
beginning students	2	11	12	20	45	3.11	
<b>25. It was emphasized that dance is a collaborative form.</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>3.37</b>	
core courses	0	6	16	64	86	3.67	}--0.0001*
elective courses	11	18	49	67	145	3.19	
advanced students	0	1	1	8	10	3.70	}--0.6421
beginning students	0	4	10	31	45	3.60	
<b>27. I recognized my place in the larger dance community.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>3.26</b>	
core courses	0	9	25	52	86	3.50	}--0.0142*
elective courses	15	22	40	68	145	3.11	
advanced students	0	1	0	9	10	3.80	}--0.0648†
beginning students	0	7	16	22	45	3.33	
<b>TRANSCENDENT LEARNING</b> (question 28)						<b>3.57</b>	
<b>28. I learned skills that transcend the dance content.</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>3.57</b>	
core courses	1	1	10	74	86	3.83	}--0.0010*
elective courses	8	13	35	89	145	3.41	
advanced students	0	0	0	10	10	4.00	}--0.4563
beginning students	1	1	5	38	45	3.78	
<b>TRUST INSTINCTS</b> (question 17)						<b>3.18</b>	
<b>17. I felt I was asked to trust my instincts.</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>3.18</b>	
core courses	2	16	33	35	86	3.17	}--0.5889
elective courses	11	21	43	70	145	3.19	
advanced students	1	2	3	4	10	3.00	}--0.8221
beginning students	0	12	21	12	45	3.00	

## Findings

A reasonable interpretation of the quantitative analysis leads to two specific findings.

1. Students perceive that transferable habits of mind are taught and learned in dance classes. Overall, students express a high rate of agreement that transcendent learning goals are addressed. All ten habits have mean responses above 3 (*rather true*) with means for individual survey items ranging from 2.97 to 3.77. The data show that students at all levels — elective, core, beginning and advanced — understand that they are learning more than dance steps in dance classes. Item 28, which directly asks students whether they learned “skills that transcend the dance content” has a mean response of 3.57 for all dance courses, and 3.83 for core courses.
2. Students more deeply involved or more experienced in dance are especially strong in perceiving its broader benefits, suggesting that appreciation for the transcendent quality of dance learning increases with intensity and duration of study, and that measurable growth in student self-knowledge occurs as a result of dance education.

Mean responses of core students were higher than those of elective students on all 28 items. Statistically significant ( $P \leq 0.05$ ) or near significant ( $0.05 < P \leq 0.1$ ) differences were noted between core and elective students on 20 of 28 of these, providing strong evidence that more committed and experienced students of dance are more likely to perceive its broader educational benefits. Small subsamples (only 10 advanced and 45 beginning students) undermined the power of the hypothesis test to distinguish between these subgroups, and indeed only two of 20 items (a rate that could easily be due to chance) showed near statistically significant differences. However, advanced students gave a higher mean response than beginning students on 19 of 28 questions, an imbalance that would only be observed 4.4% of the time by chance (one-tailed binomial  $P = 0.0436$ ) if there were actually no difference between advanced and beginning student perceptions.

It should be noted that this study does not determine whether student perceptions are accurate. Students’ feelings about their learning are assessed, not the learning itself. It should also be noted that while the quantitative analysis provides strong evidence that perceptions of transcendent learning are higher among core students than elective students (and weak to moderate evidence that they are higher among advanced core students than beginning core students), it does not establish a *causal* relationship between perception and level of education. Our finding that growth in student self-knowledge occurs *as a result* of dance education is consistent with the analysis but not proven by it.



## Conclusion

While learning to dance, we learn to learn.

On a basic level, dance students perceive their learning as transcendent, addressing multiple levels and applicable to all academic, career and life pursuits. Dance training teaches students to identify what is important and to make concrete decisions about how to proceed in the moment, with long range goals in mind.

Choreographer Erick Hawkins writes, "I would like to see pure fact occur in the art of dance and pure fact is the rebellious rediscovery of the innocence of the materials."<sup>7</sup> When evaluating curricula to support student success, it is important to see students as whole and integrated persons, addressing the intellectual along with the physical, the concrete with the abstract, and the objective with the subjective. When teaching dance, the deeper goal is to nurture well-rounded, creative thinkers, and capable contributors to society. Learning has an inherent freedom and fluidity that transcends subject boundaries. As students themselves perceive, dance education teaches steps, but not just steps.

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# Of Pupusas and Love

Philos Molina



*This essay is not about freedom. It is about passion and food. When you put those two together in my country, El Salvador, you get comedy: we joke endlessly about both. This may be the reason El Salvador has ranked in the top ten happiest countries in the world. Ironical, I know. The U.S. has not been on that radar for years. The secret is simple: laughter is liberating. Schiller, the German philosopher, not Salvadoran by any means and as biased as this writer, makes this point about the relationship of comedy and freedom in his Naïve and Sentimental Poetry. So, maybe this essay is about freedom.*

There is something erotic about the *pupusa*. True, we are talking about a pancake typically made with maize dough and stuffed with pork rinds, cheese, and beans, not exactly something usually associated with carnal excitements. Yet there is something in this appetizer that goes beyond the sort of food that you put in your mouth and compliantly chew only to satisfy a digestive need. A *pupusa* requires not just art to make, but passion from beginning to end, both in preparation and consumption. Though classified as a pancake, it requires more work than the traditional pancake we gobble for breakfast. I would venture to say — if only to confirm the perverse, poetic Salvadoran tendency to associate sexual pleasures with food — that it demands as much exertion as the labors of love.

It starts with the preparation of the fillings, a laborious process that, if followed correctly, can give the maker pride and the eater satisfaction. Most people believe a *pupusa* is made of only three fillings. That is not accurate: a *pupusa* can be made with whatever is at hand. Like love, it can be made with a variety of ingredients, some of which are thought to be whimsical, though for Salvadorans they are sheer necessity. My favorite untraditional filling is fried minnows, but it is unpopular and expensive because of its fishy smell and its scarcity in areas away from the coast. Traditionally, however, the fillings are beans, cheese and pork which, thanks to the *pupusa*, have been staples of the otherwise paltry Salvadoran diet.

Beans have to be boiled, blended, and refried. If you are not careful, they can become too hard or too soft, so you have to stir them constantly as when you massage a delicate skin; otherwise when ready to lay on the *pupusa*, they can break the dough or get slushy. If you refried them with too many onions, it produces a sour taste, and if with too little, they produce flatulence. As you will find out, flatulence can ruin the relationship between you and the *pupusa*.

Cheese is as important as beans. Some *pupusa*-makers (called *pupuseras*) tend to neglect this ingredient. They think that cheese needs no help, but this would be like sex

without foreplay. First, it has to be the juicy, gummy type. If you use dry cheese, it will not acquire the texture required to mold alongside the dough, and all about this food is tactile: the pupusa requires a subtle sensuality in order to reach the right consistency. If you use cheese that is *too* moist, the dough will not hold it.

In addition to texture, you need to give cheese some extra flavor. The most common and excellent addition is a wild flower called “loroco” (*Fernaldia pandurata*). It is a tempting aroma, its redolence by itself aphrodisiac: it makes the pupusa the sensual dish that it should be.

Pork is the hardest ingredient to prepare. First, you have to find meaty and fatty pieces. Next you fry the chopped pieces and blend them with onions, green peppers, garlic and other spices to create another mash with similar consistency. Pigs are among the animals forbidden for consumption by major religions, except Christianity. Any Christian, however, who reads the Holy Writ, will find that pork is forbidden in Leviticus, because of its impurity. Yet, Salvadorans love it. I am sure this predilection is because of pork’s sinfulness.

Once these three fillings are ready, you take your time handling the dough. The corn is the main element in giving the pupusa its shape. You take your time kneading, sprinkling some cold water to soften it, and making sure your hands feel that it reaches the right texture. There is no technique to achieve the right texture; you accomplish it by touching, as when you dip your fingers through something wet and tender, and you hold the ineffable in the hollow of your hands.

Putting together the ingredients is an art in itself. You start by picking the right amount of dough. I have seen pupuseras deftly grabbing the perfect amount every time. This, of course, is not instinct, but years of experience. They make a little ball with the dough and softly flatten it in the shape of a pancake. The key, some pupuseras have told me, is to flatten it to the right thickness, because it should be thick enough to hold the fillings and flexible enough to fold. You proceed to place the fillings in the center and start wrapping around them with the edges of the dough. The pupuseras then press the bulky contraption in their hands to give it its final circle shape. Believe me, watching this step is the most fascinating experience, almost as succulent as the appetizer that will come out of their laboring hands.

Expert pupuseras make pupusas with their whole bodies. Their hands work as if they were clapping in a contra-tempo rhythm; their shoulders, in turn, maintain the perfect oscillation, like a metronome, and their breasts shake like Cuban maracas. The movement of the buttock is a treat in itself: it swivels frenetically, though graciously, while commanding the legs to move in perfect synchronization. Most Salvadorans will not admit it, but I believe that they go to the pupuserías (the places where they make and sell pupusas) to watch this sensual display.



Before you start making the pupusa, though, you have to get the griddle ready. Again, what is true in love is true for the pupusa: you do not leave things for the last minute. Lovers know when their passions are ready to fuse and work long before their love session; likewise, the pupuseras know when the griddle has reached the right temperature to start tossing their pancakes on the hot surface. A lukewarm griddle can have disastrous results. When you toss a pupusa on a tepid griddle, it usually ends up sticking the outer layer of the pupusa to the surface of the griddle, destroying its shape, and smearing its content all over the place. You will flay a pupusa on a lukewarm griddle. I doubt you treat your lover this way. If the griddle is too hot, a pupusa will burn, and nobody I know likes the taste of charcoal.

The best pupusa is a hot pupusa. Salvadorans pay extra for this pleasure and wait patiently at the pupuserías to grab the pupusa as it comes off the griddle. The pupuseras juggle the hot pancake in their hands, impervious to the heat, and toss it with precision on your eager plate. Then, out of the messy mix comes a unique smell that puts you in a trance. It is not uncommon to salivate profusely — and you should not be embarrassed if caught drooling. It is quite a feast to put pickled cabbage (called *curtido*) on top of the pupusa and hear the sizzling sound on contact. It is almost an epiphany when it enters your mouth and all the flavors explode against your taste buds. You can only douse this delightful chaos in your mouth with cold fruit beverage, a Coca-Cola or, if desperate, a domestic beer.

Not all pupusas are made the same. This simple fact has misled some Salvadorans to believe some pupusas are better than others, but they are not. They are just different. In the town of Suchitoto, there were two pupuserías that illustrated this. One belonged to Martina, a thirty-something woman whose age never withered her beauty. Her undulate black long hair smelled of jasmine, because she washed it every night with expensive shampoos and covered it with the colorful silk scarves her daughter sent from Los Angeles. Her long legs, always covered with equally long sarongs, were scented and smooth like cinnamon sticks and her round breast reminded us of *Song of Songs*' palm trees. She was our Sophia Loren in a time when it was still expensive to watch movies in Tilo's theater.

The other pupusera was Chenchá, not as attractive as Martina, I may say, but as the saying went in town, "even ugly people have their charm." She was petite like a young maize stalk. Her long face was covered by short silky blond hair and her green as husk eyes floated like water lilies in a quiet pond. Even her snub nose was an invitation to kiss her red small lips.

In any case — pardon the reverie — some people thought that doña Martína's was the best pupusa in town, and doña Chenchá's just a second best. Martina's was the cheapest pupusa in town, no doubt; one could get double the pupusa for the price that one would

pay to other pupuseras. Though smaller than the standard pupusa, hers was juicy and well stuffed — something that she could afford since don Beto, the only butcher in town, was reportedly one of her many lovers. Her establishment also was in the middle of the town. This was a business advantage, not only because people came downtown for business, but because they could from her establishment admire the colonial church, as white as the lime could make it, and during sunsets a spectacle of light that could proselytize the most agnostic in town — don Daniel Rodrigo, for example, one of the few who did not like her pupusa. Even the priest, a man of unquestionable moral principles, used to come by Martina's joint almost every day, though he did not like pupusa of chicharrón (pork rinds) on Fridays and every year recriminated with Martina for not keeping the Catholic tradition of not eating meat during Lent. That never stopped him from enjoying her pupusa.

Chencha's pupusa, on the other hand, was not cheap. She had to buy her meats through intermediaries, because Martina was a jealous woman, even in business matters. She had to decide either to stuff more meat and charge more or smear meager amounts and charge less. She opted for the former to make a marginal profit. She filled her pupusa with more cheese, thanks to doña Tere, her godmother, who was one of the few cheese-makers in the area who sold her cheese at a low price. She also picked fresh loroco from her own garden and did not neglect to mix it with such a care as if she were preparing a love potion. One could find her pupusería, in the skirts of the town, by the smell of fresh cheese and loroco wafting over tile roofs and through the maze of cobblestone streets.

I liked Chencha's curtido better than Martina's. Martina cut the cabbage in irregular shapes and thicknesses, as if cutting hair with dull scissors, perhaps because she was always in a hurry and thought that her customers cared more for her pupusa than her pickled cabbage. She was wrong, of course; we cared for both. Her cabbage was hard to put it in the mouth because it created a coarse and bulky heap on top on the pupusa, some of which ended around our mouths or on top of the table. Chencha's, on the other hand, was finely shredded, easy to masticate and never sticking between our teeth.

We will always arrive at the same conclusion: there is no bad pupusa, just like there is no bad sex. One can complain that some have more of this or that than others, but in the end any pupusa is better than no pupusa. If someone still believes that there is a bad pupusa, he simply has not found the pupusa to his liking, that's all.

*For Lance Sparks*

# The DMV Trip

*Douglas Weiss*



Looking through the vision tester without my glasses, well, I guess I was thinking that I could fool them like I had last time. But she wanted me to start at the third line down and I couldn't really make out much of anything. I couldn't even see the white space to figure out where the third line was. I told the lady that I'd better put on my glasses. She said okay and promptly checked a little box. From then on, I would need to wear spectacles in order to legally operate a motor vehicle. While that was personally a little disappointing, something else was about to happen that would make a different type of impression.

Upon being sent over to the camera, I found that they had adopted a new procedure since my last "in house" renewal. It used to be that you would sign your license after you got it in the mail, but now they have you sign a card that is photographed and transferred onto the license before they send it to you. Well, I shrugged it off to progress, grabbed the official signature card and scribbled my usual mark. Upon handing it to the photo guy, though, he looked at the card and told me that I would have to do it again.

Bear with my little digression here. One of my earliest memories is about coloring books and crayons. I was three, I think, and I liked the outlined pictures you were supposed to fill in. I would look through a book, find a good cowboy scene and use wide back and forth motions that pretty much zigzagged across the entire page. The color, as I recall, didn't really matter so much as the free style motions. And it was during one of those waxy adventures that my sister, an all-knowing five-year-old, pointed out to me that I wasn't doing it right.

Barb sat down and showed me that different colors could be used to fill in the pictures. She explained that blue is supposed to be used for sky and green for grass. She outlined shapes and carefully filled them in; her pages looked really good! "See," she said, "You're supposed to stay inside the lines."

I tried it that way but quickly became bored and went off to play with some other toy. From there, my memory has faded, but this much is true. I never drew in another coloring book after that day.

Decades later, a complete stranger was telling me to keep my signature inside the box. If you ever saw the zigzag roaming scrawl that I call my signature, you would appreciate the magnitude of that request. I tried my best but the second attempt really didn't look much like my signature. It was, however, inside the box, so I passed it to him anyway. As I slid it in his direction, I told him that he reminded me of my sister. He looked at me a



little funny but gave me my temporary license a few moments later and said, “Thank you sir, you should receive your license in about ten days.”

As I walked out the door, I started thinking. Now that I would be wearing my glasses more often, the world might not seem so fuzzy all the time. Maybe I hadn’t been giving defined edges and strong contrasts the chances they deserved. Could this be a portent of sorts? As I put on my glasses and started the car, I decided to stop on the way home and pick up a coloring book.

# The Horse Messenger

*Alise Lamoreaux*



Summer term of 2011 I attended Sandy Jensen's Writing 240 at Lane. In my job at the college as an ABSE Faculty member, I teach essay writing to students who are studying for their GED exam. In my classes I have focused on essay styles like the standard "five paragraph"/sandwich models of essay development. While I trained in research styles of writing, I have never explored creative writing in a classroom setting. Sandy's final project exposed me to the braided essay. Braided essays involve fragmented concepts woven together through repeated words, concepts, themes, quotes, dates, times, or any number of mechanisms. The nature of the braid can pull seemingly unrelated ideas together. The overlapping ideas and repetition pull the reader through the essay, perhaps slowly revealing the topic. I found this approach to be very liberating and have incorporated the braided style of essays into my own teaching. I have seen amazing growth in students who are not usually prone to enjoying writing come alive with this braided pattern.

## I.

She opens her eyes,  
as the god-like force,  
pulls the massive rippling curtains apart,  
lively notes of music dance through her ears,  
adventure, dreams, drama.

Saturday morning was special. Kids with two Williams Bread wrappers in hand gained free admission to McDonald Theater. Inside love and adventure waited. He was probably my first love. Weekly, we would spend an hour and a half together in undisturbed fixation. His skin was light in color, with long flowing whitish blond hair; his body muscularly commanding attention; every step he took powerful yet graceful; his behavior perfect. Larger than life, he was dependable, always ready for action and adventure, always the winner. His name was "Trigger" and every Saturday morning he could be seen on the big screen chasing bad guys and conquering the world with his partner, Roy Rogers. The connection was mesmerizing, the lifestyle captivating.

It's hard to believe Trigger's fate was to be stuffed and preserved forever by a taxidermist. Statically confined to one stationary stance forever. A game show hosts on television asks guests to guess Trigger's current stuffed value in order to win a prize. Whatever the answer, it is not enough. The answer should be a MasterCard advertisement saying, "priceless." How can a value be placed on inspiration or the dawning of passion?

## II.

Smart people sitting  
like small trees in the forest.  
A knowledge dispenser moderates,  
as wind sways the trees in agreement.  
Muffled beliefs hide.

College baffled me. How could my childhood memories have been so wrong? Television brought characters into my world that I adored. College said I missed the point. A show I loved was stereotyping groups of people and leading youngsters like myself to view diverse populations in bathetic ways. I never spoke up in class to say I loved the characters deeply and had nothing but admiration for their lifestyles. Couldn't college see beyond the obvious into the world of connection? Silver was amazing. The union began when the Lone Ranger saved Silver from an enraged buffalo. Silver could carry his partner through all kinds of evil and keep him safe. Tonto, and his horse, Scout, accompanied them. The William Tell overture whisked the four companions off to new adventures every time I watched. A strong bond between horse and rider was illustrated in every episode. It was a lifestyle to envy. College focused on Tonto, what about Silver and Scout? What about connection?

## III.

Children's illustrated Bible books sold door to door,  
as angels float about.  
Nappy abstractions hypothesized,  
as imaginative greenness listens,  
doctrine, implantation, ignored.

At an early age, I dropped out of religion. My questions unsatisfactorily answered.

"Why didn't John Glenn see heaven when he went to the moon?" I asked.

"He didn't go far enough," the book saleswoman replied.

"How far did he need to go?" I responded

Reading changed my life forever.

In third grade, I discovered a section of the school library that was filled with biographies of western folklore. There I found characters I could relate to: Annie Oakley and Wild Bill Hickok were among my favorites. I read volumes of information about their lives and personal character.

Annie was a smart woman who could out perform men in many areas. At an early age, Annie was trapping and hunting to support her siblings and widowed mother. Annie



could ride a horse, shoot a gun, and make a living on her own as an entertainer. "Aim at a high mark, and you will hit it," was Annie's motto. I believed in what Annie stood for.

Wild Bill Hickok was a gunfighter, a scout, and a lawman. He always seemed to be saving someone or dodging some kind of trouble. Despite the various squabbles he got himself into, he appeared to be an honorable man. In the books I read, he traveled by horse and had a deep connection to his equine companion. They fought battles and outran enemies. They survived together. That's why I was so shocked.

I had been deeply engrossed in the tale of Wild Bill's latest adventure. He was racing to beat the enemy and get important information passed on. He and his horse raced through the night. I did not expect the ending. Wild Bill rode his horse so furiously that at the end of the book the horse died. What? I was crushed. I no longer trusted books.

I sought my mother's wisdom and for the first time needed spiritual guidance.

"How could he do that to his horse?" I asked. "Will they be together in heaven?" I wondered. Somehow, if they were reunited, it would be okay in my eyes. I began to wonder about death, spirituality, and connection.

#### IV.

Stories told with light,  
as brumal air fills the morning.  
Gaits like fingerprints foretell  
as distinctive shadows linger,  
whispering, unique, memoirs.

I knew them all by sound. Each one left a different impression on my ear. Milling about the pasture in the morning fog I listened to make sure they were all present, all accounted for. None had been lost in the night.

The sun began to come over the horizon hinting at the silhouettes of life. I had become a storyteller with light, a photographer. The early morning's mood waited for its opening line. I heard it coming. The backdrop of light coming through the trees revealed a horse rapidly approaching. The scene was planned in my mind. I clicked off a series of photos as the horse passed before me, then vanished into an unlit area of the pasture. I continued to listen. Hours spent eavesdropping with a camera revealed novel personalities. The horses shared their world through snippets of time captured with a lens. What story would they tell next?

Across the channel, a woman was watching my stories. I didn't realize the significance of posting my photos to online.

V.

Three men and a horse,  
blending together like storms.  
Lost in a sea of depression,  
admired, cherished, united.

Roger Ebert says he has a theory that, "People more readily cry at movies not because of sadness, but because of goodness and courage."

An awkwardly built horse, with a rugged beginning, too small to be a giant, gave a tired nation hope during a period of great depression. Seabiscuit did what only a racehorse can do; he took a whole generation of people for the ride of their lives all at once. During the Great Depression, Seabiscuit was listed as one of the "Top Ten Most Influential People" in the world. On race days, the nation sat spellbound around radios, listening to him race. When he won, they won. When he lost, they knew he would try again. Despite great adversity, he ultimately triumphed, and so did the country.

I didn't know much about thoroughbreds when I adopted a 22-year-old, off-the-track mare that I called "Sage." Innocence allowed the union. Sage's background was illusive. Sage came with a lip tattoo and a photo of her as a two-year-old winning a race at Calder Race Track near Miami, Florida. A readable lip tattoo can trace a pedigree. Thoroughbreds breathe history. Sage was a descendent of Man O' War, the top racehorse of the twentieth century. The Man O' War connection linked Sage to Seabiscuit; the history was enticing and intertwined our lives.

Despite the passage of time, the trauma of a book ending badly had not left me. I deflected reading novels and frequently avoided finishing books altogether. I loved history, but avoided literature classes that required reading books like, "Animal House." No need for an animal parable, with the horse dying near the end, to tell the tale of Stalin. I took to the practice of reading the end of the book first. It was much safer that way.

A friend suggested I read the book Seabiscuit, by Laura Hillenbrand. I was reluctant, but knowing the horse's place in history, the story's ending, and the connection to Sage, I agreed. Seabiscuit sucked me in. The characters and the book resonated deeply with me. Many of the words took on timeless meaning.

George Woolf: "Wanta know what I think?"

Charles Howard: "Of course."

George Woolf: "I think it's better to break a man's leg than his heart."

*From the movie Seabiscuit*

## VI.

A dark bay gelding,  
comfortable as mid-summer,  
a silken tapestry trusting as youth,  
cushioned wisdom,  
blind.

Muscular bounds of joy racing across his pasture; moments of endearment nuzzling with a friend; munching long blades of grass casually in an early summer's field; splashing water on himself as he played in the water trough; and the deep penetrating look of his brown eyes, as pools of thought lurked inside; images of life whittled by my camera's lens over time as I watched Beau move about his life. My photographs were displayed online for the world to see. Beau had fans outside his fences. People knew his life's story without words.

Our partnership was forged through: daily lives woven together by ordinary moments, combined with time spent leaping fences and doing precision maneuvers without a second thought. Devastation surrounded me at the thought of it ending. The onset of Beau's blindness seemed sudden, unexplainable. Two possible scenarios surfaced: Beau had gone blind slowly without anyone noticing, adapting constantly to his familiar surroundings and hiding the problem, or something suddenly changed inside him. Either way, now he was 1100 pounds of fear. It was like death, but worse. Beau was 17 years old, and otherwise, a healthy horse. Was blindness enough of a reason to choose to end his life? I pondered death, spirituality, and connection.

"You know, you don't throw a whole life away just 'cause he's banged up a little."

*Tom Smith, from the movie Seabiscuit*

Words from Seabiscuit flooded my mind. I studied the soul I knew so well for guidance. Beau seemed to be saying he wanted to try, to be brave, to see what he could learn to do without his eyes. He would let me know what he needed. Day by day we put life back together. The environment needed to adjust. Paths were rocked to guide him to important landmarks, gates, shelter, water, and the routes to the barn. My photos documented the transition. In the past, there had been photos of Beau's athletic brilliance. The images morphed into demonstrating him learning to do ordinary things again: finding his water trough and diving his muzzle deep into the water to splash about in the way he loved; re-learning the joy of being able to move about freely in his pasture, to walk, trot, and canter as a horse should; the braveness he demonstrated by rolling on his back, to scratch an itch, and then leaping upward afterward; the trials of returning to being ridden again. What could be more valiant? The world beyond his fences was watching and cheering him on.



## VII.

She opens her eyes,  
as the god-like force  
flies over the war, never looking down.  
A childhood tale brought to life  
War Horse, her horse  
hope survives.

"I believe that every soldier who has anything to do with horse or mule has come to love them for what they are and the grand work they have done and are doing in and out of death zones."

*-Captain Sidney Galtrey, autumn 1918*

World War I was a transitional period in the technology of war. At the beginning, the British Army had few motorized vehicles. These were unreliable, cumbersome, and frequently unable to navigate the muddy terrain of combat zones. Horses and mules were the engines of the war. They hauled artillery into battle, pulled wagons of supplies, retrieved wounded soldiers from battlefields in the first "ambulances," lead mounted troops into combat, and sacrificed their lives by the thousands for a cause they knew nothing about. Beyond their physical uses, horses played an important role in the mental health of soldiers. The affection soldiers felt for their equine companions boosted moral among the troops; men were comforted by the presence of horses.

The British Army Veterinary Corps was intensely tested by the sheer number of horse-related injuries during the war. According to the British Army website, field veterinary hospitals during WWI dealt with "...over 2.5 million admissions, mostly from the Western Front." Horse trailers were developed as equine ambulances to transport wounded horses to the hospitals for care. The horses suffered from fatigue, diseases, lack of food and shelter, along with combat injuries.

By the end of the war, military horses were in short supply. At various points during the war, records estimate that as many as 1000 horses arrived daily to join the troops. When the demand for horses exceeded Europe's supply, the Remount Service began to look to the United States for assistance.

My friend stopped by to tell me a story she recently heard at a family gathering. Her grandparents had given one of the family horses to the war effort during WWI. While serving in the war, her uncles were unexpectedly surprised to be reunited with the family horse. The story made me wonder about death, spirituality, and connection.

A message came from the woman across the channel, the one watching Beau from afar. The woman turned out to be an award-winning British artist. Ali Bannister landed the job as the Equine Artistic Advisor for the Steven Spielberg adaptation Michael Morpurgo's book, *War Horse*. Ali sent a link to the movie trailer with a message saying:

*Dear Alise,*

*I am so excited to finally be able to email you with this...*

*Whilst working on Spielberg's version of War Horse I had to produce sketches to go into the film. I produced a range of pictures which Spielberg himself picked from. The drawing he chose as the main sketch of the lead horse was one done from the lead horse playing 'Joey,' but the one on the left might be more familiar to you!*

*I hope you don't mind that I worked from your photo without telling you but I wanted it to be a surprise.*

*So Beau is famous in a Spielberg film no less :0)*

*I know it's only a rough sketch, and only visible for a few seconds, but I drew it hoping that it might be a nice surprise, seeing all the heartache you've been through with your huge hearted horses and all the work you've put in with them and shared with us.*

*I'm sure that Sage would be proud too. Maybe she had a hoof in the selection process. Who knows ...*

*Ali. x*

The words "hope survives" flash on the screen of the movie trailer immediately before the sketch of Beau appears. He leaps off the left side of the sketchpad's page. Ali said Beau reminded her of the Joey character in the book. Beau's strong will and gentleness transcended oceans. Movies, books, and photos have a way of twisting stories through lives: inspiring when needed, planting new ideas in the garden of the mind, and filling the blanks of companionship during empty moments in life. The movie *War Horse* comes out in December 2012. It will be a tough movie for me to watch. The pain of the horse, and his connections, will tug at my heart. I bought the book and know the ending. Beau's sketch on the big screen is too important a moment to miss.

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ART

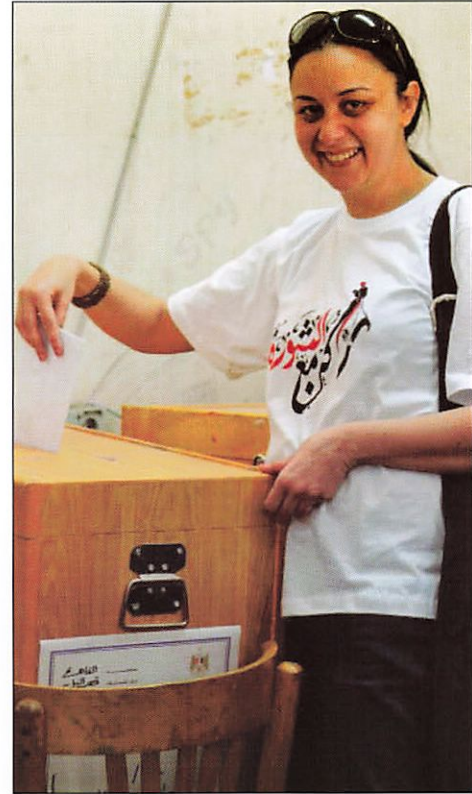


The only real prison is fear, and the only real  
freedom is freedom from fear.

*Aung San Suu Kyi*



## Egyptian Spring



Left upper and lower: Tahrir Square, Cairo, March 18, 2011. The banner portrays four Arab heads of state as oppressors waiting to be sacrificed.

Right: The photographer's friend, Hind, voting in Egypt's first free election in 60 years. Her t-shirt reads "I'm also with the Revolution."

**Tamara Pinkas**  
digital photography

*South Dakota Badlands*



**Jim Bailey**  
*digital photography*



*September October 2011*



**Dennis Gilbert**  
*digital photography*



## *La Passeggiata con Cinghiali*



*A metaphor for modern Italian life under the current center-right government. Here a handsome young couple out for their evening walk are confronted by a large wild boar symbolizing all that makes life impossible in modern Italy: the mafia, the bureaucracy, the establishment. The bright light on the right illuminates the scene with a lone girl walking in the distance.*

**Jerry Ross**

*oil on canvas • 84" x 60"*

## Among the Troubles



Based on *The Leopard*, a book about the Italian Risorgimento in Palermo. A lone girl walks up the stairs of the palazzo in the main square while Garibaldini storm the gates of the city.

**Jerry Ross**  
oil on canvas • 28" x 24"



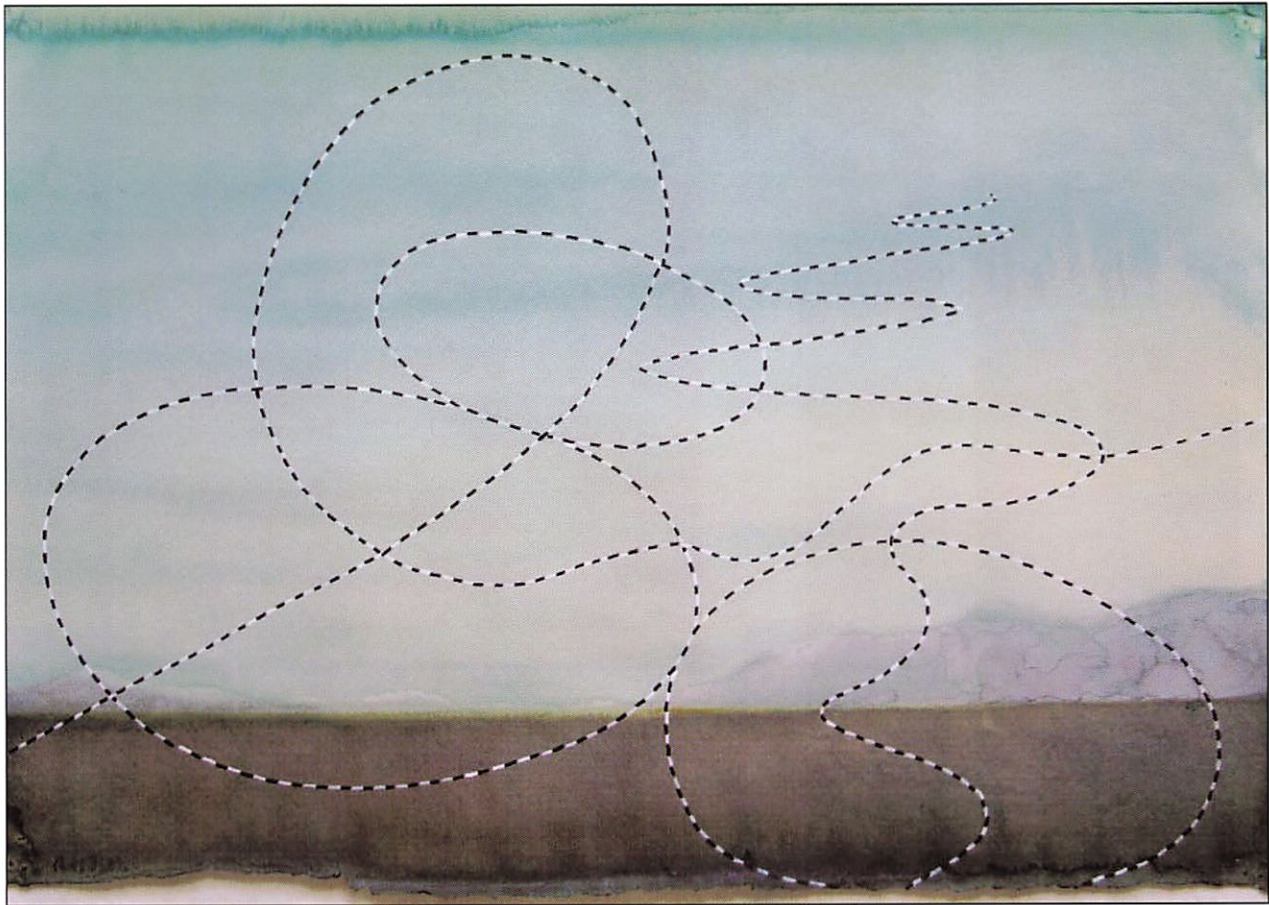
*Playa Scape I*



**Kathleen Caprario Ulrich**  
watercolor, ink on paper • 22" x 15"

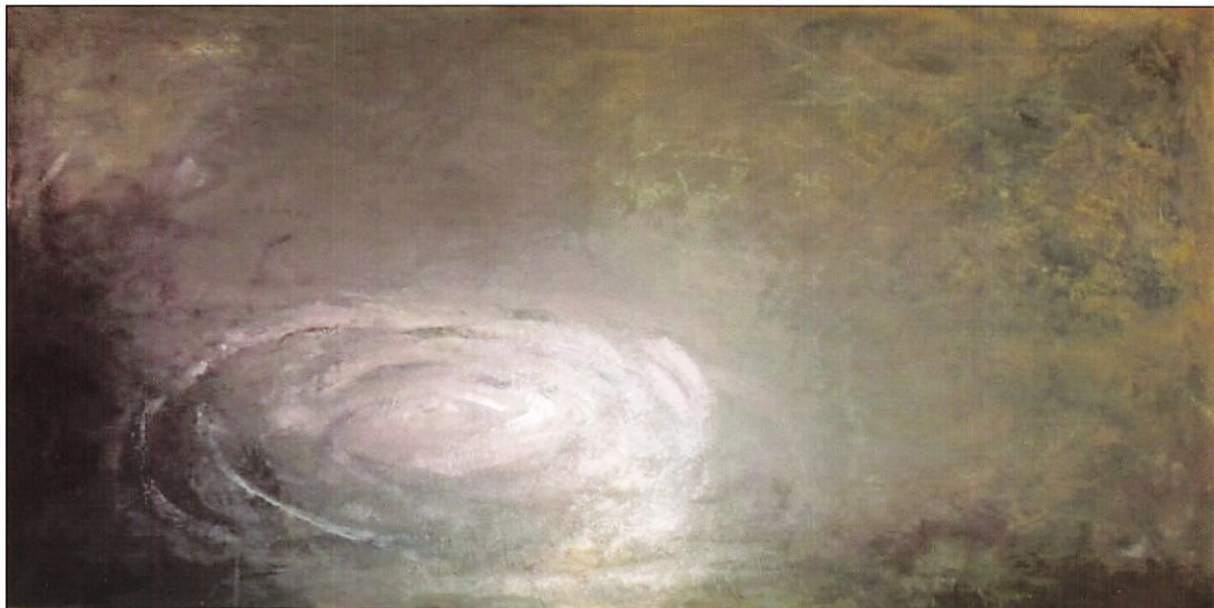


*Playa Scape 3*



**Kathleen Caprario Ulrich**  
*watercolor, ink on paper • 22" x 15"*

*Ripple*



**Tana Stuart**

*acrylic on canvas • 48" x 24"*

# FICTION



**Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.**

*Jean-Paul Sartre*





## Excerpt from *I HATE FICTION*

Tim Shaner

### Chapter 46

for the record: *I HATE FICTION* is an entirely fictional construction. it's not real. in no way does it resemble facts on the ground. it is not i repeat it is not actionable intelligence. i did not have designs on that man. there is no design. insofar as there is an entirely would-be "A" plot structure construction idea it is entirely fictional and as such a fabrication a fantasy if you will and nothing more. it's all in your head. listen these are just words on a page ok. trust me. they bear no resemblance to facts on the ground they are not actionable intelligence. any reference to an entirely fictional would-be resident construction is purely coincidental and serves no purpose other than to advance a plot. a plot that in any case utterly fails to hatch itself utterly fails in driving the narrative forward to some kind of definitive conclusion that resembles facts on the ground. the writer in question is not i repeat is not a demented abd would-be "A" nor is he a drug-taking lover of gay pornography. trust me. while the interpellated author function does indeed refer to the protagonist by the interpellated author function's own indeed factual on-the-ground name he is in no way related to the utterly real on-the-ground tim shaner who in any case is an utterly ineffectual entirely inconsequential unquantifiable failure of a construction and who is in any event in real life unemployed. but in no way should the tim shaner of *I HATE FICTION* be confused with the real deal. trust me. *I HATE FICTION* is utterly fake. in a good way yes i hope but never so good that it becomes mistaken with facts on the ground. i'd say it's inactionable intelligence but for the second part of the equation. there is no intelligence here in intelligence see. no intelligence and so no failure of intelligence either since there's no intelligence here to speak of as it were. there is on the other hand as it were plenty of inaction. does action happen off stage one might inquire. you bet it does though i leave that to the reader. it is up to the reader to do what they can i say but there is no actionable intelligence here to speak of. the resident in question is not the president of the united states. the resident is not the president even if he's up there on the stage of the book hand on bible as it were acting like he's the president. *acting* i should emphasize and not a very good act at that i might add. not a very good act at that. what i'm trying to say is that although the tim shaner of *I I HATE FICTION* who is entirely a would-be fictional construction although that tim shaner is indeed a bush-hater and of course as a result anti-american he is in every way a figment of the imagination in the text in question not to mention *biased*. trust me. in real life on the ground i tim shaner the real deal in fact love america. for the record: i love america and i pledge my allegiance to the united states

of america, under god over god whatever. you know because for me america really is the greatest country on the face of the earth known to man. known to man america really is the greatest on the face of the earth. really. people all over the world want to come and live in america, which is indisputable proof that america really is the greatest nation known to man on the face of the earth and also i might add a wonderful place to live and raise your kids to boot. with all sorts of creature comforts and entertainments not to mention freedom out the gazoos needless to say. they want to leave their own cesspool of a country, cesspools where breed the evildoers in general of all kinds. they want to leave their own entirely nukeable cesspool of a nation and come and live here and take our jobs and receive our benefits and infect the water with their putrid language which just goes to show you how great america really is. by the way, america really *is* the united states of america when it comes down to it. all those backyard countries down there in south america and central america too are not really america at all, is what i'm saying. south america is not america period insofar as they are entirely south of america. canada is not america either because they're entirely north of america. being north of america they are naturally god willing north americans and so not americans strictly speaking at all. anyway, as i was saying, the writer in question is not i repeat is not a demented abd would be "A" nor is he a drug-taking lover of gay pornography. trust me. one throws things in like that to be entertaining to be sure. to keep the reader glued to the page. if we've found ourselves in the thick and thin of an entirely fictional would-be "A" plot structure construction idea it is only to spice up the action to give the reader their buck's worth and so really not of our doing at all being a structural thing see. you pay for the fiction you buy the book and so you want some return on your dollar naturally some action that's going to make it worth your time and money. you don't want to turn pages without the feeling that something's going to happen, something totally exciting that's going to just blow your mind and what better way to deliver for the customer than to make the goods some kind of crazy utterly unspeakable and scandalous "A" plot structure construction idea that is nonetheless totally fictional and bears no resemblance to facts on the ground yet is totally entertaining as it were. we said this earlier which anyone at all can go back and read. saying it earlier in the section on altman's the player which is where we got the idea. wanting to make some money on the investment we naturally concluded that we needed to spice up the would-be novel to streamline it as it were with some action and of course some anal sex scenes and a happy ending naturally. like the player there's fiction within fiction on a number of levels. a fiction within fictions that exist within a still larger though hidden fictional infrastructure as it were. only those who drink swill from the public trough at the taxpayer's expense are privy to the still larger though hidden fictional infrastructure. why because they're living it naturally though naturally that's no guarantee of anything as we see for instance in places



like kansas as it were. in any case those who drink bottled water are entirely blinded by the purity of their sterilized fluids and so unaware of the would-be construction before or rather in their very eye. now, in terms of a happy ending, which the drinkers of the bottled purities are heading blindly towards unbeknownst to themselves as it were, it will be like that ending of the movie within the movie of the player where in this case the entirely fictional would-be author is strapped to an electric chair about to be executed when some kind of hero, in this case sedgwick, runs in at the last minute and saves the abd would-be author from certain death. that the sedgwick, who one assumes is dead and whose death is part of the entirely fictional would-be “A” plot structure construction idea, bursts through the doors of the prison into the viewing room or witness chamber or whatever and yells out I’M ALIVE THIS IS ALL A PLOT NOTHING AT ALL IS REAL. it will naturally be an emotional scene and the book will close with our reunited lovers driving off into the sunset toward another life. a life beyond the academy, beyond fiction, beyond poetry and beyond the dissertation. a real life where real people lead real in-time lives.

### About IHF

*I HATE FICTION* was written between 2003 and 2005 when I was working on my dissertation. Suffering from writer’s block, fearing that I couldn’t write the dissertation, wasn’t up to it, I figured I’d write a novel. I was like the protagonist in Thomas Bernhard’s *Concrete*, trying to write his great work on the composer Mendelssohn but incapable of getting past the first sentence. When *Concrete* begins, it’s the protagonist’s sister who interrupts his morning ritual of preparing himself to write, arriving unannounced as she is prone to do. He blames her for his writer’s block, convinced that she’s out to sabotage his book and his life in general. Seeing a parallel between the sister and my five-year-old daughter (my other job), but realizing I couldn’t blame her like Bernhard blames the sister (hurling nasty epithets her way before pivoting inexplicably with words of praise and love; just the sort of contradictory maneuver one savors in reading Bernhard), I decided I’d have to blame President Bush instead. (My own morning ritual consisted of drinking coffee and reading the news online, the results of which left me feeling both enraged and impotent, such that the dissertation felt trivial in comparison — even if I knew that was just a way to rationalize my lack of productivity.) I would write a novel in the Bernhard mode (ranting, ironic, linguistically playful) that would perhaps loosen me up enough to write the dissertation, as it turns out it did.

As for the plot, I decided to follow Robert Altman’s advice in his movie *The Player*, that all successful Hollywood movies must have the following features: sex, violence, and a happy ending. Since the novel’s impetus was my inability to write, the happy ending would be the completion of the dissertation. Like the procedural poetry I was reading and studying in the Poetics Program at the State University of New York, Buffalo, *I HATE FICTION* would



be a rule-bound text, constrained in duration by the time it took me to finish the diss. As for the sex, that was a no brainer: I'd have an affair with my next door neighbor, who I'd turn into a character (that's what all novelists do, right — turn people they know or who they're acquainted with into characters?). That left violence, which is where “the resident” came in. Through the act of writing, discussing these things as I am doing them, I landed on the idea of turning the protagonist — a disgruntled, middle-aged, graduate student who is suffering from writer's block and who has become, in the novel, *unhinged* because of it — into a would-be assassin.

Chapter 46 comes midway through the book. You can read Chapter 12, where the assassination decision is made, at <http://www.shampoopoetry.com/ShampooTwentyeight/shaner.html>.



## Excerpt from **The Hour before Morning**

Arwen Spicer

*The Hour before Morning is a far-future philosophical science fiction novel about the ties between political oppression and personal regret, between the struggle for a nation's freedom and the search for freedom within. For generations, the Outliers, a scattered group of related cultures, have suffered under the regime of the expansionistic Ash'torian hegemony. Jenchae, an admired rebel leader, and Elek, a common fighter, have lived very different lives but share the scars of Ash'torian persecution. Together in a prison cell, they have been condemned to death but may yet find meaning in their lives through each other.*

### Chapter 1

People of Ash'tor, I know you are not evil. You are human, and like most of us humans, you strive to do good. I know this; I am, after all, to some extent, one of you. I believe that most of you support the absorption of the Outlying Planets, at least in part, from a desire to improve living conditions on these worlds. Yet your attempts to incorporate us into your Nation can only succeed by our murder. For we Outliers do not wish to be you, and we will not submit to you. You may call us fools for that. The fact remains: we will not submit. I must ask you then: is the salvation you offer us worth more than our lives?

*Letter to the Nine Ministries of Ash'tor, 2109 A.E. by Denned Jenchae*

Received in Ash'tor three months before his arrest on Taenquûn

Jenchae did not want, in his final hours, to go back to being what he had been. He had consecrated his life to overcoming his hatred for Ash'tor. Yet here, on this prison ship, in the black-walled bareness of this cell, he knew he had not overcome it.

No more thoughts: only the floor against his back, his hands on his chest. From the ceiling, twilight lamps looked down like facets of an insect's eye. The ventilation system whistled airily.

He jerked at the grind of the cell door rolling open, a sound he'd have recognized in his sleep, though he'd only ever heard it when he'd entered this cell.

Since that day, the ship had been still, grounded at the space port, not even en route for the Death Planet yet. It could not be his time to die ...

Whiteness flared into the room. A weapon?

Just the light from the corridor, normal illumination slicing the cell's honeyed brown.

A yearning to dash into that light flooded him — and a terror of the ones who barred the way: a slight man in black prison coveralls and a guard behind him, gun at the ready. Jenchae sensed fear leaking through a closed mind. The guard's, he realized with a start. The guard was afraid.

By a force of will, Jenchae steadied himself. Over the protest of arthritic joints, he sat up, outwardly composed.

The guard pushed the prisoner into the cell.

A dangerous man. Or dangerous only to Ash'torian domination?

The door clanked shut, plunging the cell into darkness. As his eyes readjusted to gloom, Jenchae stood. The newcomer was looking at him darkly - no, not at him: at the place.

The stranger was a sverra: a species engineered from humans but stronger and longer-lived. He had a sverra's eyes, black, too large, and a sverra's white, gleaming skin. Yet he was also part human, his hair a human shade: blond or brown - hard to tell in the dimness.

And he's here. The simple fact struck with the force of revelation. He's here with me. I don't have to face death alone. Not yet.

The need to make contact was immediate and vital. Jenchae reached out his hand to the stranger, who stared at it as if the gesture had no meaning, then turned away, eyes darting from wall to wall.

Jenchae remembered the crushing claustrophobia of his own first moments in this squat, square chamber, five meters to a side and not quite four high, floor and walls of slick, black tiles reflecting the amber lamps above so that the room seemed covered in dusty moons.

The lights never changed; there was no chronometer, no viewscreen, no way but the meal intervals to measure the passing of time. No sound but a soft hiss of air through the ceiling pores. No furnishings but a single narrow cot set in an alcove carved out of the wall opposite the door.

To the left as he faced the cot was a small lavatory with a flimsy door, to the right an alcove half a meter on a side, which served out meals and devoured returned dishes. There had been an antiseptic scent to the room when Jenchae was first locked in. He couldn't smell it anymore. He'd adapted. Even the cell's dimensions had become correct. But in this new man's presence, the room, once again, was tiny.

A rumbling began under their feet, expanding to a deep drone as the ship lifted off. Jenchae tried to picture them rocketing skyward, but it was impossible to imagine such violence behind that soft sound. The inertial dampers deadened all sense of acceleration. His heart knocked. There was deception in moving with no sensation of moving.

Our journey into death.



He glanced at his companion, who stood still, eyes closed.

The ship underway, the drone faded. Jenchae summoned up his better self: the one who gave comfort, the good host.

"I'm Jenchae. Welcome." He spoke in Ash'torian because it was the common language, not his own and not a sverra's. It hit the ears flat, without the nuance of his native tongue.

The man smiled briefly. "Welcome?"

Jenchae returned the clipped smile. Welcome to my prison cell: well come indeed. He admired the sverra's Ash'torian, a delocalized Outlier accent, almost native.

"Elek." The man gave his name like an afterthought as he paced the perimeter of the room. Crossing to the lav, he knocked the door back fast as if expecting an ambush. The sudden thump, more than the action, made Jenchae flinch. Elek glanced around the lav, then turned back to his cellmate. "So tell me what's wrong with this scenario."

"In which respect?"

"A prison cell with a separate lav - with a door ideal for jumping out at unsuspecting guards."

"They'd say an Ash'torian soldier is more than equal to ambush."

Elek smirked.

"But they could always gas us if they wanted to put us down."

Elek nodded at the cot. "And only one bed? A separate lav for one prisoner? Or one bed for two?"

"It's a za'jen."

Elek gave an uncomprehending shake of his head.

"A 'test of honor.'" Jenchae broke the word into its root components.

"Marvelous. That's where they torture people, isn't it, to test their strength of will?"

"Only in the ancient times. In this version, people are given a set of conditions and left to themselves to sort out what they do with them."

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"That's stupid." Elek ran a hand along the wall. "They've already condemned us; what's to test?"

Jenchae shrugged. "It's designed to prepare our souls for the Quol'shab, the Death Planet."

"You believe that, do you? A special planet just for executions."

"Oh no, it's not a single planet. More a task shifted from planet to planet."

Elek's smile this time held a touch of condescension.

Leaving the old man to his fantasies. Many doubted the existence of the Death Planet. It would, of course, be more economical to execute prisoners in space while maintaining the myth of the sacred, cleansing resting grounds.

Yet that, at bottom, was Outlier thinking, the reasoning of people who subsisted amid such scarcity that efficiency must be a way of life. But Ash'tor was not a poor Nation. It was a Nation of believers, who saw necessity in the ceremonies of death for the condemned. Jenchae himself had seen it - the Quol'shab - long ago: to go there was part of the training of every lawyer schooled in Ash'tor.

But he did not want his companion to know that.

After a moment, Jenchae asked, "Were you a Striver?" Not every Outlier was an active Striver against the Ash'torian regime. Most were too busy eking out a living. Yet if Elek were a Striver, then he and Jenchae were allies.

Elek answered, "Yes, that's right," and crossing to the nearest corner, he sat down on the floor.

Jenchae did not like that answer: it was too fast and plain, like an easy lie. But he made himself smile. "That makes two." Following his companion's example, he sat down where he'd been standing.

To look at Elek made his consciousness prickle. At first, he assumed that he was picking up a telepathic impression of the other man's mind. Now, it struck him that the crackling he sensed was no more than his own emotion.

Elek himself had a quiet mind ... a silent mind.

In Ash'tor, telepathic etiquette reserved true mind-sharing for close friends and family. Yet each Ash'torian was raised as part of the Naha'jûn, a subliminal collective that provided comfort and cohesion. When enough of its members were nearby, Jenchae, who was a strong telepath, sensed the Naha'jûn as an inaudible hum.

Elek was not of the Naha'jûn. But that only intensified the mystery: being an Outlier should make his mind louder. Among Outliers, though "closed" minds blocked the transfer of most thoughts, they still echoed emotions.

Elek's mind did not echo. It did not hum. Its silence was a vacuum.

Perhaps Elek had no telepathic center in his brain: a throwback to pre-engineered times. Jenchae had heard of such rare mutes.

He longed suddenly to touch this man's mind. He hadn't realized how thin his solitude had stretched him until given this chance of contact.

Could he touch this man? Did he dare?

After decades — in some cases centuries — of Ash'torian occupation, most Outliers, including sverra, followed a looser version of Ash'torian mind etiquette. To nudge Elek's

mind might seem too forward - but not offensive, as it would to an Ash'torian. Jenchae would knock at the door and see who answered.

He pressed outward softly, advertising his presence, requesting a response. It was passing a hand through empty air. He pressed a little harder: still nothing. Yet Elek had heard him.

"What?" he asked crossly, eyes fastening on Jenchae.

"Forgive me." Jenchae raised a placating hand. "I merely meant to invite contact."

Elek stared.

"It was rude of me."

Elek's eyes narrowed a little.

After a pause, Jenchae continued, "I was thinking that here, so near our ends, it's surely a moment for minds to meet. To find company in death."

A few seconds more, Elek said nothing, then, "Have you thought about escape?"

Jenchae's heart lurched. Escape had become too paradisiacal a fantasy. "Thought about it. Dreamed up plans, but nothing that would stand a chance of working - not really. I serve myself better by preparing for death. But if you're planning to try to escape, I'll help."

"I'm not."

Why not? Jenchae didn't ask. I did offend him by my mind touch. He would have to step back and begin again. "You must have been an influential Striver."

Elek's eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Well, formal execution's usually reserved for leaders."

Elek crossed his arms. "Then you must have been influential."

There was an invitation in those words that Jenchae could not resist.

"I've been a Striver for decades, most recently guiding peaceful protesters on Taenquûn. To give Ash'tor their due, they left us alone at the start. But when we began to impact the ore sales, they began the arrests." His mind ran off faces - so young, those Taenquûnian miners torn from their friends, death's irredressability etched across straining mouths. He studied his fingers. "I wrote a letter of protest to the Nine Ministries ... "

A snicker burst from Elek. "How many years did you say you'd been a Striver?"

Jenchae sighed. "Every once in a while, it behooves us to remember that hope is not the same thing as idiocy. No, I did not expect the Ministries to listen. But is that a reason to stop talking?"

"What did they do?"

"They picked me up."

Those last minutes were as vivid as life: diving into the hiding closet at the sound of the soldiers forcing the door, an Ash'torian voice: "Where is Denned Jenchae?"



And her, Fenen, his friend, the local resistance leader, shouting indignantly, "How dare you come barging into my house."

Scuffling sounds, a squeak. "Your daughter or Dened. The choice is yours."

"You have no right ..."

Jenchae did not wait for Fenen to finish. He surged out of the closet, sick at the depths to which his cowardice had brought him, risking that child's life. And reeling, he realized he'd implicated them by his very surrender.

"She didn't know I was here," he said, fabricating as he talked. "An acquaintance - mine, not theirs ... a repairman who serviced this house, told me there was a cellar I could hide in."

As the soldiers dragged him out, his friends' eyes haunted him. The Ash'torians wouldn't believe him. They never believed in innocence.

His legs were stiff. Thankful for the distraction, he concentrated on stretching them. "I was hoping for a showy trial," he told Elek. "I thought it might generate positive publicity. But they tried me in the basement, as they say." He shrugged. "Here I am."

"A martyr."

Jenchae considered. "Well, to those who know what happened maybe. Not many."

Elek smiled.

"And you?" Jenchae pursued.

The sverra's face went blank. "I was an infiltrator for a Striver group. But I was sent here on charges of murder."

Murder.

Plain murder. Not political.

"Were the charges true?"

"I'd assure you that you're safe with me, but I'm a little tired of lying."

Jenchae tensed, processing this statement. It had none of the intonation of a threat: simply a fact. A fact stated too flatly. It sounded like a lie, a careless lie never intended to be taken for truth. Or a speech, rehearsed perhaps - but not untrue? "Who did you kill?"

"I don't know. Very many people."

"How?"

"Fast." Elek laughed. The sharp noise twisted Jenchae's gut. "So take that as some consolation. They didn't suffer much."

Jenchae wrestled his voice calm. "So you're planning to kill me?"

All at once, Elek was sober. "You're about to die anyway. Do you care?"

"I find I do."

A silence. "No, I'm not planning to."

Jenchae tried to find comfort in that.

But what was this man? Which way would he dart? Was he even a murderer at all, or just demented — or lying? Demented liar? Murderer? Striver?

“Why have you killed others, then?”

Elek’s eyes bored into Jenchae’s; then he grinned with a child’s sincerity. “I don’t know. I’ve killed people since I was a boy.”

Jenchae peered at Elek through the twilight of the cell. His white face was lined around the eyes and mouth, hair graying at the temples.

“How old are you?” A tremor crept into Jenchae’s voice.

Elek sighed. “Two hundred and sixty ... three,” he answered, as if adding it up as he went.

A laugh escaped from Jenchae: “Sverra genes! And here’s me, a hundred and twenty and not nearly so well preserved.”

Elek made no reply but to smile with a palpable absence of amusement. That smile silenced Jenchae.

• • •

Some time later, Jenchae was startled by a clang. Even as his head jerked toward the sound, he realized it was their meal, the second of the day. Two bowls of rice and two water cups, ceramoid dishware red as maple leaves in autumn. Their clanging was nothing like the clink of just his own bowl and cup.

Jenchae handed Elek his food, and the two sat a little apart.

Elek picked his spoon out of his bowl. “How long have you been here?”

“Ten days, counting two meals to a day.”

“How do you know that’s a day?”

Jenchae didn’t know for certain, of course. “It feels like it. It felt that way to my belly when I first came here.”

“How do you know they don’t change the intervals between meals?”

Jenchae shrugged. “They have no reason to.”

“Spite,” Elek suggested.

“No. The Ash’torians design these last days to help us let go of this universe. That cause is best served by physical regularity, not mind-games.”

“You seem to know a lot about it.”

That Jenchae did not answer.

Elek took a bite of rice and glanced around the room. “That server,” he nodded at the little alcove. “You return the dishes to it?”

Jenchae nodded.

“Have you tried keeping the dishes?”

"I did at first. I kept the cup so I could get water from the lav sink when I wanted it . . . and because I liked the splash of color in the room."

"And?"

"They stopped sending a water cup. The water they send tastes cleaner, cooler than the lav water."

Jenchae liked Elek's questions; they were practical, not the questions of a madman. But that didn't mean the madman was gone. And if Elek attacked him, the guards would not save him. The world inside the cell was not to be interfered with.

Foolish, perhaps, for the condemned to fear murder; still, Jenchae would not bow to this new, violent death. Life remained precious, in its final moments most of all.

He kept his mind open for unblocked mental impulses. That, at least, could not be impolite: just to be alert to thoughts left accessible. Such impressions couldn't give him open truth, but they would hint at it. Still Elek was silent - and the silence was beginning to beat on Jenchae.

I'm not seeing this the right way. It doesn't matter if his story is the truth. If he's lying, that lie conveys his truth. At bottom, the truth is all any of us speaks. So believe — and reach deeper.

"Have you ever had life-modification training?"

Elek glanced up sharply. "Many times. It hasn't worked."

"Not in Ash'tor, was it?"

"No, not likely I'd end up a patient in Ash'tor."

Jenchae straightened his back and shifted his legs, wishing the floor was not so hard. Done with his meal, he set his bowl aside.

"Did they give you drugs?"

"Sometimes."

Jenchae leaned his palms back on the floor. "And the drugs didn't work, you say?"

"They tranqed me out. It would stop the rage all right; they'd let me go. But I didn't stay on them."

Jenchae was reassured by Elek's willingness to talk.

"Did the drugs change your mind too much?"

Elek hesitated. "They made me too groggy to work, and when I couldn't work, I couldn't afford them."

Jenchae shook his head. "Ash'torian medicine would have done better for you."

"It was Ash'torian — cheap, Outlier hand-down Ash'torian meds."

Jenchae nodded, realizing with relief that the simple act of talking had dampened his fear of Elek. "It's hard to feel compelled to harm people."



"I don't see how it matters now." Elek resumed eating, speaking between mouthfuls. "The only person I could harm now is you. Soon I'll be dead, and you'll be dead, and that will be that. So why should I care?"

You first, and me second. That's interesting. Jenchae shrugged. "Peace."

"Peace," Elek repeated the word and laughed.

"Certainly." Jenchae kept his face its most sincere.

Elek set aside his plate. "You think I'm not at peace? You think I hate myself for what I've done?" He grinned. "When I remember what it's like to crush the life out of a living being, all I can think of is how wonderful it feels. That's when I know peace."

It's the truth. Jenchae's doubt melted. And still, he was not afraid. No, that was wrong: he was — but afraid of forces more powerful than Elek. Elek had stirred the pool, bringing heavy, old things back into the light. I've been here before. With Akhté: the man's copper face flashed before him. This is truth, and I owe him the truth in return. "I've felt elation when I've killed too, but elation isn't peace. No, I don't believe you feel peace."

Elek studied him. "I thought you were a nonviolent protester."

"Not then, when Ash'tor had just killed my mother; I had no wish for peace."

"What changed?"

Yes, he had been here before. He had spoken while Akhté had refused to understand — or understood too well perhaps. "I came to remember my mother's life: how her contentment had come from within, through the ... inability of the outer world to command hope or despair. She knew her life had been good because she'd made it so. I took that into my heart and sought peace."

"How old were you?"

"When I made that resolution? Forty-six."

"I'm a bit older than that."

"You're young for a sverra."

Jenchae ached to see who this man was, to make him knowable and let the knowing quell the fear. "You could allow me to touch your mind. Then, perhaps, I could help you."

Elek fixed him with unreadable eyes. "I can't."

# POETRY



To me, freedom entitles you to do something,  
not to not do something.

Shel Silverstein



## The cake of life

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*Dennis Gilbert*

The cake of life, our pieces,  
and the slices we partake:  
Do we comprehend the knife that  
partitions, and shaves off our portions  
each hour? ... the light  
coming through the window  
revealing this blade?  
... and outside, the pattern  
of the city, and questions asked  
in the buzzing of cars and buses?  
... over the hills, somewhere,  
water flowing and speckled fish  
congregating? ... and in-between,  
the fragrance of eucalyptus and  
longing, and the texture and taste  
of dust and fear? ... and somewhere,  
the line of darkness and sunset  
making its way toward us? Or  
maybe it's already here, and  
it's a lamp, stationed on a table,  
that illuminates this divining blade,  
and our faces reflected in black  
windows. And then, before morning,  
our hand gripping a knife  
finds its way into our dreaming.



# My salmon salad not yet finished has taken me elsewhere

*Dennis Gilbert*

My salmon salad not yet finished has taken me  
elsewhere:

The factory ...

    its punch-clock and the languages spoken  
    ... where the fork was made,  
the debates over the nature of the light reflected,  
the farm from where the crème fraîche began and  
    the smell of the barn,  
the olive's bath,  
the egg's hen;

The dam where electricity started flowing to boil the water,  
the little metal form ...

    stainless steel  
        the foundry, its heat and din  
... that made the waves in the extruded yoke,  
the salmon's journey to the Pacific,  
the fishing,  
    its anxiety and weariness,  
weather the day of the catch,  
the design of the smoker, and  
the care taken for timing and temperature by someone.

Even the errant cork grains in the wine carry the tree  
and the rush of the bar too busy in the bustle,  
    or someone new at the job,  
in this Great Recession.

Images and memory of real things  
so dense in history and life, which language strains to reveal,  
arrive to make an occasion of this half-eaten plate,  
thought condensing after good honest work,  
as water has condensed, simply, naturally  
on a cool glass.



## Of Course, I Have Fears

---

*Carol Watt*

of course I have fears that tumble and jag my waking hours

cancer stalks brain, cervix, breast, everywhere except the appendages .... maybe  
them too; certainly the skin offers melanoma as a prospect, and don't forget  
appendicitis, even though it's not cancer, and tooth decay, with porcelain grinders  
in blue water at night.

better yet, my oldest fear, the one I've crafted to a predictable state of insomnia: family  
friends pets revered others

a) die swiftly or b) linger in oblivion or pain

not to mention that greed, stupidity, and maybe cosmic entropy are destroying  
the planet for which I feel homesick

maimed hearts and bodies, victims of hatred, vulnerable young and old of any  
species: their suffering compels my compassion, anger, and shame at inaction. Am I  
simply applauding my own tender tears?

moving along, panics of professional and romantic incompetence feature my  
desire for approval and importance  
and predict slumps when beams don't go my way

but I also want to say that my dreaming hours rarely wake me  
in terror of loss or danger;  
as far as I know, I am not fearful at the core  
a blessing not a choice  
as a child, I sang when I woke

lawn daisies after the mower  
the rose with one bright petal left  
an apple tree's bounty lying below for squirrels and deer  
often I can see that life is exquisite and not a tragedy.





## Independence Day

---

*Dan Armstrong*

I'm bundled up against the winter cold:  
a heavy coat on top a scratchy shirt and sweater,  
my furry cap with leather strap and ear flaps tightened down,  
the reindeer scarf pulled snug around my neck and mouth,  
and fuzzy mittens too large for tiny hands  
the tops pulled tight over tight coat sleeves.  
All this to shut out the cold and keep me well.  
Only four, I've badgered my way outside on a freezing day  
alone. Mother has prepared me for my first solo foray  
onto the long, tree-lined sidewalk that fronts  
the small patch of yard in front of our apartment  
Penguin-like, I walk the distance of our entry walk,  
feeling my mother's eyes warming my back,  
and turn into a foreign land, the sidewalk near the busy street.  
Once there, I stand, stiff and startled by the bitter cold,  
turning around in my new-found independence  
to face my mother still standing still in the open door,  
crossed arms cradling her upper self against the winter bite,  
and voice a complaint, more like an accusation,  
about the surprising cold as if it's her fault somehow  
"Yes," she says, "it's chilly outside."  
I stand frozen in attention at these strange words  
Knowing chili only as something I sometimes have for lunch,  
my head snaps skyward with thoughts of chili falling from the clouds,  
a little boy's reward for braving the cold all by himself,  
spoon in hand, reaching for the parmesan,  
digging into a heaping warm portion of his favorite lunch,  
finally licking the spicy, blue bowl of the noonday sky

Later that night, once Father has returned from work,  
we sit at the dinner table to eat our evening meal  
On the tablecloth Mother has placed the pink-flower plates,  
the promise of a special food on this special day,  
my independence day. I tuck the white napkin into the collar of my shirt  
and take an eager bite, then pause to accuse her a second time this day:  
“Hey, this steak tastes wike wivver!” I hear myself say

# Aboard the Empire Builder with Jacob

---

*Dan Armstrong*

*Written at the request of my grandson  
to accompany pencil sketches he made  
on a train trip back East last winter.*

## **Poems for the Columbia Gorge**

#1

Far below the tracks  
The river is a snake  
Winding blue-green  
To the wide, wide sea

#2

The day is slate gray and windy  
But the Columbia is happy,  
Tipping white caps of greeting  
To our train, a silver bullet  
Speeding through the chilly air  
Whiteout  
Our train plows through a total blizzard  
And out my window I see a sea  
Of white so thick, I cannot see  
To see.

## **Minot, North Dakota**

The houses in snowy Minot as we rattle past  
Look ready for the party,  
Little birthday cakes with vanilla icing on top  
And warm yellow lights in the windows  
Twinkling like candles



### **Cut Bank, Montana**

Fast tracks go clickety-clack, clickety-clack  
And trees zip by, just like that  
Far off from the side of the tracks  
stand the lonely, time-abandoned shacks

Where did the happy families go?



## The River Geese: Solstice 2011

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*Sandy Brown Jensen*

For six months, a dozen well-dressed geese  
with green cards from Canada, have talked  
apart the sky above my house, wearing  
smooth the air between the open Willamette  
River and the foraging fields of Fern Ridge.  
Now, in the dawn dark, I hear them high  
up over the bike path cottonwoods,  
coming my way. I imagine  
what I cannot see — twenty-four wings  
beating tip to tip, veed out  
like talkative angels. I can almost understand  
the jokes, the chuckles, as they come faint,  
pass over 340 N. Grand loud,  
and, still in strong confabulation, fade  
south to Skinner's Butte, Alton Baker Park.  
And I am only afraid when the honkers fly on silent,  
intent wings, quieted by some collective  
thought too large or moving for even geese  
to talk about, even to each other,  
in those black hours before the earth creaks  
again toward the light, and we can breathe, and speak.

*December 16, 2011*

## “Boketto”

(A Japanese word we don't have in English meaning “Gazing into the Distance”)

*Sandy Brown Jensen*

When I crossed the threshold of a dream,  
I saw my father at the window —  
the one in the Music Room where the gauze-white curtains  
blow out the open frame.

He was gazing across the winter distance  
to where the Wenatchee River carves the white cliff  
on its way to the Great Mother Columbia.

I wanted to tell him I had seen  
a golden-scaled fish in the shallows there  
swimming downstream, that its name  
was Grandmother, Ancient of Days,  
for whom I had searched so long.

But his eyes were so distant, so lost  
in thought, I knew if I touched him  
he would shine like the ribbons  
of the river and flow away; or if I spoke,  
he would flower into the white flame  
of a chrysanthemum and his petals  
would settle on the river like  
shattered moonlight  
and flow away.

And so I turned and left that room.  
And I closed the door  
more carefully and quietly than anyone  
could imagine. In the distant  
recesses of the house, I heard  
the ship's bell chime noon.





## By the Time You Read This

Demetri Lontos

By the time you read this, it may be too late.  
Another war will have started  
More young toughs will have turned  
From freedom fighters to cannon fodder  
From the status that was never quo  
To the cauldron of oil and dreams  
                                spilling over

Scalding the old guard.

Serves them right, you say, reaching  
for the pump that reads  
Five Dollars a Gallon

By the time you hear this, you won't believe your ears.  
Is it true? Is that what really happened?  
Was it a rumor or were you eavesdropping?  
No, it really happened, it must have  
I heard it on the news. Which news? Does it matter?  
Sure it matters. Really? Really.  
In that case, I don't know what to believe  
We're all confused.

Serves them right, you say, reaching  
for the remote that kills  
the eleven o'clock news.

By the time you feel this, you won't feel a thing.  
Comfortably numb? Yes, thank you.  
But whatever happened to the toughs and  
the oil and the dreams — Sshhh.  
Take a deep breath now, close your eyes.  
But what does it all mean? Sshhh.  
Close down. Close down. Rest.  
Serves them right, you say, reaching  
for the warm body next to you  
before it's too late.

*Eugene, April 2011*



## Skating in Concord

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*Jean LeBlanc*

If you fall asleep halfway through a book on the Transcendentalists, you will dream of the low, frozen meadows of a Concord winter, when the whole town turns out for skating. You will hear Sophia Hawthorne whisper that Thoreau looks almost handsome as he dances a jig on ice. You will see the straight-backed figure of Emerson against the trees, slightly apart from the happy throng. You will see the Irish families from the edge of town, whose men work on the railroad or in the sandpits. An Alcott sister or two will grab your hands and pull you out onto the ice, despite your protests, and whirl you about. And soon, someone will make a little fire, and another, and another, and the dusk will be marked by a string of little fires, of silhouettes sipping cocoa, or passing flasks, and you will find yourself wondering if it could be true, that a town could join in such spontaneous holiday, that this must happen everywhere, or must *have* happened, once, despite tuberculosis, despite threadbarity, despite pennilessness, despite the hardships of time and place, which have never gone away, but this has, the shadow of an Emerson or Alcott falls no more across the lanes of our little towns,



the towns themselves draining off the meadows,  
discouraging little fires, dancing Thoreaus,  
the carrying of flasks, the welcoming in  
of families from the edge, and perhaps  
you are too singular even dreaming of such things,  
but winter is long and lonely, so dream, so dream.

## Photographing Thoreau

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*Jean LeBlanc*

At first, getting him to hold still  
was like pleading with a barn cat not to fidget  
in the presence of a mouse, but at last  
he resigned himself to the process, and in fact  
his visage softened. It was then I realized  
what I had before me: child, old man;  
robust declaimer, failing soul; all in one body,  
all in one face. A face to face down winter,  
and melt at the first blush of spring. A clodhopper  
who spoke to me in Greek. Not of this time,  
I tell you. A friend of Homer once, I fancy,  
advising him to sing a little more of Troy,  
another book or two; or Hamlet's Horatio,  
only it was he who dreamt of more  
than most philosophers can ever know.  
I wished I'd had the cleverness to keep him  
the entire afternoon, wished I'd been a painter.  
Curse this camera, the brief minutes,  
our modern ways, the quickness of our lives,  
strangers shaking hands with strangers,  
learning little more than one another's names.  
A man from another time sat for me one day,  
and all I'm left with is his telling me  
of storing flowers in his hat, and of an eagle  
he saw out-fly a thunderstorm, and of the view  
from the top of the world. Wild, I tell you; he was  
wild, had some depth of wildness to him, though  
peaceable. A man, plus something more.

## LIFE IN THE CC



**Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.**

**Kofi Annan**



## On Being at Playa

Kathleen Caprario Ulrich

Landscape, identity and the relationship of self to nature are at the core of my practice. In the late 1970s I moved to Oregon from New York City, trading architectonic canyons of concrete and steel for real canyons, valleys and broad skies. Growing up back East, I understood that everything of interest or value was found inside a building and contained, while in the Northwest my immediate impression was that everything truly important is experienced and interacted with outdoors. That was the moment I found my subject — the land. I was attracted to it at once and it has held my imagination since.

The invitation to spend two weeks as an artist in residence at the Playa Foundation was most welcome; I was part of a trial residency to test-run the Foundation's Summer Lake facility in South Central Oregon prior to its official opening. In a remote setting that includes wetlands, subalpine meadows, and the seasonal lakebed of the Summer Lake playa, this cluster of rustic cabins provides an unplugged oasis for artists, writers and natural scientists to pursue their work, to interact with each other, and to stop, take a deep breath and *listen*. During the school year I teach at both Lane Community College and at Oregon State University, and have little time to dig deep into my own curiosity and interests. For me, the Playa residency was a chance to engage my subject with intimacy and depth and to hear anew that authentic part of myself that routine often silences.

Playa gave me a chance to work surrounded by natural beauty and to engage that experience singularly but not alone; the six other residents offered just the right amount of collegiality, social support and opportunity for mindful conversation. Excursions to the Summer Lake Wildlife Area and to the remarkable excavations at the Paisley Caves further informed and enriched my appreciation of the area and its history.

At Playa I "shook hands" (Goldsworthy, *Rivers and Tides*) with my subject through *plein air* studies and in-studio explorations that resulted in a new and ongoing series of paintings and collages. My process was similar to the organic growth of a forest, the erosion of earth or the receding edge of the playa with layer upon layer of colored washes or collage papers creating dynamic transitions through the compositional space. Black and white linear continuations rhythmically traverse these surfaces, suggesting the various pathways and actions drawn and observed in nature — the flight of birds, the march of ants or my own movements through the land — the journey from one destination point to another realized as an abstract mapping. In industrialized and Western cultures, the land



tends to be viewed as merely a decorative backdrop against which more valued human activity occurs to alter and consume nature. My work hopes to create renewed value and respect for the land where events occur simultaneously and occupy the margins of perception, and where interior and exterior life co-mingle in a state of flux and tension.

*Editors' note: See the Art section, pages 56-57, for examples of Caprario Ulrich's work during her Playa Foundation residency.*



## Your Greatest Fear

Leslie Rubinstein

How do I start to tell you about my students, my writers, who pour out their lives in 12 point font every week for a college term? You know, they're mostly young, they don't have much, and they want to be auto mechanics and pharmacy techs and chefs. Or they're 30, with teenagers and bills, and they're so out of work that they've come back to school because financial aid really can help pay the rent. Sometimes they're my age, dislocated from a long-term role as a homemaker or a factory worker for the past so many years. And sometimes they're homeless, living in a car or on the couch at a friend's, where it's a little hard to find a quiet space to write about this week's assignment: your greatest fear.

So they sit next to each other, all complaining about how much writing they have to do in this class, but they write, most of them. For some, it's too hard to produce a full page, even double-spaced; others keep going and going until I say, "Wait — just write *one* page: this week, a description; next week, a narrative; eventually, cause and effect." And I will mark them, because that's what I'm paid to do, but not in red. No, I use purple for my comments and questions; I put purple smiley faces and exclamation marks next to commas and colons and misspelled words.

How do I start to talk to them, in conferences in my windowless office that smells a bit smoky due to the cafeteria below? What do I write to them in my purple pen marks scrawled across their papers? *What a lovely essay, Charlie, about how you lost your volunteer coaching position when the school district found out you had been a felon ... Annie, I really enjoyed your narrative about the nastiness you endured as a lunch lady ...* Should I mark every comma splice wrong when Della writes so wrenchingly about her childhood in a one-bedroom apartment with her three sisters and her mom? Perhaps it matters more to her than to me; she tells me that her family doesn't care that she's in college, they don't believe she can do it, they don't get what it means. And she's working hard to fix those splices to prove them wrong.

Then I worry about Hanna; she's been absent all week ... should I call her? That's not part of my job, but sometimes a little encouragement helps. I dial, but her cell is not accepting calls; I email, but nothing comes back. I remember her essay last week ... her greatest fear is a drug relapse.

And should I say something to Craig? As I walk over to hand him the material he missed when he was absent last week, I can smell on his breath that he just got stoned before class...probably why he was 10 minutes late. Yet I've just managed to establish a little rapport with him, and he whispers enthusiastically, "Thanks for the notes!" I mention the smoke anyway, and he says that's how he studies best ... and how can I respond? Because

that's how I studied best when I was in college. So I just smile and say, "I'm glad you're almost all caught up, and I know you can pass this class," ... although I may be exaggerating.

My job is to teach, not to mother, but mothering is what I majored in for the past 22 years, with teaching on the side. So now I'm excellent at gentle and humorous nagging, and with my own kids off in the world, here are perfectly good substitutes who may need my unconditional love — and badgering — to get their paragraphs in ... even late ... it still counts ...

Then Sal, with dour face and arms crossed, stops by my office, hands me her rough draft, and says, "Tell me what you think of this." I read and I start to feel panicky: how can I make corrections on a page full of pain, full of dead facts that tell the story of her rape at age nine? You see, I can't *just* teach writing; it doesn't exist as a separate entity; it isn't discreet. And I can't just *teach* writing; I have to ooze expression and coax commitment to "go for the jugular" as I quote to them from Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*. And Sal gets it and does it every time she writes, whether it's about the rape or having her stomach pumped after she took all those pills last year ... and now all that jugular makes me a bit queasy and uneasy and my purple pen looks pale next to her words on the page.

This fall I have some rowdy classes; it's funny how one term's random distribution of students has a lot of them ending up with similar characteristics. There's Jimmie, whose arms are so covered with tattoos that I always think he's wearing a navy blue long sleeve under his t-shirt. There's Joey, who sticks a wad of tobacco in his cheek just before he leaves the classroom. I stand, with my hands on my hips, my eyes narrowed, looking up at him — way up, cause he's a big guy — and he says, "I know, I know, I'm not gonna chew until I leave the building." And there's Tommy, who really did learn how to use the comma with a subordinating conjunction, except for the times, frequently, when he confuses them with conjunctive adverbs and adds the semicolon, incorrectly. Another student said to me, "Tommy? He's an acquired taste." And he loves to write — if it's about motors or vehicles.

There's Jamie, too — what a kick in the pants! She's sharp, and she's not afraid to speak up. We were working on being specific when selecting topics, and the book provided some silly exercises: *In the morning, \_\_\_\_\_ helps me get ready for the day*. First I hear "coffee", and then someone says "loud music". And, without skipping a beat, Jamie adds, "sex", and the entire class cracks up, the young ones a bit nervously. When we calm down enough to try the next one, I read: \_\_\_\_\_ *is my favorite piece of furniture*. Jamie is right back at it with "the kitchen table," which, coming after her previous answer, means I've totally lost control of the class. But Jamie isn't stuck in her humor; she writes so sweetly about growing up with her dad and so bitter-sweetly about losing him when she was 25. And today she was so frustrated by not knowing where the commas go that she actually started to cry in class. I talked with her afterward; she really wanted to understand.



And Jillian, all talk and no action, lots of questions, and good ones, but no writing with her name on it appears on my desk. Then one day she shows up pale and bruised, and tells me her old man found out where she moved and beat her up. Tears well in her eyes, and what can I say: *we're doing semi-colons today; will that help?*

I'm still thinking about Hanna: she asked me if I'd seen the news about the federal parole officer who just plea-bargained his way out of life in prison. She told me she was one of his victims, one of his parolees that he sexually abused, for years. It's been two weeks now that I haven't seen her; I wish she'd let me know what's going on.

You know, I'm not impatient with my students' ignorance – they can learn, and they do learn. It's really cute to see big, macho guys saying to each other, "Dude, you need to put a quotation mark there." No, I'm not impatient with their ignorance; I'm impatient with my ignorance – not knowing what happened to Hanna, hoping Sal won't take those pills again, wondering how Jillian can find another place to live. You can't just teach *writing*; you teach wondering and questioning and the unknown; you teach *really?* and *aha!* and *raw...*, and yes, *love*. And you learn more than you teach, every day.

So my students, my writers, they squeeze out their remembrances and hopes every day, sprinkled with way too many commas as if their paragraphs needed salt and pepper and Tabasco sauce, too. They type their black marks in Times New Roman on the white page, extruding so many colors, bland and bright, neon and glossy and grayscale, too, and my heart rips a little, here and there, and I scribble in my purple ink and mostly speak the truth.

Yesterday, after three weeks of no Hanna, I picked up the local phonebook and found out where she lives. I drove over there and knocked on the door. She was on the couch, and she came outside to talk to me. She had to kick her husband out; she's having major surgery next week; she's on prescription meds to control the pain. I gave her a hug, got back in my car, and drove home.

At the end of the term, I still have many questions, but my ignorance is softer and gentler. I'm working on a balance between the jugular and subordinating conjunctions, which are subordinate in my opinion, but they have their place. I'm not sure about Hanna, but I know that today she's sitting on that couch, and she just may come back to my class next year to write, again, about her greatest fear.



# Writing and Using Cases in the Classroom

Anne B. McGrail



For the past three Septembers, I have led two-day professional development workshops for faculty across disciplines as part of my work on a Title III *Engaging Students* grant. More than 50 faculty have participated in at least one of these workshops at Lane Community College, and some have attended each year, developing their practice and pedagogies to increase student success. The goal of these workshops is to raise awareness of the importance of active and collaborative learning strategies for student learning and to build expertise and a common vocabulary in student success principles.

Active and collaborative learning strategies such as case studies are one of the many so-called “High-Impact Practices” that increase student learning and success. “High-Impact Practices” (or “HIPs”) include First-Year Learning Communities such as those at Lane, and extensive educational research suggests that they increase student learning, retention and success (see *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* by George D. Kuh. AACU: 2008.).

The case study is a high-impact learning activity that all faculty can adopt and adapt for multiple disciplinary purposes and pedagogical goals. In what follows, I will share the case study that I wrote for the faculty development workshop. In this case study, I intentionally model how to develop a case while embedding discussion of important academic behaviors into the content of the case.

To write the case, I used guidelines developed by Clyde Freeman Herreid in “What Makes a Good Case?” (<http://bit.ly/wPfviF>). To paraphrase Herreid, a good case is short, tells a story and focuses on an interest-arousing issue that may be conflict provoking; it also creates empathy with the central characters. It includes quotations, is relevant to the reader and is set in the past five years. It must also have pedagogic utility — there must be a learning goal that students will achieve by working through the case. A good case forces the reader into making a decision, which poses an interesting challenge to many students and faculty who want to sit on the fence. Using these guidelines, instructors across disciplines could create course-specific cases or ask students to create cases and questions themselves.

What follows is the text of the case study “The Case of the Unsuccessful Student” and the questions that we worked with in the workshop — first individually and then in interdisciplinary group discussion. If you would like to know more about how to develop a case study for use in your courses, email me at [mcgraila@lanecc.edu](mailto:mcgraila@lanecc.edu).

### **“The Case of the Unsuccessful Student”**

Marlena Cortez, a history instructor at Emerald Valley Community College, sat in the cafeteria drinking a latte. She had just enough time to drink her coffee before her 10 a.m. class. Today’s lecture was on Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution. This was the topic of her thesis from graduate school; she’d been giving the same talk about the gender politics of Antoinette’s role since she first started teaching in 1993, and she looked forward to discussing it with her best students. Hurriedly, she picked up her drink and gathered up her papers on her way out of the cafeteria. She bumped into Eliza Haynes, a freshman student who had shown some early promise in class but had missed the last several classes.

“Hi, Eliza. Are you coming to class today?” she said, trying to keep her voice neutral. Marlena was always a bit impatient and disappointed by these eager first-year students. They show up the first day of class, she thought, eager to get in, promising they’ll work hard if you let them add the class, and then for whatever reason they seem to just disappear. They ought to know better, she thought. In the end they just waste my time. I should stop being a softie and letting them in.

“Oh, hi, Ms. Corless,” said Eliza, a little embarrassed. “I’m sorry I missed class on Monday. I have to take care of my mother and she was sick.”

Marlena winced a bit at Eliza’s mispronouncing her name. “Well, actually I haven’t seen you in more than a week, Eliza. We’ve moved on to the French Revolution at this point, and you entirely missed the Glorious Revolution of 1688. You know we have a mid-term project due on Friday.”

“Oh, we do? Well, ok. I’ll definitely get it in to you. I really want to get an A in your class. I can definitely make up last week.”

“Well, maybe you can get the notes from a fellow student,” said Marlena. “Stay after class today and we can talk about your grade.”

Rushing to class, Marlena took out her dog-eared notes about Marie Antoinette, placed them on the dais and launched her discussion of gender politics and the French Revolution. Gizelle, Samantha and Roger, who always sat in the front row, nodded eagerly as she convinced them of her thesis. Near the door, Marlena’s other “A” students, John and Arturo, laughed on cue at the history lecture, asked pointed questions about their instructor’s theoretical underpinnings, and generally dominated the brief question-and-answer time at the end of class. While several quiet students took careful notes, many others in the room seemed a bit confused or overwhelmed, and some furtively texted their friends under the cover of notebooks and book bags.

At the end of class, Marlena felt both exhilarated and exhausted. As always, her thesis generated controversy among her brightest students, and her jokes had gone over well. Overall, it was a good class, she thought to herself as she turned to leave for her office hour.

Bumping into her colleague Siaboan Fen, who was walking into the near-empty classroom, she remembered Eliza Haynes, and noted that in fact she had never come to class.

"Well, she'll certainly not be getting an A in my class," she said to Siaboan.

"Who are you talking about?" asked Siaboan, smiling.

"Just a first-year student from class," she said, half to herself. "I'm really disappointed that she couldn't pull it together. And now, lying to me about making up the work. She obviously had no intention of coming to class or of doing the work." She turned to Siaboan, who was setting up a diorama and turning on the smart board. "I wish these students would grow up and take some responsibility for their college careers. I have a strict attendance policy, stated clearly on my syllabus. And if she doesn't turn in her mid-term, she'll likely fail the class. And it will be her own doing, not mine."

"I know what you mean, Marlana," smiled Siaboan. "But you have to expect that these students are still learning how to be in college. I usually spend a whole class just orienting my students so they know what to expect for the term."

"I go over the syllabus carefully on the first day of class, and I warned Marlana that she was in her first year and this was an advanced class..."

Back in the cafeteria, Eliza still sat with her latte, frozen at the table, panicked and unable to decide what to do. She didn't know anyone's name in the class to get notes from. She hadn't done the reading for Marlana's class because she was up all night working on her research paper for Writing 123. What she had said to Marlana was true: her mother was sick and she did have to take care of her. But the real reason she didn't come to class last week was something else: on Monday, she had felt left behind and bewildered during class, unclear about the lecture, and so then Wednesday came and she didn't come and then after she missed a day it was easy to miss another one. And then, when she tried to catch up with the reading, Ms. Cortez was already on another topic in the syllabus. Some of the other kids in the class obviously were smarter than she was, because she often didn't know what Ms. Cortez was talking about. And the smart students always dominated the class with their questions, so Eliza felt stupid. Asking what "historical materialism" meant when the other kids were challenging Ms. Cortez's interpretation of it was too humiliating. "How am I going to write the mid-term project for Friday when I don't even know what we've been doing for the past week?" she asked herself. "If I don't do well in this class, I may lose my financial aid. I don't know what to do!"

After sitting for 20 minutes thinking about all of this, Eliza looked at the clock: "Now it's too late to come to class," she said to herself. "I'll go to Ms. Cortez's office hour and ask her about the project." With this decision made, she relaxed a bit and ordered another coffee. After a while a fellow student came by and they got to talking. Then she texted her mother and got the grocery list. When she next looked at the clock, it was 12:20. "Oops!"



I better run!” she said to her friend. “I’ve got to figure out how I can pull my butt out of the fire in my history class.”

When she arrived at Marlena’s office, there were three students she recognized from her class leaning on the doorway, and Eliza could hear Ms. Cortez’s voice and laughter coming from the office. “Darn it,” thought Eliza. “I missed my window. She’s talking to the smart students from class. Now I’ll never get to talk to her.” Unsure of what to do, she stood down the hall until the other students left. When she saw Marlena walking the other way down the hall, she chased after her.

“Ms Cortez? Can I talk to you?” she asked.

“Oh, Eliza. I wondered what had happened to you. Well, you know you’ve now missed five classes, and according to my attendance policy your grade goes down by a letter grade.”

“I know. I really screwed up. I’m sorry. But I’m here now. Can I talk to you about my mid-term project. I’m really lost and I am not sure how to begin.”

“Well, that’s what my office hours are for, Eliza. I have another appointment that I have to get to now, and then a class after that. Talk to one of your fellow students about your project. I don’t have time at this point.”

“Ok,” said Eliza. “I’ll see you Friday, and I’ll have my project done!”

“I hope so,” said Marlena distractedly, catching the elevator up.

### **Tasks for Use of this Case in Class**

**SOLO:** Take a moment to jot down answers to the following questions.

- What are some of the key themes and issues that arise for you from reading this case?
- What do you know about Marlena Cortez’s pedagogy from reading this case? What assumptions does she make about her students? What does Siaboan Fen’s entrance and words suggest to you about her pedagogy?
- In what ways does Eliza take personal responsibility for her success in this case? What skills does she still need to work on?
- How might Eliza have made better choices?
- What do you think that Marlena Cortez could have done differently to help Eliza succeed?
- his case is necessarily brief. What would you like to know about Emerald Valley CC and its role in Eliza’s success? What else would you like to know about this history class?
- Do you identify in any way with Eliza Haynes? How?
- Do you identify in any way with Marlena Cortez? How?



- Given what you learned from reading and discussing this case, what change(s) might you make in your own course, pedagogy and practice — from major overhauls to minor tweaks — to help Eliza become a successful student?
- Take five minutes and finish the story, creating a feasible conclusion.

INTERDISCIPLINARY GROUP SHARE: Share one of your answers with your fellow group members for discussion. Then ask each group member to read aloud their case endings.

REFLECTION: What did you learn from this case study? Was the case activity valuable for developing your understanding of students' experience? Of faculty's?



# Writing Across the Curriculum: Thinking in the Disciplines, Reading to Learn

Siskanna Naynaha

*Writing is not the expression of thought; it is thought itself. Papers are not containers for ideas, containers that need only to be well formed for those ideas to emerge clearly. Papers are the working out of ideas. The thought and the container take shape simultaneously (and develop slowly, with revision).*

Mark Richardson, *Writing is Not Just a Basic Skill*

## College Writing: Different, Related Approaches

Historically speaking, college writing pedagogy has been profoundly influenced by a handful of different developments in U.S. higher education. The Dartmouth Seminar of 1966, in which British and American scholars met to discuss the state of the synecdochic English department, is often referred to as the inaugural event in the disciplinary rise of composition and rhetoric within the broader field of English studies. The subsequent spread of related (though not synonymous) Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movements along with the formal articulation of Write to Learn methodologies continue to shape our thinking and practices related to the teaching of writing in colleges and universities across the country.

## College Writing: Traditional Models

Traditional models of college writing instruction — models familiar to many of us from our own educational experiences — tend to position writing as “gatekeeping.” That is, writing tasks, assignments, and courses in this framework are often designed and structured to keep underprepared students out of higher education altogether. Some of the signature characteristics of such models include a lot of writing on demand: writing tasks that are timed, high-stakes, and performed “on demand” (for instance, in placement testing, essay exams, in-class essays and reports, etc). These kinds of writing tasks are not necessarily anathema in and of themselves. However, when they constitute the primary form of writing instruction that takes place in a curriculum, it disadvantages students who come from backgrounds in which varied writing practices, the English language in spoken or written forms, and/or formal educational opportunities in general, for example, may not have been readily available or accessible.

Student success in traditional postsecondary writing instruction tends to rely on a kind of apprenticeship model in which students are assumed to learn writing almost as if through osmosis, by working with course content and, when possible, by interacting

directly with faculty members. Writing instruction in such models is therefore typically implicit, and students are often left to their own devices: they either sink or swim. The disciplinarity of English composition and rhetoric, arising as it did in response to the increasing democratization of higher education in post-World War II United States, influenced researchers in a variety of fields to theorize the limits of those traditional models for writing instruction.

### **What the Research Suggests**

Studies in the field of literacy in general and writing studies in particular run the gamut from Shirley Brice Heath's classic ethnography *Ways With Words*, which details the literacy practices of two communities — one black and one white — in a rural southern town, to Mary Louise Pratt's now seminal "Arts of the Contact Zone." Still, the past thirty to forty years of literacy studies have demonstrated again and again that there are certain ideas about writing that hold particular salience for educators who are concerned with implementing both sound and effective pedagogy. The research suggests that:

All students can learn to write.

Writing is a recursive process.

Writing and ways of thinking are discipline specific.

Students learn to read and write by reading and writing often.

Writing in a subject is correlated to student perceptions of engagement and higher-order thinking about the subject (see results on the national Community College Survey of Student Engagement or CCSSE, for example).

Such research helped spark corollary movements in college writing instruction, including the spread of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) programs on campuses across the U.S.

### **The Insights of WAC: Basic Principles**

While WID and WAC arose from a shared set of circumstances, the goal of the WID movement was really to remove college writing almost entirely from its familiar domicile in English departments. The thinking, not entirely preposterous, was that disciplinary specialization was the key to producing excellence in disciplinary scholars. The main problem with the primary methodology of the WID movement was that, at the time of its inception, there were not many specialists in *writing instruction* within those disparate non-English disciplines. This left many scholars, brilliant as they may have been in their respective fields, at a loss when it came to adequately addressing the needs of their students as writers in the classroom.

In contrast, Writing Across the Curriculum or WAC, as Charles Bazerman *et al* define it in the *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*, “refers specifically to the *pedagogical and curricular attention to writing* occurring in university [and college] subject matter classes other than those offered by composition or writing programs (most often housed in the English Department).” As a movement, WAC has often provided “*systematic encouragement, institutional support, and educational knowledge to increase the amount and quality of writing occurring in such courses as history, science, mathematics and sociology*” (emphasis added). So, rather than removing writing from its home in English per se, the focus of the WAC movement has been to extend writing practice and expertise to every disciplinary corner of the college campus. Hence, the basic principles of Writing Across the Curriculum models include:

*Writing is a method and mode of learning*, not simply a means to demonstrate one’s knowledge;

*Writing instruction should span over all of the years of students’ college education*, rather than being isolated to one or two introductory courses or terms in a student’s college career;

*Writing instruction should occur across the entire academic community* rather than being the sole responsibility of one department or program;

*Writing should be integrated across disciplinary boundaries*; and

Due to the deeply contextual nature of academic writing, *students can only begin to communicate effectively within an academic discipline by practicing the particular conventions of thinking and writing in that discipline.* (See The WAC Clearinghouse at [wac.colostate.edu](http://wac.colostate.edu).)

## Challenges

So why isn’t a WAC approach more widely realized in the practices of higher education in the U.S.? The model is not without its challenges, including the difficulty of designing effective writing assignments (while it’s easy to simply assign writing, it can be much more difficult to construct assignments that are both useful and effective at helping students develop their writing abilities). There is also the difficulty of finding time to include (more) writing in already burdened class schedules as well as finding the time to grade additional or more intensive writing assignments. Concerns about these and similar points are well-founded, but there are ways to address these concerns that make the challenges manageable for faculty while providing students with the kinds of practice they need to truly improve as college-level writers and thinkers.



## Making It Do-Able

Keep in mind that even very brief writing assignments — especially when undertaken repeatedly with some measure of consistency — can help students learn content and gain fluency in disciplinary thinking and writing.

Try short assignments that draw on a day's classroom lesson, such as:

The 1-minute paper: Students summarize the most significant, surprising, or useful thing they learned in class (added benefit: check-point for faculty to determine if students are “getting” classroom concepts and lessons).

The muddiest point: In a few sentences students write out the least clear or most confusing thing in the day's lesson (added benefit: built-in classroom assessment that shows gaps in students' learning).

Faculty may also try brief assignments that relate to students' reading, such as:

Definitions: Students define key concepts and terminology that come up in their assigned reading(s).

Graphics to Text: Students put the contents of a graph or table in a short paragraph.

Describe the evidence: Students write a short paragraph that provides support for an assertion made in a text (instructor provides the assertion).

What's the big idea?: In a few sentences students write the controlling idea suggested by a series of provided data (instructor provides the data).

These assignments can be written in a matter of minutes, perhaps using 3" x 5" index or notecards to ensure brevity and concision in student responses. Evaluation can be equally speedy if instructors focus on keywords and phrases from the day's lesson, “grading” higher for inclusion of important concepts or terminology and lower for their omission.

You can find these suggestions, along with a growing catalog of ideas for incorporating more writing in a way that's manageable for overwhelmed faculty, on the Lane Community College Writing Programs blog at <http://pln.lanecc.net/metaphrasis/>.

## The Role of Reading

Some fascinating new studies in the neuroscience of reading have recently become available (see Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain*, for example). Interestingly, this research appears to show that reading isn't a “natural” ability, meaning that, unlike the development of spoken language in *homo sapiens*, the human brain is not “naturally” adapted for the cognitive tasks demanded by reading. There is no “reading center” in the brain, in other words, but, rather, the development of human culture seems to have driven our creation of tools and technologies that allow us to understand and manage data in increasingly complex ways, which has in turn encouraged the appropriation of certain brain functions to handle those demands — by reading. Such research may help to explain why some

students struggle so mightily to comprehend and engage complicated texts in productive ways.

Additional salient points related to reading that are suggested by current studies include the fact that fifteen to twenty percent of the human population is affected by learning disabilities such as dyslexia, a number far higher than was once suspected. New literacy studies also emphasize the ideological dimensions of reading, suggesting that texts dealing with issues and ideas that lie beyond students' familiar worldviews may be more cognitively inaccessible to those students than has previously been understood. Other studies highlight the importance of intrinsic and social motivations for reading (see Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives*, for example). Taken together, this research certainly emphasizes the need for in-depth and detailed faculty consideration as well as discussion of the role of reading in higher education. Moreover, as with the importance of developing writing expertise across curricula, it seems clear that conversations about reading must be cross-disciplinary in order to adequately capture the complexity of academic literacy.

### **Writing to Learn *Reading* in the Disciplines**

Following are some activities and exercises that you might draw upon to help students use writing to become more proficient readers in your field:

Pre-reading: Have students write brief responses to discussion questions *prior to* reading.

Have students define new terms and complex disciplinary concepts in writing with examples from text(s).

Ask students to create a flow chart of the logic of an assigned text, or to map its claims and reasoning.

Have students choose a brief passage from a text, paraphrase it, and then write about how the passage is related to the rest of the text (the main idea, significant points, etc).

Thinking consciously about their reading processes, and practicing techniques to increase their facility and fluency in the comprehension of texts, can help students make dramatic leaps in their academic literacy skills and abilities in a relatively short period of time.

### **New Insights of Social Psychology**

In his new book *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*, Timothy D. Wilson describes scientific research and experimentation that suggests the stories we tell ourselves go a long way toward helping, or hindering, our success. Wilson also confirms the effectiveness of some age-old ideas about how to change lives for the better by changing self-stories, such as:

- Story-editing: Techniques to help people change stories about themselves in ways that can lead to long-term behavioral changes.
- Story-prompting: A technique that uses subtle prompts to redirect personal narratives into new or alternative self-stories.
- Do good, be good: Or, as I like to call it, “fake it till you make it,” is a technique in which one actually adopts new behaviors first, altering self-perception based on the kinds of things one does (it sounds strangely circular but can be surprisingly effective).

Faculty can utilize and help students benefit from similar techniques by asking them to write about their own literacy experiences in a way that reorients them to their own reading and writing practices. Students who struggle in college often have self-perceptions and related self-stories that exacerbate their continued struggle rather than easing it. Developing insights in social psychology and methods like those listed above may encourage some students to reframe their identities as college writers in order to help them negotiate the challenges of academic literacy more effectively.

### **Parting Thoughts**

Consider bringing the ideas and practices outlined above together in your own pedagogical approach. Challenge traditional assumptions and models of academic literacy as you build curricula; examine current theory and best practices in writing instruction as you develop activities and scaffold assignments each term; reflect upon the insights and basic principles of WAC in your course development, and ask yourself how — in the context of your classes — they might help increase student comprehension and writing fluency in your discipline; and contemplate the roles that reading and self-stories play in your students’ experiences in your courses. You may be able to incorporate all of these into your teaching more explicitly to excellent effect — and with remarkable results for both you and your students.



# Contributors

**Dan Armstrong** received his Ph.D. from Indiana University and taught at the University of Arizona, Oakland University, and Oregon State University before coming in 1991 to Lane Community College, where he taught composition and film studies until his retirement in 2008. He continues to teach one course a year at Lane.

**Jim Bailey** created and leads the Computer Simulation and Game Development program at Lane Community College where he has taught for seven years. He is the Principal Investigator on an NSF ATE grant on the use of virtual worlds for distance learning. Jim is passionate about the environment, which has led to his becoming a professional nature photographer.

**Dennis Gilbert** teaches physics at Lane and is active in the American Association of Physics Teachers. He has served as faculty union President, Bargaining Chair and in a variety of union and innovation positions in and beyond Lane. He is currently a Faculty Council co-chair.

**Ellis Goldberg** is a professor in the department of Political Science at the University of Washington, specializing in Middle Eastern politics. His publications include *Trade, Reputation and Child Labor in 20th Century Egypt* (Palgrave/MacMillan, 2004), *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East* (editor, Westview Press, 1996) and *Tinker, Taylor and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley Press, 1986).

**Sandy Brown Jensen** is a poet, writer, independent scholar and community college writing teacher. She is the author of a book of poems, *I Saw Us in a Painting* (Walking Bird, 2006). She is currently working on her Certificate in Digital Storytelling from the University of Colorado, Denver. <http://pln.lanecollege.edu/mindonfire/>

**Alise Lamoreaux** began working at Lane Community College in 1976 as a teaching assistant while also taking Lane courses. She observes that she has grown up at Lane and changed alongside it. Lamoreaux now works at the Downtown Center, teaching adults returning to school to complete GED credentials, prepare to pass college placement tests, and improve skills for the workplace.

**Jean LeBlanc** has been published in four previous issues of the Community College Moment. Her books include *At Any Moment* (Backwaters Press) and *Where We Go: Haiku and Tanka Sequences and Other Concise Imaginings* (Modern English Tanka Press). She teaches English and Developmental Reading at Sussex County Community College in Newton, New Jersey.

**Demetri Lontos** has been an ESL teacher at Lane for 22 years and writes poems, plays and short stories as an avocation. He has recently published three poems in the winter edition of *Groundwaters*, and is working on a play for a festival of short plays at the Very Little Theatre, where he is to be found if not at Lane.



**Michael McDonald** did his undergraduate work at “Mr. Jefferson’s university” (The University of Virginia) and earned his Ph. D. from the University of Oregon in 1991. His dissertation is “James Joyce and the Aesthetics of Dissonance.” Before beginning his favorite job at Lane Community College, McDonald taught at the University of Oregon, at Iowa State University, and at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. He enjoys playing musical instruments, including the Turkish cumbus, mindful of Walter Pater’s point that all art strives to emulate the condition of music: fully in the moment, and willing to let that moment go.

**Anne B. McGrail**, Ph.D., with ambitions to be “universally condemn’d, yet universally read,” stays true to her eighteenth century British literature training by practicing the Grub Street arts of hack writing at Lane Community College. Able both “to do” and “to teach,” she also teaches courses in literature and writing, most recently online. In 2013 she will spend her sabbatical working to bring digital humanities to the community college and vice versa.

**Philos Molina** was born in El Salvador and has lived in Oregon since 2005. He is a Lane Community College Enrollment and Financial Aid Advisor.

**Siskanna Naynaha** is the current Composition Coordinator at Lane Community College. She teaches writing, African American literature, and Latina/o literature. Her publications include two forthcoming collections: *On Language and Value: Political Economies of Rhetoric and Composition*, co-edited with Wendy Olson and Victor Villanueva, Utah State University Press; and *General Education and Linked Course Programs*, co-edited with Margot Soven, et al, Stylus Publishing.

**Sarah M. Nemecek** is a movement artist and educator. She enjoys teaching for the Dance Program at Lane Community College. Sarah is interested in research on the dance classroom, and her academic writing as well as her choreographic praxis reflect this passion for her work with students.

**Tamara Pinkas** is Cooperative Education Coordinator for Advanced Technology and Language, Literature and Communications at Lane Community College. She is Representative to the League for Innovation and a member of the Art on Campus Committee. Prior to joining Lane in 1986, Pinkas coordinated the Oregon Imagination Celebration and authored Eugene’s Public Art, a Field Guide.

**Jerry Ross** was born in Buffalo, New York. Influenced by the I Macchiaioli and verismo schools of Italian painting, Ross has won art awards locally and abroad, and recently exhibited at the American Academy in Rome where he was a visiting artist/scholar for three weeks.

**Leslie Rubinstein** has been a part-time instructor at Lane Community College for the past 15 years. She currently teaches basic math, writing and study skills credit classes. And she learns more than she teaches, every day.

**Tim Shaner's** poetry can be found in current issues of online journals *The Claudius App* and *Word for/Word*. He is the co-editor of *Wig*, a magazine devoted to poetry written on the job, and curates *A New Poetry Series* for the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts in Eugene, Oregon. He works as a full-time part-time instructor at Lane Community College and Umpqua Community College.

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**Tana Stuart** grew up in Oregon while spending summers on a 3000-acre ranch in Northern Idaho. As a first generation college student, she is a graduate of Lane Community College and Linfield College in Business Information Systems. She has worked at Lane since 2005 in various departments creating and managing web pages. Currently she is taking art courses and working on a series of books for children in watercolor.

**Kathleen Caprario Ulrich** is a studio artist and educator whose work has been acquired by the Microsoft Collection and exhibited at the Portland Art Museum. She has received artist residencies from the Ucross, Morris Graves and Jentel Foundations. In Summer 2010 she participated in *SWIRL — Story Writing In Remote Locations* — with Aboriginal youth in the Australian Outback.

**Carol Watt, Ph.D.**, has taught writing and literature courses at Lane Community College since 1997, having previously been an English instructor at Oregon State University and the University of Oregon. She joined the fledgling American Indian Languages project in 2000 and has been an active AILP committee member since then.

**Douglas Weiss** is a vegetable gardener, a bicyclist and a baker. He teaches electronic technology for Lane Community College and sometimes dabbles in the art of creative writing.

# Community College Moment: Call for Submissions

*The Community College Moment* invites academic and creative writing, visual art, and other original work relevant to the mission and environment of community colleges. Submissions should reflect scholarship, broadly defined, and should appeal on a local or national level to an educated, but not specialized, audience. Each issue of *The Moment* is thematically organized, all or in part, providing multiple perspectives on a topic. The current theme is Generations. The deadline for submissions is Monday, November 12, 2012.

*The Moment* is open to a variety of submission formats, including essays, research articles, conference papers, sabbatical reports, and reflections on innovative pedagogies (under 5000 words; languages other than English considered), fiction and poetry relevant to our audience, artwork including drawings, paintings, photographs, three-dimensional works or choreographic projects featured through photographs, and musical compositions. Works in progress and excerpted works are also considered, as well as collaborative, web-based and multi-media projects. We invite scholarly book and film reviews (under 1200 words).

## 2013 Theme: Generations

A cycle of the Mayan calendar ends December 21, 2012. The ensuing year may be a good time to contemplate generations and all things generational, from baby boomers to generations X, Y, and Z, from families and generational lines of descent to lines of dissent about general education. Raise or settle questions about the greatest generation or the lost generation. Generate ideas about iterations, editions, or sequels — Web 2.0, James Bond 23, seasons or sporting seasons or the NBA lockout. Contemplate the cyclical or emergent: auroras and power outages attending the latest solar cycle, papal encyclicals, Persian centrifuges, containment, meltdown, melting polar ice, social media, next generation computing, Star Trek: The Next Generation. How long is a generation? According to science blogger Greg Laden, a generation is “25 years, but a generation ago it was 20 years” ([http://scienceblogs.com/gregladen/2011/03/how\\_long\\_is\\_a\\_generation.php](http://scienceblogs.com/gregladen/2011/03/how_long_is_a_generation.php)).

We ask for your submissions by November 12, 2012, the Monday following the 57th U.S. presidential election cycle and 40 days prior to the rebirth of Mayan time.



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Egypt, January 25



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