

Final Project Portfolio

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True Self

I was excited to be going to a new school. Jr. High was going to be better than grammar school, I just knew it. There would be new kids to meet and I was sure I wouldn't be bullied anymore. This would be the first year it opened.

The start of the school year was exciting for me. I met new kids, mostly from band class. We were a large group and had similar interests in stuff like video games and movies. It was hard to learn some of the new rules of the playground, but I managed. Basically, most of them were pretty silly, like the kind of clothes to wear or how to sit. The one I thought would be easy was the no dating rule. Kids in 8th grade were allowed to date, but not 7th grade, which is my grade level. I was popular, but so were most of the kids in my group. Popularity was important to me for the first time. Now things had changed.

Jazz band auditions started, it was the only school activity to join, there wasn't any sports or anything like that. I wanted to play piano, instead of the clarinet, and I thought I'd be the only one. That's when I met Gabby; she played the piano too so I had some competition. I thought she was better than me, but the teacher couldn't decide so she picked both of us.

We had to play together, on the same piano bench. She got the higher octave and I got the lower octave. It was fine, for a while and we became good friends. I'm not sure how it happened, if it was because we were physically close all the time, or maybe it was just who she was. But, I soon began to have feelings for her. Love type feelings. I wasn't used to this and at first I wasn't sure what to do about it.

When Valentine's Day came, you could buy candy grams for people. They were cards with candy attached to them. I thought it would be the perfect thing to give Gabby. I could show her how I felt, without asking her out, since technically I wasn't supposed to date her yet. I could tell that she really liked it and I began to think that maybe she had feelings for me. She even thanked me for the card and candy.

Our friendship continued, but we never talked about anything like dating. I felt fine with waiting till next year, when it was ok. The problem was that rumors began to spread all over the school. The price of popularity I guess. The candy grams were not given in private, so other kids could see what was going on. Even though, nothing really was going on, yet.

Other kids started to tease us, saying things like, "When are you going to get married," and "Gabby and Scott, sitting in a tree..." that schoolyard saying. It didn't really bother me; I was used to things like that. I could tell Gabby wasn't used to it. She didn't like the teasing. At the time, I could only imagine how it made her feel.

I was walking with my friend Chris during lunch and Gabby approached me with two of her friends. We were all fairly high on the popularity chain, I guess she wanted witnesses, because she asked me if I liked her. She wanted it on the record.

"Yes," I replied, very shyly.

"Well," she began, "I don't like you!" She turned around and walked away with her friends. I was stunned; it was the last thing I expected. I thought she would want to be with me, but now I knew that wasn't the case.

"Are you ok?" Chris asked.

“Yeah, I’m ok,” I said. It was the truth, I was ok, but I had a strangely fuzzy feeling. I don’t know how else to describe it. It continued for the rest of the day, like my stomach was full of grass, just strange.

When I went to bed, it really sunk in. I realized that we weren’t going to be together. I was mad! I couldn’t understand what I had done wrong. Things were going great until the rumors at school. We had followed the rules too, those stupid rules that messed everything up. My heart finally broke. She was my first love and it ended in tragedy.

The next day, I decided that things would be different from now on. I wasn’t going to let myself get hurt again. I was going to stay away from girls, avoiding them was the only answer. For the first time, I felt completely alone, it was weird but I felt like I couldn’t trust anyone to get too close to me. Chris was the only exception, though we had been friends since the beginning, so I wasn’t worried about him betraying me.

Looking back to my school days, I really understand what happened to me. From my perspective now, heartbreak just comes with the territory. It still hurts, but my attitude is much different. In Junior High, I believed that Gabby liked me, and she probably did. I thought she probably just didn’t like being teased. I still think that’s probably true. Though, I reacted as if she betrayed me, as if it really mattered. It was so important to me, yet, if such a thing were to happen today I think I’d react in a much more healthy way.

Of course, it’s easy as an adult to use hindsight and realize that shutting out new people in order to avoid pain doesn’t really work. I tried to avoid girls after Jr. High, but I ended up falling in love again. You can’t stop instinct from kicking in. Though I wanted to have a girlfriend, I found that I still had issues

that resulted from Jr. High. I couldn't be a normal person, because I still had fears and insecurities from childhood.

It took me a long time, but I finally realized that my sense of self, my identity, was poisoned. I believed that I was unworthy of love and intimacy, so I avoided it as much as possible. I hated myself and in some way I knew what I was doing the whole time! There was a part of me, my old self that wanted to break free. I didn't really want to make myself a social-outcast; it was the emergency decision to protect myself.

In the end, I was able to bring back my authentic self, my true identity. I left the insults, bad names, and other things those bullies said to me behind. I also realized that kids don't know any better and that many of them didn't realize the pain they caused me. As for Gabby, I forgave her, because I know she was under a lot of pressure. Love is a tricky business and sometimes it doesn't go well. But, you never know how things will turn out next time. That's why it's important to take risks, even if you might get hurt, because emotional pain is temporary. You move on and not long after you feel ok again. It's scary at first, but as they say, it is better to love and have lost, then to have never loved before.

Protest with Extra Cheese

Another economic crash resulted in a large public outcry against Wall Street. People pictured the rich fat cats of Wall Street living the high life while the middle class and the poor faced financial ruin. The Edmond building was the headquarters for one of the largest investment firms in the country. It was also the center of protest, because of a decision to give bonuses to executives instead of using the funds to invest in job creation.

John arrived to work to see protesters covering the entrance of the building. He was recognizable to the crowd. They booed and hissed at him.

“Where’s our bailout?” Someone shouted.

“Why aren’t you lending more money?” A protester shouted.

John ignored the shouts and screams. They were from all walks of life: unemployed workers, public union members, foreclosed homeowners, and everyone else hit hard by the recession. The security guard standing on the inside of the doors greeted John.

“Hi John,” he said, “fun day so far!”

“A bunch of whiners,” John said. He made his way to the elevator and pushed the button. The doors swung open. John took the elevator up a few floors before it stopped. The doors opened and two people entered. A man wore a t-shirt that said, “Down with Capitalism,” and a woman in a nice dress. She had a secretary’s name badge. John did not react to the new passengers. The elevator ascended for a few floors and then stopped. The lights in the elevator went dark for a few moments.

John waited for a moment before deciding to use the emergency phone.

“Hello,” he said. “The elevator is stuck.” The lights came back on.

“Really?” the voice on the other end said, “I’ll send someone to check the elevator.”

John hung up the phone and turned to the man and woman.

“They know there’s a problem,” he said.

“Really?” the other man said, “oh, ah, well is there help on the way?”

“Eventually,” John said.

“Do you think it will be a long time?” the man asked.

“Probably,” John said. He started to feel annoyed, as if talking with the other man was beneath him. John wished that he was alone in the elevator. The woman sensing the tension, decided to introduce herself to the men.

“I’m Mary,” she said, “what are your names?”

“My name is Timothy,” the man said, “But I usually go by Tim. I just came from a protest outside some douchebag’s office.”

Both Mary and Tim looked at John with hopeful eyes. John ignored them for as long as he could, but the silence overruled his desire. “John,” he said.

“Nice to meet you both,” Mary said.

“I’m glad to meet you both too,” Tim said. They again looked at John to catch his response. John ignored them, this time successfully. The dead silence in the elevator was like a game of chicken, who would dare break it? It was Tim this time.

“Who here likes cheese?” Tim blurted out. It was the first thought that came to him, anything he could do to end the awkwardness.

“All types of cheese,” Mary began, “or just certain types?”

Mary welcomed the odd statement. She wanted a conversation to distract her from their plight. “Well, I like pepper jack the most,” Tim said.

“Why specifically?” Mary asked.

“I like the zesty taste,” he said, “and it’s not bland like some other cheeses.”

“I like mozzarella, myself,” she said.

“Yeah, that’s a good one too,” Tim said. “You must like pizza too, huh?”

“Yeah,” she replied, “but I try not to eat too much, goes right to my hips.”

The conversation continued into small talk, about pizza, cheese, tacos, and many other dishes that required some form of cheese. John stood there looking at the emergency phone, thinking about calling for help. Then he thought that if he stared at the floor buttons long enough, then maybe the elevator would go back online. Finally, after trying to ignore what he considered to be a pointless conversation, he snapped.

“Oh for God sakes,” he yelled, “would you two shut up?” John glared with a devilish intensity.

The silence returned. Tim felt scared, as if John was going to murder him for his taste in cheeses. Mary was shocked and angry at the same time. How dare this rude man tell her to shut up? John could see her glaring back at him. Her serious and youthful face announced the coming backlash.

“I’m sorry,” she began, “if you can’t appreciate the subject matter, but the truth is we are stuck here together in this elevator. You might be happy with complete silence, but Tim and I are not. It is obvious to me that Tim feels uncomfortable being in here and talking seems to be helping. I’d prefer to pass the time quickly and talking is the best way to do it. So, you can stand there all you like and be silent if you want, but you aren’t going to shut us up!”

John backed down and said nothing. He turned his attention to the elevator doors, trying to force open the elevator doors using his mind, with no luck. “If only I had mental powers,” he thought.

“So, Tim,” Mary began, “have you ever been to Mont Pier? It’s a really good restaurant.”

“No I haven’t,” he said.

“They have some of the best pizza there,” She said. “It’s also relatively healthier than fast food pizza.”

“Ah,” Tim said, “you go there often?”

“When I can afford to,” she said.

“Hey, why don’t you two go there together,” John chimed in.

“Ignore him,” Mary said, “he’s just jealous that we are getting along so well Tim.”

“Ha, ha,” Tim said, “yeah he probably isn’t used to talking to pretty women!”

“You think I’m pretty?” Mary smiled.

“Oh brother,” John thought.

“Sure do,” Tim said. “In fact, I’d much rather be dining with you at Mont Pier, then stuck in here with that bozo.”

John saw his situation moving from irritating to intolerable. He walked towards the doors and began to try and pry them apart in desperation. “Maybe if I try hard enough, I can escape from you two,” John said.

As if by some unforeseen magical force, the elevator began to move upward at a slow pace. It finally reached the 12th floor and the doors opened. John stepped out of the elevator and turned around.

“Thank god,” he began, “no more stupid conversations about cheese! Good god! You two are the most annoying and stupid people I have ever met! Why, if I had been stuck in there with any longer, I’d--” Tim pushed the “door close” button. The doors slowly closed, hiding the disdain on their faces. The elevator slowly moved downward.

“So, how about dinner tonight,” Mary said, “at Mont Pier?”

“Sounds like a date!” Tim replied.

John walked to his office. Inside was a mess. His secretary Dave was in tears. There was grated cheese all over the office.

My First Car

An old 81' Honda Civic,
A great car despite the lack of luxury,
It took me anywhere I wanted to go,
It was free for me, except the gas,
A gift from a deceased grandfather,
He always wanted me to have it.

When I was ready to drive,
My new freedom took me everywhere,
School, work, hanging out, I got to see my local world,
It was hard to steer, poor air conditioning, raggedy seats,
But it was mine, and I could go anywhere I wanted.

I did not have to worry about any payments, no loans,
Automatic transmission, the only part that was automatic,
But for a young man it was everything that it needed to be,
And freedom was freedom all the same.

Horrible Prohibition

In America at one time,
Controversy abound,
In which removed all wine,
Neither booze nor alcohol could be found.

There was a mountain of troubles,
The people called out for their bottles!

It was the law of the land,
Morality was being forced,
But then somewhere music by the band,
Was heard in secret, the speak easies, were in force.

There was a mountain of troubles,
The people called out for their bottles!

Soon word spread about a place,
Where one could find,
Some drink to put in his face,
That might put him in a bind.

There was a mountain of troubles,
The people called out for their bottles!

The police were nigh,
To end the speak easies work,
Ensuring the towns were dry,
And find where all the drinks lurk.

There was a mountain of troubles,
The people called out for their bottles!

The morality law had won,

And the people lost their drink,
Until the ban was gone,
They no longer had to think.

There was a mountain of troubles,
The people called out for their bottles!

Dreaming of a Sestina

After hours, in my lab looking for answers,
To the questions I have long sought,
I found myself drifting to sleep,
Quite slowly though I struggle to stay awake,
My attempts were failing,
I begin to dream of many wondrous things.

I could imagine many impossible things,
Discovering a new law of physics with many answers,
Learning every possible language but failing,
Being awarded the Nobel peace I sought,
Eating all the pizza I could ever want while awake,
A beautiful woman who desires with me to sleep.

All the while that we then sleep,
I soon began to drift away to other things,
Alone again without yet being awake,
And soon a rabbit crosses my path looking for answers,
With black eyes that examine me, like it was I he sought,

And had now found me without failing.

I try to escape my new cage, yet failing,
The rabbit in a lab coat put me into sleep,
Testing for answers to questions they sought,
And I, who is forced to their tests, and other things,
Many terrible experiences I face and giving my answers,
The mascara and lipstick upon my skin, trying to awake.

Still struggling with my attempts to be awake,
And alas such attempts are failing,
My skin becomes as plain as dirt without any answers,
With grass and trees growing out of it while I sleep,
A thriving town filled with many things,
I am the mountain guard near a valley that is sought.

The large castle with stone not sought,
I am a lord with riches beyond compare while not awake,
My knights are loyal and fight for many things,
The lovely maidens seek my courtship while failing,
I am handsome, strong, and brave while I sleep,
Yet, I see the dragon, perhaps it has the answer!

After all the many things, I finally awake,
Knowing now the answers I had not sought,
Perhaps now I shall start failing to sleep!

Reflective Essay

In the past I have focused mostly on writing fiction, but this course has challenged me to try new genres. I did enjoy writing a non-fiction essay using creative writing skills. However, the poem assignment was the most fun for me, because it allowed me to write in a format that I never use. Through this class I feel that I have improved my writing.

The easiest genre to write in was fiction, because I have the most experience in that area. I have been writing fiction for a long time and when I started my career in literature I focused on fiction. Expressing imagination is so much fun when creating characters and plots. Since I tend to stick to science-fiction, I can create my own worlds anyway I desire.

The most difficult part of the revision process, for me, is peer reviews. While I do appreciate opinions from readers, it can be difficult to decide what advice to accept or reject. Usually, the suggestions are useful and help me improve my work. Another reason peer reviews can be challenging is that it is easy to take criticisms too seriously. That is why a writer must carefully weigh what is said to determine its validity. We all have opinions and sometimes we disagree. Not everyone will like what you write and you can't please everyone.

I believe that my strength in creative writing is dialogue. When I create interaction for characters, I try to write realistic dialogue. I picture the characters in my mind and imagine what they say to each other. In some ways, my theatre training helps me, because I can become the characters and act like they do in my mind. It's like a movie that is showing me what the action would look and sound like.

With regards to weakness, I think I have a difficult time determining how much detail to put into a story. I often like to put in details that may be unnecessary. Consistency is also sometimes an issue with me. If I use themes that involve weather, for example, I need to make sure that I sustain it throughout the story. It wouldn't make sense if the story begins in a warm climate and ends in a cold climate if the story takes place within a week and in the same location. This is part of the reason I do a lot of revisions.

In order to work on these weaknesses, peer reviews would help me improve. Having other readers give insights or comments can help reveal inconsistencies or themes that are not fluid throughout my story. I also think that I need to work more on having a clearer basic structure, such as an outline, for the story before I begin writing. It helps having a basic idea of what happens in the story before beginning the writing process.

I feel that my writing has improved thanks to this class. I can listen better to criticism and can value reader input more now. I also enjoy poetry more as well as creative non-fiction. I believe the experience from this class will help me in my future endeavors.