

VOICES

from the

Writing Center

Fall 2010

**A celebration of writing done in and around
the University of Iowa Writing Center**

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PART I

Art Inspires Writing; an Invitation to Write

This semester, the Writing Center has the pleasure of hosting an art gallery showing of paintings by Colleen McCarty. Her exhibit is titled “Reality and the Abstract.” Here’s what Colleen says about how she hopes her art will inspire writers:

I hope to inspire writers to move in new directions. I support the pursuit of the indefinable and unknown. I welcome writing outside the borders of your comfort. Allow ideas to thrive within and outside of your perceived reality and share your quizzical nature with readers. There is beauty in abstract because there will always be elements within that are unknown. An English teacher once told me to show instead of telling the reader everything. Give them space to imagine and figure. The simplest line can be the beginning to the utmost complexity and the grounds for all the layers to come.

We invite you to write in response to Colleen’s art. You might choose a favorite painting and write about why it appeals to you. Or consider the effect of all the paintings hanging together and write about your thoughts and feelings when you’re around the art. Spend just a few minutes reflecting on whatever it is about these paintings that intrigues you. You could write your response like a letter to Ms. McCarty. Or you could write a poem or a short piece of fiction or an essay reflection. Give a copy of your writing to your tutor or to someone at the front desk; we will share your responses with Colleen.



McCarty with her painting *Translations* at the October 22 opening event.

Devin Van Dyke responds to *Translations*.

Color fills space bounded by big bold lines announcing their intentions to crash into each other and encompass the colors foothold upon the canvas. The black boundaries are dominant by virtue of their lack of color and by their absence of anything but the plainness of their constant darkness and their strong statement of purpose. They say, “I am here, you must accommodate me.” The colors are hemmed in, split up and divided and forced to exist in subservience to their masters. Blackness in its lack of color, lack of creativity rules the colors by its association to nothing but itself. One group dominates the other and yet they have something in common—they stare back.

The eyes of strangers look into the void created by the constantly changing image—they feel conspicuous, watched by the noisy collision of the boundary and the color. The image seems to move as eyes try to find a center—the eyes follow the wide encircling masters and the movement created is the painting in motion.

The shade of the master never changes—the hue of the slave always does. One is free, the other is master. And each one believes he is master, neither know there is no master.

Jessie Meyer responds to *Blues Acrylic*

I saw the black and whites usually. Stripes were always a clear clean pattern. Sometimes when the girl stood on a bridge she wanted to drown.

The water rushed with a roar, and she would sometimes imagine it tidal. And the tones, on the edges, would fade into something more cross hatch.

She slowed often.

At these times she imagined she could fly. Or that she already was.

Because she could see the patchwork of an aerial view from her window seat. And she always wondered what her mother was doing at these moments, and if she could see her equally as well.

They walked together.

The water moving beneath the streets, and the sound of that. It would, wash out all of the sediment.

He saw some people were tone deaf. His assumption was that the sediment had gone on and clogged up their ears.

He also considered the possibility that it was a matter of wavelengths. Certain eardrums perhaps lent themselves to a higher or a lower pitch. This receptiveness, a matter of genetics possibly, or circumstance. He dismissed the possibility as irrelevant.

She always considered the drowning, but it was a playful image. The distance was safe usually, the impact would likely be gentle. And while she slowed on the bridges, she very rarely paused when the bridges had been poured of concrete.

The slowing was not noticeable from the perspective of a passerby, I did see it play out though, when I was there.

Some others would have seen, but it is not everyone to stay to the bridge. There is serenity in standing still—peace is to depend on a variable. My favorite of which was X Only because of the widespread assumption that it tended to mark the spot.

I just thought the groundwater and the sky were both blue, and that they were reflective.

When they sparkled they shone like the snow, and like the steel rails of the bridge.

When either of them were too outward, or when the tide came in super destructive, walls were prone to crumble.

Had my bridge been wooden, or had the give of something older, had the water beneath been rocky and deep, set on a jagged cliff, she would have released herself, I think.

The ones who only saw shades of grey would stop on the bridge alone.

The grey would consume them, blinding and brilliant. As compared to the blue.

Jusielyn Spading responds to McCarty's exhibit

Abstract painting, for me, is like a labyrinth challenging me to explore places unknown to me.

Abstract painting is like a dream, going to places, people, and events of my subconscious mind.

Abstract painting is like a vision, bringing me to the future of my life that I want to achieve and fulfill.

Abstract painting is like a hollow space in me, knowing what is yet unknown. It's like a space that needs to be filled up. A line in my way that needs to be straightened up. A shape that needs to be brightened up with colors.

Abstract painting is like our endless God. He gives us a creation that is concrete yet so complex. We reach to be near, yet we are tossed by the waves of life.

Abstract painting is like me. I can be so complex and yet so plain. I can be so colorful yet so dull. I can be whatever I want as time goes by.

Yang Liu responds to McCarty's exhibit

There is an ignorant pigeon
who is tired of living in the sky.

He starts to hate its origin
and wants to start a new life.

His wings touch this rich soil
and transforms as time goes by.

One day he finds he himself can walk,
just like tiger, cattle and fox.

He loves to live in this new land
where the sun always shines.

In winter,
he remembers he has to migrate
yet he can no longer fly.

All day he feels cold and hungry
but no one could help in his sight.

At last in a lonely mountain
the ignorant pigeon dies.

PART II

A Tribute to Lou Kelly,

Writing Lab Director 1965-1989

The essays and letters that follow were composed for Dr. Kelly by her former tutors from the Writing Lab (now the Writing Center). The tutors gathered in Iowa City for the NonfictionNow conference in fall 2010 and presented their tribute to Lou.

November 5, 2010

Lou—

As these essays attest, you have taught so many so much. This collection represents only a fraction of the students (both grad students who tutored and grads and undergrads who were tutored) who have learned from you. You have influenced how we teach, how we write, even how we feel about ourselves, and how we relate to the world. You invited us to learn and care so much, that here we offer you an invitation to read what we

wrote when we talked on paper about what we remembered from our time in the Writing Lab.

Second invitation to write: A request for advice

You've already spent a lot of time in school—about 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, 9 months a year for 12 years or more.

You've probably had between 20 and 30 different teachers.

Given that much experience, we think you can tell us something that will help us become better teachers. In your opinion, what

is a good teacher? What will we have to do to fulfill your

expectations? Answer these questions by describing the work of one of your favorite teachers. Or tell us about one very

special teacher you would like to use as a model. Think of this

writing as talking on paper. We're just asking you to share

what you know about teaching with the people who'll be

working with you in the Lab this semester.

As that old ditto invitation to write asked our lab students to tell us of a model teacher, we used it to talk on paper about our model teacher.

Don Arenz

Don worked in the Writing Lab 1983-1986.

What do I remember when I think back to the Iowa writing lab?

I remember the plants and the home made bread.

I remember the round tables and Lou's instruction to lift them rather than slide them across the floor, out of consideration for both.

I remember Fridays off--a civilized gesture long overdue for a revival.

I remember Lou's campaign button in the 1984 presidential campaign: Geraldine and what's his name.

I remember Allison's post it notes, everywhere, organizing the lab just fine without electronic dependence.

I remember Lou's favorite word processor, her always sharpened no. 2 pencil.

And the students, like the underprepared young basketball player who had to be reminded to begin sentences with a capital letter, and the middle aged engineer from Japan, often frustrated when the English language did not seem to accommodate the complexity or subtlety of his native tongue.

All, laboring in the lab.

Ken Smith

Ken worked in the Writing Lab 1985-1989.

I remember sitting in 110 EPB and hearing that first invitation to write, Lou's words, her voice, recognizing it all as something otherwise. Those were not the terms upon which school operated, and that was not the voice of school, university or otherwise. As far as writing went, I was

accustomed to doing well enough in school, on school's terms, and I was comfortable with that and likely took some of my sense of self from the ways I could make school happy with me (and veering away, if possible, from the ways I could not). This was something different; I was invited to operate on terms of my own choosing, and I could feel that some trust would be required. I would have to trust those words, that voice, that person completely comfortable with what she was doing there in that large, varied, as yet unfamiliar room. But wasn't this still school? I still wanted to do well, I could tell, I could feel it. It felt risky to accept the invitation, to choose my own terms, to talk on paper in the way I was invited to do. But writing was bigger than school, wasn't it? Once I got a ways into that first invitation to talk on paper, I could feel that the writing, and the possibility of this interesting person who asked to be the audience, was slowly and increasingly larger than the little, safe habits that school had in mind. That first invitation suggested something other than school, and writing when it went well suggested something bigger than school. This was interesting, and it still is. Looking back, I feel as though I was

humanely put off guard during that first hour of writing in the Lab.

When a Lab teacher had enough experience, Lou would invite him or her deeper into the work. More hours with students, more chances to share the responsibility of helping recreate the curriculum over the course of a few years. What was this developmental course, 10:89, going to be? How would this summer program work? What readings, what writing assignments? What new lab materials? If Lou didn't shake you off as one of the unserious ones or as somebody who just never figured it all out, then she invited you to come forward for more of the thinking and shaping work of the lab. Bring in readings, draft new class materials, get Lou's response to what you've assembled. This would lead, sooner or later, to sitting at a table as Lou worked over a draft with pencil and eraser. Revising with Lou or watching her revise was one of the key experiences of graduate school—only a few faculty knew how powerful it was to show the finest grains of the work of writing by revising with or in front of graduate students. Showing the differences it could mean to move a word or phrase, to collapse or expand a sentence, to trouble over the rhythm as it would be

reshaped by one comma more or less. This was the closest of close reading, with the urgency of making the teaching materials speak to the students we would see the next day. Lou and only a couple of other teachers helped me see the sentence as an utterly malleable, utterly plastic, elastic thing. Can you become a writer until you've learned that about the sentence? Probably not.

Look at all those eraser crumbs, look at the pencils blunted through use, look at the clock turning as we attend to the questions of our teaching and our students' writing. We were invited to take teaching as seriously as we could manage, and Lou would take us as seriously as we were able to take ourselves, and more so.

A university is, of course, corrupt, and from time to time the indifference to mission or the convenience of shortcuts or the ignorance of powerful others on the campus would intrude, and Lou would be, if necessary, fierce in her defense of the work of the Lab. That seems like the right word now, at a distance of these many years: fierce.

Every season, Lou moved the posters and decorations and arrangements that graced the Lab, replaced some and adjusted others. As retirement approached, Lou set about perfecting the physical space of the Lab, I seem to recall—ordering new posters and art, enriching it one more time with new pieces, meaning to leave it at its best to those who would follow.

She knew that somebody, sooner or later, who remove the largest painting in the Lab, the young woman standing in her purple jeans and indifferent to the absence of her own shirt, so she honored the art and the artist by finding a place for that painting somewhere else herself, I believe. But for years that portrait had been one of many clues to new students that 110 EPB was not an ordinary classroom and would not call for their ordinary ways of doing school.

When I became director of a writing center at Rutgers a few years later, Lou bought and donated a smashing art poster to get that same work of making the place beautiful underway in the miserable attic space that Rutgers allotted to the center. Nudged in the right direction one more time, I added other posters and somehow talked the university into new tables and

chairs, and into adding a foot of sound insulation between our room and the film room next door. I had an example in my mind and a standard to try to live up to.

There is something extravagant in many of the most interesting people, I sometimes think. Lou was extravagant in her devotion to the writing of undergraduates and the developing teaching of her graduate students. I think that is why many of us chipped in to buy her a hot air balloon flight upon her retirement—we sensed that you should try to repay her kind of extravagance with something that symbolized extravagance. Something big for a big spirit, something elevated for a person who knew how to see the true scale of things, some grand motion for the person who had moved us so well.

Three cheers, three cheers, three cheers, and thank you, thank you, Lou.

April Lidinsky

April worked in the Writing Lab 1988-1989.

October 27, 2010, South Bend, Indiana

I took Lou's course in 1988 and worked in the Lab 1988-1989, in the year between graduating from the University of Iowa with a bachelor's degree in English, and heading off to Rutgers for my Ph.D. in literature. I took Ken Smith with me when I left (though I married him first!). Sorry about that, but it has worked out wonderfully for me!

Voices from the Writing Lab

Ah, "talking on paper" – it takes me back. But, really, it's something I've been doing ever since my time in the Lab course, and something I teach students in every single one of my undergrad and graduate classes in women's studies or literature at Indiana University South Bend.

When I met you, Lou, I'm pretty sure I was shell-shocked from an intense senior year at the U of Iowa in 1988. I had just written what felt like a dozen literary papers on Big Ideas that were Blowing my Mind, and had just fallen in love with Ken Smith. And had suddenly changed my plans to

“blow this popsicle stand” (Iowa City) and head to Seattle with a bunch of my English major friends. Despite the harassment I received from friends who thought I was “caving” just to “be with a guy,” I felt certain about my decision to stay an extra year in Iowa City, to move in with Ken, and ...well, I wasn’t certain of anything beyond that.

I already had two part-time jobs before heading into the Writing Lab – a daytime job babysitting for professors’ kids, and a nighttime job copy-editing and headline-writing for *The Daily Iowan*. I knew I wanted to apply for graduate school in the coming year. I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to write. I didn’t know how to make any of that happen.

Ken, however, had had a life-changing experience in the Writing Lab, and had introduced me to you, Lou, and I was smitten! How could I not want to be in the presence of such a funny, warm, smart, visionary person – especially one who didn’t put up with laziness or crap, and who I could see would bring out the best in me, even if I had to really, really work for it?

So, I rearranged my babysitting schedule, and, with nerves a-flutter (Who was *I* to think I could help anyone else

learn to write?), I signed up for the Lab pedagogy class. I felt like the little kid in the room – or maybe the mascot. Everyone knew Ken already, and I felt strange to be entering “his” territory, especially since I had been used to being “someone” among my peers. I was humbled, uncomfortable, and very worried.

That feeling didn’t linger, though, in the warm but industrious atmosphere in the Lab – a mix of cozy brick, retro posters (retro even then!), spider plants (if memory serves), and writing bodies everywhere. During our first “talking on paper” session in class, I felt the spirit of democracy settle over us. We were all simply people – thinkers, trying to gather our ideas, trying to get them down, trying to let go of the internal editor (still fighting her now, I gotta say) that nags us to get it RIGHT instead of allowing ourselves to get it DOWN, first). In those sessions, I learned about the importance of practicing fluency. I learned how humbling and liberating it is to think on paper. It really did feel like an “invitation,” and not an assignment or challenge. What a lovely thought – to be “invited” to think! This principle informs all the courses I teach, now. In class, and in every assignment, I privilege

frequent writing and fluency over “saving up” for a few huge assignments. I talk about what I’ve learned from writing this way, and invite them to grow as thinkers and writers through this method. It works. I am in the midst of thinking-on-paper my way through a new research project this week, actually. (It’s on bicycling women in the 1890s ... you’d get a kick out of these outrageous women I’m researching, Lou!)

But I digress. Back to the Writing Lab, with all of us hunched over our paper, scribbling away. What I learned about writing and teaching in that space, crucially, is about the power of an engaged reader. A true listener. As in Rogerian therapy (whoa – who knew that would pop up here? A surprise to me!), the student’s growth doesn’t come from the cleverness of the teacher’s lecture, but from the teacher’s skill of listening closely, of saying back what she hears, of asking “tell me more” questions that will allow the student/writer to push beyond the obvious, to make the challenging connection, to move down a new path. In your class, with you as a model, I began to think I *could* become a teacher, not because I envisioned myself becoming a stupendous expert, but because I knew I enjoyed listening and learning and drawing others out.

I may not have had your bear claw ring, but I could imagine asking focused questions that were strong and forceful.

Also, I learned in the Lab that good teachers are always devoted students, always practicing the methods they invite their students to try, always learning along with students in the pursuit of sharpening ideas, clarifying the elusive point that could be captured in a cliché, but that deserves something better. In that atmosphere, I grew less intimidated by the students who were older and had more experiences of all kinds than I did as a 22-year-old. I learned from your questions to me (I can picture your handwriting, now, in the margins!) how to ask similarly engaging and respectful and challenging questions. I learned how to ask those questions of myself, too, by the way, even when I wasn’t writing. (Did I mention that like Ken, I, too, found my time in the Writing Lab life-changing?)

The students I tutored in the Lab are a bit of a blur: panicked graduate students wanting one more reader for a thesis in a field I could not possibly understand; international students so grateful to learn about patterns of error they could eliminate systematically; last-minute students who found out

the hard way that we were not a one-stop-fix-it shop. I learned how to listen kindly, to hold my ground with confidence in my methods, and to invite other people to take themselves as seriously as I was taking them. I cannot imagine any more important lessons for teaching, or for life.

When I finally finished my own Ph.D., in 2000, I returned home from my thesis defense at Rutgers, in New Jersey, and my older daughter, Grace, who was then a kindergartner, asked me a question that has become a favorite family story: “You’re not a *real* doctor now, are you, Mom? Aren’t you just a doctor of *sentences*?” I laughed, of course, but also found truth in her probing question (maybe she absorbed your wisdom through my breast milk?). After all, what could be better than to be a doctor of sentences? I love being a doctor of grammar, of clarity, of the vehicle that allows us to give shape to inchoate thoughts that mean so much, but that are so rarely shared in the way that honors their intent, or gives them life and use. I learned that from you, Lou. You are the best sort of fairy godmother one could hope for: a generous, brilliant, kind, tough, loving teacher. Thank you. I hope every cup of coffee you drink is just as hot as you like it to be.

Anne Lattimore Price

Anne worked in the Writing Lab between 1983 and 1993

September 23, 2010

Talking on Paper

For Lou Kelly

Lou, you invite me to say what is on my mind, right now, for the next thirty or forty minutes, using my own language and my own way of talking. Haven’t I had this educated out of me by now? Well, no, I guess I haven’t. I used to keep a journal but stopped when I got tired of hearing my own voice. And I used to write English major papers but stopped when I got to where I couldn’t read English major books anymore. Everything started to seem the same, and predictable, or tedious. But I still manage to think of myself as a writer—if I just don’t happen to be writing right now. This is because I write when I need to process my thoughts. It is an activity that helps my mind realize what it experiences. I started out by thinking I wanted to write children’s books, like my great aunt Eleanor. Then I thought I’d be a poet. When people would tell me that not everyone in the room would

become a poet, I thought I was the one who would. But I didn't. At least, I didn't become a poet with a capital P. But still I find that when my mind is processing something, a poem will come out, and it will help me move on to something else. Trouble is, it will be so personal that I couldn't possibly share it with anyone. Do you know that I got through all those years of teaching writing without knowing the difference between "that" and "which." Worse, yet, I had no idea how to use a semicolon. I just knew what I needed to know—that you don't need semicolons because there is always something else you can use instead, and using semicolons is just something that is likely to get you in trouble with some English teacher. But then I learned to be an editor, so I had to get on top of those little gems. And I actually learned that using a semicolon could be a good thing. I have a comfort level with the English language that I have come to take for granted. I don't struggle with it the way I did when I was a freshman and couldn't understand why some people wrote quickly and said it was all bullshit and got an A on their paper, while I pondered and typed all night long and misspelled the same words three different ways without noticing and got back something that

was covered in red ink. I knew that red ink was not a good thing. And I knew the professor who looked me in the eye and said well basically my problem was that I just couldn't write had something wrong with him. I wasn't sure what it was, but I knew it before he ever said that. He almost got me to cry—probably what he was after. But it wasn't until years later that I realized that was what was wrong with him; it didn't have to be more than that to "count." He was a rather self-congratulatory sort of person to begin with and I just had a bad feeling about him that I couldn't put my finger on. That was my freshman year in a self-congratulatory sort of college that I went to because I wanted a conventional education after I had spent high school in a progressive boarding school where learning by and through experience was both subscribed to and offered. So, anyway, that experience I had as a freshman is something I have carried with me. It was not an isolated experience—I got rather used to being told that my spelling was "atrocious." But some people managed to say it more nicely than others, and I gradually learned to think of spelling as part of the craft of writing, the craft that I thought was to be my craft. I spent three years as an English major in EPB being

told I spelled badly, and I never crossed the threshold of 110 EPB. I didn't think of "help" as being something I wanted to get. When I did enter the Writing Lab, it was because I wanted to teach. I had already taken Approaches to Teaching College Writing, but no one was offering me the chance to put into practice what I was learning. I wanted to be a TA, and thought learning to teach in the Writing Lab would be a step in that direction. I came to think that being a TA was one of the mistakes I made that kept me from finishing my PhD. But I never ever have thought anything I did in the writing lab was that kind of mistake. I made mistakes there, of course, but not that kind. By the time I got to 110 EPB, and to the world you created there, I knew I didn't want to be using red ink. I had gotten that bit figured out easily enough. But I didn't know what to do instead. It's the what to do instead that I learned from you, and that I learned from people who learned from you. You know musicians and actors do this thing on their resumes where they list who their teachers were, and who the teachers of their teachers were, and this is a meaningful part of their resume to the people who live in that world. If I would write my resume in that way, there would be: and she studied

with Lou Kelly. And she studied with Jan Cooper who studied with Lou Kelly, and she worked with Sandra Bolton who studied with Lou Kelly, and so on. And people in the know would know that this meant a tremendous amount. The what to do instead of using red ink is not to use purple ink to do the same thing. It is to use your voice as a reader to say an encouraging word. It is to convey to the student writer that if there are these little problems, these are things that the writer can get control over. It is not that the spelling is atrocious, it is that you can make a little list of the words you are going to get control over, and then get control over them. I'm not trying to make this sound like a control freak thing. I'm trying to say that the student has the power to learn to go after those surface errors---after they have learned to say what is on their minds. When I was a freshman, no one was trying to help me say what was on my mind. What you brought to so many people in so many ways is the concept that learning to say what is on your mind is at the heart of learning. If you focus on that, the writing will come. And that's when I become a writer—when I need to say what is on my mind. The rest of the time, when I'm not a writer, I can be a teacher, or I can be an editor, or I

can be a customer service rep. But it all comes down to listening to what someone is trying to say. Communication. And you shaped a world in which that could happen and you made your world available to the freshman writers that didn't know what college was, and you made it available to the graduate students who wanted to really teach people what they could do with their writing and not just spend their time marking and grading with some sense that this was maintaining standards. No one maintained a higher standard than you. It just wasn't a standard that allowed a teacher to say: well basically your problem is that you can't write. It was a standard that insisted that basically what you can do is sit down and do some writing!

Thank you for all of that, and more.

Annie Lattimore Price

Doug Hesse

Doug worked in the Writing Lab 1979-80 and 1983-86.

Dear Lou,

I'm going to talk on paper by talking to you. It's been awhile.

Back in 1979 I was finishing a masters in expository writing and decided it might actually be nice to have a job afterwards, and it might make sense to teach, since that's what I'd been studying. I didn't have any teaching experience, so I came to you in the fall and basically threw myself on your mercy. You were as skeptical as I'd have been, but you agreed to it, and so I taught that spring at the same time I was doing an independent study with you.

I'm sure I wouldn't have gotten my first teaching job, at a little college in Ohio, without that experience. Three years later I came back to Iowa for the PhD, and I asked for part of my assistantship to be in the Writing Lab. You took me back again.

I'm living in Denver now, and I'm writing late on an October Sunday afternoon. Out my kitchen window is a

yellow tree holding on to its last crabapples. It's snowing in the mountains, the last gasp of fall. I remember the trees outside the Writing Lab, the shadowed green that made it such a good place to teach, to write, and, I hope, to learn. At least I know it was a good place for me to learn.

I sometimes wonder how things would have turned out for me otherwise. I went on to teach 20 years at Illinois State. I edited *Writing Program Administration* four years, its articles quite often less interesting than the stuff in *Voices*, then became president of WPA. Was chair of CCCC. Lost an election for president of NCTE.

I came to Denver four years ago to start a new writing program. Incredible as it sounds, this place had never had a writing center before, so I started one. I hired a center for the director, and I watch her work with the new graduate student tutors (Eliana has me calling them "consultants") each fall. They all are so eager to fix student writing, to point out and correct all their errors, to give them advice about topic sentences, and she has to explain that's not the way it works. I keep telling her I'd like to work some shifts in the center, but I

seem perpetually able to come up with an Important Reason that I can't commit for a even an hour or two per quarter.

For the past couple of years I've had the pleasure of organizing national creative nonfiction contests for high school and college students, for NCTE. Writing contests stick in my craw, but a foundation gives thousands of dollars to winners and finalists. As important, it gives an excuse for teachers, especially in high schools, to let students write memoirs or personal essays or profiles or travel pieces or even some investigative journalism. As certain anti-education forces (they, of course, would see themselves just the opposite) have managed to insist on practical, quantifiable skills, there's little room for the impractical writing of inscribing yourself into the world and figuring yourself out along the way. Each year, then, I read hundreds of pieces, some of it not so great, some of it stunning.

What else? I have three kids, all in their twenties. One writes for the *Washington Post*. One writes for NPR. One is a professional cellist. I sing in the Colorado Symphony chorus, and I like to hike in the mountains. We have a small brick bungalow in an old part of Denver where half our neighbors

are Mexican Americans, and hardly a weekend goes by without seeing a piñata hanging in someone's backyard. We have a big apple tree in the backyard, and we planted a plum tree in the front. The plum was laden this year, and I found myself awfully protective of them, scheming about ways to keep kids' hands off the tree. Then I figured if you're going to plant a fruit tree in a front yard, you either were stupid or you knew exactly what you were doing, and what you were doing was expecting kids to pick them. I chose to imagine I'm not stupid.

It's been nice talking to you again, Lou. I'm tempted to look back and find the places where you'd say tell me more or even tell me a story. But I'll just keep them until I see you.

Nan Hackett

Nan worked in the Writing Lab 1981-1984

What I learned from Lou Kelly—

Be a human more than an English teacher when responding to student papers. I don't want to bash English teachers while I talk on paper. In fact, I stopped going to

Writing Centers conferences because I couldn't take the English-teacher-bashing, since the speakers particularly focused on the professors who require Milton and I am teaching *Paradise Lost* right now. Although Concordia University, St. Paul, the small, private institution where I teach, has a Writing Center because I and the ESL teacher decided one day to start one despite no budget and no bureaucratic support, I defected from writing instruction into British literature. If there is a war between those who love literature and those who nurture students, I think I do both, partly because I taught in the Writing Lab.

For example, I have a stack of papers on 16th and 17th poetry sitting on my desk right now. I really want to know what my students think of Donne, Spenser and Herbert. I want their hearts to enlarge at the beauty they see and their minds to grow with the thoughts they decipher and those they develop because of what they deciphered. Even if I ask them to write in that de-personalized, all-knowing academic voice, I will respond as a person to their astonishment, their confusion, their confession as well as to their punctuation, structure and content. That was a big change that Lou Kelly wrought.

Don't be afraid to make students cry. I don't mean crying at the grades they receive. I remember one of the first students with whom I worked was a football player from the Chicago projects. He was really tough. His first paper (what he did well) consisted of a list of the high school games he won and how many yards he carried the ball in each game. When I suggested that he write a letter to his grandmother (his father was in prison for killing his mother so his grandmother was his primary care-giver) describing what his life was like in college, he was eager. When he read the part about how much he missed his grandmother to me, he cried and I, too, responded to the power of his writing. I hope he sent it and she cried, too. There is so much power in writing and students should learn that they can wield it as well as feel it. It is, of course, the power to do other things than make people cry.

Think while you write and write while you think.

That is what I am doing right now as I talk to all of you, not just Lou. I always knew that I learned a lot from Lou, but as I reread this, I realize how much of it I learned from the students with whom I worked. They taught me so much—and that's what Lou wanted—for me to listen to them and learn from

them and for them to listen to me and learn from me. What power that is. Thank you, Lou.

Sandra Bolton

Sandra worked in the Writing Lab 1986-1990

Reflecting on my current teaching philosophy and practice has made me realize the debt I owe to Lou, through taking her class and spending semesters in the Writing Lab under her tutelage. Lou respected the student writers who walked through the door, and this respect took many forms.

Writing is a developmental process, Lou taught us. Helping students develop as writers is more important than any individual course papers students might work on. Developing writers draw on their own experiences and can be encouraged to continue if they have interested readers, as Lou demonstrated to us, with the “tell me more” questions we posed to students when responding to their writing and having short conferences with them. Responding to students' ideas is

important to developing writers, Lou said, especially to those students for whom English is not their first language. Too often, before coming to the Lab, responses for these students concentrated on grammar and mechanical correctness. I saw students' confidence build and their progress as writers develop over the semesters of work in the Writing Lab, and I hoped to replicate this in my own writing classroom.

My Kirkwood writing classes, meeting at night, are filled with nontraditional students whose varied writing development has depended primarily upon their interest and past writing experiences. Building on these, student writing in the course draws on their personal experiences, and students and I respond to the ideas often with questions, showing the writers we are engaged readers and often wanting to "know more" about their topic. To support the idea that writing is a process, each student keeps a collection of their writings in a portfolio, some of which will be handed in for grading in a final "showcase" portfolio at the end of the semester.

Throughout the course students write a reflection for each paper, including the processes they used, the strengths they see and what they learned from writing the paper. At some point

in the class, I put Bernard Malamud's quotation on the board: "Writing is never finished; it is only abandoned."

The course is structured so that students write solely from their personal experience in the beginning, then as the course progresses they begin to use outside sources, which culminates in a final I-Search paper at the end. The English Department requires that students completing the course should have had experience with citing sources using MLA documentation.

I hope the connections between what I learned in Lou's Writing Lab and my writing classroom are seen as easily as I feel them.

With great affection and best wishes,

Sandra

Rachel Faldet

Rachel worked in the Writing Lab beginning in 1981.

October 2010

Dear Lou,

Time travel back to 1981 in a mint-green (including the summer screens) house on Fairchild Street – a place where you and a heap of earnest writing lab folks had supper now and then. David and I were your hosts. Small town Midwestern kids, we had lived in Seattle for two years while David got his MA. I scandalized my mother and got my ears pierced. David was content to stay in the rainy Pacific Northwest for his Ph.D. work. I wanted to learn how to work with basic writers and write some personal essays for graduate credit at the University of Iowa, a place with four seasons and Lou Kelly's lab. David – a blond-haired guy who Richard Jenseth (for at least half a year) thought was just my "good friend" not my husband – consented to change locations.

I took the lab course, taught in the lab for who knows how many semesters until you told me I needed experience in a

rhetoric classroom (even though I told you I was never going to teach in a classroom because I was too shy), was your research assistant (seems like I mostly listened to your emerging ideas that sometimes/sometimes not turned into tasks for me), and ran the lab for you one summer. I earned my MAW.

And since then (not counting short stints in Idaho and England) I have spent my days in Luther College classrooms with basic writers. For twenty years I've dished out assignments based on the writing lab sequence. You know, self as writer, talent, home... every now and then I think I should change things up, but my versions of your assignments work so well, I don't want to mess with them. Case in point: each fall semester my 50-60 first year students (don't worry – they are not all in the same section) and I read a book (such as *True Notebooks*) because they need practice with writing a thesis-driven analytical essay about literature. They flounder around with thesis statements, documentation, a balance of what happened and analysis, and come out of that assignment nervous wrecks. But then we go back to personal writing and the room comes alive with energy. They make important progress.

I have read thousands and thousands and thousands of papers, helping at-risk students find their voice, confidence, and effectiveness on the page. I work with them on content for the first half of the semester, and bring in the sentence level in the context of their own writing during the second half. (Let's just say that I have taught a "human fright train" and a young man writing the home paper who said "the next person I want to talk about is my dead cat" and a young international student who, only a few weeks ago wrote about her talent of reading. She said, "Everyone is different because of their experiences, character, beliefs, even though we may seem to be quite similar in biological taxonomy or to the aliens from outer space." Though it's true that some of my students end up in jail or on academic probation, most blossom.

People in Luther's English department – and other departments – are amazed I'm not burned out.

So, Lou, even though you are not roaming the halls of EPB or supervising the lab while wearing a comfy pair of Birkenstocks, your influence on student writers in Iowa is still huge. Your influence on my professional life and my writing life is significant. (Your writing is so clear.) Maybe this is

where I include that much-used-by-first-year-students-summary-line "You made me the person I am today!"

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Rachel Faldet

English Department

Luther College

David Faldet

26 October 2010

Lou,

Today, as the assembled Luther College faculty discussed our first-year course, a colleague said, "You can't separate writing from the content of writing. If students have trouble with the ideas they are grappling with, they'll have trouble with their writing." And I thought immediately of you, and your perfect knowledge of that, and the way--in your lab--students who had always struggled with writing experienced

the unlooked-for miracle of finding pleasure in writing. Because you asked them to write what they knew. In fact, you began your interaction by asking them to write about what they knew and did best. In the labocracy over which you reigned as queen, writing became something quite the opposite of throwing light on a struggling student's ignorance. It became the means by which that struggling person could, through the medium of pen and paper, turn the educational table, becoming the teacher and authority for a teacher/reader who needed some enlightenment on some topic foreign to their mental universe: running the hundred meter dash, playing fullback, field dressing a deer. And you taught us all to start with that remarkable cornerstone, and build an intellectual life of writing from there.

That's the beautiful basis of what you taught me: allowing that we college educators might best begin by letting the student get the feel of being the teacher. But you also were my colorful mentor. You occupied some secret office at the far end of the hall, where no one ever went, and before that you came from a place called Epps, Louisiana, where people spoke English in a remarkable new color, and where, long before the

dawn of history, the residents of Poverty Point had built the first city in the Mississippi basin. In your loose hippy clothing and Birkenstocks, and your comfortable, confident way of facing the world, you struck a perfect balance between being queen of the labocracy and, at the same time, friend and colleague of us all.

Thanks for being my teacher, my friend, and a wonderful example of what I might aspire to in my own professional career.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".

English Department
Luther College

Martin Klammer

I have kept [one of my lab student's essays] on my shelf for 25 years. Every time I think of throwing it out, I resist doing so because the writing seems almost sacred. It's the story of a young man coming face to face with terror and tragedy, making sense of it first in the Writing Lab and then in the Rhetoric 10:1 classroom where other students asked questions and commented on his paper as "Daniel" moved from first draft toward finished product.

I can't remember Daniel, frankly, aside from this and other 10:1 writings in which he tells us that he and his family (father, five brothers) were forced out of Laos by war and spent two years at a refugee camp in Thailand. I do remember asking Daniel to provide shape to this writing by exploring some meaning to the event, which he does simply but eloquently at the end.

I may have been teaching students in the Lab about writing, but in some essential way I felt some of them were teaching me about life -- not as I knew it but as they lived it in Laos or Vietnam or the American inner city.

I wrote a final comment to Daniel's essay, but another student put it far better than I could when he wrote to Daniel: "First I have to say that this story is very sad and touching. I would imagine that this would be one of the most difficult subjects to write on that a person could write about. I admire the fact that you were even able to write about it at all."

Martin Klammer

October 28, 2010

Susanna

November 3, 2010

Dear Lou,

My last student just left, and her essay about what she learned outside the classroom—an assignment I stole, er, adapted from one of your invitations to write—is still warm.

This student is a few months away from taking the GED. She is a late forty-something, single mother caring for an aging mother, unemployed, and thinking about maybe, maybe becoming a nurse. Besides all those balls in the air, she

struggles with all things math related. Tonight, when she had hit a brick wall in her struggle with percentages, I asked her to write.

Before this woman wrote a word, she went through the whole litany: “I hate to write. I can’t write. I don’t want to write. I never can think of anything. What do I have to say?” You know. The whole shebang.

“Just talk on paper,” I said to her. (How many times have I said that? How many times have YOU said that? If everyone who passed through the Writing Lab said it at the same time, would the roof puff off EPB?)

After the class was over and all the other students were gone, she kept writing. I stayed out of her way. Finally, she held a sheaf of pages looking surprised. She asked me if I’d read what she wrote and tell her it was okay. I stopped collecting my books and the bins of student folders and took her essay. We sat down together one-on-one.

Before I got to the end of the first paragraph, I snorted. Her face filled with fear. I read the sentence out loud, “My ex, ex, ex-husband taught me to fly fish and I love it and I won’t give him back his reel, hip boots, or the flies on my hat.”

The woman tucked in her chin and added. “And his pole.”

I snorted again. We both giggled.

I told her that my snort meant she communicated.

“Everything is here in this essay.”

She is a writer; I am now her reader. Monday she will read my response to her writing and the question or two. She will ask me to explain the pale pencil check marks by certain lines. We will set up an error correct log.

As I heard her footsteps echo down the dark hall, I knew lights were coming on as she passed motion detectors set up to save energy during after school hours. Is that a metaphor? This student’s way becomes more visible with each step in the process of her moving to where she wants to go.

I told Allison that you are with me every day I teach. That is true, but, perhaps, I did not go far enough. You are also with me now as I write this letter and any time I look at other’s writing. You will be with me as I stretch out this day and stop and pick up groceries for a housebound friend. You will be with me when I check the coffee pot to see when it was last brewed before I pour a cup and commit to a longer night. You

will be with me when I reach my own kitchen and glance at the clock above my own picture of naked women (mine are dancing) and wonder where the bare-breasted Writing Lab painting is hanging these days? If I am home by midnight, I may be positive I hear your voice —that gravel road and corn bread voice that tells where you come from and exactly what you think in no uncertain terms—tell me to scratch a few paragraphs before sleep.

I am sorry I can't be with you and the Writing Lab folks this weekend. I will miss hearing stories from you all. Celebrating you sounds like a fine idea. Saying so in writing is in keeping with you, your life, and our continuing conversation.

Love,
Susanna

PART III

Creative writing composed and revised in and around the Writing Center during fall, 2010.

Ice Water for Icarus

Brett Brinkmeyer

Fiction

My shoulders are hunched forward and I'm staring into the sand. The tiny rocks are jagged enough against one-another that they leave space for the water to come in. It does, a little here. If you dig down you can find it. You can make a pool or a moat or a river, whatever you want. I love the sand. I love the water.

I'm sitting next to my younger brother who is asking me about the apartment again. I know he cares but I hate talking about it. "I don't know, I just don't like him. He's

always telling me what to do." I sigh and keep looking forward, digging with a stick, pushing rocks around.

It's neat how sticks work when you do this with them. The end touching the rock feels the tension put on it by your hand and you can move one way or the other and push the thing at a distance. It works with leaves too, lots of other stuff. When the stick gets wet, when you go deep enough in the sand with it, it soaks up some of the water and the sand will start sticking to it a little more. Little wet sand chunks.

My brother Alex and I are wading in the water, skipping stones. He winds up and releases a smooth sidarm and his smooth stone skips several times, big skips turning to small, eventually skittering to a curl in the middle of Pammel Lake. It's not a big lake, but it's out of town a few miles and surrounded by beautiful green summer trees. The air is clear, not a cloud in sight and we're standing in the sun and shallow water, our toes gradually numbing to the cool. I take a step farther out, cringing slightly at the cold water on my thighs. It's creeping up and down with the slight waves and teasing at my legs to go deeper. Deeper, deeper, I tread out until the water is at my stomach, my arms out to the sides, feeling the

cool of the water under them and the sun on the surface. The warm skin on my arms feels like a fresh pancake to the touch, just a little warm so you can still feel that its gooey on the inside.

“Hey,” Alex says, “sorry about how things are going with Jon at your place. I’m sure he’s a good guy—don’t worry, things will work out.” He’s looking at me matter-of-factly and waits for me to respond. I turn my head as he talks to see him and then a back again to the lake, shining in the sun. “No problem,” I let out a sigh as I watch the rippling water. Suddenly there’s a big splash in the middle and I turn back to Alex, who’s smiling mischievously. “KER-THUNK!!” he yells, and then jumps forward, diving into the deeper water.

A few yards from where he went under, he’s treading water, shaking the water out of his hair and laughing. “Come on, James!” he yells “let’s swim!”

June 4th

I haven’t told you about Jon yet. Jon’s my caretaker on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I don’t have a lot of problems through the week but Good Living still wants to check up on me

throughout the week. He cooks breakfast and follows the list that my worker and I made of my goals. He wants me to be more “presentable,” and I want to do well at work. Jon asks me every time if I’ve brushed my teeth and put on deodorant. It’s annoying. I’m 26, I’m an adult, I have my own apartment and my own job and just because I have a disability doesn’t mean I can’t make decisions about how I look, what I do. I can take care of myself.

“Stop talking to me.” I’m really annoyed with Jon now. He’s got my backpack which I couldn’t find and he’s dumped it out, sorting out what he thinks is junk from my papers and books. My personal stuff. *MY* stuff. What an asshole. I’m fuming but I can’t say anything because last time I protested he just talked about the goals sheet, which I don’t really care about right now. I just want to eat breakfast. It’s 8:30, the bus will be here in a few minutes and I have to get to work on time because everyone on the bus will be waiting and the bus driver will yell at Jon’s boss who will tell him to get me on the bus on time and last time it was really embarrassing. It’s just my bag,

MY bag but still, there are worse things. At least they leave my room alone. I hate having to put up with this. My parents would probably say something too. I'll probably write that in my journal. That's a relaxing thought. I just have to make sure to leave my journal out of my backpack.

UGH.

Alex and I are both treading the cool water of the lake now. I feel the currents of the water cooling my legs and arms as they pass through it. The water ripples on the hairs on my arms and legs, I can sort of see my arms if I look closely through the muddy water. "Getting tired?" He smiles, teasing me. I give him a look and turn towards the center of the lake. It's not far so I start swimming a little. We used to have these contests when we were kids, swimming out and treading water in one spot, talking and then swimming again.

I'm treading water in the middle of the lake and Alex is swimming toward me. I feel something scrape against my leg as I kick. Legs in, legs out, arms swirling the water and I smile. Alex is under water swimming towards me, and I'm waiting for him to surface again. I toe at the area where the

thing scraped my leg, trying to figure out what it is. Now my right ankle is wrapped in some kind of rope or netting, coarsely holding my foot in place. Alex surfaces. I have just enough time to give him a terrified look and let out a yell before something shifts and I'm pulled down a few inches, just below the surface.

June 5th

Work was OK today. I'm still sorting out engine parts and putting in screws. The other people that work with me are sorting things and packaging parts together so we can put them together. I like my job, but the people I work with are mean and I don't belong there. At least Jon isn't there. The other people, they call me names and threaten me. I don't like that and they're all retarded or something, like they say I am but I don't believe it. I have some problems with people but my life isn't bad, it's easy to talk to people I know, when I need to. Life is empty and dry sometimes but everybody feels that way.

I'm alone in my apartment today. I cleaned up a little in the living room because Jon said if I didn't that he would

make me on Saturday. I feel good today. I'm going to watch a movie.

My hands can't get a grip on the netting, it's too tight against the bottom and the more I struggle the tighter it gets. I'm panicking. I keep thinking I'm going to drown and all that goes through my mind is how dark and cold and alone I am, this netting pulling me down. I'm out of breath and I breathe in a mouthful of lake water.

Now there are other hands, helping, pushing my hands away and a fingernail scrapes against my ankle as I'm free. I cough out a bunch of water at the surface and gargle in some clear air. I'm swimming as hard as I can for the shore and something cracks against my heel. I can't stop, I'm swimming for shore... I'm going to make it.

After what seemed like forever I'm on my hands and knees in the shallow water by the shore throwing up. I get everything coughed out and collapse on the sand. My eyes are closed and I'm breathing so heavily, so hard. My body hurts. My lungs hurt. My ankle is bleeding where Alex's fingernail—where's Alex?

My eyes snap open and I scan the lake for my brother. The water is still and calm, I hear the waves lapping at the sand as the slight breezes sway the body of the lake. He's not there. He's not here. My brain seizes up. What do I do?

June 6th

Work was hard today. I kept thinking about the way that the pieces go together and it's all I think about at work. Putting in screws. I line up the round edges and put in the screws. I tighten them until I can't anymore and then put them in a plastic container with dividers, part after part. They're all the same. I get to listen to music while I do it, but it's hard to ignore the others. They're laughing, they're playing, they're messing up their jobs. I don't say anything to them about it because it's not my job, but it makes me feel mad.

I wish I could have a job where I get to do something that I like, something that I do at home. I could write or tell people about sailing. I could teach them about tying knots, I'm good at knots. Not as good as Alex but I can tie a knot and

help sail a boat. Maybe I can study sailing at a school someday like Alex is. He's in college learning about trees and plants and things, he wants to work in a forest someday by himself. I don't know what it would be like, what kind of job that would be but—

I feel frustrated and confused. I'm so mad they keep calling me names and I have to take these pills that make me feel nothing. My brain doesn't work right, they say, and these pills can help me. They make me feel like a rock. A still rock in the middle of the road with cars full of normal people driving by. I don't know what to do but there's nothing I can do because who would listen to someone who's brain doesn't work for ideas. UGH, I hate my life sometimes. At least Alex treats me like a normal person. He's the only one I think. Even my parents sometimes, even the people at work who should understand, who are just like me—no, they're nothing like me. None of them know how to think, they're just dumb happy people. UGH. I'm going to bed.

“Hey. Hey, are you alright?” I come to myself and see a man facing me, on the side of the road. I must have been

walking. I recognize the place, the farmhouse nearby and these trees, I must have been walking towards town, towards home. I don't remember walking, my head is swimming with thoughts and I don't know what to do. I look at the man, still and silent. He's asking me questions. I am looking at the man's shoes. They're brown with some dry mud sticking to them in clumps. The toes are round and there are pieces of metal holding onto the laces. The laces are tight and coarse around his ankles.

The man tilts his head and feels the scruff in his chin, taking a long breath. “You look lost,” he says. The man waits and I never look him in the eye. I'm looking at his shoes. “Lost or stupid. Maybe you're retarded. You a retard?” The man takes off his hat and runs his fingers through his hair. “Good Lord,” breathes the man. “What am I supposed to do with a lost retard?”

The man puts a hand on my shoulder and I flinch, still at the lake in my mind. “My brother,” I say before I can think. “My brother's—well, he's...” I'm stammering, I can't believe it myself, I can't accept what has happened. I'm not dreaming, but I have to be, I have to be. My face is suddenly full of blood and hotness.

The man pulls his hand away and crouches down to his heels. His voice is softer now, calm.

“Hey buddy, you want a ride or something?” He sounds very friendly now and I think I can trust him. I have to tell someone, something has to happen. My brother can’t just die. He just can’t.

“There’s plenty of room for you and your bag in my truck if you want. Don’t worry, I’m nice. Bruce, see?” The man holds his hand to shake and smiles. I reach out and the man holds my hand firmly and pumps it down once. “Now I’m not a stranger, get it?”

I hold my breath. I don’t like to be called names, but the truck will go a lot faster than walking. Bruce might know what to do.

“OK.”

June 7th

You’ll never guess what. Alex said he was busy with homework today but he decided to surprise me anyway with a trip to the lake!! Can you believe it? We haven’t been to the lake yet this year and I keep asking him to go, I gotta go. Yes!!

Nothing makes sense. Everything is wrong. I curl a little in the passenger seat and wait to get home. I give Bruce directions and he keeps looking at me. He asks me what’s wrong and I open my mouth but nothing comes out. There’s a thing that needs to come out but it can’t. It’s too big a thing and my mouth is too small. It gets clogged in my chest and it hurts.

I close my eyes. The bumps of the road are shaking me as I ride and the window is down to let in the cool summer air. I have to say something. I feel a tear, warm on my cheek and I decide that I have to say something, *anything*.

“Hey, something just happened.”

“Now? Did you poop or something?”

“No, my brother is dead.”

Bruce stops the car, pulls over to the side of the road. “Your brother is dead?” He shifts in his seat in the parked car. Traffic is going by on the road. He pauses, looking for the right words. “You mean, he’s been dead a long time, right?”

“I don’t know,” I say. That’s not right. “I mean, I think he drowned. We were swimming and I got stuck and I think—

“You mean, your brother drowned, like, today.”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Knock it off what that ‘I think’ stuff kid,” Bruce has lost his friendly demeanor now but he doesn’t seem mad. I can tell he’s upset but he’s not ... I don’t know what’s happening, what’s going to happen. I just have to say it. “I got tangled up in something at Pammel Lake and I think, I mean, he went under the water and I got out but he wasn’t there.”

Bruce takes a deep breath, closes his eyes and lets it out.

“Of course. OK, don’t worry. We need to do something. Are you OK? I have a cell phone and I’ll call 911.” Bruce is getting out his phone and dialing emergency.

I am in bed and the shades are closed. The moment of disbelief hangs above me in the dark, over my chest. It’s guilt, shame, remorse, disbelief, but it’s not accusing me. I stare into it and feel panic and fear from the moment again at the lake.

My mind is blank like before and I’m not thinking. I close my eyes and see myself with a long tube which is draining the lake. There are screws in it that I put in. I’m screaming for help across the water, through the trees, but no one is there. No one answers. Then Bruce is there, standing next to me. He’s draining the lake with another tube.

The lake is too big and it’s too quiet and I feel clutched by it again in my bed, my face is buried in my pillow and the pillow feels like it’s wrapped around my head, suffocating me and I can’t get it off. I’m covered with it.

Finally I can’t take it anymore. It’s too dark in this room and too quiet. People are in the living room talking, crying, I can hear them through the walls.

“It wasn’t his fault, he doesn’t know any better.”

“Maybe he could’ve called—“

“He doesn’t have a phone, how could he call? Besides, it was Alex’s idea to go to the lake anyway, maybe if he hadn’t—“

I flip on the bedroom light on my way to the bathroom and now I’m vomiting into the toilet until there’s nothing left.

I'm still leaning there, spitting in the toilet and there's a knock on the door.

"James, hey in there, you OK buddy?" It's Jon. Why does it have to be Jon?

I don't say anything. Don't want to. Nothing to say.

"Alright, you just let me know if you need anything, I'll take care of it."

Tears are washing over my cheeks, my face, hot with panic and shame. I pull off my shirt but all these feelings, it's like they're stuck inside my skin. It's tormenting me to the floor where I curl up. I'm scratching at my skin, it's useless to do but I have to do *something*. I want to yell or to moan loudly but the people—

I'm scared alone here in the bathroom, it's too familiar. I'm at my parent's house and I wish I could just be in my bathroom is all. I'm panicking, searching the bathroom for *something*. It's like, a crowd of people I ... I don't know them... I recognize the voices, it's like they're all yelling at once. I'm trying to think my way out of them but they won't stop. I'm held down to the floor. I can't move.

I close my eyes, covering my face and shivering as it goes on.

Now I'm standing, holding onto my hair in my fists and I'm naked in the shower. I'm turning on the water and the cold of it makes me yell a little and step to the side. The shower warms up and I lose track of time, just standing there. I wonder about what Alex felt in the lake, if it was like what I was feeling, so cold and alone and dark.

I get out of the shower, I can hardly stand up I'm so tired. I turn off the water and towel off, sitting on the toilet. I'm holding my head in my hands. I lie down on the bathroom floor and fall asleep.

Exercise

Devin Van Dyke
Nonfiction

While clouds obscured the sun, frost from the chilly morning still covered the ground; I sat on my log with my feet dangling in air. I inhaled deeply, slowly closed my eyes and focused on the feeling of air coming and going. Four complete breaths later I looked up at the sky and was thankful for another day. I looked down and my feet, swinging back and forth as if they were walking on air, let out a deep breath and slipped off my log.

My shoes landed on the ground with my laces tucked into my boots to decrease the chance of tripping, my pants tucked into my socks so as I wandered to the bus stop I wouldn't get mud on my clean jeans. I walked slowly, taking leisurely sips of my coffee, sometimes contemplating each footfall, knowing that once I got on the bus the day would fly by.

Once I arrived in the parking lot adjacent to the stop, I stood in a place where I could see the two ways into the lot. I

was situated between two parked pickup trucks to screen myself from bored cops needing to ticket me for smoking outside, though I am far from people. Holding my smoke in a curled hand, I savored a moment of internal calmness the nicotine provides.

I'm not sure why, but I checked my watch—I already know the bus will most likely be late. I call the Cambus office, a *free* campus bus service, every Monday and they tell me the naval observatory time, which is what Cambus uses to keep to its schedule. If a train hems in the parking lot I am not powerless, because I called the dispatcher once and he told me that, "The train can block the crossing for six minutes and then they have to move it." *And how far is a move?* I take these measures to limit the impact my paranoia has on my life. I feel that if I actively seek relief by being proactive then I will feel better, because then I'll at least have a fighting chance.

The bus ride signals a transition from a leisurely wander to the beginning of a pressurized-panicked-rush. I have learned that in order to appear calm, grounded and focused for class, I need to arrive in plenty of time and to have had a

chance to expend energy in fast walking as well so I can just kind of hang out casually as I arrive. I think of the fast walking phase as releasing the energy of a shaken soda, the anticipation of class is the shaking and the fast walking is releasing the excess energy. It can also ensure that there is enough time for the hang-out phase of class preparation. If I appear calm and grounded on the outside then people will see that in me, and I will respond by acting more so, and the cycle will continue. My habits for getting to class and to arrive on campus to study are very similar.

My routine has evolved over the course of many semesters and its rules allow me to remain non-paranoid and oblivious to the world around me. If I allow myself to be over-stimulated by crowds of strangers, by loud chaotic noises or by a lot of activity in my field-of-view, the echo of that over-stimulation can stay with me all day. So I have a set of rules I follow from the time of my first bus ride on a school day until I arrive back at my quiet non-stimulating home. In the last year these rules have become what I call my personal standardization, and their application has become more

flexible: I have found a new sense of freedom by using the rules as the basis for protecting my quiet calm state of mind.

After arriving on campus, if I have to cross a street I always wait for the walk signal before I step into the street. Once I begin, I move briskly between the parallel painted lines that are the cross walk, but I still feel more like a target in the crosshairs of the car drivers' aiming devices. Occasionally a driver, acting more like the pilot of a jet plane, will attempt to bully their way through an intersection and cut me off when I know I have the right of way. They don't know I'm a veteran of dueling with 60 foot recreational vehicles driven by retired folk, on two lane highways, over bridges three hundred feet in the air all while riding a bicycle with 60 pounds of camping gear. I kept my bicycle on the painted white stripe of the shoulder and would look into the beautiful river valley below me, sigh, glance towards the ocean and know if I got hit and died it would be while doing something I loved.

Once across the street the panicked rush to a quiet environment to study or to class resumes. Before going inside and cornering my focus I purposefully pause, standing still with feet together and back straight. Then I walk around in a

small area of the sidewalk, sometimes in circles, I walk in one direction for ten feet and then do an about face and walk in the opposite direction. If people walk by I don't notice them and I don't ignore them. I hope they understand that it's not them per se, but my need to shift my focus to inside me and in effect become aloof to the outside forces seeking my attention. If I give myself the freedom to let my mind and body wander and allow myself to ruminate about whatever pops into my head my focus changes to an interior one. As my focus settles in I find the quiet space I left at home when I got on the bus for the first time that day. My routine to arrive ready to study and to be readied for class is virtually the same thing. What I must avoid most is putting myself in a circumstance where I have few options and must chose between fight and flight.

My destination on the last day of my favorite class of the spring semester was a little known vending area in Hardin Health Sciences Library. Most people would probably consider it an austere environment, but I love it. It has white walls with simple functional tables and chairs both with armrests and without, a coke machine and a microwave. It also has a wireless internet connection. If the tables have moved

from their most common places then I put them back to create my consistent study space.

I sat down at my favorite table and fired up my laptop eagerly looking forward to writing about an instant of time. The computer took forever to start up—I thought about how its feet-dragging behavior was the polar opposite of what I was readying to write for. Finally it signaled its permission to begin working and I dove in like when I was eleven and dove off the high dive into a pool for the first time. Thirty minutes later I was content with a rough draft detailing that instant in the morning when you realize you're no longer asleep. The document was ready to save.

I clicked the mouse before I could even read the screen. My finger didn't really hit the button, it just hovered over it a nanosecond too long. The computer seized the initiative and I had no recourse. At the speed of light, effort was destroyed and work was forever lost in the labyrinth of the machine's bowels.

When I first realized what happened, all I could feel was uncontrolled rage. It filled my body and consumed my

consciousness. The heat of madness started in my head, behind my eyes and moved down my back. The fight or flight response was confined to my body, I couldn't run from my computer and the only way to fight it would be to destroy it. My stomach started to produce acid and bile as if I were about to eat a big meal, and it let out a growl like the tigers in Africa do when the photographer gets too close to their cubs. Under my skin, microscopic blood vessels dilated and my skin turned pink like sunburn. My whole body felt as hot as you expect the sun to be. Nerve endings in my fingers first tingled and then felt like matches igniting while they're still touching your finger tip and the striker pad. Hairs on my head became erect, standing at attention while Himalayan-sized goose bumps grew all over my skin. The world dimmed as my pupils constricted below deep furrows in my forehead that were like the canyons of a river gorge. Beads of anger-smelling sweat, stinking like garbage left in the sun for days, formed above and languidly rolled off my eyebrows.

I saw the computer screen through eyes filled with an ocean of contempt and a swamp of fear. It was laughing at my puny humanness, my helplessness before its unerring

duplicitous perfection. It giggled and I sighed. I was over an electronic barrel, a dilemma the world of pen and paper never knew, never can know. A slice of life's work gone in the time it takes to blink because a machine flinched and I paused.

It had bested me, but I would have revenge. I got out a piece of paper and grabbed a pen. This day's work would not be lost.

Then I noticed the computer having the gall to ask me if I was sure I wanted to delete my writing exercise about an instant of time. Suddenly all the stress of the semester floated away and I was transported to a Buddhist monastery high in the snow covered mountains of Tibet. I was sitting before ritual candles aware of my breath coming and going.

I clicked "no," and saved the work.

All I had to do now was get out of my study area and get to class and do what I trained to do: distance myself from a situation where I had little to no control. The computer's behavior threatened my survival. It probably doesn't seem as though the inconvenience of having to make-believe that "document recovery" is efficacious, but to someone who isn't tech savvy, very little of the computer stuff is easy, simple or

stress free. It may seem like the machine not working correctly is not life threatening, but from the perspective that my academic success is dependent upon the machine performing properly, it is. It didn't matter that my work was okay. The effect of the almost instantaneously lost work had a horrifying effect, and the echo of the stress would settle in and stay for a few hours.

I knew my stress level was approaching the molecule-wide-line that defines where being mentally challenged begins and ends. My sanity battery needed to be recharged so what I needed most now was a relaxing free-bus-ride to class. Getting something for nothing had a pampering effect. I knew the stressful event could be buried by returning to my routine. This specific day was important because it was the last day of the semester and because another piece I had written was to be work shopped. When I left my study area to go to class, I knew my ability to adapt and ground myself was going to be pushed. I faced an internal duel to the death.

My habituated routine can handle the ten or fifteen minutes for Cambus's usual tardiness, but it cannot handle

much more than that or I lose the time I need to quiet myself before another round of class or studying, even under ideal circumstances. I have found that I thrive while teetering on an edge; on one side is the calm world of my ordered home life, on the other is the chaos of life itself. And then there is the absolute razor's edge of life as a procrastinating student.

As soon as I was outside walking in the sunlight I felt better. I could feel the brisk fall air hitting my cheeks and the beginning of my recharge cycle. I knew my mental stability was fragile and I planned to judiciously nurture myself back to my usual state of aloof well-being.

I panicked, my pulse quickened and my eyebrows began to sweat as I saw Cambus performing an undefined activity, which is one I have never seen or directly experienced. None of the busses were going down the street, they were making u-turns as nonchalantly as when I pace outside before going inside to study. Time was being gobbled up like popcorn in a movie theater and along with it, my sense of calm. I knew if my sense-of-quiet was bankrupted, I would lose clear thinking and would still be disorganized hours later, until what ever causal event finally receded from my immediate memory.

I decided to play ignorant and hope that the bus was running normally, fearlessly foring ahead and getting on the bus as I usually do. Part of my motivation was the impending possibility of the cliff-of-despair I knew was waiting if another thing went awry in my day. I was incredulous when the bus went back the way it came, the exact opposite from the direction I needed to go. I was at the front of the bus in a second and asked “What’s going on?”

“A sewer line broke and the busses can’t get through.”

I sneered at the driver and said, “Just drive through it. You can wash the bus later right?” I believed I had staked out a good bargaining position, knowing that there had to be a shorter way than just turning around.

“No I can’t do that. I have to do what the dispatcher tells me to do.”

“Going back the way you came is going to take all day! Can’t you just jump on the highway or something?” The fight or flight response was taking over.

“That’s just the way the detour is going to work.”

“God, you’ve got to be kidding—lemme off right here.”

I was losing control fast. The thought of being late coalesced in my mind and before I could cajole a sense of control and of having my needs met, my mind raced to the finish line and the thought snowballed into getting F’s in all of my classes. It never occurred to me at this point how unrealistic that was. Being twenty minutes late on the day of my workshop was the realization of my worst nightmare.

I stood at the bus stop where the driver had dropped me and verbally ventilated my growing anger on the first passerby. This guy I’d never seen before became the victim of my wrath of verbal energy. He probably sensed I was harmless and probably understood I needed to relieve my self of some unwanted baggage. As cars passed by us standing at the bus stop, my voice became quieter, my gesticulating slowed as if my body was finally of purged of the toxin of my crazy day. Less than five minutes after I had begun to talk, I was finally silent and was standing quietly breathing and focused on the air coming and going.

I felt better, but I was still toying with the idea of skipping class rather than just being tardy. I needed time to just be quiet with myself and realize that I would be okay and

that my need to get to class would be met. I would be late, but I hoped if I stuck to parts of my routine that I would arrive at class still appearing calm. I knew if I could settle down enough I would accept that getting to class would take longer than usual and I would be late for the first time in the semester.

While I was focused on how frustrated I was about being late to class, Cambus changed their detour route and when a bus came by twenty minutes after the one I had abandoned, the driver told me he was taking a much more direct route to North Hall. I sat on the bus and closed my eyes, focused on my breathing and tried to let myself unwind. I got off the bus and decided that it was okay to be late. In other words, since I was already going to be late I reasoned it was okay to be a little later, so I could be my usual grounded, jovial self. My decision was the result of internal negotiating between a desire to not be later than I already was and the need to have enough time to keep myself grounded.

As I walked toward class I set a goal to be there fifteen minutes late, but grounded. I felt better now that I had a clock to race with. I associated the perception of pressure with my

usual routine and lulled myself into believing everything in my world was okay.

I was trying to get to the general area of class early to relieve the perception of pressure. If I could accomplish this or I could tell by how close I am that I can wander along instead of purposefully walking, then my previous panicked-pace walking will have served its purposes.

I stopped for another “don’t walk,” signal and the students around me flowed past as if I was a rock in the river of progress. They don’t seem to be concerned about getting a ticket or getting hit by the cars. I’m paranoid of both and have actually had my backpack searched by a cop who saw me jay walk and he even admitted that I didn’t intersect cars paths. I also stop and do the sign thing because a lot of the time I am so distracted by the ongoing internal chatter of my thoughts, that my best choice when walking is an absolute compliance to the rules in order to feel safe. I wait patiently for the little white-led-light guy to symbolize that I can now step off into the void of another street. It’s odd that while I walk on feet, he has none and is the director of the cross walk. I noticed this year that the walk guy lets me go before the light has actually

changed. This gives me more time but it also means that if someone runs the red light in the other direction, his probability of breaking my bones and splattering me on his wind shield is higher.

I have two more blocks until I get to North Hall and no more crosshair crosswalks with 3500 pound 25 mile-an-hour projectiles in them. As I walk these last few blocks I resume a wandering pace and am thankful for a three foot wide sidewalk right up against the street. This gives a justifiable argument in case a cop decides to ticket me for being on campus while consuming tobacco. I could walk on the wider sidewalk close to the dorms like I see people do, but I would be too paranoid to enjoy my last cigarette before I go to class and learn to write about my paranoias.

Grasping at Tardiness

Brett Brinkmeyer

Poetry

Pouring across the blanket's caress,
begrudging squint finally caves me in.
I wake, unaware.
I witness the hour
discovering itself,
filling the room with light
and I with life.

Unchanged yet newly able
still, languid in rest
languid— low against impulses,
un-awaited, interpreted
scuttled together
plainly to the day.

Mouths full of tender nonsense,
stories of stories
maneuver for release.
Accepting, perceived
breathe slivers of perceptions.

No longer drawn absently away,
we rejoice the morning.

Sweater in my hands
trails thickly after

the surfacing of moonlight
across abandoned shards,
watchers try their gaze
silent as we sweep.

Washing the work from us,
idling beaches have forgotten
moisture bulges from below,
teasing away the dry imprints on our skin.
That gray scrape, a small tearing
under your presence.

Against the blankets
I pull through
touched by your privilege
your unwinding colors—

Recalling you I see
as the threads pull away
your chest from its comfort,
bare now:

unwound.

The World He Crafted

Jessica Faselt

Poetry

Does God regret the world he crafted?
Does he wish us a better life?

We are blind to the intricate interwoven strings
connecting and holding life

He took care,
with beautifully complex etch, to create what we see
And what we don't see
Our simple thoughts stop at a roadblock

A tigers' kill can stem from a loving God?

This is where we fall
A cliff to the edge of the unknown

Does God regret his craft?
His craft betrayed his intention
We are blinded- for now

But we do not march on into the darkness unloved
His knitted locks hold all unworthy

He will make do with the choices of our world
For the ending