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Mary T. Mackley  
Director, CWP/Storrs  
The University of Connecticut  
Box U-25A  
Storrs, CT 06268  
(203) 486-2328 or 486-5772  
or  
Faye C. Gage  
Director, CWP/Fairfield County  
The University of Connecticut  
Library Building, Room B20  
Scofieldtown Road  
Stamford, CT 06093  
(203) 968-2213
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FREEWRITING TITLES
Tracy Benham

THE PHILOSOPHER - SCHOOL TEACHER
(Or What I Did on My Summer Vacation)

or...
1) The Radical Grade School Teacher
2) The Introspective Social Studies Teacher
3) The Metacognitive English Professor
4) The Poetic Math Teacher
5) How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love My Journal
6) The Unexamined Method is Not Worth Using
   (this is fun Linda, thanks!)
7) How My Paradigms Shifted
8) How the Winds of Change Knocked Me Over
9) Conversing with Mankind
10) The B’s: Berlin, Berthoff, Bruffee
11) Whose Piece is this Anyways?
12) Whose Mind is this Anyways?
13) Whose Class is this Anyways?
14) Who Left Their Felt Sense on the Table? ****
15) Dialing for Dialetics (no, I don’t think so)
16) My Affair with a Word Processor
17) My Garden is a Desert
18) My Husband has Forgotten My Name
19) Laundry Can Wait!!!
20) a. Is It August Yet?
21) The Summer My Sister Had a Baby (Jeffrey Max -- 8 lbs.)
22) My Brother Just Got Home
23) Writing to Learn (no, boring)
24) Learning by Process (no, no)
25) Prosletyzing for Process (yes, that’s it)
26) Yea, You Guys are Easy But Math Teachers Have No Sense of Humor
27) Fractions are Friendly, They Live in Your Neighborhood

   (I’m running out of steam, Linda)
THE RIGHT WAVE
Arline Summing

The day was perfect — not a cloud in the sky and the wind blew steadily off shore. As I hooked in my harness, I leaned back against the weight of the sail. Light sprays of salt water brushed against my face as I prepared for my first run of the day. I could feel the adrenalin begin to course through my veins as I moved back on my board to hasten the plane. Within seconds, I felt like I was flying. The air was charged with excitement. I was living for the moment determined to fully experience every second.

My interest in windsurfing began about three years ago when my stepson, Shawn, dropped off his windsurfer at the house. It was an important point in time for both of us. I had just uprooted three protesting children into a new community, and I was coming to grips with the problems of blended families. My career seemed to be on a back burner even though I had managed to complete my 6th year at Fairfield University. I was beginning to wonder if I was on overload. Shawn, on the other hand, had decided to try to become a professional windsurfer. And a move to Maui seemed to be the logical next step.

At first I laughed as he gave us a few beginning instructions on how to use the board. "Just remember to keep your back to the wind while you pull up the sail. The rest will just naturally come to you." Shawn seemed so pleased when I said I'd give it a try that I felt I had to follow through.

The day finally arrived when the weather conditions seemed right. The board was assembled and I eagerly took my turn on the windsurfer. As I began pulling on the up haul, I groaned at the incredible weight of the water-filled sail. "I can do this!" I repeated over and over as I continued to tug at the sail. Finally the sail popped free of the water and stood directly in front of me. "What do I do next?" I thought to myself. But a sudden gust of wind blew both me and the sail back into the water before I could figure out my next move. By this time I had drifted out into the water well over my head. I hung on to the side of the board while I figured out my options. My choices were few: I could either try to swim back to shore with my rig in tow or I could pull myself up and try again. Since I'm not a quitter, I chose the latter course. Time after time the
scene repeated itself until that fleeting moment occurred when I finally managed to become the skipper of my craft. I grabbed the boom with new authority as I sheeted in my sail to catch the wind. For a few glorious moments I glided across the lake surface experiencing a oneness with the wind. But the experience ended abruptly because the wind suddenly came about and neatly deposited me back into the surf. The length of that first run was unimportant. The fact that I did it at all is key. Now the questions remain: why?

If I was out just to show Shawn that I could learn to windsurf the romance with the sport would now be over. But instead, I find myself the owner of a brand-new, state-of-the-art, high-performance windsurfer with an adjustable mast and several assorted-size sails for all kinds of wind conditions. Obviously, my love of this sport continues to grow.

Could it be that my age is a factor? Often I am the only female at the beach braving the elements to surf and if there is another female, I am usually twice her age. What drives me to pursue a sport few women embrace? Novelty is just too obvious a response. There must be something else.

Up to this point, I have never really tried to answer any of these questions. They weren't important. But windsurfing — that's what turned me on! My favorite part of the day comes when I finally get on my board and head out into the stretch of water ahead of me. At this point, I feel totally free yet completely in control of where I will go next. I can sail for hours without the need of coming back to shore. I am totally free of the noise that comes with being a wife, mother, daughter and member of society.

I find I need this time to get in touch with me and spend some time doing something just for me. Perhaps this makes me selfish. I don't know. Somehow I think windsurfing helps to keep my life in perspective. Yes, I am getting older and also heavier but pursuing new things is not over.

The windsurfing experience has taught me how to go about learning and it has also given me the affirmation that I am still capable of doing new things both mentally and physically. Maybe it will take me a little longer to learn than it did ten years ago but I know the only thing that can possibly stop me is my failure to "stretch" and "go for it."
Photographic image:
Francesca, expectantly
She stands before the sea
Alone except for me,
The image-maker on a Bahamian beach.

She stands like a calligraphic stroke
On canvas.

I recall:
Cinnamon speckled her cheeks,
Toenails like transparent sea-shells,
She faced the swell.

Four year old Franny,
Captured.

Right after we moved to our street, new people moved in
across from us. They had a turtle named Jane. She had been
a tiny fish tank turtle and she ate a lot and got big. Jane
was as big as a football when she moved in across the
street. Mostly those tiny fish tank turtles die, but Jane
didn't. She grew. I never saw her when she was a fish tank
turtle because when she moved in she was already big. Where
they use to live, Jane went outside for the summer. They
let her out on our street that summer, but she never came
back. She was the first to die.

We lived on a dead-end street. Did you ever wonder
what dead-end means?

Santa Claus came to the circle at the end of our street
each Christmas Eve. He brought presents for me and the
other kids. Mr. White brought a hot drink that smelled
awful and had soggy fruit floating in it. The adults drank
that but no one got drunk even though it was alcohol. Right
after school was out, we had a square dance. I don't like
to dance, but my friends and I ran around as the music
played for the dancers. There was always Stew Leonard's
juice and ice cream before the cook-out, and my parents were
busy dancing so they didn't keep track of how much I ate to
spoil my dinner.

Mrs. Bronson lived next door to us. She was old, she
wore old clothes, and she smelled funny because she had so
many cats and they took over her house. Every Halloween she
gives the trick or treaters the same thing -- stale cheese
doodles wrapped in a napkin. My sister and I think she had
one large bag which she is still using from many years ago.

One summer, when I was bigger, my sister ran into our
kitchen. She said "Jessica was killed."

Mom didn't hear at first but I did.

"What did you say?"

Pam said, "Jessica was killed."

Mom asked her to say it again. She's going deaf, but
she and Dad finally tuned in, and I guess they both got the
message because Mom got upset and she started crying. She called someone on the phone, and then she was gone. When she returned we learned that Jessica had been killed walking home from work. A truck had run over her. The truck was coming down off a ramp from the Thruway and its brakes didn’t work. It honked, but Jessica didn’t hear it. Why didn’t she run? Why didn’t the driver turn the truck? How could you not jump out of the way of a truck?

Jessica wasn’t my friend, and I had never especially like her or played with her. She babysat for us once in a while. She had big feet and was always barefoot. She moved slowly. We all went to the funeral. Everyone on the street was there except Jessica who I never saw again. I didn’t think much about Jessica’s death. It was an accident that happened in July.

Mrs. Bronson never came to Christmas at the circle and she never came to the square dances either. My mother is the only one on the street who ever went into her house because she had to use the phone once. I wouldn’t ever want to go in there.

A year later in June I found out that John was dead. The mailman told mom about John, and when she picked me up at school she told me. He was killed by someone after school who strangled him with a belt right near his school. I was too small to go to that school. He lived across the street from me in the house where the turtle had been. John used to come over once in a while and play hide and seek with all of the kids. He was a skinny kid. Sometimes we had huge neighborhood water fights. It was scary all those kids waiting to get you with their squirt guns, hoses and buckets too. I knew John’s sister, Kristin. Jessica’s sister and John’s sister played together with my sister. The papers said that my Sunday School teacher’s son was the person who killed John. I never especially liked Sunday school anyway.

I was seven and already I knew two dead people and one dead turtle. They had all lived on my street. My street has a small hill in the middle and a circle with a big hairy tree at the end. At first, I thought it was a circle-end street, not a dead-end. I loved to ride my big wheels around the tree and down the hill. The hill curved around some big trees in front of Mrs. Bronson’s house, so I’d drag my feet to slow me down or stop in case a car was coming.

Sometimes at school kids asked me about the dead people on my street. Where did they go? What did it feel like to be dead? Who killed John? I didn’t know that much. I just lived on that street and I knew those kids a little.

Santa still came on our street and we had those square dances. My mom and dad started taking Mrs. Bronson’s trash to the dump on Saturday morning. They had to pick it up and take it there quickly with all the windows rolled down even in winter because otherwise our whole car stunk. She had the smelliest garbage.

There was a trial about John’s death and in the paper were pictures that were not very clear. The trial took a long time -- all of second and third grade. They took a long time to decide who did it until finally they said it was the kid who they thought it was from the beginning. I knew the mother of the kid that died and the mother of the kid that killed him. John’s family sold their house and they moved out west.

After John was killed, Megan moved next door to John’s house. The house where John lived was two houses down from where Jessica had lived. Next to John’s house, on the opposite side of Jessica’s was Megan’s house. Her house was right across the street from Mrs. Bronson. She was in 4th grade with me. Her mom and dad weren’t married, but they always came to the square dance and to the circle at Christmas. Her dad wasn’t her real dad. His name was Jim, and he played football catch with me sometimes on the street because Megan wasn’t much interested in catching footballs. Jim died in a car accident when I was in fourth grade. He died in January. The car accident was in the town where my mother works, but it was late at night. There was a lady in the car with Jim when he died, but we didn’t know her. Jim’s care went into a river and he drowned. My mom showed me where it happened.

I don’t live on that street anymore. Jessica’s family moved away too. John Moore and his daughter, Julie, also moved. So did Jim and Jane Mitchell. No one in my family has a name that starts with a J, but we moved away anyway, and we moved in November not in January, June or July. Our new street is a dead-end, but Mrs. Bronson doesn’t live there.
I've been looking over my poem to read to our group and, in combination with this boiling temperature, I am getting really steamed. Where is the dividing line between my group and me? They write about the sensitive spots in their lives which gives me the nerve to write about mine. If it hadn't been for my group, it would have been just another notecard, gathering dust on the shelves. It turned out well and I give them full credit. But this piece I now "own," it's like owning swampland in Florida or whatever the expression is for getting gypped. Yes, all right, it's my property. But fair is fair. The realtors of my property -- my group -- talked it up to me. Maybe you could try doing something with those images, they said. So I, a sucker for the smallest bit of praise, excuse me, "positive reinforcement," worked on this damn poem all Friday afternoon, wrote three drafts and felt smug all weekend because I was already so far ahead with my second assignment. Well, I have had a third look at my property and I WANT TO SUE. For the false and misleading PR from the group which made me buy this piece.

What is this bizarre terminology of "owning"? Owning writing, feelings, thoughts, self? I don't own myself; I am myself, indivisible, not a bundle of parts. Actually, I'd like to believe in owning different parts of myself. If you own something, you can sell it right? I'd welcome the chance to get rid of a few parts of myself. TODAY'S SPECIAL: Embarassing Memories Going for a Dime A Dozen; Excellent Talents for Worrying and Procrastinating, Get Two for the Price of One; Unparalleled Ability to Listen to News and Tune Out, Final Clearance; Body Weight, a Mere Penny a Pound. In fact, forget that quarter. I'll write YOU a check. Take it all away. Please.

And how does "owning" jive with "sharing"? If I own a bar of chocolate and share it with you, I devoutly hope you will chew, chew, chew and digest, not attempt to give me back that which I did in fact once own. What am I doing when I share my work with people? Aren't I offering them a stockholder's "share" in my corporate, though not corporeal, stock? They can take it or leave it, of course. But if they choose to invest, surely there is some part of them in my corporate stock. Wouldn't that be the result of collaborative learning and writing? Isn't that why it is so difficult for feminist and minority literature to get accepted in the curriculum? All those stockholders, heavily invested in the blue chip writers, and the older the writer, the more the number of stockholders through the centuries. Aren't the combined sales of the Koran, the Bible and all other seminal religious texts still the bestsellers? Of course, the bigger the investment, the more reluctant you are to spread your portfolio thin. I would fight to the death to keep up the value of my stock in Austen, Thackeray, Dickens. No wonder we talk about the disenfranchisement of women and minority groups. But then you can't talk about subjective criticism and owning part of a major author's work and turn around and refuse to offer stock in your own, can you? What's the dividing line? Death or Fame or Both?
Come Fellas, I am steaming, burning up, boiling mad, about to fry my brains, torch my writing. Reinvest and save this piece, will you? I gotta go take a cold shower.

META-POEM
Shakuntala Jayaswal

This quasi-poem was,
At the fervent request of the pseudo-poet,
Primarily conceived,
Partially revised,
Semi-collaboratively.
So acknowledged, gratefully.

THE PACK RAT
Crates, fourteen, full of fabric about to be stunning clothes
Boxes, twenty-four, full of books waiting to become wisdom
Tins, two, full of cards, the seminal articles of the future.

Bagsful of outfits that outlived their fit and fashion
Shelvesful of porcelain whimsies, moments of frivolity turned leaden
Envelopes of photographs ticket stubs theatre programmes letters, the junkanalia of pleasures treasured.

A body, substantial, replete with the vestiges of companionable pizzas, quiches, and yes, shrimp
A mind, active, filing myriad systems of order and meaning,
A heart, heavy, clutching fading dreams, ambitions, balancing alternate visions of happiness

Weary feet trip over the future and past to get somewhere, anywhere, now.

KNOWLEDGE ISN'T TRUTH
Morgan Kelley

The principal's letter home to parents concluded:

"The school is constantly being asked to provide drug and alcohol education and safe activities for our students. We made every attempt to have an event that would be a well-regulated evening with a dinner format. We cannot do it without the full assistance and cooperation of parents. Just as students are being educated to "Just Say No," it may well be that it's a slogan just as appropriate for parents."

Elsewhere in her letter, the principal described the incident that had marred the high school prom: the arrival of eight girls who had been drinking at pre-prom parties:

"In very short order, one after another managed to devastate the girls' bathroom by their throwing up, making it unusable for others and necessitating constant clean-up by hotel matrons, and long lines outside the girls room."

There had been drinking at some of the pre-prom parties, the principal wrote. "This, in spite of our cautions regarding serving alcoholic beverages to students and our appeals to have alcohol and drug free school activities! Young girls excited by prom activities, having eaten little or nothing prior to the prom, and with limited tolerance for alcohol, simply can't handle what may appear to be harmless fruit punches with "just a little alcohol" or "just a glass of champagne."

This incident meant little to me personally; my daughter's prom was over a couple of years ago. But the principal's real message and feelings in that letter concern me. In her school, much time has been spent on informing kids about alcohol and drugs; in fact, these high school kids have been "exposed" to such programs since their middle school or even intermediate school years. The problem, the principal implies in her letter, lies in the behavior and attitudes beyond the school walls, in the homes and in the community where parents reign. She is angry. Her school has been charged with the responsibility of imparting to students the knowledge or facts about alcohol. Now must the school clean up the mess in the girls' bathroom because parents see no harm in "just a glass of champagne"?
I sense the principal’s anger and frustration and resentment toward the parents and community by whom she feels abandoned and betrayed. I wonder, too, why so much educational effort in the schools and in reaching out to the community does not seem to have been effective in enlightening some students’ and parents’ behavior.

Perhaps the reason is best expressed in an observation written many years ago by Fulton J. Sheen:

Never before in the history of this country had there been so much education, and never before so little coming to the knowledge of the truth. This is because knowledge and virtue reside in two different faculties inherent in every human being. Your intellect is the seat of virtue. Your intellect sets up the targets, your options; but your will shoots the arrows of your choices and your acts.

The principal’s indignation is justified, then, because we do all “know better” in these times. This prom incident is, in the grand scheme, forgettable. But it is instructive. Facing the mazes of personal decisions we and our students will have to find our way through in life; how much can “education” help us if we remain unable to come “to the knowledge of truth”?

But the only one here now is me.
I’m fighting things I cannot see
I think it’s called my destiny
that I am changing.

That is a verse from a song.

I use to always rely on other words to convey my meaning.
Now I want to rely on my own.

Points begin and end straight lines. We all have points.
It’s time to connect. It’s time to draw lines.

Straight lines are the shortest distances but the longest thoughts. People can follow straight lines and people can draw straight lines. I want people to draw and follow their own lines.

When I write I lose things. Those things end up somewhere else. When I find them it’s called a discovery. Columbus discovered a place because he got lost and wrote about it.

Writing introduces me to people I’ve met but can’t recall. Names and faces appear on the page from a photo I’ve only seen once. It’s developed and shown to others but it never looks the same. This is not a compliant.

We’re too busy capturing the past. Writing lets me. I can go on to the present. And when I do, I can write. All that’s left is the future. Writing creates the next place. I just have to find it. When I get there, I will write.

I was created in its image. It creates, therefore I write. I lose and I gain when I write. This happens at the same time. And it’s not confusing.

Strength comes from writing even though it weakens you. All of us are learning to become weaker so we may become stronger. Stronger to write.

Writing is fighting and wanting to lose. To win is to stop writing. We give in because we can’t stand the pain.
Fighters keep fighting because someday they will lose. I never want to win at writing.

Writing is the seventh sense. Some things can only be known through writing. I need to know more. I will write. I never did before. Now I know.

Concord's river barely flows. They say the current is so mild, one can't differentiate between upstream and down. Along its banks tall lavender flowers grow -- city-bred, I can't tell you their name -- and tall grasses -- or as I imagine, biblical rushes. In the evening, the softness of the light makes the scene vague, intangible, undefined -- a Renoir -- blurred, softened lines. I see a canoe, a river, myself, and a stranger.

I am here because this is the first day of my summer seminar. Arbitrarily, I have been assigned a canoe partner, a fellow teacher. He sits behind me, our having established, in few words, that he is a more proficient canoer than I. Thus, he will steer. I met him only hours before; we don't know each other's names.

It is evening. My family is far away -- on a distant shore. I am Columbus, and they are in Spain. This is my first time away in eighteen married years, and two hundred miles is an ocean.

The stranger at my back is very still. At first, I let the silent landscape envelop me. I am adrift in a pastel haze. I am eighteen again, alone, experiencing the world for the first time. My fingertips tingle; my eyes blur -- or is it the evening mists? Everything seems far too lovely.

After a while, I remember the other presence in the canoe with me. Like the shoreline, he too is blurred in my mind. I've forgotten what he looks like. From politeness, or unease, I begin to ask questions:

"I'm sorry, I forgot your name."
"Chris," he responds.
"Where are you from?"
"Hawaii."
"What do you teach?"
"English."
"When did you arrive?"
"Yesterday."

One word answer follows one word answer. Who is this stranger at my back? I crane my neck slightly to the right,
hoping to add substance to the voice. I see a silhouette, short dark hair, glasses, the edge of a blue shirt; details that reveal nothing. Now, the air begins to feel heavier. I am not alone. The texture of the silence disturbs me. How do I discover a person I cannot see? Finally, pouncing on a question I feel certain will lead to some kind of knowing, I ask: "What about Thoreau and Emerson intrigues you so, to make you travel this far for a seminar?"

"My wife filled out the application and sent it in," he replies.

I give up. He’s unknowable, or uninteresting, or reserved, or bored. I try to adjust to the more uneasy silence, when suddenly, I realize the quiet is more intense. We’ve rounded the river bend; the other canoers are out of sight.

I see a movement of a small animal or nesting bird on the shore. I point it out, and he directs us to a small cove. As we approach, I realize how dark it’s become, and how alone we are. And, like an eighteen-year old, I am frightened. Two feet from shore, I suddenly start paddling us away from the cove. He doesn’t say a word. But, he knows. The air is full. In the silver evening mists, I see phantoms — our cumulative pasts swirling by. I am not eighteen. I am not eighteen.

We paddle back to the dock. The landscape assumes its shape; the silence is typical when strangers meet. Having paid our debt to the rental office, we part in as few words as we’d begun. But I think, as I walk away, much has been said. For one brief, lovely moment, we’d paddled to a foreign shore — and fled.
"Nice to meet you," I replied, extending my hand to shake hers. She looked at my outstretched hand for a minute, as if wondering why I was offering it to her. Finally, she shook it. As insecure as I was feeling in my new situation, I worried all day about whether or not it was cool to shake hands with her. Obviously I was a wreck.

Eleanor, her stride purposeful, led me down the chaotic hall to her classroom. I followed on her heels. I did not, I noticed, walk beside her and again was annoyed by my behavior. She turned to me and said, "You can call me Ellie." 'Gee thanks,' I thought, 'you can call me Lise.' I reprimanded myself for my lousy attitude.

We stopped in Ellie's room, a windowless cell with one royal blue wall, thirty chair/desk combinations, a steel teacher's desk and little else. I made some mental notes about how I would decorate it were it my room. Next, I followed Ellie, again like a puppy, to room 44, where she presided over freshman homeroom. The bell rang and the students took their seats, the girls gabbing incessantly, the boys sitting, paralysed, gazing at a point in front of them.

Ellie explained homeroom procedures and introduced me to the class. It would be the first duty I would take over. Her other five classes I would inherit gradually after a two-week period of observation. As I was introduced, I was irritated at how vulnerable I felt, standing there in front of a room full of thirteen-year-olds. The girls, all dressed in the latest chic fashions with which I could never compete, checked me out for a critical moment before returning to their important discussions. The boys just stared. I squirmed uncomfortably, trying to find a position to sit in which would make me look comfortable, casual and cool. Should I lean back in the chair, tipping it on the back legs? No...too casual. Twist around with elbow propped on back rest, fingers bracing my head, legs crossed? No...too posed. Slump down in chair, legs stretched out in front, crossed at the ankles, hands folded and hanging loosely in lap? No...too lazy. Sit up straight, back rigid, shoulders stiff, feet flat on floor, hands on desk? No...too formal. It wasn't until the bell rang thirteen minutes later that I realized that I had just spent the entire time moving about in my seat, testing poses. The entire class probably watched, snickering and discussing what they would tell their friends about the new student.

The Vice Principal was making introductions.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi?" I thought. That's all she can say to me? Just 'Hi'? No 'welcome', no 'pleased to meet you', no comforting hugs?

January 20, 1987

I examined each female faculty member as they slipped through the swinging doors into the front office, wondering which was 'the one.' "That one looks like an English teacher, maybe it's her," I thought as the first one entered. "Could it be her?" I mused about the second one. "This one looks pretty cool; maybe I'll luck out and get her," I hoped as the third woman bopped through the entrance. I continued my survey hopefully, but none of the teachers seemed to be looking for anything more than their mail and perhaps another cup of coffee. I waited, nervously that "Eleanor" had changed her mind, deciding that she didn't want the burden of a student teacher after all.

It was a bleak winter day, the kind of day that could become a snow day if it tried hard enough. I had gotten up at 5:00, a dark and frighteningly still hour of the day which I hadn't experienced too many times before. Two-and-a-half hours later I stood in the heart of Joel Barlow High School, awaiting the elusive "Eleanor," a person who I knew by name only; a stranger who would be my guide for the next fifteen weeks. I had no idea what lay in front of me, though my college advisor had warned me that it would be "the toughest three months of my life." With this in mind, I predicted that anxiety attacks would become a new part of my daily agenda.

A few more 'modern looking' women slipped in and out of the office as I stood next to the reception desk, fidgeting. I felt so stupid, standing there, out of place and out of control of my situation. I began to resent "Eleanor" tardiness, her casual attitude about meeting and greeting her paranoid student teacher. My nerves were making me bitchy.

Then, a woman appeared by my side and the vice principal was making introductions.

"Lise, there is Mrs. Derwin. Mrs. Derwin...Lise."

"Hi," she said.

"Hi?" I thought. That's all she can say to me? Just 'Hi'? No 'welcome', no 'pleased to meet you', no comforting hugs?
Back in Ellie's room, I was assigned to my insignificant seat in the corner of the room, where I sat relatively unnoticed but for an occasional sideways glance. Ellie introduced me to the students and all heads turned in my direction to stare. No one spoke, no one smiled. They simply stared. I stared back. It was one of the more uncomfortable moments of my day, one which I would have to suffer through five more times. I wished they would do something, applaud, stick their tongues out, something. It never occurred to me that I could say hello and smile. My face was stuck.

I watched four classes that day and after a time became comfortable in my little corner of the room, next to the royal blue wall and three-drawer file cabinet. I watched as Ellie mingled with the students at the beginning of class, chatting with them about events in their lives, boyfriends, girlfriends, family. The students responded to her freely, trusting her, enjoying her presence. I envied their intimacy and wanted to be standing there, in her size seven shoes, comfortable and experienced, suitably cast in the role of teacher. I exhaled forcefully with the thought of how long it would take.

While conducting class, Ellie remained integrated with her students. She talked easily and had the ability to keep her students engaged, listening and discussing. I was amazed at her ability to do an entire lesson on imagery in The Bell Jar without looking at notes. I would, I was sure, be reading everything straight from notes, not looking up ever, throughout my entire career. I would never be so smooth. I respected her every move.

It had been three long months, I thought, as I unlocked the door to my classroom. I looked at the key and wondered if I could keep it as a souvenir — my first classroom key. I left my bulging bookbag on the desk and shoved a bag of goodies beneath it — goodbye treats for my kids, my 94 kids. As I made my way to the English office, I was stricken with a now familiar pang of sadness. What would I do when I awoke at 5:00 the next morning? How would I fill my days? How many times could I come visit without looking too stupid? God, I'd miss this.

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I opened the door of the English office and peered in at its emptiness. The table in the middle of the room, which was usually covered with papers, left over lunches, and The New York Times was cleared, its tan formica showing false wood patterns. A fountain of white, yellow, and red flowers occupied a leftover peanut butter jar, assorted pastries fanned out on a tray in the middle of the table and a card announced, "Congratulations, Lise. You made it!"

"What did you think?" she asked after fourth period English. "Think you're ready for it?"

Jesus, no, I thought panicking. "Sure, no problem," I replied, trying to sound authentic, to cover my fear, my doubt, my insecurity — feelings that I did not particularly wish to share with a stranger. Ellie just looked at me, her deep brown eyes gently searching out the truth in mine, her lips curling into a knowing smile. I felt a rush of relief then, relief that Ellie could see through my walls, through my Mount Rushmore imitation. She had found my weak spot and I knew then that it would be hard to fool her.

Later, during study hall duty, we sat and talked. Ellie wanted to know a bit about me and my educational background. I gave her the impressive details, and she listened, her head nodding at appropriate places, brown curls bobbing to the beat. Behind her patient face I could tell that she was not impressed by such statistics, that the real test would be in the classroom. I knew that this one would be honest with me from the start — tough and honest. I was grateful for this, grudgingly. How did the selection committee know to not match me up with a 'softie'? How did they know to put me with someone who would gently, but firmly show me the way, someone with whom I would grow and learn as a teacher? In retrospect, these sentiments are touching, but at the time all I could think of was, "If she mentions the Madeline Hunter theory one more time, I'll puke. Does this woman have a sense of humor or is she all business? Oh God, it's going to be a long three months..."

May 1, 1987

My classes, having all been completed the day before, were devoted to parties and good-byes. I read to the students an article I had written about my student teaching experience. This sharing somehow completed the bond between us, the bond which would be broken at the ring of the bell.
I couldn’t remember a time during those three months when I hoped the clock would slow down, but that day, while watching those kids, I wanted time to stand still.

Yes, it had been a long three months. I had learned, in that time, many valuable things. I learned that students love to eat Dunkin’ Donuts during first period, especially if supplied by their teacher. I learned that freshman students talk during class, and seniors stare. That they will do the absolute least amount of work possible, if they can. That Cathy hated my black boots and my haircut made me look like a student. That the pigs should have listened to Snowball instead of Napoleon. That Pip and Estella had an unhealthy relationship. I learned the fine art of ‘wining it.’ I also realized that the kid who seems to hate you the most is the one who is saddest when you leave.

I discovered that unless you have a strong bladder it is imperative that you go to the bathroom before starting class, and to not drink anything until the end of the day. I found out how to develop a deep, meaningful relationship with a xerox machine. That a lesson plan does not have to be eighteen pages long. That the Science office brews a mean cup of coffee and the English office doesn’t brew at all. That the conversations and antics in the English office tended to be obscene, out-of-control and hilarious. That teachers really are a funny bunch.

I also learned that collapsing in bed by 8:00 at night was not unusual. I found out that I needed to make new friends who would understand a teacher’s schedule and that I would have dreams about short story characters chasing me around my bed at night. I learned that teaching is an incredibly difficult job. And learned that I still have a long way to go and would like to take my master teacher with me when I leave. I learned a lot in those three months. A reallot.

That afternoon, after receiving flowers and gifts from students, I sat in the English office with the rest of the ‘crew.’ I had just received a dozen lovely roses from Ellie and had eaten a lunch which was made by a PTA mother. Conversation flowed around me as I sat back and watched. Soon, I would have to say good-bye. I hated good-byes, but knew they were necessary if I were to move on to my next adventure. There was one good-bye I refused to make, however. That was to my master teacher. For her, a ‘see ya round’ would have to do.

This week I celebrate an anniversary of sorts. Two years ago this month, I boarded a plane in San Francisco headed for New York City. My two young daughters and a cat in tow, I maneuvered our way to our seats, the girls scrambling for the window seat. I sat back and breathed a long sigh of relief. All the hard work was over; I had sold the house, supervised the movers, and tied all the loose ends together, to finally join my husband in New York and begin our new life as Easterners. Our furniture was in a truck heading for New Canaan, Connecticut. I was so relieved to have weeks of open houses, realtors, and packing boxes behind me. Images of a small New England town, blazing autumn vistas and train rides to New York filled my head. Memories of our life in Berkeley, California seemed to dim as our plane took off and headed East.

My husband and I had moved West out of choice. Born and raised in the Midwest, we grew bored with Kansas and wheatfields, bland food, and limited horizons. In a wild move typical of youth, we quit our jobs, rented a Ryder truck, stuffed all our worldly goods -- and car -- into it and drove 1800 miles across I-70 in search of a new attitude, open minds and a world that said “hurray for diversity.” We found that world in Berkeley.

A small city located across the Bay from San Francisco, Berkeley is famous for its great university, its radical politics, its innovative cuisine, and its benign climate that keeps flowers in bloom nine months out of the year.

We bought a tiny two bedroom bungalow there on a dead-end street named “Buena.” The hydrangas and camillas helped disguise its plain and homely style. Our neighbors reached out immediately, offering advice, directions and homemade goodies. We soon felt comfortable in Berkeley’s relaxed atmosphere where young people filled the streets, where jeans and birkensock sandals were standard dress and every other person owned a VW camper for trips to Mt. Tamalpais, Big Sur, or the Napa Valley.

We started developing a circle of friends -- just ordinary, middle-class, family-oriented people. No wide-eyed revolutionaries threatening to overturn the government. Social workers, nurses, teachers -- a lot of
service-oriented people. My best friend was an interesting kind of nurse -- a midwife. Homebirths were the rage then. Another friend/neighbor, also a nurse, belonged to a religious cult called the Sikhs. Nancy was something of an apostate though. She used her own name and refused to live in the ashram. These unusual lifestyle/professions were the exception, not the rule, however. Most of the people in our neighborhood worked nine-to-five jobs struggling as we all do to keep afloat. But not killing themselves. There seemed to be a time to work and a time to enjoy -- the eucalyptus trees in Tilden Park, Chez Panisse on a sunny afternoon, a stroll through the Berkeley Rose Gardens, maybe a Sunday afternoon concert at the Greek Theatre.

Of course, our relatives from the Midwest would visit regularly -- Berkeley would always provide a bizarre experience to write home about. One time my sister and I were standing in line at the Coop when two "ladies" began emoting over sister's baby. It took us about five seconds to realize they were gay men. Talking to strangers in a grocery line is a very natural occurence in California. Even if some strangers are more strange than others, that friendly, relaxed attitude of reaching out, if only for a moment, is very common.

What is common in Berkeley, however, is rare in New Canaan -- or so I decided after I arrived here. My girls and I landed at Kennedy delighted to be reunited with a husband and father after nearly three months of separation. Arriving in New Canaan, we were charged with enthusiasm and excitement. We stayed at a charming country inn, exploring the beauty and novelty of the town while we waited for our furniture to catch up with us. When the moving van arrived, we moved into a spacious old colonial on the west side of town -- a house we had rented until we were sure the move would be permanent. My girls relaxed in the space -- (almost an acre). "Mom, do we live in a park?" These kids who were used to postage stamp yards didn't know what to make of their new home. Yet, I could tell they liked it. I wasn't so sure about myself. My husband's job made many more demands on him so I found that we were seeing him less and less. He travelled extensively so I was left to look around town and figure out how I could fit in.

A couple of trips downtown made me realize the "California" look was out and the "preppie" look in. But I always hated pink and green together. Walking up Elm Street, I couldn't help noticing all the real estate offices (there are over 200 agents in town), expensive gift shops, and flashy Mercedes parked every which where. Standing in line at Grand Union, I ventured a casual remark to a stranger and received a chilly response. Several more such incidents convinced me of this cardinal rule in New Canaan: Do not talk to anyone you do not know.

I decided there must be some warm and friendly people in New Canaan -- people who cared about things other than the value of their houses and the price of swimming pools. So I started looking for them.

My daughters were attending West Elementary School, so I threw myself into the volunteer scene with a vengeance. Book discussions, Reading Rainbow programs, even the leader of the third grade Brownie Troop. I met so many different mothers; some who seemed afraid to smile, others who couldn't stop. But we all shared a common bond -- we wanted good things for our children. And so, working with them, I was able to gain some insight into the more reserved, more distant New England personality that hit me so wrong in the beginning.

We moved across town the following summer into another house remarkably like the first -- an old colonial set in a wide open field where rabbits, deer, and dogs roam freely. I felt it almost immediately: the air was not so rarified. My eighty-year-old next door neighbor brought over cookies warm from the oven. A woman across the road invited me to join her in her daily walks through Waveny Park. I thought to myself: "Am I still in New Canaan? There must be something in the well water on this side of town. How dare they try to tear down my stereotype!"

But they did. Two women, both trying to cope with significant problems of their own (a divorce and old age), they have become, for me, models of strength and maturity. But more than that, they have become my friends in a town where friends are hard to come by.

So, this week I think of Berkeley and its wonderful memories. I still miss it a lot. Yet, I feel I have finally carved out a place here that feels right. It feels good to be back on track and going forward once again.
WRITING AS/IS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

Leona Trinin

A writer writes. It is a poem about a delicate wildflower which blooms though ensnarled in thorny underbrush. A simple poem—but is it? Government officials in the poet's country think he is talking about a seed of freedom budding beneath repression. The poet is jailed. And so it must be if that country is to remain as it is. His image of a wildflower is dangerous.

A writer writes. She writes of family, continuity, of birth, death, birth again. She writes of the mother she came from and the children she's borne. Simple tales from a mother's heart. Or are they? They speak of life and love and living. They become part of the peacemaker's litany. She is dangerous.

A writer writes. He looks like a soldier, uniformed, grimy, and grim. He writes of what he sees. He describes the scene around him. A young man's journal. But is it? We read it and smell the stench of war and we say "No!" This journal can stop tanks. This writer is also dangerous.

Writers are harder to vanquish than terrorists. A man with a gun can be brought down with a gun. So can a poet, but the poem lives on.

Journalists are writers who look at the powerful and tell us what they see. They pry open basement doors and pour light on secret schemes. They too are dangerous.

These are solo voices. Consider now groups of writers: seminars, collectives, institutes, projects. Writers writing—thinking—reading—listening. Individual lives become shared experience. A community is formed. They disperse, become parts of other writing groups. The community grows. Trust expands. No one can set these people against each other. They are each other. Expanded shared humanity precludes exploitation.

Yet these apostles are not the most dangerous; the most insidious peril to the status quo comes from the writing teachers. They make classrooms into communities. They teach children to reach into their own inner cores, find a bud of humanity, nurture it, bring it out into the sun, share it. They teach children to collaborate with each other, and yet to maintain ownership of their own feelings and beliefs. These children are not learning to watch the leader/teacher for approval. They fail to understand how to compete with each other; they do not court the leader's favor. Instead, they question authority, they do what seems right to them, they smile often. Within classroom communities such as these, individual integrities are born and grow. Watch out for these teachers. They are building the human community. They are dangerous...and powerful.
HE'S MINE NOW
Don Schuman

Why weren't you home, Cousin Lynnie?
Why weren't you home?

He cut off his thumb with the power saw
Down in his workshop, mother explained,
Making a toy for one of us --
Probably Lynnie, his favorite.

He lived with her,
his darling
She called him "Gramp"
her special name for him,
our dear old "Papoo."

"Isn't that something?" Aunt Lois said
through the crackling phone line.
He just picked up the severed thumb
put it in place
paint rag wrapping
saw dust clinging to clotting blood.

The thick Westchester County phone book
as if it knew the urgency
Opened itself up
"Dr. Shaw -- Rogers 9-03227"

Eighty-eight years old
straw hat, silk brimmed
troll-like Pap
wire-rimmed spectacles
sitting halfway
down the long
Huguenot
nose

Driving to the doctor, all alone
Silver Delta 88
maroon leather seats
little splatters of blood
the red not matching well

Little lead-foot, road-runner
Holding on tight to the wheel

and the thumb

I wonder what he said
When the saw took its quirky turn.
"Oh pshaw! Land sakes!"
Funny little man, driving too fast
Strong stubborn --
dear old Pap
his stubby fingers
called used and tan.

Now the master of his lakeside camp,
He has me in his summer spell.
He sits amidst the sundrenched ferns
watching the lake below
The loons call
the peewee sings

Still the straw hat
silk tie
woolen trousers.

The stub has healed.
I stare, fascinated,
at the absence of thumb
Morbidly drawn to the little knob
of bone and flesh nicely hidden,
skin stretched over and neatly sewn.

I savor the familiar smell of him
vicks and witch hazel
damp wool and Aqua Velva
a touch of moth ball.

But his hand's no longer deft without the thumb.
I help him tie his shoe, button his cuff.
We've got the lamps to fill; we trim the wicks.
The little trimming tool no longer works for him.

"This hand's no darn good anymore," he says.
I help him replace a torn mantle,
the new one white and delicate.

Where were you, Lynnie?
Why weren't you home?
You,
Where were you?
I'll call him Gramp.

THOUGHTS...TOO DEEP FOR TEARS
Bob Wilson

1 A.M. and a long, dark ride home from somewhere still vague in upper Westchester County. Even in the daylight we had difficulties finding our way through the scenic hills to the historic, comfortable tavern. Now the early morning fog made the trip more puzzling. The evening had been worth the trip, though. We joined some old friends for a concert featuring a folk group from Scotland. The dinner, the music, the conversation had been enjoyable. It had felt good to go out again. With three kids we rarely make an evening of it, especially in winter. It's all just too much trouble to arrange: their supper, the babysitting plans, getting ourselves ready and out.

Enjoyable, yes; but also a very long ending to an extremely tiring Friday. I need rest now and the ride seems endless. I continue driving slowly through the misty morning fog.

2 A.M. We pull into the driveway; the house is all lit up. I should have suspected then that something was wrong, that it wasn't just a case of wasting electricity. We walk into the house. The boys are in bed, but my mother-in-law and Rebecca are still up. Our daughter greets us with: "I got burned -- and it was all your fault, Mom!" What? What happened? I can't believe my ears, and my eyes flash over to Grandma sitting on the couch at the other end of the room. She is silent.

Rebecca continues her accusation: "You asked me to help with supper. I boiled the water for the macaroni. When I went to pour it out, it went on my leg. If you hadn't asked me to help, it wouldn't have happened. It's all your fault!"

I wince; I can feel the water scorch my own flesh. The sweat pants she had been wearing soaked up the boiling water and pressed against her thigh, prolonging the painful moment. My wife, the mother and professional nurse, examines the wound. "Were you cooking by yourself?" I asked, though I instinctively knew the answer. "Yes, Grandma was in the living room." Hurling a fierce, penetrating look to my mother-in-law, I leave the room.
I knew the truth; I could have guessed the facts of the story I was hearing being retold in the other room. Grandma had yet again abdicated her responsibility by just letting things happen, by just letting the twelve-year-old take over because it was too much trouble for the woman to move from in front of the t.v. while a show was in progress.

Goddamnit! My hand stings as I pound the kitchen table. The woman didn't even take my daughter to the emergency room. Why didn't she call the EMS? She knows about it; I'm a driver for them. The volunteers would have handled the situation in my absence. She did relatively nothing beyond a feeble attempt at minimal first aid; she is to blame. I cannot bear to hear my daughter's tearful and wrongful accusing of her mother. I am so damned angry that I cannot even go back into the room to console Rebecca. I would unleash a fury of words that would hurt the woman and not help the girl.

It is days before I can even look at what turned out to be a second-degree burn. Just thinking about the wound and its dressing evokes nausea, tears, and anger. This need not have happened. Once it did, if I had been called, I could have ordered that the ambulance be called. I could have done something. I know that this line of thought will do no good, but I am beyond logic. Luckily my wife has the expertise, the stamina and the love to tend to the wound. I can now give Rebecca my affection and my physical caring because I can ignore the presence of the grandmother who has maintained her silence, who has not even expressed sorrow or regret, much less guilt. She just sits tight hoping the immediacy of the situation will pass.

And it did pass. It has been two years since Rebecca was hurt. Treatment and surgery result in a successful skin graft, but also in unexpected, ugly, and rock-hard keloid scar tissue on her abdomen where they took the donor skin and on her upper thigh where the burn was. She never mentions the injury and does not seem embarrassed about the keloid. As a matter of habit, she takes care to cover the graft from the strong rays of the sun. She has become the babysitter for her brothers; she even cooks.

My emotional wound, however, is still fresh. It will not scar and become hard; I will not let it heal. I touch it; I probe it. I want it to bleed its angry feelings, as if this pain will allow me to vent the violent emotion without injuring either an aging woman or a maturing girl with the force of my truth. But is there really any significant truth in my self-righteous clinging to fury, in my addictive urge to blame my mother-in-law for what cannot be done? Is there really any valid purpose in any desire to inflict the pain of admission of guilt on someone who does not seek confession?

Rebecca has questions, too, but they are ever so much more practical. As we all sit around the dinner table, she tentatively asks, "Is it still possible for me to see that doctor about my scar?" My wife and I quickly look at each other and then cautiously affirm that it is quite possible. We had been waiting for her to see the need for this next phase of her treatment. As my wife talks with her about plastic surgery and how the operation will result in a thin, barely noticeable scar, I hazard a quick, covert glance at my mother-in-law who is sitting at the other end of the table.

Whenever the topic of Rebecca's burn comes up, I usually avoid looking at her. Now, in a spontaneous instant, I notice the many wrinkles on the tough skin of her face and the constant, nervous movement of her upper lip. I am startled as I am magnetically drawn to her averted eyes. For the first time, I see in them a sadness "too deep for tears" that pervades her silence, and I know that she, too, is suffering and cannot let the pain rest. In her way, she bears her own unhealing wound.

Our eyes do not meet; the moment passes. I know now that it is time to let my wound heal. For although a scar is a permanent reminder of past pain, it will at least fade...in time.
OLD DOGS, NEW TRICKS
Diane Drugge

Of all the dogs that have shared my life, only one started with me as a puppy. Max, a boxer, was a Mother’s Day present for me at the age of thirty-nine. The family, consisting of a husband, three teenagers, a daughter of nine, an infant of four months, a grandfather, a mixed collie, a goat, three chickens, and two cats evidently thought I needed something to keep me busy. Fortunately, the puppy fit right in, responded well, and now that he’s departed from this earth, I have only pleasant memories, most of them after he grew to adulthood.

The point is this. All puppies are interesting, lovable, fun, and a lot less effort. Besides, some them actually work for their owners. I’ve known them to trot out front to pick up the newspaper, get your slippers, fetch their own dish, respect your sleeping time, discourage approaching salesmen, guide the blind, and I even knew one who pulled kids around in a pony cart. Now a days they are saving people from buying $3,000 alarm systems.

I can hear the objections. Those are trained dogs you are speaking of. Well, of course I am, but who is to say that someone else’s training hasn’t exceeded yours? Back to the only dog I had from puppyhood. Along with the dog came obedience lessons. The now sixty-pound puppy and I attended the beginners’ class. From the moment Max entered the ring, he had one purpose — locating smells. Short-snouted, near-sighted, he burrowed into the backside of the seven females in the class. As he flew around the ring with me holding on to his leash, he frenetically swiped one little rear after another into the air. The teacher managed to pull us aside. We watched the rest of the lesson. By the third time, I was still dragged into the fray with no less fervent desires — he to smell the ladies and I to train him not to. The teacher broke the news. “Sometimes boxers are difficult to train. You might crush his spirit.”

“Crush his spirit?” I can’t even keep chickens confined to their pen. For the rest of his days, he proudly wore the badge of a kindergarten drop-out.

Max lived until the age of nine and a half. One of the last memories I have of him, when he was old and suffering from the ravages of cancer, was my standing on the stoop at 1:30 a.m. and calling his name over and over again as he walked in the opposite direction. Frustrated, I retreated into the house and returned with his bed and water dish. Twenty minutes later, I opened the door for the stubborn fellow who never lost his spirit.

On the other hand, Big Ethel, a Boston black dane, an import from Spanish Harlem, was trained to the hilt. There is no point in mentioning her talent for alleviating the need for a burglar alarm, but rather the position she captured as the instant entertainer. Conversation at a lull? “Big Ethel, roll over.” Flop! Big laughs. “Ethel, play dead. Ethel, shake hands. Ethel, sit.” Now there was a trained dog. When she died at twelve and a half, we prayed a special “thank you” to her former mistress who had given us the joy of an on-call show.

Without Ethel, there was a big void. I hit the trail again. In pursuing the “Animals for Adoption” column in the New York Times, I saw an ad, “Boxer Rescue” with a New Jersey phone number. The man who answered my call told me that the one to describe the three available boxers, boarded elsewhere, was his wife, Jean, who was attending a reception for Corazon Aquino. She had been a former classmate of the Philippines’ President.

On the 6 p.m. television news, Jean Loubriel was before me chatting in an interview about her seat next to Corazon in a huge auditorium when she took English Comp 101 at St. Vincent’s College. Mildly excited, I thought that I am about to have contact with this woman. Of course, the old magic was crowding in — the dog in the state of my birth, the breed of my childhood and sometimes womanhood, and the woman now appearing right before my eyes. The signs were there.

Jean called. She was presently boarding three dogs for the Boxer Rescue Organization — a four-and-a-half year old flashy male, a two-and-a-half year old shy female, and an older dog they dubbed “Old Fashioned Max.” “Max?” I asked in disbelief. Another sign.

The next morning, standing before a pen at 6:30 a.m., watching a miserable greying-masked boxer barking raucously, convinced my husband, as no doubt others had felt, prolonging his confinement to over two months, that a younger more pleasant dog would suit us better. Ethel’s demise was still vivid.
We were walking along the road on our way to the rocky grottos and hidden pools. We each carried our own towel. I carried a bag of fruit.

"I'm a knot," I said. "Most of the time."

"I've known you almost a year, but I can't remember you really at ease. You're on guard. Or keeping a kind of vigil or something."

"Am I really that way? I don't mean to be. I just am." Why were we talking about this? "Where is the footpath to the grottos? Didn't he say it was just past an open field with a corral fence around it?"

"Yes. I think I see it coming up over there." She pointed diagonally in front of me to my left. She has slender arms. I liked her. I could lose myself in her. But she would never know this.

"For what?" she said.

"What?"

"What are you waiting for, or protecting?"

I was annoyed at her eyes. But I like them, too. They are large and deep, almond-shaped. And she could narrow them nicely. And make them do anything. They could make me smile. They were probing now.

"I'm not on guard or watching for anything. Maybe I'm preoccupied."

"With what? You had a good year at school."

"With me." I didn't want to say it. It just came out.

"You think too much, David. Just relax." She reached for my hand but it moved away from her quickly.

"And you too little." I was looking at the ground in front of me, kicking pebbles. I didn't want to see her, her eyes. "I didn't mean that. Let's drop it, Eva. Let's have a great time." I wanted to mean it.

"You know, David. Sometimes I think I don't know you at all."

"I could tell she was getting angry again. Her eyes told me. I almost didn't care. She was the one asking all the questions. I was having a hard time too. Maybe the islands and all this water wasn't a good idea. The water was everywhere. There was no place to go. I began to feel confined. I tried to fight it.

"You know alot," I told her. "I put my hand on the nape of her neck up into her thick hair. "You know I like you. Very much." Her probing eyes, a deep-sea blue, softened, inviting me.

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frantic. Her head bent backward toward Bingo who bounced sideways, each time his hysterical bark lifting him. The sheep tried to pull free, the tether taut as a rod. She bellowed her bleats. Her head twisted toward us. Her huge eyes searched for Bingo, who now came from behind her. Her loin was exposed. The dog riveted his excited eyes. There was a momentary silence.

And then I saw Bingo's calculated lunge. With an ancient precision, his teeth tore into her udder. The milk splattered into the air. A scream ripped out of her. Bingo bounded back and forth again, barking, the sheep wild with pain and unrelieved terror. Avoiding the kicking feet, Bingo set himself again, the ritual beginning again.

I felt immobilized and heavy. But this was happening. I thought I must do something this time. This time I must act immediately but accurately and correctly. I ducked between the rails of the fence, then running, yelling.

Bingo saw me quickly. I divided his attention. He couldn't concentrate on the lamb though he wanted her. I scooped up a large stone. I menaced him. He faced me, barking aggression. His upper lip was raised. I came forward raising my arm automatically. Bingo was not brave, but he was smart. He backed off, turning. I didn't think I would hit him but I did. The stone struck his skull. He fell forward, wobbling. I picked up the red stone, again running at him. I caught up, kicked him down, knelt by him. I raised my arm.

"David!"

I struck his head, grunting. Then again. He no longer moved. I couldn't stop.

"David! Stop!"

I smashed his head finally. My hand felt warm. It was red. I got up slowly. Everything was still again. I walked to the watching sheep. She was quiet. Her skin was shaking. So was mine. I untethered her. She turned quickly, heading up to the brush, bleating softly, to nurse herself. I saw the red rip of the wound, and the dark stains on the ground. I felt empty.

Eva appeared beside me. She seemed cautious and fearful. She walked toward Bingo but then stopped short. She must have seen him. She came back. She looked at my bloody hand. Her eyes, like a tidal bore going backwards, fell into her, shutting.

I walked back to the fence. I picked up the towels and bag of fruit. Then she was next to me.

"Leave my towel alone!" She was yelling at me. She grabbed it. I kept walking. I wiped sweat from my brow.

"You've got blood on your face now." I just kept walking. I heard her but I didn't know what to say. I felt very strange.

My arm was shaking hard. Eva was doing it.

"David! Listen! Why did you do that, David? Why?"

And then I was running down the narrow path to the water.

* * * * *

He had dropped his towel and the bag of fruit. I picked up both, not touching the blood. I didn't know what to do, but I didn't want to lose him. So I ran after him. I came to the beach but I didn't see him. There were huge boulders everywhere. Then I spotted his faded denim jacket. He called it his soul jacket. I looked out to the water and saw him swimming away from the island. I heard screams. Then I thought I heard a name. Ernie. Over and over again. I called out to him but he kept swimming. I knew he couldn't have heard me. Even if he did, he wouldn't have cared.

I climbed up the boulders to get a better view. I saw him clearly.
didn't hear any name now. I wanted to run for help but I couldn't take my eyes from him, to lose him.

I don't know how long I waited, standing on the rocks, crying. Finally he was moving toward the beach and I jumped down to meet him. He was walking from the water, exhausted and panting. I ran to him but he moved passed me. He didn't seem to see me. He just fell to the ground, clutching his jacket close to him.

I looked down at him. His eyes were closed. He lay half in shade, panting. I knelt and stroked his hair from his forehead. He felt cool. After a while he calmed and then he slept. I took off his clothes to dry, but I also wanted to see him. Then I took off my clothes.

A few hours had passed and he was in shadow now. I was staring at the sunlight on the water. I heard the sound of the sea pulsating against the hard island. I felt cold and alone and unsure of us.

I remember lying next to him. I felt strong feelings. I knew I wanted him. I felt a passionate desire to touch him and arouse him and love him. He seemed accessible now, and vulnerable. But I still had a fear of him. He was unpredictable. I found myself looking at his hand, expecting to see the blood.

I looked at his breathing body. I touched his smooth shoulder and his chest. I moved my hand along his sleeping muscles. I felt warm.

His body jerked. Suddenly he was looking at me. He noticed my nakedness first, and then his own.

"Where are my pants? And your clothes?" He looked so puzzled. He couldn't figure it out. I couldn't help a little laugh.

"Well, I took them off. I mean I took off your pants first because you were cold and I wanted to dry them, too, and then I took off mine because...because I didn't want to be embarrassed by your...nakedness." I smiled at him, watching him. He smiled and relaxed. He looked around a little.

"Where are we?"

"By the beach. You ran down here raving into the water, swimming and screaming. You came back and fell asleep. You frightened the hell out of me, David. Do you remember what you did?" He wasn't looking anywhere, just up, at the sky. I felt better now, more in control. He didn't answer. I saw the bag.

"Do you want something to eat? Some fruit? You'll feel better."

"I killed him."

"Who? Bingo?"

He was still looking, staring at the sky. I felt chilly. I don't know why. Maybe he was doing it to me.

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"Where are we?"
He looked out to the water again, staring at it. "Who knows what prepares us for that moment...to act correctly...to do the right thing. We're not all John Waynes."

I knew, now, that he had a private knowledge. I looked away from him when I saw his tears. I felt like an intruder but I couldn't stop intruding.

"David. Tell me about Ernie."

"How did you know about Ernie?" Suddenly he was penetrating me.

"You were screaming it in the water, David." His shoulders went down and he looked away. I approached again. "What happened to him?"

"I thought you wanted to know about the sheep, damn it!" But his resistance was weak. I could sense he wanted to tell me, whatever it was.

"I do, David. Tell me about Ernie." I wanted to touch him, to warm him. He looked out to the water again, motionless in the moonlight. He was so still. I wanted to be near him but he was somewhere else. I knew he was preparing to tell me but when he spoke his voice surprised me.

"We were very close. He was close first. We knew each other on and off during our first year at college. But in the last two years we roomed together off campus. Did alot together. I liked him. He saw some humor in life. He knew how to joke with me. He lightened me. And he knew things about me before I came to know them. Before I could open up to him, he was inside me...I don't want to go over it again."

I said nothing. I waited. He was just looking at the ground, moving his fingers in the sand.

"We graduated in June of last year. He went home to his mother's place. I went home, too. I had no clear intentions beyond graduate school. I worked."

"At what?"

"Doesn't matter. He called me in July. He wanted to see me. When he came in August, I realized how much I had missed him. He lightened me.

"It was my idea to go to the beach. I had missed rough waters. I felt more alive in them. I enjoyed my body in them. I could get lost in them. Ernie would like it too. I could share this with him."

"Yes."

"We walked across the sand. It was cool. The sky was lead grey and the ocean full of white caps, choppy. I saw the sand bar. I had seen it for years. Strong, shifting currents formed them and then took them away. Large waves were breaking beyond the bar. An ocean wind drove the surf. It was a strong day." He stopped and I waited again.

"You went in?"

"Yes, we did. I first, then Ernie, behind me. He seemed...hesitant. 'Come on, Ernie.' He waded through the calmer waters between the shore and the bar. I was farther out now, near the breaking waves. 'Hey, Ernie, our here. Come out further. The waves are breaking out here. Come, Ernie.'"

"I felt the crashing waves. I dove through them to get further out, to ride them in. But Ernie lagged behind. 'You're almost here, Ernie. Come out.' I motioned with my arm pulling him out. He came. He said the current was strong. I joked, saying a lot of dead people would agree with him. The beach had a reputation.

"I didn't really feel the current. But I guess it was there, pulling us sideways, and out. But I felt safe. I saw no danger. There was no danger. We were not that far from shore."

He was shaking now, holding himself with his arms.

"And then what happened, David? Where was Ernie?" He lifted his head further as if looking over people in front of him to get a better view. I followed his eyes into the water. I didn't see much in the fading light. But he was seeing something.
Then. Somehow. Ernie was with me but off to my left and a little in front of me. He looked OK. But then we were over our heads. I didn't feel the bottom, but I felt OK. I had no fear. And so when he started yelling I was surprised..."Help...help." What was the matter? "David! Help me." He was about twenty feet away. There was no danger around him. I didn't see it. But he made me afraid. "Help. David. Commere." Where was the danger? Am I in danger?

"And then...And then we were together. Somehow. We were touching each other, but he was wild, out of control, he was climbing on me to get out of the water, to climb out of the water. I felt his hysterical weight. I went under. Came up. He was climbing on me again. But where, what is the danger?

"And then... I pushed him away. Quickly. 'Tread water, Ernie! Just tread water! I'll get help. Tread water.' I turned away from him.

"I swam with great power. I didn't look anywhere. I was full of fear and purpose. I had to get help, get help, get help. I reached the bar. It was disappearing, the water up to my chest. I looked back. I saw his face like a bouy bobbing up and down, up and down. I saw his head riding the waves. Good, I thought, he's there. I swam again, not far. I ran in the thick water. I saw two people. 'Help! Get the lifeguard! My friend is drowning!' I fell to the shore, staggered up, looked back.

"The sea was stormy. The waves were so damn high. I couldn't see his face. I looked and looked. I saw seagulls floating in the sky... He was gone. I knew it. A fact." He lay back, limp.

"Where were the lifeguards, David? What about them?" It was so quiet now.

"We were swimming in between the guarded beaches. It took time. He was gone. I picked up his jacket. I spoke to the police. I walked into the dunes. I fell asleep looking into the night.

"Was his body...?" I couldn't finish.

"No."

He lay down on the sand, staring but not at anything. I just looked at him. He seemed tired again.

When I lay next to him, I heard him moaning. His eyes were closed. He whispered his name. He was calling him. "Ernie, Ernie." He was shaking so I took Ernie's jacket to cover him. I looked at it. I felt envy and anger at the same time. Would he ever want me that much? Maybe he shouldn't have lived at all. Everything would have been much easier. What was he like? What did he look like? I wanted to see him, to talk to him about David.

I was still holding the jacket in my lap when he moved toward me. His arm reached out and he brought me to him. I felt only an easy resistance. Maybe because I wanted him very much now. We were alone. He buried his face against me. I felt him burrowing in. And then he was on me. I felt uncomfortable. There was too much force.

"David. Wait."

"Oh, Ernie, Ernie." I pushed him hard and he jerked back.

"I'm Eva. I am Eva." And then I said it. I didn't want to. I just said it so suddenly I couldn't stop it.

"Have I always been Ernie?"

"I can't let go, Eva. Not yet. Don't demand it."

"His death was not your fault."

"I never said it was." He said it so quickly. He weight shifted backward.

"I can't always be Ernie, David. I'll help you, I know you better now." He moved toward me. His face was so close to me that I saw his grief in the water of his eyes. "I won't be."

"I'll let go, Eva. I will. But not yet, Eva. Not yet."
He came to me and I lay down and again I heard his name. And again and again. That night I gave him all the love Ernie had to give. And Ernie took all of David's love, forgivingly and finally. We spent ourselves.

First morning at CWP becomes the Range Hike. Squeezed in the back of a pick-up, Trucked to the base of Mt. Madison, on a day so hot, Humidity hit 98%, Relentless sun, my face purple in half an hour. Basement room at U Conn opposite, Layers of clothes, even then I shivered, Physical discomfort, mental stress, Seven hour climb up Mt. Madison, Straight up, never sure I could make it — Assignments at CWP steep and treacherous, Mt. Berlin, Mt. Proust, Mt. Burfee, Mt. Berthoff, Heavy stuff, one climb won't do it. A workshop to prepare, Foolhardy to sign up for Range Hike, Condition good, can breathe and walk on flat, Now the truth is known, Panting I hang out with the Sweepers, Goats have long since gone. A workshop for these experts? Theory? Goals? Procedures?? Why didn't you sign up for bridge luncheons, Golf lessons? Theatre bus to matinees? I see the hut, only an hour to go, Twisting, turning path through woods, Now and then, the View, spectacular View AHA, now I know why I'm here. Leaders, Faye and Del, not holding out the carrot, They do not sweeten us, Not like our mountain Guide, who said, Rest of the climb is a piece of cake. CWP hard hard work, My own writing torturous, I wait for the ITCH, It pours out like the hurricane on the third day, The sense of the piece in view. Response group reacts, My Sweepers, they applaud, critique, encourage. The hut's ahead, You're going to make it. We eat, we sleep, begin again.
Mt. Adam's next, eight days of this,
Painful bleeding feet,
But so much love, the caring carries me.
Workshop flies, some problems too,
Acceptance, help, suggestions.
Trail is long, Zealand Falls hut,
Still a thousand miles to go.
We sing, recite A. A. Milne.
Crouch in the lightning.
Hear Doug Paulsen's collaborative learning.
Oh do I know the truth of that!
Joanna Nicholson's brain research.
Summits to ponder, a place to reflect and rest.
Colleagues' workshops, substance for the long haul.
AHAs to last, all the way to the top.
We stagger back down the last trail.
Backpacks heavy with sodden new baggage.
No place or time to sort.
Seventeen souls, entwined forever.
Plus two who guide us still.
Oh God, the hut boys, sometimes girls.
They hauled our food, toilet paper, paper sheets.
Sonja and Randi, patiently photocopying.
Collating, finding our books, articles.
Held our days together.
It's over now, we stagger back.
Some to Pinkham Notch, to recover enough to drive.
Some to nearby family, scarred and weary.
Victorious in spirit.
Filled to overflowing.
With new ways to be, new ways to serve.

I REMEMBER...
Summer Fellows, 1987

I remember when writers gathered, in the summer of '87.
I remember how wonderful I felt when I finished giving my workshop.
I remember readarounds: how we read aloud, how we listened and, in silence, heard each other.
I remember when all the faces became real, all the voices, unique.
I remember when your words became alive during the readaround.
I remember when Diane, driver extraordinaire, left the carpoolers waiting and kept the rest of the Institute wondering.
I remember when I first met my response group with seventeen layers or more, of impregnable politeness.
I remember how the silence sounded when we were writing.
I remember discovering how much I knew and how much more I need to learn.
I remember when Tracy read her first piece, about her brother and Latin America, and I wished I handled math one third as well as she does language.
I remember when Bob's piece helped me forgive my mother.
I remember how lonely I felt as the writing groups forged their minds.
I remember how I felt getting stuck in Merritt Parkway traffic and caring about what I was missing.
I remember how our response groups sat on the ground, under a tree, on a city of ants, and it didn't matter.
I remember how little I knew on July 1st at dinner.
I remember the many times we broke into laughter.

I remember when Berlin floored us.

I remember when the group laughed at my jokes in my workshop.

I remember when metacognition became a dirty word.

I remember when I was afraid to talk (approximately ten minutes).

I remember when.