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## A Reflective Look at the Writing Process for Both Children and Adults: A Memoir Study

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*Bank Street College of Education*

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A Reflective Look at the Writing Process  
for Both Children and Adults:  
A Memoir Study

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of  
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### Abstract

In order to teach the writing process, one must be a writer. This independent study explores the writing process from the inside out. It investigates the writing process from an adult perspective while also examines the writing process that developed for individual student writers within a second grade classroom. Over the course of three months, the students in my second grade classroom and I developed personal memoirs about a “small moment” from our lives. This study includes a comprehensive breakdown of lessons which scaffolded the memoir writing process. It also includes a strong reflective component which reveals how we all responded to the various aspects of the memoir writing process.

My ongoing reflection gave birth to a series of questions which led me to think more deeply about what I want writing to look like in my own classroom. I have used the work of Lucy Calkins, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, Carl Anderson, Nancie Atwell and others to help me begin to answer these questions as well as to support my own views about the development of a strong writing program within an elementary school classroom.

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## Rationale

Over the past three years, I've worked in a variety of school environments and a diverse number of classroom settings. On multiple occasions, I've been asked why I wanted to go into teaching and my response was (and still is) "I want to be a teacher so that I can help children feel good about themselves." I was not initially drawn to teaching because of my love for school and the academic subjects. I found myself more attracted to the social and emotional components of school, which certainly influence students' learning of math, reading, writing, social studies and science curricula. Being that a classroom teacher is responsible for all aspects of student learning, I want to discover how to think about the academic subjects so that I can use them as a way to tap into the positive social and emotional development of children.

My time in the classroom the past few years has challenged me to think critically about the experience I want my students to have as they learn about math, reading, writing, social studies and science. My interest in this aspect of being a teacher has been rekindled and heightened! I now greatly anticipate meeting with my colleagues to discuss and plan what, and how, we will introduce material to our students in the weeks to come, yet I feel somewhat reserved and less confident thinking about how to teach writing.

For as long as I can remember, feelings of fear have been associated with the teaching of writing because growing up as a student, and even into my adulthood, I have never felt confident and strong as a writer. Writing has always been something that I've struggled with and now that I'm stepping into this role

as “teacher”, I feel the pressure to teach it the “right” way. The responsibility of “teaching students to write” feels intimidating.

Recognizing that I cannot escape this and that I do not want my students to go through school feeling the same way that I always have about writing, I am taking this opportunity to be introspective about my own writing process as a means of providing myself with insight into the ways my students may experience writing. My guiding question throughout the course of this study will be: How do I, as a struggling writer, support and encourage my students as writers?

I am beginning this study by thinking about myself as a writer and examining how I learned to write. As I continue to unravel and explore my own process of writing, I will have more access to ways of helping myself, which, in turn, will allow me to be more effective with my students. When students say things like “I don’t know what to write”, I want to feel confident in my ability to help them, rather than join them in their frustration.

I believe that as I come to understand myself better as a writer and identify my strengths, I will feel more confident in my abilities to teach writing from a comfortable place. This knowledge gained from this independent study will provide me with tools that I can take with me as I continue to grow as a teacher.

“Everybody has something to say, something close to his or her heart.

It's a matter of being courageous enough to put the thoughts and feelings into words.”

-Lulu Delacre (Kovacs and Preller, 1993, p. 21)

## My Experience Learning to Write

*"The cat was white. It had whiskers. The End."*

While I don't have a strong recollection of learning to write, one of my earliest writing experiences remains a clear and powerful memory. In first grade, when my teacher read the story I had written about my white cat, she felt the need to relay her concerns to my parents about how I was developing as a writer. "Jessica must focus on adding more details to her work. She has wonderful thoughts but she needs to work on expanding her ideas."

Now, as an adult, I can think back on this moment and chuckle, but this example is just one of many which represents how difficult and demanding the task of writing can be. For me, writing has always been an emotional process and experience. As I reflect back upon my experience with writing in elementary, middle and high school, I have difficulty recalling particular writing teachers or writing assignments but I strongly remember the feelings that I associated with writing: frustration, exhaustion, frustration, boredom, frustration and disappointment.

Writing was difficult and, for the most part, it was a chore. I was taught, and soon thereafter became a believer, that writing had a formula. The formula was as follows: introductory paragraph (which includes a topic sentence/thesis statement), three body paragraphs (all of which include three supporting details for each point that is made), and a concluding paragraph (where you restate your thesis statement). I'm certain that there were opportunities for more creative, less



structured writing throughout my school years, but, sadly, the scripted, formulaic writing assignments are the ones that stand out in my mind. Writing was meaningless and served no purpose other than to satisfy my teachers' requests.

Soon came the pressure of having to complete assignments within a specific timeframe. I would walk circles in the hallway of my house thinking of what to write. An hour later, I'd return to my paper only to be greeted by the blank page. I'd go and eat a snack, leave the house for a run yet, afterwards, when I sat down to write, I was still unable to fill the page. Frustration. "Try making an outline" "Organize your thoughts first" were the words of my teachers in response to my frustration. That just didn't work for me like it worked for others. I had so many ideas but I had great difficulty recording them on paper. Nothing sounded as good on paper as it did in my head. I wasn't able to find a fool-proof method of writing that worked for me, although I was taught that one existed.

Writing was no less daunting as a teenager as it was as a six year old but the difference was that as a teenager, I became aware that my writing was being used as an important assessment tool. Writing became a benchmark for teachers to determine how their students were doing. I remember feeling pressure to perform for my teachers because I had internalized the fact that my writing was constantly being judged as a reflection of my intelligence and who I was in their classroom. The valuable tool of retrospect has helped me to recognize and articulate that I felt (and sometimes still do feel) self-conscious as a writer. This

has certainly affected my ability to write as well as my feelings about myself as a writer.

Although the majority of my earlier writing experiences felt meaningless and purposeless, I cannot neglect the moments when I found sanctuary in my personal journals. At about the age of thirteen, I began keeping a travel journal. Originally, the idea for keeping this journal arose out of pure practicality. I wanted to be able to record all of the wonderful moments and anecdotes that made my travels unique and memorable. All of a sudden, writing had a purpose. Over time, these travel journals became a place where I would write down more than just what I did on a particular day. I began to respond to an experience that I had or turn to my journal to express a feeling that I had. My journal slowly evolved into a safe place where I could openly communicate thoughts, ideas and have dialogue. Different from the types of writing that I did in school, I did not feel self-conscious because my journal was a place free of judgment. It became personal, and therefore, important.

As I moved into my adulthood, I became fond of journal writing and sought refuge in a place where I could be silently communicative, reflective, and thoughtful. Writing became meaningful for the first time.

### Parallel Experiences: A Memoir Study

Writing has always been an emotional process for me and, for the most part, is a source of anxiety and frustration. As I sit in the privacy of my own home or in the corner of a coffee shop, I'm faced with the struggle of getting the words on the page and conveying my thoughts on paper as clearly as they exist in my head. While the feeling of frustration can be exasperating at times, it's something that I deal with in private. I feel protected and comforted knowing that I do not have to share my writing with anyone unless I choose to do so.

A few months ago, I found myself sitting in front of my classroom of twenty-two students speaking with them about things that good writers do. All the while, the voice inside my head was shouting "I don't know what good writers do!" It became very apparent that my own anxiety, frustration and insecurity with writing had become public and I felt vulnerable. I didn't consider myself to be a good writer and I panicked at the thought of having to model "good writing" in front of my students. These students were looking to me for strategies, structures and ideas that could help them grow as writers? I felt that I had nothing to share with them, nothing that would make sense to them.

When talking about my fears with seasoned teachers of writing, their advice seemed to lead me back to a similar place: *Teach writing to others from a place that is comfortable for yourself.* My question is: What if nothing feels comfortable to you? I could best describe my process as a writer as "jumbled" and it doesn't feel comfortable because I'm someone who typically thrives off of structure and organization. Articulating my writing process to myself is difficult

enough and trying to articulate it to a group of students would be much more challenging. I realized that I didn't want to expose students to *my* actual "process" but then was left wondering which process I would expose them to? One that I'm less familiar with and is less comfortable for me? Thinking about all of this left me feeling like it would be easier to have someone else, who "gets" writing, to come in and teach it.

Teachers are often resistant to teaching things that they find to be difficult and challenging. I certainly picked up on my own hesitancy towards the ways that I have thought about and approached the teaching of writing to my students. I felt fearful of teaching them how to think about writing in the "wrong" way and I felt as if I could never provide them with the joy of writing because it was not a feeling that I generally associated with writing. At the same time, I felt strongly about learning more about writing so that I could build my confidence and present writing in a positive light for children.

In an attempt to clarify my process, develop greater knowledge and become more confident as a teacher of writing, I decided to examine the different elements, aspects, and emotions attached with my students and with myself as writers moving through the writing process. To gain deeper insight into how the students in my classroom were approaching and experiencing the task of writing, I decided to mirror the writing experience that they entered into.

A large portion of our spring writing curriculum was devoted to thinking and writing about "small moments" in our lives. Students spent time familiarizing themselves with these small moments by talking about them with

peers, teachers and family members. Later on in the process, the small moments were fleshed out into well developed personal memoirs. This type of writing has been part of the second grade writing curriculum in the school where I work for many years and while the teachers do not strictly follow the Teacher's College Writer's Workshop model, this particular unit of study closely resembles the work of Lucy Calkins as the "small moment" is a feature of her writing curriculum (Calkins, 2003). The mini-lessons which accompanied this unit of study have been adapted and tweaked by different teachers as they have all thought deeply and differently about how best to engage children in vividly capturing small moments from their lives through writing. Over the course of three months, my students were immersed in the process of pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing their small moment which culminated in the publishing of their own personal memoirs.

I was one of two teachers in a second grade classroom. I supported the head teacher who was responsible for introducing the mini-lessons, which were then followed by small writing assignments. The mini-lessons broke down and guided students through the process of thinking about the qualities of strong writing. The students contemplated what made a good memoir, brainstormed "juicy" descriptive language, thought about how to add comparisons and sounds to their writing, highlighted and sequenced main events of their story, created a setting, revised and edited their work. As the head teacher led each of the mini-lessons, I had the luxury of being able to sit in the meeting area with the students and absorb and grapple with the lesson for the first time, just as they did.

After each mini-lesson, the students in the class were sent off to explore and try out the idea, concept or strategy that we had just learned about. Near the end of the work period, the students reconvened in the meeting area to share what they had worked on with their peers. Although I had the luxury of being a “student” during the mini-lessons, my role changed when the students were sent off to work. I put my teacher hat back on, circulated in the classroom and worked with a variety of students: answering their questions, helping them to brainstorm, encouraging those who seemed to be on a roll and guiding those who needed closer attention. As I worked with the students in my classroom, I paid careful attention to the experiences that each of the students were having as they engaged in the writing process. I noticed those who were struggling as well as those who entered into writing with greater ease and comfort. I recorded my observations of “what came up for the students” on a chart that I made for myself.

When I stepped outside of the classroom, I transitioned from my role as “teacher” to my role as “writer”. I gave myself equal time and space to complete the assignments that my students worked on during the day at school. As I worked on each of the individual assignments, I paid attention to how *I* was feeling and to what came up for *me* as a writer. I recorded my observations about myself as a writer in a separate column, but on the same chart where I recorded the observations about my students’ experience with writing.

What I’ve discovered thus far is that careful observation, recording and reflection has enabled me to arrive at deeper understandings and awareness about myself and others. This experience has reinforced the notion that students learn in

different ways and have different needs. The combination of observing my students and experiencing what it feels like to be a writer again has helped me to think more deeply about my own teaching practice.

The memoir writing process was launched with the book Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge, by Mem Fox (1984).

*“What is a memory?” asks Wilfred.*

Throughout the course of the story, Wilfred speaks with various people who help him to see that a memory is many things; it is something from long ago, something that makes you cry, something that makes you feel warm inside, something that makes you laugh and/or something as precious as gold. The students in my class used Wilfred’s definition of a memory to help them start thinking about the memories from their own lives.

The students were introduced to a “memory tree” (See Appendix). The memory tree had five branches on it, each one labeled for the different ways Wilfred defined a memory. The image of the tree served as a graphic organizer which helped students begin to brainstorm about the memories in their lives. They were required to write three of their own memories to correspond with each of the branches on their memory tree.

As students were sent off to work independently, I noticed a variety of things occurring in the classroom. I observed students who immediately settled down at their tables and began to write feverishly and there were others who sat down, pencil in hand, and stared at the blank piece of paper. The majority of the

students fell somewhere in between: writing down a memory, stopping to think, coming up with a different memory, stopping to think.

A handful of students approached me with a similar concern as they worked on their memory trees. They expressed difficulty in categorizing their memories. It was a complex task to determine whether the memory fit on the “long ago” branch or on a different branch. In a similar vein, other students questioned the difference between a memory that was “warm” and a memory that was “precious as gold.”

When I sat down to work on my own memory tree, I found myself asking many of the same questions. I certainly identified with those students who were having trouble differentiating between memories that were “warm” and those that were “precious as gold”. I began to think about what their distinguishing qualities were. Was there a difference? Defining memories in terms of a “feeling” felt challenging because this was not something that I was accustomed to. On the other hand, it was interesting to begin to consciously attach different feelings to the variety of experiences that I have had. Upon doing so, what I realized was that I craved more specific categories on my memory tree. Many of the memories which stood out to me didn’t seem to fit into any of the categories and I was left wondering what to do with those memories? Should I disregard them entirely? Should I attach a feeling to the memory that wasn’t there originally so that it fits onto my memory tree? I managed to use the memory tree effectively for the purpose of this assignment, but it made me think about the different



organizational needs that writers need and/or need to disregard in order to feel comfortable.

On a separate note, I grappled with what to do with memories that were very powerful and meaningful to me, but also extremely personal and private. I was hesitant to place these memories on the tree because I didn't feel entirely comfortable having these memories become public. At the same time, I experienced some internal conflict because choosing *not* to write about these more private, yet meaningful memories meant that I had to settle on writing about a memory that was not as meaningful to me.

After observing my students and reflecting upon my own experience with this writing assignment, questions arose for me as a teacher. When the students asked the question "What is the difference between a 'warm' memory and a memory that is 'precious as gold'?" I, too, asked myself the same question. My uncertainty and inability to answer this question reinforced the importance of teachers remaining connected to the writing process. When teachers engage in the work that they assign their students, they gain the advantage of being able to more organically and authentically anticipate the needs, questions and potential concerns that may crop up for them. Lucy Calkins (1986) writes "If we ourselves are immersed in an ongoing way in our own writing, we have a fabulous resource to draw from when we teach" (p. 13). My experience as a writer enabled me to contemplate the following questions: *How do you structure an assignment, like that of the memory tree, enough for students who need to thrive off of the structure but also allow enough flexibility for student who revel in the freedom*

*and looseness of structure? Also, how do you make the very personal safe to write about? How can you create points of entry for students so that they can eventually find the personal in something else?*

The style of writing that characterizes a memoir is different from other types of writing that the students engaged in earlier in the year. To begin to familiarize the students with this style of writing, they listened as the teacher read aloud Allen Say's The Lost Lake. Following the read aloud, the teacher asked "What makes a good memoir? Why do people choose certain stories to tell?" Students responded to these questions and shared their thoughts and ideas as a whole group. Afterwards, students broke off into partners. With their partners, they practiced telling each of their memories aloud. The goal of this activity was to help each student narrow their list of ten to fifteen memories down to one, one memory that they would eventually turn into a memoir. How did the students determine which memory would be best suited to transform into a memoir? If while telling the story aloud, students could recall it with great detail and had a lot to say about it, then that was a sign that it would likely be a good memory to use for the memoir piece. Upon selecting the *one* memory, students were asked to write a paragraph defending why they wanted to write about it.

Selecting one, and only one, memory for some students was a struggle. Several students expressed that they felt connected to one particular memory although they couldn't say a lot about it. In their minds, the memory was vivid and stood out for one reason or another. What I noticed, and what I have experienced, is that often times, our memories evoke strong emotions which are

difficult to translate into words. It's important to distinguish remembering how you felt in response to a memory and remembering the actual details of a memory. Both types of memories are valuable but, for the purpose of this assignment, students were encouraged to select memories that they would be able to elaborate on.

As I worked on this assignment, I felt rushed into picking *the one*, the memory that I would transform and publish as a memoir. Knowing that I had a specific amount of time to select this memory made it more difficult for me to focus on the actual task at hand. I wasn't naturally drawn to a particular memory and this made me feel anxious. Because I was already invested in the project and was committed to writing a meaningful and thoughtful memoir, the choosing of the one memory felt like a very important task. I didn't want to settle for a memory that would not lend itself to this type of writing solely because I felt pressured by the time I had been allotted to complete this task. If I selected a memory and then wanted to change my mind later on, would I be able to backtrack in the process? In my best attempt not to "fall behind", I selected a memory that was fun, but not one that I was certain would necessarily allow me to reach the "powerfulness" that I was aiming for.

This experience highlighted the importance of providing children with time when they write. As teachers, there is certainly the accountability crunch which may dictate when writing needs to be started, edited and completed, but unfortunately, most writers are unable to do their best work under these conditions. Personally, I've learned that I write best after I've exercised. Many

times, I find myself needing to go out for a walk or a jog when I've hit a wall as a writer. The time spent away from my writing helps me to return to it with a clearer mind. It may feel more difficult to provide students with these kinds of opportunities for breaks within a classroom, but it's important to keep in mind that time spent writing is dependent upon the time that students have been given to think. When students write last minute, the thinking has done beforehand.

As my students and I struggled (to varying degrees) with selecting the *one* memory that we were going to further develop, I recognized how comforting it can be for students when the level of commitment is reduced. This may lessen student anxiety and make them feel that they have more choices and flexibility in the writing process. This may not be necessary for all students, but it is important to consider giving each student what s/he needs to be successful. If everyone is expected to do the same thing at the same time, there will be outliers.

This experience reminded me of the film How Difficult Can This Be? By Rick LaVoie (1989). This film was made based upon a workshop that Rick held for teachers, social workers, psychologists, and parents. The goal of the workshop was to have them experience what children with learning disabilities face on a daily basis. In the film (1989), Rick uses the following scenario as an example: If a person needs CPR, do I not give it because I can't give it to everyone at the same time? His response to the question was "No" because *that* individual needs it at *that* particular moment. We must think similarly about accommodating the individual needs of our student writers. Not all students need exactly the same thing at the same time. Teacher must get to know their students

as individuals so that they can be helpful in creating an environment where each student can be most successful. *An equally important part of this journey is to help student writers come to know and understand their own needs. My question is "How do you help students become aware of who they are as writers?"*

The students continued to listen to a variety of memoirs as the teacher read them aloud. Some of the memoirs included: Salt Hands by Jane Chelsea Aragon, Owl Moon, by Jane Yolen, Thundercake, by Patricia Polacco and The Lost Lake, by Allen Say. Each memoir was utilized in the context of a mini-lesson to highlight different ways of adding description to one's writing. For example, after Salt Hands was read aloud for the first time, the teacher asked the students to listen carefully as she read it a second time and to raise their hand every time they heard a comparison. The students' ideas were recorded on chart paper. Afterwards, the students were asked to go and think of at least five comparisons that they could incorporate into their own memoir. After having time to think independently, the class reconvened in the meeting area to share their ideas with one another.

As the students worked independently, I circulated the classroom and observed the work that was being done. Something that stood out about this assignment was the ease with which the students engaged in the task. They were able to generate lists of comparisons without teacher assistance and their eagerness to share their ideas with those around them was nice to see. When I think about why this assignment was so successful for both myself and the students, two things come to mind. One has to do with the fact that the students

have been thinking about literature and language in interesting ways all year long and the second thing has to do with the fact that there were not high stakes attached to this assignment. It was merely a brainstorming activity. We, as writers, were not sitting down to select which comparisons and what type of language would be put into the final version of our memoirs, but rather we were toying around with different ideas that we would then revisit at a different time. I found this step in the writing process to be necessary and helpful because it enabled me to think more flexibly and take risks (something which I do not often do as a writer). It helped to eliminate my internal censor which often makes it difficult for me to commit to writing words down on a page when they don't sound "just right" to me. I also noticed a heightened creativity in myself.

The one part of this assignment that I found to be particularly challenging was coming up with "juicy" descriptive words. I was able to come up with a handful, but then I felt stuck. I had exhausted my vocabulary and wasn't quite sure where to turn. *My experience generating vocabulary has brought me further into thinking about how I can build and my students' vocabularies so that they steer away from descriptors such as "nice" and "cool" when they write.*

In order to prepare the students for the drafting phase of the memoir writing process, they listened to the story Shortcut by Donald Crews. This story was used to help students isolate and sequence the main events in the story. The students were directed to think specifically about four main events that occurred in the story and place each of those events into a graphic organizer that had four

distinct columns. This sequencing activity was meant to help students organize their own memoirs in a similar way.

This seemed to be one of the most challenging parts of the pre-writing phase for students. I noticed that the students had difficulty generalizing the four main events of their stories and that they benefited from teacher directed questions.

As I isolated the four main parts of my story using the same graphic organizer as the students, it became more clear to me what exactly I was going to write about and in which order I was going to do it. The organizational nature of this assignment was helpful to me because it was one more step that helped me to feel prepared to write my actual memoir.

As I watched some of the students struggle with this assignment, it made me think about the importance and even necessity of this assignment. (Upon later reflection, I know that this particular sequencing activity was very helpful to students as they composed their memoirs. It served as a guide for them so that they didn't omit any vital parts from their story. Sequencing is an important skill the students will continue to develop from year to year). I was challenged when I sat down to help students with this part of the assignment because I felt as if I was doing too much of the work for them. It was difficult to ask the right questions without giving too much away.

The amount of work that went into the pre-writing phase built up excitement and enthusiasm for the actual writing of the memoir. Drafting was the second phase of the memoir writing process. Similar to the pre-writing

assignments, the drafting of the memoirs was also scaffolded for the students.

The entire class came together and listened as the teacher read Owl Moon by Jane Yolen for the second time. The first time that the students heard this story, they listened for descriptive language, but the second time around, students focused on how Jane Yolen wrote the setting of her story. As a whole group, the class dissected the different elements of what Jane Yolen included in her setting: who, when, where (and sometimes what). Being aware of what constituted a well written setting, the students were sent off to begin writing their own settings to their memoirs.

Students immediately dove into their writing and a quiet energy filled the classroom. Many students remained focused and on task for the entire class period while some others raised their hands indicating that they felt they were finished with the setting and that they were ready to move on.

I felt equally as inspired and ready to begin writing my memoir as did the students, but once I sat down and began to write my setting, I quickly felt stifled by my own internal censor. I wanted to begin the memoir in a unique and interesting way but I had difficulty coming up with the “perfect” first sentence. Each time that I came up with something, I compared it to what Jane Yolen had written and asked myself “Is this language beautiful enough?”

The frustration tends to mount for me in situations like this one where I’m sitting and thinking but producing nothing. I eventually get to the same point as some of my students did where I have the impulse to say “I’m finished!” I know that when I say “I’m finished” it typically means “This is hard and I’m tired of



working on this for now.” It also means that I’ve done all the thinking I can do on my own and now I’m at the point where I need another person to come over and give me help and feedback. Writing is difficult to do all alone. Two pairs of eyes and two people thinking together encourage me to want to improve my writing and embellish.

As a teacher of writing, hearing students say “I’m finished” is one of the most difficult things for me because I understand what that means (in a variety of different contexts) and I know what my next step is as a teacher. It is my responsibility to push the students further and challenge them to do more with their writing but I often feel uncertain about how to do that. (I often am challenged by the same thing when looking at my own work). *This feeling made me contemplate the teacher’s role in responding to student work. How can the teacher respond in a way that moves students towards independence rather than solely responding to their immediate question? What are some good strategies that teachers can use to help students expand their thinking?*

After spending a day or so thinking about our settings, the students were given the freedom to move into the body of their memoirs. They used the four main events that they worked on during the pre-writing phase to help them organize the flow of their story and stretch it out. It was exciting for them to actually be able to use all the thinking and work they had done over the past few weeks. During this particular writing period, the students were invested in telling their stories and nobody seemed to be at a loss for what to say. I, too, felt that same momentum when I began to write. I had an entire story in my head that I

wanted to get out on paper. After the original struggle of getting those first few sentences down, the rest came relatively easily to me. It was at this stage in the process where I really saw students benefiting from the sequencing work we did earlier (although that work felt challenging at the time).

On the second and third and fourth days of memoir writing, the teacher continued to let the students write independently. Occasionally, she gave them reminders so that they wouldn't forget to refer back to all the work they did in the pre-writing phase. They needed to be reminded to use the descriptive language, comparisons and sounds that they had spent time thinking about earlier. It was interesting to observe the different paces at which the students wrote their memoirs. Quickly enough, more and more students reached the point where they felt they had already told their entire story. As students began to say "I'm finished", the teacher introduced mini-lessons on how to incorporate more details to their writing. Students were introduced to the "star system" which helped them to neatly make additions to their piece of writing. As students read over their piece, when they came to a spot where they needed to add in more detail, they drew a star to indicate that more was going to be written and inserted into that particular spot. The corresponding star, on another piece of paper, is where the student added in whatever needed to be said. As students revisited their work, many asked for teacher assistance in helping them to find spots where they could add to their writing. I noticed that it was challenging for students to recognize places where they could add more to what they had already said. Even after a

teacher helped the student to find a section that could be further developed, sometimes the students would still say “I don’t know what to add.”

Writing down that first “perfect sounding sentence” was a challenge for me. I sat staring in front of a blank computer screen for a long time until the right sentence came to me. I suppose I could have tried other strategies to help myself get over this hump, but what I’ve come to realize about myself is that I needed to sit there staring off blankly. (This is a learned strategy that was effective for me as a writer). When I was able to move past this point, the actual writing of my memoir came quite easily to me. As I was writing, I found myself smiling as I vividly recalled and replayed the memory in my head. This was confirmation of how significant it is when writing has meaning and purpose. Adding more detail to my memoir was one aspect of writing this piece that I enjoyed the most. I turned it into a personal challenge for myself seeking out more and more places where I could describe my experience more vividly. I continued to push myself to paint as accurate and as descriptive of a picture as I could so that my readers/audience would truly feel the emotions that I felt as I was experiencing this moment skiing down the mountain. As I began to edit, a luxury that I afforded myself (that my students did not have) was to be able to walk away from my piece of writing numerous times and come back to it over the course of a few weeks. The students had time to edit, but it was only over the span of a week or so. That space helped me to see, much more clearly, where I could add details. I also found that reading the piece aloud to was a helpful editing technique!

After a few days of composing and adding details, the students began to think about the following question: “What makes a good title?” As the class recalled books that they’d read and liked, they created the following list:

A good title...

- Should go with the topic of your story (it should make sense)
- Should not be too long
- Should be interesting/ “juicy”
- Should not give away the ending (could be suspenseful)
- Should match the feeling of the memoir

After a brief class discussion of what makes a good title, the students were sent off to brainstorm at least three possible titles that they would consider using for their own memoirs. There was a buzz of excitement in the room as the students thought about interesting titles for their memoirs. Similar to the activities where students were brainstorming “juicy” words or comparisons for their memoirs, the low level of commitment inherent in this activity made it so that students did not have to agonize over the perfect title. Students seemed to find enjoyment and take pride in giving a title to their memoirs.

Creating a title for my memoir happened after the fact for me. It wasn’t until I shared my memoir with my class that I realized I hadn’t yet thought of a title. After I read my memoir aloud to my students, I asked them for title suggestions. The titles that they recommended were suggestive of how they internalized my experience skiing down the mountain. It was fascinating to hear their feedback. In the end, I used one of their ideas.

One of the final stages in the memoir writing process was the revising and editing stage. After students revised their own work, looked for places where more details could be added, and checked over one another's capitalization, punctuation and spelling, they began learning how to peer revise. Students paired up with other students in the class and they swapped notebooks. Their job, upon looking in their peer's notebook was to make suggestions, comments and ask questions that could help that person with his/her writing. One of the goals for the students was not only to help their classmates in an effective and thoughtful way, but also for them to be able to incorporate their classmates' comments about the memoir into their own work.

As I write, I always look forward to the opportunity to revise because it takes the pressure off of the initial writing of the piece. Knowing that I will be able to look over my work, adding to it and changing it, is really what writing is all about for me. Anticipating the opportunity to revise allows me to linger with thoughts and ideas during the first go around of writing. As I reviewed my own piece of writing, I was easily able to identify places that needed more work. The more challenging part was figuring out just what to say and how to say it.

Peer editing looked a little bit different for me than it did for my students although I felt that I benefited from it similarly to them. I received the most valuable feedback on my memoir when I shared it with my entire class. After reading it aloud to them, they had the opportunity to comment on what they heard. Some students strongly identified with the piece, other students commented on specific parts that they enjoyed and spoke about why they enjoyed that particular

part while other students asked clarifying questions. All of their feedback helped me to see what I had done well and which parts needed more of my attention. Also, hearing myself read it aloud, yet again, highlighted certain parts of the memoir that needed more clarification, more emotion and/or more details. *As a teacher, I was pondered what is a good way to teach children how to peer edit. What should students be looking for in one another's work? How do you teach students to talk in an appropriate, constructive way about their peer's work?*

Examining myself as a writer has brought me to a new level of thinking, understanding and sensitivity towards the writing process. My personal experience with it has brought to light my strengths and weaknesses, my struggles and successes and it has enabled me to begin to identify what my needs are as a writer. Additionally, I've realized how my needs are similar to and different from the needs of others.

Thinking introspectively as a writer has affected and influenced my thinking as a teacher of writing. I find that I'm able to identify with students in a way where I can understand potentially how and why they are responding to writing in a certain way. My experiences have also highlighted the different components that need to be available to students in a writing program. It is not a "one size fits all" program (although I was educated in this way). The following paper will examine different aspects of a strong writing program.

### *Why Rehearse?*

*“Teachers can answer children’s questions only if they know the writing process from both the inside and the outside. They know it from the inside because they work at their own writing. They know it from outside because they are acquainted with research that shows what happens when people write” (Graves, 1994, p. 71).*

Experiencing the writing process from both the inside and the outside, just as Donald Graves says, has brought me to a new level of questioning and also depth of thinking about writing. As I read the work of Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, Nancie Atwood, Katie Wood Ray, Shelley Harwayne and other notable authors/writers, I began to make connections and notice an emergence and reoccurrence of themes in my exploration of what I believe writing should look like.

How do I select a topic to write about? Where shall I begin? What should I include? Why have I been staring at this blank page for twenty minutes now? I can’t add details to this! These are natural thoughts and questions that arise for all writers at various points throughout the writing process. My students and I were certainly able to identify with these thoughts and questions as we engaged in the memoir writing process. As teachers, we cannot erase the feelings and thoughts that students encounter when they write, but we can provide them with a multitude of writing experiences and equip them with strategies so that when they do have questions and experience strong emotions, they have ways of working through them. One of the writing experiences that we can provide students with

is called “rehearsal.” In the book A Fresh Look at Writing, Donald Graves (1994) defines rehearsal as “...the preparation for composing” and says it “...can take the form of daydreaming, sketching, doodling, making lists of words, outlining, reading, conversing, or even writing lines as a foil to further rehearsal” (p. 75-76). In order for rehearsal to be a valuable tool for students, we must examine the purpose of writing has in the lives of student writers.

Lucy Calkins (1986) stated it well when she said “When we teach writing, we will probably not begin by talking *about* writing, but rather, by demonstrating the power and purposes writing has in our lives, and by inviting students to discover ways that writing can enrich their lives as well” (p. 31). Teachers are responsible for helping her/his students to see how they can connect to writing on a personal level. Students who feel that they are merely writing to complete an assignment given by the teacher have not made a personal connection to writing and therefore have little driving purpose behind what they write. When children are able to connect to writing on a personal level, the work that they do will ultimately be more authentic and have greater meaning. Nancie Atwell (1998) and Donald Graves (1994) discuss some different ways that students may be able to naturally connect to writing. One way that stood out was when Donald Graves made the connection between using writing to help students work through the issues and everyday concerns of their lives (p. 106). He also highlighted that it was a way for students to respond to the world and make meaning from their experiences. (Additionally, students may use conversation and/or art to access their thoughts on their lives and the world that surround them). As students begin



to ponder these very personal things, they must allow themselves the time to linger with these thoughts and give themselves time to spend time inside their own head. It is this time to think which gives birth to some important and beautiful writing.

After a writer has come to a place where s/he can see the value of writing, then s/he can begin the process of brainstorming and mapping possible directions for a piece of writing. This process of brainstorming is what Lucy Calkins, Donald Graves, and Nancy Atwell refer to as rehearsal. "Rehearsal involves living wide-awake lives – seeing hearing, noticing, wondering – and gathering all of this in bureau drawers or notebooks or daybooks (Calkins, 1986, p. 31).

Donald Graves (1994) explains rehearsal this way: giving students the time and opportunity to record the things they notice, wonder about, memories that they have, favorite words, or responses to experiences. It is one of the most difficult parts of the writing process because it is the part of the process where writers are wrestling the most with their thoughts and ideas. During rehearsal, writers access initial ideas and think about what they have to say about something before they shape it into a piece of writing. Author Charlotte Zolotow talks about writing and recommends the following: "Write a line about feeling sad, mad, bad, or glad – something you really feel." (Kovacs & Preller, 1993, p. 71). As writers rehearse, they constantly reflect upon the world around them. Rehearsal "is a state of readiness out of which one writes" (Calkins, 1986, p. 24) and it ultimately provides writers with a large breadth of ideas to think about when they sit down to compose in a more formal way.

Rehearsal is not a replacement for formal writing assignments, which are often dictated by writing workshop programs and/or state standards, but rather it is a precursor. Students should be writing four to five times a week. "When students write everyday they don't find it as difficult to choose topics. If a child knows she will write again tomorrow, her mind can go to work pondering her writing topic. Choosing a topic once a week is difficult. The moment for writing suddenly arrives, and the mind is caught unprepared" (Graves, 1994, p. 106).

What happens when students do not have opportunities for rehearsal? Donald Graves (1994) highlights an experience that a friend of his, Donald Murray, had when he attended a conference in New Hampshire. A group of the participants at the workshop selected a topic for Murray to write about. He was asked to write about his favorite place in New Hampshire. He attempted to write on this topic for a few minutes and finally said "I can't write this piece; I have no favorite place in New Hampshire" (p. 107). Murray could have written something, if he had decided to write about something false, but this is what Graves refers to as "dishonest" writing (1994, p. 108). The type of intellectual manipulation that a writer has to go through in order to fulfill a teacher's or a curriculum requirement does not produce good writing.

Another reason this experience was so difficult for Donald Murray was because he was not able to put any "voice" into his writing. When students become invested in what they're writing about, it's typically evident through the "voice" that comes through in their writing. Voice is the driving force behind the

writing process. Voice gives writing life. As Graves (1994) says, "Voice is the imprint of ourselves on our writing" (p. 81).

Rehearsal is a valuable opportunity for writers to play around with ideas and it is also an important time for writers to play with language. Classrooms are a rich place with many resources to go hunting for interesting words; there are word walls, dictionaries, thesauruses, literature and peers, but there comes a point when, sometimes, coming up with new, interesting vocabulary is difficult. As my students and I were writing our memoirs, the question of "How do you build students' vocabularies?" arose.

There are specific activities and/or conversations that a teacher can have with her/his students to introduce them to new vocabulary. One technique was mentioned in Teaching Vocabulary: 50 Creative Strategies, Grades K-12 (2004). Select a word that students are overusing (such as *nice*). Have the students go through their work and highlight the word "nice" each time they come across it. Together, as a class, brainstorm other ways to express "nice" using different words. In doing so, students become exposed to one another's word pools. Read-alouds can also be used to build nuanced vocabulary in students. Often times, students have the ability to recognize "juicy" words in a story although they might not be able to retrieve those words from their memories independently.

Philosophically, I see great value in giving writers opportunities for rehearsal, similar to Lucy Calkins, Donald Graves and Nancie Atwell. It is difficult to ask students to write if you have not given them reason or a tool to help them invest in the task. Writing is a demanding and elaborate process and

rehearsal can take some of the pressure off by giving writers the space to not have to commit to the final immediately. Rehearsal can build up a students' confidence, motivate them to want to do more and provide them with opportunities to develop a writer's voice. Rehearsal also inherently helps students to carve out more time to linger with ideas and grapple with their thoughts. I believe that rehearsal is the foundation for strong writing and that it needs to be the first step as we work with our student writers.

### What are you doing today as a writer?

Wrestling with ideas is a natural part of the writing process, although at times, it can feel frustrating and never ending. I reflected on the moments that I struggled the most while writing my memoir and my Independent Study and thought about what would have been most helpful to me during those times. Based on my own experience, I then thought about what I could have done to be more effective with my own student writers. After having read the work of Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, Nancie Atwell, Carl Anderson and Katie Wood Ray, I feel that the general answer lies in “conferencing.”

Throughout my experience writing this Independent Study, I was fortunate enough to have many individual writing conferences. What were these conferences about and how did they work? I can most closely compare the writing conferences to conversations. Carl Anderson (2000) thinks about writing conferences similarly. “Conferences are not mini-lectures but the working talk of fellow writers sharing their experience with the writing process” (Anderson, 2000, p. 7). I often went into these conferences feeling like I needed a great deal of guidance. I wanted my mentor to tell me what to write and to help me “clean up” the work that I had already done. The type of help that I received was far more valuable than the type of help that I originally wanted.

My mentor would normally begin our conferences with the question “How’s it going?” or “What have you been working on?” I then would launch into a conversation about what I had been doing and talk about what questions had come up for me. Our discourse surrounded the theme of what I was writing

about, but also had much larger implications. We had conversations about everything from educational theorists to the practicalities and conventions of everyday writing. I left our conferences feeling motivated to want to read more, learn more and discover more. Our conversations reinforced my purpose in writing this independent study.

The occasions when I felt very stuck about what to write, surprisingly, didn't make it any less difficult to have conversations during writing conferences. Our conversations then became about "What is feeling so difficult about this work right now?" These conversations helped me to think about what I was doing that felt hard and what I thought I might do to make it easier. Our conversations were based on the content of my work, but focused on me as the writer.

The reason that these conversations were valuable for me was because I came out of this project feeling that I had a great sense as to who I am as a writer. The questions that my mentor asked of me gave me multiple opportunities to explore what was going well for me and *why* and what was more difficult for me and *why*. I was able to thoughtfully step back from my work and examine the writing strategies and techniques that contributed to my success as a writer. Carl Anderson (2000) lists some other valuable questions that help students to become reflective writers: "How's this going?" "What are you trying to do here?" "What do you need to do to make this work?" "What can I help you with today?" (p. 9) "Where did this come from?" "Where are you headed?" (Atwell, 1998, p. 221). A metacognitive writer is one who has "knowledge and control" over her/his "own thinking and learning activities" (Irwin, 1991, p. 109).

Katie Wood Ray (2001) talks about helping students to be metacognitive as she supports the development of a writing identity in her students. The identity that she speaks about does not change based on age, experience or ability. As students develop this writing identity, they are learning about “the ways they work best as writers” because this “will help students manage writing throughout their lives” (p.33). Students develop a sense as to what is most helpful to them as a writer. They might ask themselves questions such as “Do I need to write things down in short spurts? Is it more effective for me to sit down for large chunks of time and get all of my ideas out at once?”

Sharon Taberski discusses ways in which she helps readers to become reflective, but much of what she says rings true for writers as well. Taberski (2000) explains that children need to be encouraged to use all of the information sources that are available to them so that they can approach the task at hand as a meaning making activity. She continues on to discuss how she can help her students become aware of what they are learning and how they are learning. Taberski writes “I help children reframe what they’re learning about their reading, and themselves as readers, into broader strategic terms” (p. 172). One way of doing this is by asking the following question of students: “What did you do today that worked so well that you might try it again and again? (p. 172). When students begin to think in this way, they are becoming more aware of who they are as learners.

Learning what works for you, knowing what is a challenge, understanding what is a strength, and being able to recognize the environment best suited for

productive work are things that will help writers for a lifetime. The job of a teacher is not as much about helping a student think of *what* to say when s/he is stuck, but in helping her/him to feel comfortable with strategies and techniques that will be lifetime tools for them as writers. Carl Anderson supports this line of thinking when he says:

“In conferences, we help students become better writers by teaching them to teach themselves.” If we take control over a student’s writing and make sure that the draft has our perfect lead or our brilliant dialogue, all we’ve done is given a demonstration of our expertise as writers. We shouldn’t confuse this with helping students develop their own expertise. A teacher fixing up students’ drafts no more helps them grow than a coach standing in for players in a basketball game helps those players improve” (p. 9).

As writers develop a greater sense of themselves, they can transfer those skills into helping their peers. Peer editing is a part of the writing process where students look at one another’s work and give other writers constructive feedback on what they are doing well and also on places where they may need more work. The same types of questions that a writer would ask her/himself about her/his own writing are equally as valuable to ask a peer when looking at her/his writing.

Nancie Atwell (1998) has a Peer Writing Conference Record (See Appendix) which asks both the writer and the peer editor to be reflective about the piece of writing they are looking at.

My original question of “How do you help students become aware of who they are as writers?” became clearer to me through the connections that Nancie Atwell and Carl Anderson made between writing and dialogue. It is communication among peers and communication between students and teachers that gives birth to personal growth and fosters writing development.



### Final Reflection

I've learned about writing by becoming a writer. I challenged myself by doing this Independent Study on something that was always difficult for me. My motivation in doing so was to give myself the opportunity to move forward and grow as a writer so that I could do the same as a teacher of writing. I no longer feel as ambivalent about teaching writing to students because I have come to a place where I value my own process as a writer (crazy as it may be).

I have been able to value my process as a writer because my process was valued by others. Susan, you specifically said to me, on numerous occasions, "Say it how you can say it and if it's awkward, it's awkward. Give yourself permission to write nonsense." You did not pass judgment on my thinking and on my writing process and this helped me to become less self-conscious as a writer. This was a unique experience for me in that you had faith in my ability to write without knowing much about me. I appreciate your constant support and encouragement.

Each step along the way, as I continued to show you my "unpolished" work, we had a discussion about my ideas. You placed value on my thinking. You also helped me to be reflective about my process. In thinking about my process as a writer, I have finally come to understand that staring at a blank computer screen and going out for a jog and sitting for an hour to think of the "perfect" first sentence is all part of my process and that it's not wasted time.

My experience learning about myself as a writer will make me a more valuable teacher to my students. I now feel that I have a lot to offer them,

whereas before, I did not feel this way. I know that I can help students see their strengths as writers, just as you did for me. I also feel confident in my ability to create a strong community of writers within my classroom where each and every writer can learn from one another.

My guiding question at the beginning of this study was “How do I, as a struggling writer, help my students with writing?” Over the course of this study, I’ve learned that it’s OK to struggle and I’ve learned that it’s helpful to let others in on your struggle. Writing can be a vulnerable experience, but that is because it’s personal. Lulu Delacre said it well when she wrote “Everybody has something to say, something that is close to his or her heart. It’s a matter of being courageous enough to put the thoughts and feelings into words” (Kovacs and Preller, 1993, p. 21)

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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX J

### PEER WRITING CONFERENCE RECORD

Writer's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

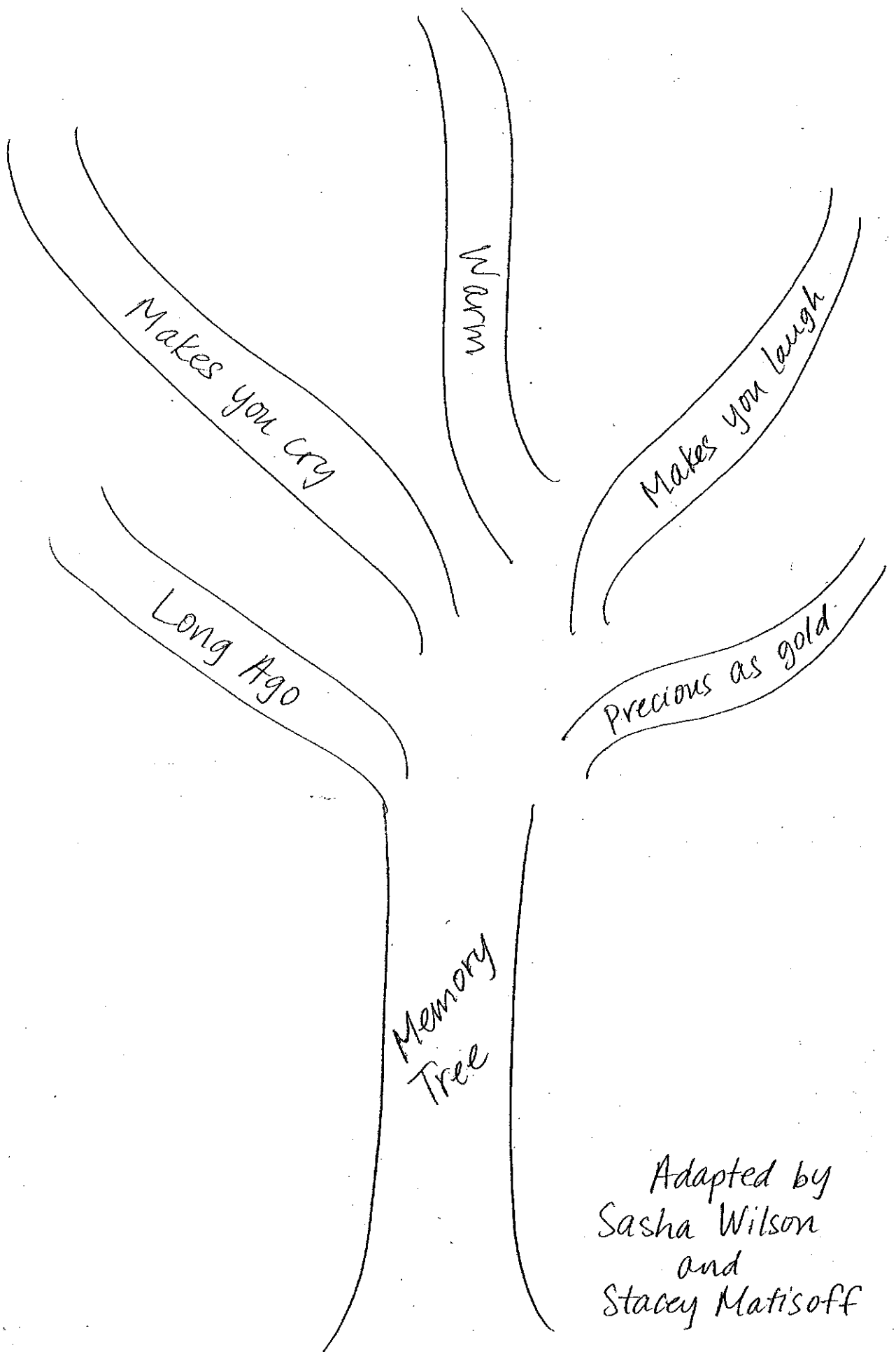
Responder \_\_\_\_\_ Topic/Genre \_\_\_\_\_

Writer, before you ask for a conference, your job is to consider what you want help with: ideas, language, images, organization, coherence, a part of the piece, a sense of the whole? Tell the responder what you want response to:

Responder, when you agree to confer with a writer, your job is to help the writer think and make decisions about the writing:

- Ask what he or she needs help with.
- Listen as the writer reads, try to understand the writing, then tell what you heard.
- If there are parts that confuse you, you don't understand, or you'd like to know more about, ask the writer about them. It will help you—and the writer—if you jot down your questions during and after the reading in the space below.
- Ask the writer what he or she plans to do next.
- Give this record of the conference to the writer.

Writer, jot down your plans before you forget them:



Adapted by  
Sasha Wilson  
and  
Stacey Matisoff

Dear Families,

I am a graduate student at Bank Street College of Education and I am currently working on an Independent Study where I am exploring the process of writing in the elementary school classroom. More specifically, I am focusing on the memoir writing process that the students are currently involved in this year. Your child has exemplary work and I would love to include his/her memoir in my Independent Study.

If you are willing to give permission for your child's work to be included in my Independent Study, please print the child's name and sign your name in the space below.

Thank you!

---

Child's Name

Your Signature

Date



# **Student Memoirs**

# **The Bear I Adored**

## The Bear I Loved 2/11/10

I will always remember this memory because I will never forget about it. I will never <sup>will never</sup> forget it because I have carried it for many years. It's on a important memory to me because

I had never had a  
stuffed animal as  
speical as it.

~~2009~~ : ~~2009~~

2115

# The Bear I Loved!

purple eyes

heart

Never let go beat!

Was a true

friend

loving Cuddly love

Bow

See no  
more

The most  
black nose  
ever

# Comparisons

2128107

Darker than a  
a purple tulip

I loved that stuffed  
bear as much as  
a cat loved its  
yarn.

that stuff bears  
ears where as  
round as a clock



# Setting

3/14/07

① It was one <sup>breezy</sup> cool

morning when I went

out with my mom. I also had

I had a playdate. We

got on the bus

until it stopped at

106 even though the

person lived at 105.

⑤ I came to her

floor as the

elevator stopped.

~~With Eliana  
I was excited, bag with  
two stuffed  
bears in it.~~



The Bear Love!

One cool breezy morning me and my mom went out.

I had a playdate.

We got on the bus and waited till the bus stopped.

② I brought a bag along with me.

I had ~~two~~<sup>one</sup> very

special stuffed bears. ⓧ

in it. Then we got  
off the bus. We went  
to the building. Her  
floor was four even  
though she lived  
on the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup>  
floor. Suddenly I real-  
ized in shock that  
me nor my mom  
did not have the  
the bag. ⑦ I thought

☆

③

This bear was

50000 special. I think

I got it when I was  
two and ever since,

<sup>It seemed like I</sup>  
I carried it for

a million trillion

years. That bear

meant sooo much

to me!!!

⑦ you had the  
bag I believe<sup>ed</sup> ~~to~~<sup>my</sup> mom

still in shock no

you had it <sup>my mom</sup> answered.

I was sad but I didn't

cry! I bet my mom

knew how I felt.

We went to her

floor of course with

out the bag. I was

as sad as when a cat loses

its taco!

when  
Went we got

there her babysitter

was <sup>standing at</sup> <sup>the front</sup> <sup>of the</sup> <sup>house.</sup> I think

that the baby-

sitter knew

I was sad.

① My mom left  
and me and my  
playdate played. I  
pretty much got over  
it. We played twister  
with music it was  
awesome!!! When my  
mom came and picked  
me up I wasn't  
that bugged about  
what happened earlier  
on.

A few days later

My dad tryed to call

the bus station, but  
there was nothing they could do to  
Even though I never <sup>help us.</sup>

got that bear back

I \* still lived a

happy and peacefully

life, I wish purple bear

was still here, but

still if he doesn't

come back I will

always have him in my hear <sup>Turn Pa</sup>

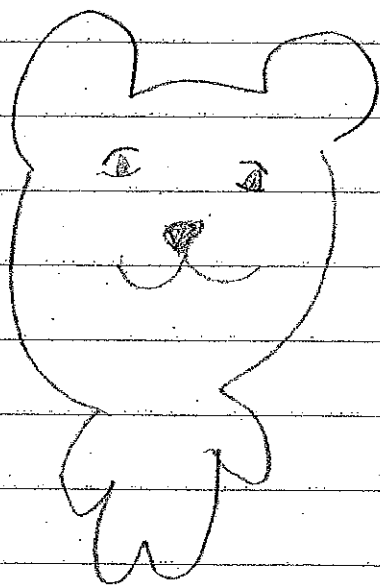
Will he ever come  
back?

THE  
END



# Titles

- 1 - The Bear I Loved
- 2 - ~~The Bear I Adored~~
- 3 - Love Between Us
- 4 - goodbye
- 5 - precious as a four  
Leaf clover
- 6 - Have a good time  
In heaven
- 7 - Will he ever come  
Back
- 8 - I Love You



Purple  
Bear

## The Bear I Adored

It was one breezy, cool morning when I went out with my mom. I had a play date with E. I was excited. We got on the bus until it stopped at 106<sup>th</sup> Street even though she lived at 105<sup>th</sup>. I brought a bag along with me. I had one very special stuffed bear. The bear was sooooo... special. I think I got it when I was two and ever since, it seemed like I carried it for a million, trillion years. That bear meant sooo... much to me!

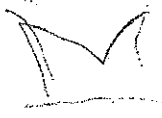
Then we got off the bus. We went to the building. I came to her floor as the elevator stopped. Her floor was four even though she lived on the fourth and fifth floors. Suddenly, I realized in shock that me nor my mom had the bag. "I thought you had the bag," I bellowed to my mom, still in shock. "No, you had it," my mom answered. I was sad but I didn't cry! I bet my mom knew how I felt. We went to her floor of course without the

bag. I was as sad as when a cat lost its yarn! When we got there, I think E's babysitter who was standing at the front of the house knew I was sad.

My mom left and my play date played. I pretty much got over it. We played twister with music. It was awesome! When my mom picked me up, I wasn't that bugged out about what happened earlier on.

A few days later, my dad tried to call the bus station but there was nothing they could do to help us. Even though I never got that bear back I still lived a happy and peaceful life. I wish purple bear was still here, but still if he doesn't come back, I will always have him in my heart. Will he ever come back?

# **Beautiful Day**



2/14/07

my great grandpas 95 birthday

this is probably one of my  
my saddest memories it is also  
my last memory of great  
grandfather it was his



my granpa's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday  
21/15/07

- Sad

- warm

- happy

- Last

- happy and sad all at once

- soft

- i wish it had never ended

- beautiful as the hole work

-

-

# COMPARISONS

2/20/07

... beautifull<sup>(sp)</sup> as the stars in the  
black night sky...

... warm as a beautifull  
summer day...

... happy and sad all at once

like the feeling in <sup>sad strange</sup> a dream...

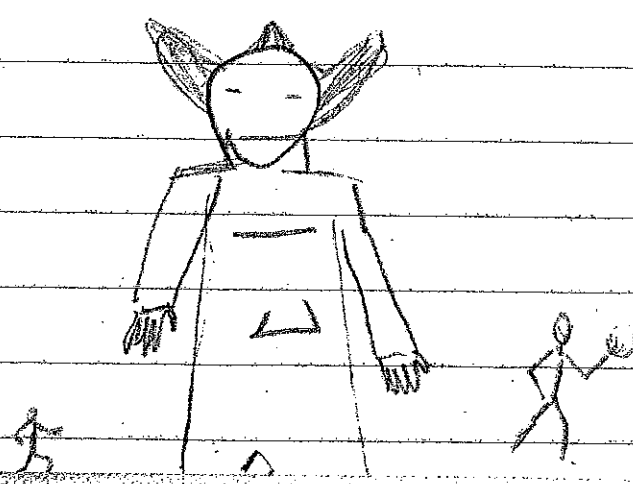
the perfect feeling you get when  
holding a new born baby...

3.5.07

# SOUNDS

ssssshhh whispered the <sup>een</sup> grass grass  
wind

ssssss whispered the waving ~~wind~~  
ch cliked the camra





# setting

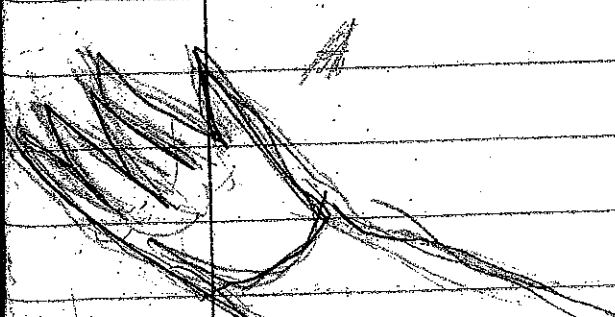
3/14/65


~~It~~ I was looking  
out the window. ~~It~~ was my ~~dad~~  
and my great granpas 95 birthday



Today was a beautiful day.

It was as if all <sup>the</sup> beauty in the whole  
world was packed into that one sunny  
day at the farm where my great  
granparents lived.



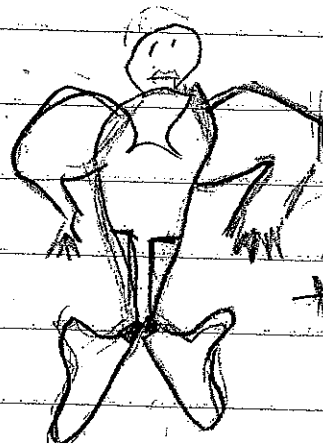


My grandma came up to me.

~~And said that we were going~~  
~~to go give him his presents~~  
POPPY

~~I looked again out at the marvallis~~  
I looked again out at the marvallis  
~~summer~~ day outside. ~~and~~ and

pushed open the door.



Hi she exclaimed,



lets go outside.

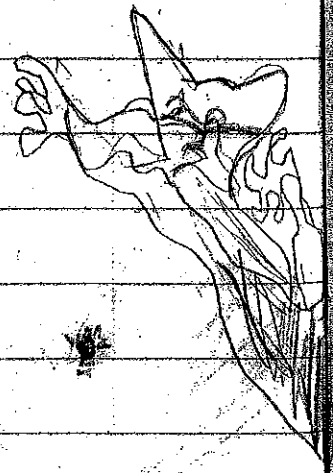
It's time to give popy his presents.

~~ready?~~  
Already

Yes your mom and dad are

already out ~~there~~  
side

OK



It was warm, so warm i felt like  
lying down righte ther in the  
grass.

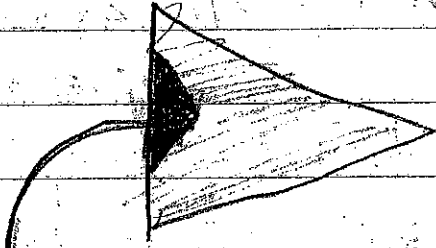
But I didnt ~~we kept on walking~~  
~~through the farm.~~ we kept ~~on~~ walking  
through that beautiful day at the farm.  
when we got to the place

where we were going to  
take the picture we stopped.

It was by the side of the house  
three chairs were set up

my uncle ~~was~~ said that  
I should sit a little bit behind  
my granpa and my brother  
shoud sit on the other side  
but more next to him.

~~but~~ now we would give  
~~him~~ <sup>poppy</sup> his presants. My parents  
gave ~~him~~ <sup>poppy</sup> him a Superman  
T-shirt. We came and  
my brother) were both  
<sup>waring (sp?)</sup>  
~~wearing~~ ours.



now we were going  
to take a picture ~~of~~  
~~of~~ granpa sat down...

etch!

We went inside and  
went through the  
kitchen, and as  
always my <sup>great</sup> grandma

gave us cooky's,

When we were

done ~~me~~ and my brother  
went to go looking through  
my great grandparents

collection of old crystals  
and status of people that look  
like monkey's.

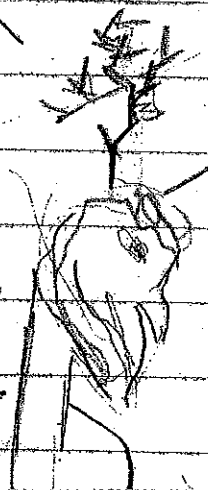
Then we went out looking  
for golf balls.

When we got back we said  
good bye and hopped in the car,  
Driving back I felt sad.

~~I knew my <sup>Great</sup> grandparents  
were very old. they were  
in their 80's and I wish I  
could have gotten to know  
them better.~~

Pretend

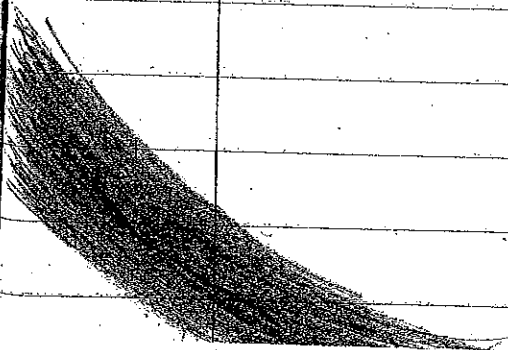
that cross  
out is  
not there



# Titles



Beautiful day





## Beautiful Day

I was looking out the window. It was my great grandpa's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. Today was a beautiful day. It was as if all the beauty in the whole world was packed into that one sunny day at the farm where my great grandparents lived.

My grandma came up to me. "Hi!" she exclaimed.

"Let's go outside. It's time to give Poppy his presents."

"Already?" "Yes. Your mom and dad are already outside."

"Okay." I looked out at the marvelous summer day outside and pushed open the door.

It was so warm, I felt like lying down right there in the grass. But I didn't. We kept on walking through that beautiful day at the farm. When we got to the place where we were going to take the picture, we stopped. It was by the side of the house. Three chairs were set up. My uncle said that I should sit a little behind my grandpa and my

brother should sit on the other side but more next to him. Now we were going to take a picture. My grandpa sat down. "Ctch!"

Now we would give Poppy his presents. My parents gave Poppy a Superman t-shirt. We (me and my brother) were both wearing ours. We went inside and went through the kitchen and as always, my grandma gave us cookies.

When we were done me and my brother went to go looking through my great grandparents collection of old crystals and statues of people that look like monkeys. Then we went out looking for golf balls.

When we got back, we said goodbye and hopped in the car. Driving back, I felt sad. I knew my great grandparents were very old. They were in their 90s and I wish I could have gotten to know them better.

# His Day

2/14/2007

my brother Julian

I pick this mimvak  
because I will always  
remember it. It  
was Kachis as a gift

that I always wanted  
and it was like a  
doll that made.

I would choose this  
one even if some-  
thing better had happen

but it's probably why I didn't

because my brother

got tears here

and I know that  
that Spachai and ill  
Owegas love him.

---

2/15/07 My brother Julian

Soft Spachil

love Cate

Warm eyes

Brite little

Cattle Soft as a piece of  
paper adorabil

Scary light Pure Sweet

CWAT light Steep

Fantig lampeg

Red Spachil as the

world It made me waley

2/28/07

comparisons

He was as blue  
as the sky when  
it's about to rain.

he was as soft  
as cotton

Cute as a baby  
chipmunk.

I wish I

could  
to cuddle  
him as  
much as  
a mother  
wants to hold  
her son

I felt scared  
like I saw  
my brother  
die.

when he was  
born, he was  
as sweet  
as a new  
born  
kitten

he was so  
small that  
he could  
fit in my  
chaps sack

3/5/07 Solent's

1. AAAAAHh

I wanted to SCREAM

2. Haha I wanted  
to SCREAM

3. My baby my MOM said

4. 123456789101112 13 14 15  
I CONTID

5. ughughugh ughugh  
he tried to breathe



3/19/07

It was <sup>a</sup>round ten  
that morning ~~and~~  
a cool summer day  
when me and my dad  
were walking  
to ~~the~~ Roosevelt  
Hospital to see my ~~brother~~ <sup>MAN</sup>  
~~brother~~ person  
who worked at the  
Hospital <sup>e</sup>  
~~hostel~~ asked  
us for an ID  
card my ~~dad~~ <sup>we</sup> showed  
his and we went in.

~~pressed~~  
pressed elevator  
We ~~pressed~~ the ~~elevator~~  
bottom ding ~~they~~ we went  
up to the eleven-  
th floor. It was  
quiet and still like  
when someone was  
in shock.  
in ~~shock~~ before  
they could talk  
again.  
~~at~~ We walked  
down the quiet  
hall. ~~was~~

I couldn't wait till  
I could ~~edit~~ hold

again. You had to walk  
through  
~~three~~ tow door  
one  
~~was~~ door you

had to put a  
car through ~~the~~ the site

Finally we opened

the door to who

all the trouble

started we walk<sup>e</sup>

in and we  
saw a nurse  
running to the  
emergency room  
with a blue baby!  
we felt sorry for  
the parents who's  
baby that was  
then we saw my  
mom crying  
that was my

Bethesda London Lon. (1)

My dad and my mom  
went in to <sup>the emergency room</sup> but I (2)

wasn't allowed in (3)

I walk in sir (4)

next to the door (5)

I got + wore (6)

it had bin 20 minutes

(7) 'sins they went in

findley they walked

out my mom's

Case was red  
She told me he  
was fine he  
just choked  
we went back  
to the room  
and I held and  
held him. I felt warm  
and he felt  
soft and lumpy  
at the same  
time. He was as sweet

~~QAR ce~~ ~~as a new borne kitten,~~  
as a new borne kitten  
n cut as cute as a baby  
chip mark Just then I

herd <sup>look</sup> was ~~eyes~~ sit

was my relatives

they finally <sup>got to</sup> meet him

~~I~~ I know that I'll

owe's love and care

about him but

~~for a sekiat he~~

~~looks like a monster~~

But for now so

will my relatives

X Some people tell me I will

want to be an only child.

Then I felt something

trickling in my body

it was love for my brother.

END



dad IM  
wored ITS  
going to  
be all right  
he wispep



my mom  
said  
"my BABY"

~~I  
dad that  
I WAS  
wored but he told  
me it was  
all right~~

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12  
I can't read  
wordley

W

A  
ugh  
ugh he

he still  
looks  
a little  
~~fat~~ blue

trid to  
breath

0

Skat hary  
I wanted  
to/all

# Titels

~~one day~~

~~he shocked~~

~~the look~~

~~at the hospital~~

~~He still looks blue~~

~~I can't  
come  
in~~

~~He still  
looks  
blue~~

## His Day

It was around ten that morning, a cool summer day, when me and my dad were walking to Roosevelt Hospital to see my brother. A man who worked at the hospital asked us for an ID card. My dad showed his and we went in. We pressed the elevator button. "Ding!" We went up to the eleventh floor. It was quiet and still like when someone is in shock before they can talk again. We walked down the quiet hall.

I couldn't wait till I could hold him again. You had to walk through two doors. For one door you had to put a card through the slot. Finally, we opened the door where all the trouble started. We walked in and saw a nurse running to the emergency room with a blue baby! We felt sorry for the parents whose baby that was. Then we saw my mom crying. That was my brother! Dun, dun dun. "Ugh, ugh, ugh," he tried to breathe. "Dad, I'm worried."

"It's going to be all right," he whispered. My mom said,  
"My baby."

My dad and my mom went into the emergency room but I wasn't allowed in. I walked in circles next to the door. "Ahhhh," I wanted to yell. I got bored. It had been twenty minutes since they went in.

"1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10," I counted worriedly.

Finally, they walked out. My mom's face was red. She told me he was fine, he just choked. We went back to the room and I held and held him. He still looked a little blue. I felt warm and he felt soft and lumpy at the same time. He was as sweet as a newborn kitten and as cute as a baby chipmunk.

Just then, I heard a loud noise. It was my relatives. They finally got to meet him. I know that I'll always love and care about my brother but for now, so will my relatives. Some people told me I will want to be

an only child. Then I felt something tingling in my body.

It was love for my brother.

# **I'll Never Do That Again!**

By

Jessica Block

## Memory Tree

### Long Ago

When I fell down in my  
dance recital.

Playing in Eve and Gus's  
pool:

Learning to ride my bicycle.  
first

### Makes You Cry

When my dog, Theo,  
died.

Leaving Spain for  
the first time.

### Precious As Gold

When my cousin, Eric,  
was born and we visited him  
in California.

Having long talks on the  
beach with Grandma.

### Warm

When we got my first  
puppy, Max.

Family barbeques in  
California.

The time I saw my

broadway show,  
The Secret Garden.

### Makes You Laugh

Skiing uncontrollably down  
a mountain in Spain.

When my brother had a  
hole in his canoe.

"I'm too tired to sleep over."



## Skiing in Spain

I am choosing to write about the time when I went skiing with friends in Spain. Although I have been skiing before, this particular experience was unique! When I think about this moment now, I find myself smiling and laughing about it, although at the time, I had probably never been so scared in my life! I can vividly recall who I was with, the weather that day, what I was wearing, the feelings of nervousness, excitement, and exhilaration as well as the view from the top of the mountain.

It's not uncommon for people to arrive home after a long day of skiing with dramatic, funny and maybe even scary stories. I believe that many people will be able to identify with the feelings and emotions that I experienced that February day at La Pinilla. I'm almost certain that people will find themselves nodding in recognition as they read about how I made my way down the mountain in Navacerrada, Spain.

**“Juicy Words”**

exhilaration

ambivalence

out-of-control

terrified

hesitant

glorious

extreme

shocking!

crisp

trembling

insanity

stunned

## Comparisons

as bumpy as an unpaved dirt road in the country

as scared as a baby bird leaving the nest for the first time

it was as if I were looking directly at the sun

as fast as the speed of light

it looked as if I'd been crying for days

laughed so hard my stomach ached

soaring through the air like a bird

as free as....

## Sounds

“Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!!” she screamed with a tremble in her voice.

Phhhsshhhhoooooommmmm – the sound of my body racing  
through the air.

Ssshhhsshshshshshsh, crackle, shsshshshs – sound of metal  
skis rubbing against sheets of ice.

Ordering of Main Events

Going up the ski lift	Getting off the ski lift and realizing that the only way down was to cross over the ungroomed, black diamond trail	Skiing down the ungroomed black diamond trail with Rachel (I passed her!)	Seeing Julian and Ernesto at the bottom, ready to go up the next ski lift
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### I'll Never Do That Again!

It was a clear, crisp February morning. I sat on the chairlift, gazing straight ahead of me. All I could see was blue sky for miles, bordered by thousands of tall, dark green pine trees. As I turned my head to look behind me, down the mountain, it was as if I was looking straight at a postcard; a jagged, snow covered mountain, sun's rays bouncing off of it, appeared as though it was painted against the flawless blue sky. The view was breathtaking and neither myself, Rachel, Julian or Ernesto uttered a word.

I welcomed the silence as I sat on the chairlift moving up to the top of the mountain. I couldn't have spoken even if I wanted to. Fear had taken control of all of my senses. Before we stepped onto the chairlift, Rachel, Julian and Ernesto spent ten long minutes convincing me that I could go up the "experienced skier chair lift" and that I'd be fine. "Come on, Jess, I've seen the way you ski, you can do it!" cajoled Julian. "Don't worry, Jess, I'll ski with you the entire time. We can go slowly while the boys ski down at their own pace" said Rachel. "Jess, you only have to cross over a small section of the black diamond and once you do that, you can get to the easier trail. You're a good skier, you'll be fine!" If I could have flailed my arms and legs and screamed out like a baby having a tantrum, I would have, believe me.

“Fine?” I thought to myself? “Was he kidding?” I hadn’t been skiing since I was sixteen years old. That was about seven years ago! In my mind, I was still a novice. I steered away from the advanced trails with red squares and black diamonds. Never once was I tempted to venture onto a trail that wasn’t a beginner green circle or an intermediate blue square. As the chairlift steadily moved up towards the peak of the mountain, I waved goodbye to the blue squares and green circles and felt increasingly more ambivalent as I noticed all of the more advanced trails. The anxious feeling in my stomach was indescribable and my heart was pounding. I closed my eyes, took a few steady deep breaths and tried to give myself a pep talk before getting off the chair lift and taking the plunge...

Just as I opened my eyes, I realized that we were just about at the top of the mountain. I spotted a sign that read “Please raise the bar and move to the edge of your seat” (the sign was written in Spanish). Julian and I lifted the bar above our heads and inched forward in preparation to ski down the little mound of snow that would help us to get off the chairlift. I contemplated remaining on the chairlift and circling back down to the bottom of the mountain but before I knew it, my skis had touched the ground and I was gently gliding down the small mound of snow. “OK, that wasn’t so bad” I thought to myself. I sidestepped out of the way so that other skiers

coming off the chairlift wouldn't crash into me. I put my gloves on and secured both of my ski poles around my wrists. I nervously glanced over to my friends who were a few feet away and I noticed Ernesto pointing his index finger off to his right as he stood in a huddle speaking in a quiet voice with Julian and Rachel. Just from looking over at them, I got the vibe that I wasn't going to be happy with what they were about to tell me. I moved over to join the three of them. With raised eyebrows and a "Jess, I'm so sorry, you're going to kill me" look on their faces, they all hesitantly smiled at me.

Rachel broke the news. "I know this looks scary..." - I knew there was a "but" coming - "but if we traverse the mountain, it will be manageable, I promise. Rachel explained that we needed to cross over this "small" ungroomed portion of the black diamond trail to get to the easier trail that we all were hoping to ski down together. We'll take it really slow, ok?" I had this overwhelming sensation that it wasn't going to be as OK as Rachel made it seem, but what could I do? At this point, there was nowhere else to go but down.

Julian and Ernesto began to ski before us and they made it look so simple - a little swish to the right, swish to the left - they were so controlled and steady. Just before Rachel and I started to ski, Rachel told me to follow



her and do exactly as she did. She started off very slowly and for the first minute or so Rachel did a good job of controlling her speed. She traversed the mountain just like she said she was going to do and I thought to myself “Alright, maybe I can do this...” It was at that exact moment when I started slipping! I hit an enormous patch of ice. “Shhhhhhhhhhhh, crackle, shhhhhhhhhhhh” went my skis as they scraped against the ice. I was no longer traversing the mountain, but rather I was sliding uncontrollably DOWN the mountain. My voice quivered as I let out a long “Ahhhhhaaaaahhhhhhaaahh!” I didn’t think I’d ever be able to stop. I tried using my ski poles to slow myself down everything was happening so fast that it didn’t help. By some twist of fate, I slid off of the ice into a bank of fresh snow where I was able to shift my weight and slow myself down. I took what felt like the largest deep breath and I told myself that I would NEVER MOVE AGAIN. I contemplated taking my skis off and walking down the mountain because skiing the rest of the trail was an option that I had decided against.

Rachel carefully inched her way over to me. I was ranting and raving. “You told me that I could do this, I can’t do this! I’m going to die!” Through my dramatics, Rachel managed to get a word in edge-wise. “We’re more than half way there, we must keep going” she said. My eyes got

narrow and small and I started taking short, fast breaths in and out of my nose. Rachel knew I was not happy but I reluctantly aligned myself behind her. We were back to the original plan - Rachel would ski nice and slowly and I would calmly ski behind her. If only it were calm!!

Within seconds I had lost complete and total control and I was no longer skiing calmly behind Rachel but I was  
FFFFFFFFLLLLYYYYYYYYING through the air on an ungroomed portion of a black diamond trail.

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

BUMP

There was so much wind in my face that my eyes began to water and tears started streaming down my face. It looked as if I'd been crying for days. I couldn't see a thing. All I could feel were the bumps under my feet (on the rare occasions that I actually hit the ground) and my heart thumping.

“Ppppppssssshhhhoooooom”

y body raced through the air.

“Whhhooooooooooooooooaaaaaaa” I quivered. I tried with all my might to keep both skis on the ground, but as my body unsteadily swayed from side to side, I knew that I had lost almost total control. There were moments when I felt one of my skis on the snow but other moments where I was completely airborne.

“How was I ever going to stop?!?” I thought to myself in a state of panic. What was I thinking? I was never going to be able to stop! It’d be a miracle if I didn’t fall and break every last bone in my body. “Boooooom!” both skis finally hit the ground. I squinted, trying to see through the tears that covered my face where I had landed. I could just barely make out the chairlift where Julian and Ernesto were waiting for me and Rachel. Although it was comforting to have both feet on the ground, I still felt unsettled by how fast I was moving. I felt as if I had just been shot out of rocket.

I braced myself and attempted one of those fancy side stops that you always see the professional skiers do when they are competing on television. My stop wasn’t nearly as clean as theirs. In fact, I zoomed right past the spot where I had intended to stop but had enough speed to loop back around to where my friends were waiting. From the expression on their faces, I think they were in just as much shock as I was in that I had made it down the

mountain in one piece. I dug my ski poles into the snow and draped by arms and upper body on them as if I was lifeless. I just let my head hang as I tried to catch my breath. When I looked up, Rachel had made it down the mountain and she, Ernesto and Julian were standing a circle around me. I listened to my own breathing for a few minutes and then, with some hesitation in his voice, Ernesto says "Jess...uhh, do you know that you're not supposed to ski straight down like that?!" Relieved, exhausted and hysterical, the four of us all fell to the ground with a smile on our faces.