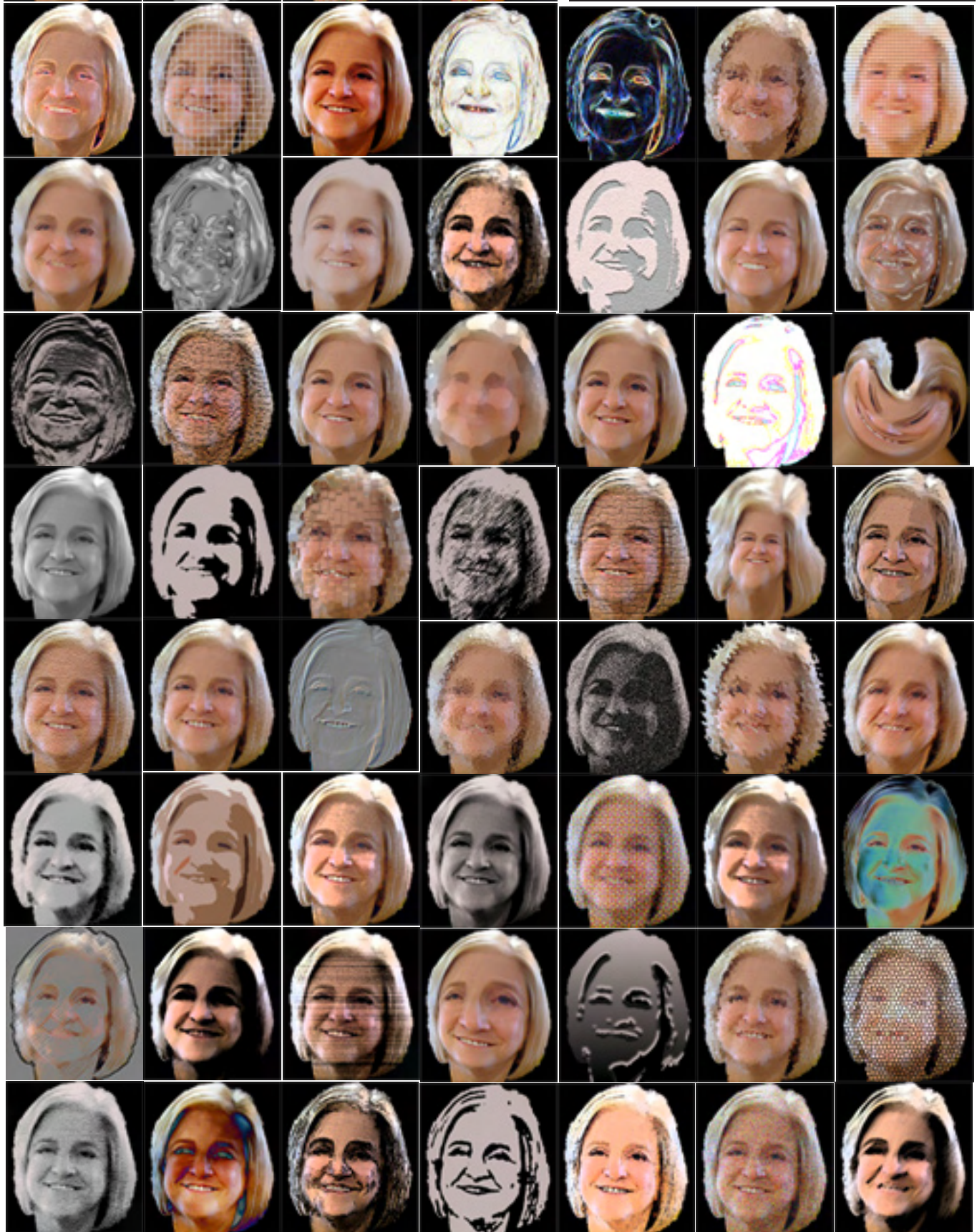


**Sandra
Effinger**
Version 6.0





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 - ❖ before he was my father
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Epilogue

1. PROLOGUE

I don't want anyone, certainly not my students, to know the real "me." So, like T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, I "prepare faces to meet the faces that I meet."

I equivocate, yet offer a few clues --

Even my record albums and spices are in alphabetical order. I still use a forty-seven-year-old cartridge pen. Storage boxes are correctly labeled and file folders color-coordinated. (Of course, I have a filing cabinet at home.)

I read approximately a book a day and always carry two books with me: one serious, solid, meaningful "classic" and one joyfully escapist piece of "trash." I also read every issue, cover-to-cover, of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *TV Guide*. (Yes, I once watched an entire hour of "The Dukes of Hazzard".)

I collect letters, quotes, quilts, crochet pieces, bookmarks, epiphanies.

Unintentionally, in play, thinking I was giving them a bath, I once drowned five Cocker Spaniel puppies. And continued to play with their bodies, not realizing they were dead, or that I had killed them, even though their mother whined and nipped at my hands. It is an ugly story.

Showing off, I once proudly counted and foolishly pointed out every bird nest in every tree near my grandparents' farmhouse. Kerosene-soaked rags on the end of a long pole burned every nest, every egg, every chick -- even the ones I heard shrieking as I hid in the cellar, my hands over my ears, screaming with them. It, too, is an ugly story.

When he was only four years old, I convinced by little brother that he had four toes on one foot and six on the other. His "deformed" feet hidden by tennis shoes, he was an odd sight in the swimming pool.

I have an “attack” cat, strangely harlequin-marked and gingery, who shreds my arms without provocation, and tigers hiss and spit whenever I look them in their eyes.

I love thunderstorms and lightning because of my great-grandmother who was almost completely blind. She would stand on the front porch, wind in her face, rain splattering all around her, turning her face upwards toward dark clouds she could not see, waiting for the brief flashes of lightning -- the only thing she could see. (I hate the moral of this story and would prefer to believe it untrue.)

When Golden Oldie radio plays the music I loved as a teenager and my adolescence turns up as the last chapter in a history book, I am reminded that my students may think of me as a middle-aged English teacher, no more than a Mrs. Grundy in blue jeans.

Over the last six years, I have lost 145 pounds, and I’m not looking to find it. The weight loss was inspired by Siena, Italy, in a story I tell elsewhere, but the loss ultimately led me to health, to a summer in Normandy, to another summer in Costa Rica getting rebuilt, and to rediscovering a passion for life I had lost.

The title of my autobiography, *Sandra Effinger Version 6.0*, is an allusion to my age, my techie nature, my newer and improved version of myself (Yes, there is a *Version 5.0*), and my true belief in the multiplicity of each of us. At sixty I thought I was all grown up and finished. Ah, what a comeuppance, or rather, downfall that arrogance foreshadows.

2. What's in a Name?

So I wrote this acronym poem –

Sandra likes cats
And people who like cats,
Not
Dogs,
Ridiculous
Animals.

Eager little lickers
Fawn on everyone --
Friends for free.
Independent sassy cats
Never prostitute their purrs,
Give their affection only if
Earned and claw the hand that feeds –
Razor-sharp repartee.

I love being named *Sandra*, not *Sandy*, not *Sondra*. Just formal enough but with a friendly feeling. I don't bump into Sandra's everywhere and when I do, I usually like them.

My middle name is *Kay*, but I spell it *Kaye*. Sort of reminiscent of *Faye*. I don't like the two names together and could never be a *Kay*, not even with the *-e*.

My maiden name was *Andrews*. My Lebanese father's family name was obviously changed from something much more exotic when they immigrated. We don't know from what. It is not the British *Andrews*, or Andrews Sisters *Andrews*, or classy Julie *Andrews*. In high school, I adopted a pen name combining both my used names – *Sandrews*.

Though I am certainly better known as *MsEffie*, the name I share with the world is usually *Sandra Andrews Effinger* – somehow combining all my lives.

3. **A** Is for ALPHABET

Allusive

Brusque

Contemplative

Disenchanting

Eclectic

Fey

Gaga

Haywire

Iconoclastic

Junoesque

Kempt

Lachrymose

Maladroit

Nonpareil

Obstinate

Petulant

Quixotic

Refined

Sensual

Transcendent

Uppity

Versatile

Wistful

Xenophilic

Yare

Zaftig

4. LIKES/DISLIKES LIST

Likes

1. Ice Cold Water
2. Vivaldi
3. Bruegel & Vermeer
4. Room Service
5. Siena
6. Leonard Cohen's Lyrics
7. Candles
8. Kites
9. Apples
10. All Things Apple
11. Chocolate
12. Rainbows
13. Used Book Stores
14. Good Manners
15. Handmade Quilts
16. Cats
17. Jewelry
18. Lapel Buttons
19. Quotations
20. "Slasher" Films
21. Shakespeare
22. Post-It Notes
23. Garden Tomatoes
24. Comfortable Shoes
25. Gossip
26. Cartridge Pens
27. Mystery
28. Quiet
29. Chinese Elms
30. Roses

Dislikes

1. Instant Tea
2. Rap Music
3. Picasso
4. Waiting
5. Mixed Vegetables
6. Ambulance Sirens
7. Telephone Solicitations
8. Junk Mail
9. Insurance
10. Being Put on "Hold"
11. Colorized Movies
12. Strawberries
13. Crickets
14. "Sucks"
15. *Daily Oklahoman*
16. Mice
17. Rolypoly Bugs
18. Reruns
19. Know-It-All's
20. Boiled Okra
21. *The Simpsons*
22. Whining
23. Cigarettes
24. New Shoes
25. Elmer's Glue
26. Snoring
27. Whistling
28. Trivial Trivia
29. Golf
30. Elvis Presley

5. Sensory Experiences

Nostalgic images of my grandparents' Christmas tree and the nativity scene nestled at its feet evoke rich sensory experiences for me. The family ritual always begins on Christmas Eve to sound of silly cheerful songs -- "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," "Frosty the Snowman," and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Clove-studded oranges and bayberry candles add their spice to the toasty warm smoky smell of burning logs and the fresh evergreen scent of pine.

Munching on sorghum popcorn balls and spice cookies, we hang the tree's scraggly branches with our favorite mismatched ornaments -- no two alike, each reminiscent of bygone Christmases. The red and blue tin soldier and the chubby chipped ceramic elf are the ones I hang in memory of childhood; the engraved crystal snowflake and sparkling golden star, my adult contributions.

Our homemade garlands of popcorn and cranberries and candy in bright cellophane become colorful necklaces like Christmas tree costume jewelry. Singing "It's Beginning to Look a Lot like Christmas," we carefully strew the silvery icicles strand by strand. The battered Christmas angel with her bright pink cheeks and cottony hair crowns the tree.

Worn stencils help us fill the frosty windowpanes with fluffy Christmas symbols. Christmas cards march across the mantle hung with ancient felt stockings. Mr. and Mrs. Santa (made from *Reader's Digests*) sit on the television, surrounded by ceramic knickknacks and candles and crocheted coasters. Colorful tins filled with divinity, fudge, and wavy candy ribbons sit in easy reach.

My grandmother brings out the nativity scene with its rough wooden stable and delicate ceramic figures. By the light of candles and the fireplace, we begin to sing a different kind of song -- "The Little Drummer Boy," "O Come All Ye Faithful," "What Child Is This," and "Silent Night." The barnyard animals seem wise and loving, the shepherds reverent, the magi in awe. Mary and Joseph, too, in a kind of gentle wonder, gaze at a simple cradle -- always left empty in my grandparents' home.

When I was six years old, I noticed that, unlike other nativity scenes I had seen, no figure of the Christ child ever slept under our tree. I asked why, and was told that our cradle was full, not empty. My grandpa told me to squinch my eyes up and to concentrate very hard and maybe I would see what beloved child lay safe and warm in our home.

Although I now doubt Santa's secret benevolence and the Christ child's divinity, the symbolism of each still remains powerful and I always revere that empty cradle -- and when I look at it, from year to year, I am always blessed, safe and warm, in the heart of our home.

6. Metaphorical Definitions

1. **LAZINESS** is not writing metaphorical definitions.
2. **FEAR** is a flat tire on a lonely country road.
3. **EVIL** is pulling the wings off a butterfly.
4. **HAPPINESS** is a husband who cooks supper.
5. **LONELINESS** is sending yourself flowers on your birthday.
6. **GREED** is eating the last cookie when nobody has had any but you.
7. **APATHY** is a student sleeping in class.
8. **CONFIDENCE** is working the New York Times crossword puzzles in ink.
9. **RELAXATION** is a purring cat.
10. **HOPE** is a new semester.

7. A Quality Personality

Shame

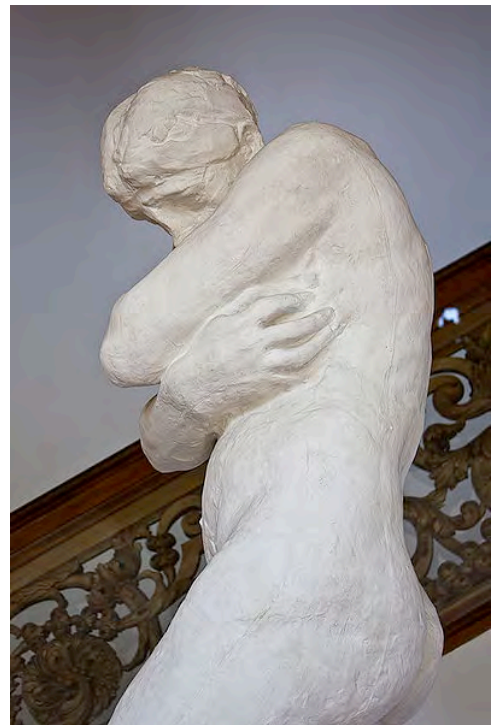
You'd never know that Shame had anything to hide by looking at her. So common that nothing about her appearance strikes you at first glance – average height, average weight. She always wears a plain solid-colored t-shirt, no logos or slogans for her, and blue jeans, broken-in but not worn-out. She bought a pair of those new walking shoes to help improve her posture, but she just won't stand up straight.

Her grey eyes, usually cast downward, are stunning, pale and eerie, when she really looks you in the eye, and she blushes easily. Although she seems so humble, every sentence starts with "I." She favors her sisters Guilt and Embarrassment, and Doubt is her brother.

She hides Snickers in her bedside dresser drawer, lies about her age, and pinches herself when she thinks no one is looking.

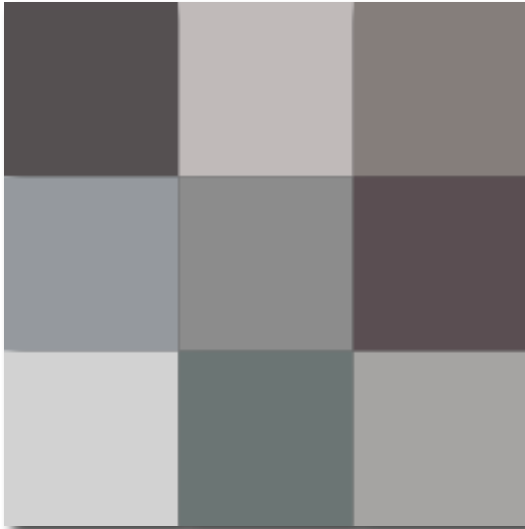
In her closet, way in back, is a bright turquoise sundress that she's never worn out but sometimes tries on late at night, listening to the blues and drinking Merlot all alone.

As she gets on the train, she smells someone's perfume and it makes her step quicken. The sound of foreign languages reminds her that the ground under her feet is moving. The crying of someone else's baby makes her sick so she leans forward and bites her knee. Her eyes unfocus, watching the scenery rush by too fast to see. Even though the only thing she can be sure of tonight is sleeping in a bed that isn't hers, she is not afraid.



Eve After the Fall by Auguste Rodin

8. Color Your World



Yes, gray is a color (and grey is a colour). After losing so much weight, I needed a whole new wardrobe. I thought style would be simplest if I restricted my new clothing to black and white and gray. Who knew there were so many grays?

At the simplest level, grays are distinguished as being warm (with a percentage of yellow, orange, or red) or cool (with a percentage of blue, green, or violet). When there is no

cast at all, it is referred to as “neutral” or “achromatic grey.” In web colors, represented as a hex triplet (with 16,777,216 possible combinations), there are actually 254 true grays. Any two colors are considered complementary if gray is produced when they are combined. Gray is its own complement.

“Grays” is a term used pejoratively to describe those who like granite, concrete, and other city materials, as opposed to the term “Greens.”

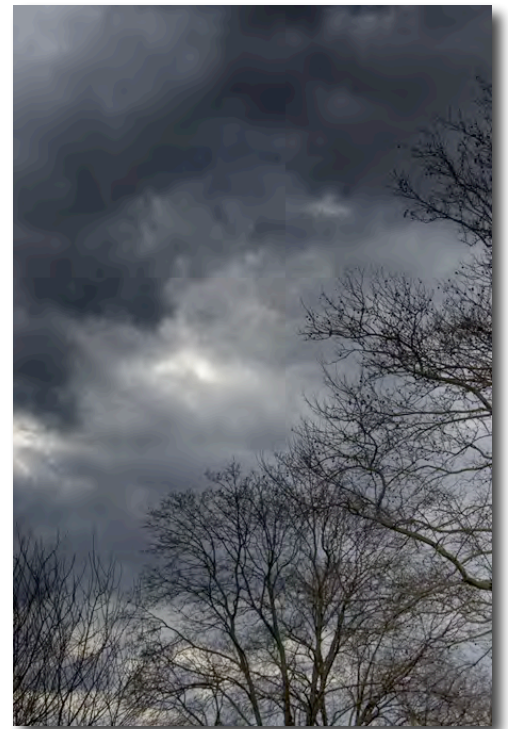
The Gray Panthers are an activist group that focuses on senior citizen issues.

Nobody likes gray weather.

Gray language connotes cursing.

“The Gray Lady” is the nickname of *The New York Times*.

In a moral sense, gray is used positively to balance an all-black or all-white view, as in shades of gray represent magnitudes of good and bad OR to describe situations that have no clear moral value.





There's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson and the Good Gray Poet (Walt Whitman).

Grissaile (from the French *gris*) is a term for any painting executed entirely in monochrome.

Common connotations for gray include boredom, reality, seriousness, neutrality, dullness, mediocrity, undefinedness, pessimism, cursing, tragedy, grumpiness, and old age.

And all I was looking for was a dress!



Developing grisaille by Deva Luna

Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery by Pieter Bruegel



Wistful Glance by Gemini



9. Room Sweet Room

The room I actually think of as “my room” is our guest bedroom. It is old-fashioned, all of the furniture mahogany hand-me-downs from my mother. The bed has a bookcase headboard which holds books special to me -- Rossetti's poems, Poe's stories, Shakespeare's plays, a Gideon Bible, ***The Golden Bough***, Plato's ***Republic***, Ellison's ***Invisible Man***, Toffler's ***Future Shock***, Neruda's ***Memoirs***. Instead of using a bedspread, I alternate quilts collected over the years. My favorite is one I pieced together from miscellaneous squares made by my great-grandmother Preskitt. Throw pillows and a comforter crocheted by Aunt Mary make the bed a comfortable place to curl up and read. Dresser scarves embroidered by Aunt Artie and my grandmother protect the dresser and chest-of-drawers.

The decorations on the walls are all very special to me. Embroideries and needlepoint are ones I have done. Although I like my cross-stitch sampler, my favorite embroidery is one of two Persian cats, white and gray, finely detailed in satin thread. Several of the other decorations follow a rainbow motif -- wind chimes painted by my sister, a laminated jigsaw puzzle, a poster that uses bright-colored quotes to create a rainbow shape, a stick-kite given me by a Japanese foreign exchange teacher, and a finger-painting my teenage niece gave me when she was two years old.

The “set-arounds” are also old-fashioned. Years ago I découpaged a lap desk covered with poems I had written, and I keep all of my own writing in it. I also have an old hurricane oil lamp my grandfather kept in the cellar of the home place. Two wooden carvings made by an old friend look modern and abstract in one sense, but the smooth surfaces, hand-oiled and gray with patina, make them look like ancient family heirlooms in another sense. Vanilla-scented candles and a Tiffany glass filled with rose petal potpourri make the room even smell old-fashioned and nostalgic.

Altogether, the room is quiet, comfortable, filled with personal and family memories that help make it the place where I best daydream and reminisce.

10. PERSONAL METAPHORS

1. **Animal** -- ginger cat
2. **Car** -- Ford Focus
3. **Article of Clothing** -- Granny's flannel nightgowns
4. **Day of the Week** -- Thursday
5. **Food** -- gelato
6. **Color** -- gray
7. **Movie** -- *High Noon*
8. **Fragrance** -- "Ange ou Demon" by Givenchy
9. **Type of Building** -- library
10. **Flower/Plant** -- lavender
11. **Musical Instrument** -- triangle or sticks (ha!)
12. **Geometric Shape** -- sphere
13. **Piece of Furniture** -- bookcase
14. **Song** -- "Nobody Here But Us Chickens" by Louis Jordan
15. **Season of the Year** -- autumn
16. **Television Character** -- Murphy Brown
17. **Comic Character** -- Lucy from "Peanuts"
18. **Appliance or Machinery** -- MacBook
19. **Natural Phenomenon** -- tornado
20. **Word** -- brouhaha

11. Extended Metaphors

ARTICLE OF CLOTHING: The article of clothing I am most like are the casual, comfortable, over-sized flannel nightgowns my granny has made me forever. Rickrack, ribbon, lace, braid frogs, industrial-size snaps, buttons of mother-of-pearl or rhinestone -- whatever catches her fancy will adorn the colorful but bizarre flannel she finds on sale. Pastel toys, tiny pink rosebuds, yellow calico, and green penguins have served over the years, finally faded, soft, strange, unique.

DAY OF THE WEEK: I'm like Thursday, not quite the free, wild, undisciplined weekend, but also not quite the dull drudgery of Monday. Thursday is caught between work and play, restriction and freedom. Thursday is a sense of accomplishment for the week past, a sense of challenge for a week unfinished, and a sense of anticipation for the weekend ahead.

PIECE OF FURNITURE: I think a bookcase and I have much in common. We both contain many kinds of knowledge -- some useful, some erudite, some frivolous. The contents of both can be selectively edited, adding new volumes and discarding useless texts. There is room for the dictionary and the comic book, for Pre-Raphaelite poetry and *National Lampoon*, perhaps even for a few knickknacks.

SONG: Since I have just discovered Louis Jordan's music from *Five Guys Named Moe* and I am wild about "Nobody Here But Us Chickens," and I haven't found any other place to put this great good time song . . . It tells a funny story, all jazzed up, and yet also gives universal advice about trust, and all that stuff. I feel good when I hear it and can't keep from grinning. Sometimes I can make others feel that way, too.

TELEVISION CHARACTER: The television character I wish I were most like is Murphy Brown. Not only is she beautiful and intelligent, she has a devastating wit and killer repartee. Candice Bergen epitomizes the modern career woman at her best (and worst). Even on a bad day, there is much to admire in how well she has aged. It is sometimes hard for me to believe she was all frothy pink in *Glamour* magazine in 1968.

12. SYMBOLIC RECIPE

Effinger Gallimaufry*

Ingredients:

2 Cups Hard Work
1 Cup Creativity
1 Cup Intelligence
1 Cup Determination
1 Tbl. Laziness
1 Tbl. Compassion
dash Temper and Spunk

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in order. Briskly whip the 2 cups of Hard Work in a well-rounded mind until all full and frothy. Then gently fold in Creativity and Intelligence.
2. To stiffen the mixture, add Determination.
3. To keep dish from expanding out of control, firmly work in Laziness and Compassion.
4. Add a dash of Temper and Spunk for “bite,” but be careful not to overspice or combination may become volatile unexpectedly.
5. Let set several decades in a comfortable, orderly room until flavors blend and mature.

From the kitchen of: Coleen Oxley and Lewis Andrews

Serves: Too many

*gal • li • mau • fry | galé môfrē | noun (pl. **-fries**) a confused jumble or medley of things.

13. **The Ultimate All-Purpose Excuse**

(Entering the room, huffing and puffing, obviously out of breath)

I know I'm supposed to be on time, and truly I believe punctuality is next to cleanliness which we all know is next to godliness, but . . . as I was on my way to class, I heard a shrill little whimper, the sound, obviously, of a wounded animal, a kitten perhaps. Knowing how you feel about cats, I knew you would hold me remiss if I did not at least look to see if some poor kitty needed my help.

The sounds were tiny and weak, but I finally tracked them down, to just inside the alcove by Dr. Jones' door. There I found the fluffiest little calico kitten, maybe all of six weeks old, trembling in terror. Disoriented, undoubtedly stunned by the loudness of the tardy bell, it shook so it nearly broke my heart. I thought it might have crawled inside the doors and became trapped and frightened.

I knew you would want me to see it safely back to its owner, so I picked it up tenderly and began to go door-to-door, looking for its owner. Finally, at a frame house nearly two blocks away, an elderly lady came to the door in tears. Her kitten, Patches, her only companion, was missing. So certain that she would find its poor flattened body, run over by some crazy, fast-driving teenager, she hadn't even looked. Soon her tears of sadness turned to tears of gladness.

Even though she offered me milk and homemade cookies, your class is so important to me that I refused gracefully and rushed back to school, running all the way, and that's why I'm tardy today.

288 words

14. **Telling Tales**

I hit a personal low when I was only about six years old. We had a family reunion at my grandparents' farm. As the oldest grandchild, I felt too grown-up to play with the "kids," and the adults thought I was far too young to join them. My aunts, uncles, grandparents, and parents would either pinch my cheek, chuck my chin, or tell me to run along.

After a while, I noticed that even the younger grandchildren left me out. I really couldn't play with two- and three- year-olds. They didn't tell me to run along, but I felt left out anyway.

It seemed almost as if I didn't belong to this family. I was just an observer, watching from the sidelines.

Finally, I went outside, sat on the windmill pump, and called Skipper, an ugly farm mutt. That silly stupid dog paid more attention to me than anyone had all day. I remember petting him, saying over and over, "Nobody loves me." He looked up at me with liquid canine eyes, licked my hand, and listened as I cried.

Of course, when my family came outside and found me crying and talking to a dog I didn't even like, they all laughed and called me, "Silly." But I wasn't silly; I was sad.

15. Unfinished Sentences

1. **I usually worry about . . .** things I could change easily -- deadlines, grading papers, planning lessons.
2. **I feel angry when . . .** I see lazy students who don't try. I get angry when I hear excuses, not reasons. I also get angry when people make fun of me or when they are rude. I think I get angry often.
3. **I'm moody when . . .** I have too much to do and/or too little time to myself.
4. **I'm happiest when . . .** I'm snug and cozy in a flannel granny gown, reading a good book and drinking hot tea.
5. **I feel confident when . . .** I am well prepared for school or anything else. Whenever I "freelance" whatever I'm doing, I lose all confidence -- which makes perfect sense.
6. **I feel frustrated when . . .** I can't express myself clearly to someone, when I have to wait in any line, when I can't learn something no matter how hard I try, and when I can't remember someone's name.
7. **I feel depressed when . . .** I have no privacy, when my students do poorly on something I've taught them, when I am uncomfortable, and when I haven't had enough sleep.
8. **I am comfortable when . . .** I am talking with people I like and respect and have time to just visit, without rushing off for errands or appointments. I am also very comfortable just watching old movies with my husband or puttering around the house all by myself.
9. **I feel nervous when . . .** school starts because I don't know what to expect and when I am in a hurry to find some place and know I am hopelessly lost.
10. **I feel sentimental when . . .** I look at old photographs or listen to songs that remind me of friends and family from the past. I even get sentimental and weepy over some television commercials.

16. **A Personal Symbol**

I have a forty-seven-year-old dark transparent blue Sheaffer cartridge pen with which I enjoy a mystical relationship. It is compact, sturdy in my hand, dependable, never leaking, never clogging -- almost the archetypal pen. Endlessly refillable, it changes colors from emerald green to peacock blue with a quick twist.

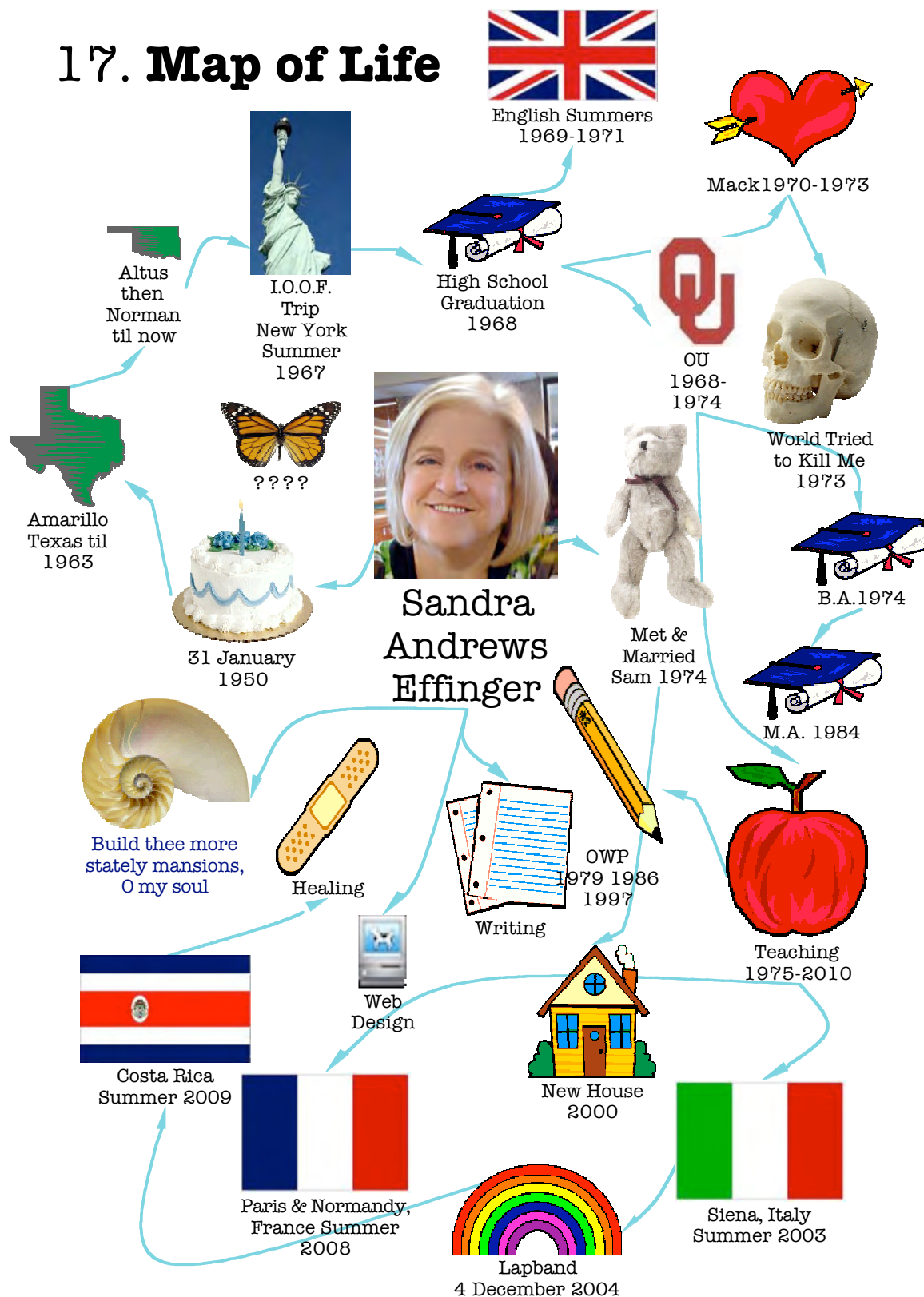
When I take exams using my magic pen, I make A's. When I use it for journals, I am astounded at the brilliant words that flow from it. I am easily witty, my words well put, my penmanship even unrecognizably admirable. Sheaffer in hand, I dare anything, from the Great American Novel to notes for Literary Criticism 5673.

As a logical well-educated twenty-first-century adult, I know that the pen is not really magical. Consciously, I know that I write well when I use it only because I am comfortable and confident. Nonetheless, hidden deep inside, a superstitious primitive lurks and laughs at such glib rationalizations -- and clutches that pen ever more tightly.

Confidence? Creativity? Or the catalyst that in my hand makes magic in my head.



17. Map of Life



18. **A Mysterious Place**

The village and surroundings of Arbroath, Scotland, were mysterious to me. A small village overlooked by many travelers, Arbroath was once the site of the Scottish Parliament. It saw kings crowned, but now its castle stands in ruins and grass grows in the coronation hall. The ruins of an old monastery crumble next to the old castle. The ancient bell tower still stands and strong winds will cause the iron bell to ring erratically.

The cliff walks along the North Sea suit the ruins. The white chalky cliffs have been etched in bizarre patterns by cold northern winds. Boulders lie just under the sea's surface and extend several miles out from shore. Since the boulders cannot be seen, people appear to "walk on water," floating upon the salty foam. Devouring sea and sky and land, a light fog sometimes veils even these strange images.

Sunset glows briefly orange and gold. The sea, the cliffs, the castle, the monastery -- all become ghostly silhouettes black against the sky. Time itself seems captured in Evening's melancholy painting, slowly melting into the darkness.

19. Synectics

1. **Which is wiser? a pen or a pencil?**

A pen is wiser than a pencil because it must “think” first, deliberation not speed, dictates its choices. Because it is not erasable, it must think before it writes.

2. **Which is easier to forgive? a street or a sidewalk?**

A sidewalk is easier to forgive than a street because accidents there are not as bad. Anyway, a sidewalk is known, a neighbor; a street can be a complete stranger.

3. **Which is smarter? a clock or a calendar?**

A calendar is smarter than a clock because it has to know more -- national holidays, phases of the moon, seasons of the year, birthdays, how the date moves through the days of the week, even leap year. The clock only needs to know 12 hours and an a.m. or p.m. Just tick tock or rather tick tick tick (See Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*.)

4. **Which is easier to teach? a question or an answer?**

An answer is much easier to teach than a question; it can be memorized and used over and over. A question is open to possibilities, always changing with new information; many things, not a one thing.

6. **Which is more fearful? new or old?**

New is more fearful than old because new is unknown; even the most fearful old has been faced . . . and survived.

13. **Which is more suspenseful? rain or snow?**

Rain is more suspenseful because you can see it, off in the distance, streaking the sky. You can hear the rain, even in the darkest night. Even when you don't get the rain itself, the rainbow announces how close you've been and what you've missed.

14. **Which has less charm? a signature or an autograph?**

A signature has less charm because it has no sentimental value; it's all about recognition and repetition and can even be “signed” by a machine. An autograph is supposed to be unique, stylish, almost unreadable -- your own mark on the world.

15. **Which is more trustworthy? history or literature?**

History changes with each discovery of new facts, with changing values, with each new historian who writes it. Literature is always universal and yet always an individual truth; something for the ages. The Odyssey is truer now than it was in 800 B.C.E.

17. **Which is sadder? seek or find?**

Seek is sadder than find because it means you lost something.

18. **Which costs more? a home or a house?**

A family living out of their car or in a shelter (no house) can still be at home . . . so a home can cost nothing at all. Yet, at the same time, a home costs more because you invest yourself in it as well as money.

20. **A Day in the Life. . .**

Outside all was quiet, although there was the occasional bark of a distant dog. Inside all was quiet, too, except for the soft blues and the scritch of pen on paper.

Sandra was propped up on pillows in the middle of the living room floor, writing steadily. Sometimes she would stop and read over what she had written, frequently crushing a page and adding it to the surrounding crumbs, smiling more rarely. And then the slow scritch would begin again.

After an hour, she abruptly jumped up, changed the music to an old Stones tape, and fixed crackers, cheese, pickles, and a coffee (just non-fat half & half). After seating herself in the old-fashioned rocking chair, she stretched and snacked and read a battered murder mystery, perhaps some forensic anthropology tale by Kathy Reichs.

Outside all was still quiet, though beginning to grow light. Inside there was the comforting smell of coffee, the crunch of the crackers, and the creak of the rocker.

“Never enough time,” Sandra mumbled to herself, or perhaps to the cat that purred, persistently arching its back and pushing against her hand. “Go away. I don’t want you.”

The cat’s golden eyes watched enigmatically as the woman stood up, turned off the music, returned to her pile of pillows, and the scritch began again. Stretching itself, the cat possessed the chair now abandoned by the woman, circled itself in the seat, and went to sleep.

21. These Words Belong to Me

1. **scar:** a mark left on the skin or within body tissue where a wound, burn, or sore has not healed quite completely and fibrous connective tissue has developed; a lasting effect of grief, fear, or other emotion left on a person's character by a traumatic experience

How ironic that a scar is a sign of healing. No scar, you didn't survive, you didn't heal.

2. **metamorphosis:** a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means

Did you know I have a butterfly tattoo on my left ankle?

3. **brouhaha:** a noisy and overexcited critical response, display of interest, or trail of publicity

I have a blog named this - me a brouhaha?

4. **serendipity:** the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way

I love it when a plan comes together.

5. **nonpareil:** having no match or equal; unrivaled; a flat round candy made of chocolate covered with white sugar sprinkles

It is so sad to admit which definition I knew first.

6. **façade:** the face of a building, esp. the principal front that looks onto a street or open space; an outward appearance that is maintained to conceal a less pleasant or creditable reality

My whole life

7. **eclectic:** deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources

the way I decorate my home; the person I am becoming

8. **transcendent:** beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience; surpassing the ordinary; exceptional.

Still hoping I will transcend

9. **fey:** giving an impression of vague unworldliness

This is the word I like better than "senior" moment or dementia.

10. **awestruck:** filled with or revealing a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder

22. In Other Words

*The tragedy of life is not so much what men suffer,
but rather what they miss.*

--Thomas Carlyle

Every sin is the result of collaboration.

--Stephen Crane

Money often costs too much.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Nothing is wonderful once you get used to it.

--Ed Howe

DON'T MAKE EXCUSES, MAKE GOOD.

--Elbert Hubbard

Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion.

--Arthur Koestler

Ignorance is a voluntary misfortune.

--Nicholas Ling

I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.

--Wilson Mizner

A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.

--Lily Tomlin

The man who does not read good books has no advantage over
the man who can't read them.

--Mark Twain

Even a lie is a psychic fact.

--Carl Jung

And still I am learning.

--Michelangelo Buonarroti

23. FLASHBACK

If I could relive any day, I would choose to relive a day late in August of 1970. I had temporarily dropped out of college and was working as a secretary in the Sociology Department at OU. I made little money, but I also had few responsibilities. That particular day someone had organized a pig roast picnic at what we called the Pink Pavilion out near Lake Thunderbird. Times were informal, free and easy, and word of mouth invited everyone to the picnic.

When my closest friends, Jackie and Martha, and I arrived at the lake that afternoon, someone asked us to donate whatever we could, a couple of dollars, to help pay for the party. The pig had been roasted whole overnight in a pit and, though a gruesome sight, smelled and tasted wonderful. People brought other food as well -- potato salad and baked beans, homemade bread, fresh organic vegetables. The Library Bar had donated several kegs of beer, so the mood was festive. Local bands like Green Corn played, poets read aloud, political activists pontificated, and frisbees flew. There were over a hundred of us, and everyone laughed and sang and talked into the darkness. As we sat on blankets under the stars, dogs and children played around us.

I would choose to relive that day because at the time I did not realize how special those lost carefree days would become in retrospect. Idyllic and unappreciated, that day typified the best of the era that had just passed. The friends I loved were all there that day, and the time and tragedies that would separate us over the years were unanticipated. Talking earnestly late into the night, none of us thought to hold those moments precious.

If I had the day to live over, I would hug Monty and Ronnie, who would die soon. I would take special time to talk with Martha and Earl and James, who would have such terrible experiences that they would become people I no longer recognized. I would take time to say goodbye to Ted and Jackie and Bob, who would move elsewhere, until we lost touch over the years. Since I know now how the intervening years have passed, I would try to capture every moment of that last perfect day.

24. Remembrance of Things Present

Who I Am Now: So *not* the proper English teacher I appear on the outside, for I lead a rich secret life – which will *stay* secret -- quite unlike anything I ever until three years ago. I am even more intelligent than you may think, but always tone it down a bit so I won't be so off-putting. Since I lost so much weight, I have become a bit of a know-it-all and strive mightily to keep my mouth shut when I see so many people around me on the same wrong path I walked.

What I Enjoy and Value: I enjoy elegant food (gelato, sushi, Thai, fire-grilled snow crab, Godiva chocolate) TV crime shows (All the *CSIs*, all the *Law and Orders*, *Bones*, *Criminal Minds*, *Psych*, *Monk* reruns) and makeover fashion shows (*What Not to Wear*, *You're Wearing What!*, *How Do I Look?*), black and white movies, and thick thick books.

I value loyalty, honesty, intelligence, ambition, and kindness.

What I Do with My Time: too much TV, cooking and eating, writing for my various websites, workout about four times a week (love yoga and pilates, but feel powerful after weight training), primp, try on expensive clothes and get free facials, email and Facebook, petting Roscoe, juggling my many lovers (LOL), reminiscing, daydreaming, writing in my journal, and reading, reading, reading.

Specifics I Want to Remember: favorite glamour coffee (Starbucks one pump sugar-free vanilla nonfat Caramel Macchiato) and favorite everyday coffee (Blue Bean blend with a splash of half-and-half), my ancient Sheaffer cartridge pen and my elegant copper Waterman, the sweetness of a nice kiss and the warmth of a good hug, the heady exhilaration of hot sun on my face and the pleasure of being safely inside during an Oklahoma thunderstorm, Five Flavor LifeSavers and cinnamon square lollipops, blues and classic rock, Siena and Caen, ambiguity and juxtaposition.

25. As Time Goes Bye-Bye

Carpe Diem?

I'm already past sixty and still have not done the one thing I have promised myself over and over to do -- to learn how to fly an airplane because of two influences. First, Dana, a boy in my high school speech class, who had his pilot's license, used to talk about flying in such a way that it fascinated me. Second, my stepdad Jim and I have long been intrigued by small planes and tried to talk anyone we knew into taking us up for a spin. For more than forty-five years, I have looked at courses offered in aviation and every year I can't find the time or the money.

All talk, no action. All plan, no lessons.

Yet as I read over this for the upteenth time, I've decided I've been too hard on myself. I finished my Master's (though not my PhD). I quit smoking fifteen years ago after two decades of nicotine addiction. I finally lost the weight my mother begged me to lose -- lapband surgery, 145 pounds gone, a detour to Costa Rica for rebuilding -- and I am the woman I never was. I've been to Europe five times, at last revisiting the *Pietà*. I taught myself calligraphy. Damn, I have even touched a moon rock and been close enough to touch *The Beata Beatrix* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. I've hobnobbed with the glitterati -- LBJ & Leonard Nimoy, Harlan Ellison & John Lennon . . . Well, maybe "hobnobbed" isn't quite the right word?

Mostly talk, some action.
Lots of plans, one big lesson.

I swear I'll learn to fly . . . maybe by the time I'm sixty-five?

Seize the day!

26. My Own List of Lists

Places That Make Me Happy:

1. my home
2. Siena, Italy
3. London (almost anywhere)
4. the National Art Gallery
5. OU's Bizzell Library
6. my classroom
7. airplane terminals
8. the open road

Places I Would Like to Go:

1. Macchu Picchu
2. boating on the Nile
3. the space shuttle in orbit
4. Moscow
5. Tokyo
6. another planet
7. Siena, Italy
8. Costa Rica

Things in People Which I Like:

1. wit
2. intelligence
3. commitment
4. determination
5. courtesy
6. discipline
7. responsibility
8. sense of humor

Things in People Which I Dislike:

1. narrow minds
2. unexamined opinions
3. apathy
4. prejudice
5. rudeness
6. self-pity
7. irresponsibility
8. ignorance

Things That Worry Me:

1. blindness
2. dumb politicians
3. AIDS
4. paperwork
5. the decline of values
6. stupidity
7. dogma
8. tooth decay

Things I Would Like to Know How to Do:

1. fly an airplane
2. sculpt
3. sew
4. read, write, and speak Italian
5. carpentry and woodwork
6. program a computer
7. write a good sonnet
8. accessorize

Things I've Said Goodbye to:

1. childhood
2. innocence
3. belief in Santa Claus, tooth fairies, and Easter bunnies
4. wild and crazy friends
5. religion
6. the home place
7. obesity

Ideas That Intrigue Me:

1. space travel
2. selective memory
3. how the brain works
4. religious belief
5. parapsychology
6. literary theory
7. somatyping
8. nutrition

People I Would Like to Meet:

1. George Gordon, Lord Byron
2. Gabriel Garcia Marquez
3. Toni Morrison
4. William Shakespeare
5. Lewis Black
6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti
7. Bob Dylan
8. Michelle Obama

Interesting Words:

1. scar
2. metamorphosis
3. brouhaha
4. serendipity
5. seraglio
6. façade
7. suave
8. transcendence

27. Cheer Yourself Up!

- ♥ Chocolate, chocolate, chocolate.
- ♥ Isn't it odd that listening to (and singing with) the blues, cheers me up?
- ♥ Driving in my little Ford Focus, the sound ratcheted way up, no particular place to be.
- ♥ Cruise around Facebook, looking for old friends, former students, famous people.
- ♥ Read a good book.
- ♥ Read a bad book.
- ♥ Go to a coffee shop, order a skinny non-fat cappuccino and write in my journal.
- ♥ Take a long hot bath.
- ♥ Go to an exclusive department store (i.e. Balliet's) and get a free facial and make-up. Don't forget the free samples.
- ♥ Ride my bicycle.
- ♥ Go to the YMCA. It's hard to believe that will cheer me up because I so do not get an endorphin kick, but exercise will take my mind off whatever worries me.
- ♥ Try on expensive clothes I would never ever really buy. Really high high heels, too.
- ♥ Sit on the back porch and answer email.
- ♥ Download apps for my iPhone.
- ♥ Browse iTunes and get some totally new music recommended on some stranger's playlist.
- ♥ Doodle.
- ♥ Indulge in a manicure and pedicure -- weird color polish a must.
- ♥ Go to a museum and have high tea in the café.
- ♥ Take photographs as if you were a professional, strange poses, snap snap snap, in everyone's way.



28. Metamorphosis

I used to be . . .
younger
heavier
sicker
sadder

Now I am . . .
older
thinner
healthier
happier

I used to behave,
carefully
coming
oh so close
to the line,
but never
crossing it.

Now I question,
stumbling and
fumbling,
even forgetting
there is a line.

I used to observe.
I used to fear.
I used to embrace.
I used to teach.

Now I do.
Now I reach.
Now I yearn.
Now I learn.

29. **Picture This**



La Chute d'Icare, Plate 8 from *Jazz* by Henri Matisse
Mixed Media Collage Composition

Despite its initial apparent simplicity, Henri Matisse's *La Chute d'Icare* is evocatively ambiguous. A single figure against a simple background, in the midst of six equally simple objects -- yet what do we see? Is this the triumphant Icarus rising into the blue sky, reaching for distant stars? Or is this the tragic Icarus, his flight over, feathers loose in the air around him, plummeting toward a deep azure sea? That is the significant question about the picture, and also about the myth.

This simple yet vividly colorful portrait of Icarus juxtaposes the joy of escaping gravity with the ultimate fall. Are those irregular yellow shapes feathers floating downward or fragmented stars? Are we looking up at the sky or down at the sea? Are his arms rising in powerful mid-stroke or flailing outward to stop his fall? And is that single red spot his triumphant heart, or a broken one? The forms are uncomplicated and the colors pure, yet Matisse still manages to convey both the story's triumph and its tragic end.

Matisse's execution of the work is crucial to its strength. The blue sky background, painted with wide brush strokes, using tones of light to medium blue, produces an airy, light, ethereal backdrop on which the brilliant yellow shapes glow and the stark blackness of Icarus's figure almost recedes in stark contrast. The catastrophic nature of the fall is underscored by this contrast and the simple construction: there is nothing to cover or mute the tragedy of the moment. Nothing distracts.

Certainly the title focuses us on the inevitable end, but the execution draws us back to the beginning. Though nowhere in sight, Daedalus is in every stroke. Ovid's Daedalus was a skilled architect-inventor-sculptor, who jealous of his talented nephew Talus, flung him headlong down from Minerva's sacred citadel. The goddess Pallas rescued Daedalus's nephew Talus from his uncle's wrath, changing him into a bird, clothing him with feathers in mid-air, saving his life through that transformation. That crime trapped Daedalus and his son on Crete, where Daedalus built the famous Labyrinth. Unable to keep his accomplishment secret, Daedalus revealed the mystery of the Labyrinth, allowing Theseus to kill the Minotaur. When Minos found out what Daedalus had done, he imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus in the Labyrinth themselves. To escape from the Labyrinth and from Crete, Daedalus designed sets of wings made of feathers and wax. Before flying to freedom, he warned Icarus not to fly too low -- for his wings would touch the water and get wet -- nor too high -- for the sun could melt the wax. But young Icarus, overwhelmed by the thrill of flying, forgot his father's warning and flew too close to the sun. Sure enough the wax in his wings melted down and he fell into the sea killing himself. How ironic that Daedalus's son is not saved.

More poignantly, perhaps Daedalus's son is punished for his father's overweening pride. Daedalus uses his knowledge to gain power over his limited nature. In a metaphorical way his technology aims at matching his power with that of the goddess Pallas. But only gods can convert falling humans into birds. Daedalus, and humankind with him, is humiliated and punished with the death of his own son, for daring to overreach. Icarus, the impulsive and inexperienced youth, too daring and deaf to his father's wisdom, makes a rash use of the powers given to him and pays with his life. The folly of the ambitious artist, his inevitable failure to attain his lofty goals, and the misuse of his rude technology ends in tragedy.

The motif of the fall resonates, whether it be Icarus, Adam and Eve, or Lucifer. Is it a cautionary tale about over-reaching our human bounds? Is it an inspirational story about amazing possibilities? Is it a parable about age and youth? Because this version is so simple, we are compelled to interpret it, and each of us brings our own perspective to that interpretation. For me, the thrill of the flight might well be worth the fall.

30. Look Who I Look Up To

Admiration is a strange emotion. Jean Rostand said, “The only things one can admire at length are those one admires without knowing why.” Though this may be true of things, careful reflection can reveal why we admire certain people. Often they are role models for us to emulate or representatives of the best we already see in ourselves. Sometimes the people we admire highlight a weakness we would like to overcome. Whom we admire and why reveals much about ourselves. I admire three people who share similar qualities.

Marva Collins, the Chicago educator, is someone I admire, and envy somewhat, because she is a great teacher (while I may be only a good one). She teaches Homer and Emerson to “hopeless” fourth-graders. She insists upon excellence, allowing no one to take the easy way out, and not too surprisingly, her students become scholars.

I also admire Harry Truman. He had to make what was perhaps the hardest decision in history: whether to use the first atomic bomb against Japan. Though no one truly realized the horrors that would become Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Truman’s Potsdam diaries reveal how well he himself recognized the crossroads at which mankind stood. Clearly tormented by his dilemma, Truman had the “guts” to take full responsibility. “The buck stops here,” especially when it hurts.

Finally, I admire the British poet John Keats for his courage. Even though he knew he was dying, this young man wrote poetry so marvelous that it became “a thing of beauty [that] lasts forever.” Can any poem be more poignant than his lines, “when I have fears that I may cease to be . . .”? Maybe flames that burn out quickly burn more brightly?

These three people that I admire all have the courage of their convictions, an unwillingness to whine or pass the blame or curse the heavens. Perhaps it is the beauty and the power that come from staring long at one’s own choices that makes each admirable, whether in education, or politics, or literature. By assuming responsibility for those hard choices, all three have transcended their fears, resolved their problems, and gloriously met their own standards for admiration.

31. Remembering the Child

It is sadder than I expected to realize that I have no one left to ask about myself as a toddler. I'll have to focus on my teenage self and the only two people who knew me intimately then. My sister Karen's memories of me are always a bit warped by the jealousy between us – always! My brother's Kim's memories of me are equally warped by a kind of hero worship. So, these views of me...

My sister Karen always tells stories about how much I bullied her. If true, it is remarkable that she survived. Though, truth be told, she was an irritating manipulative child who often provoked me into yelling or smacking her – so I was frequently punished for mistreating her. I don't think I ever actually drew blood, or left bruises. Her favorite story is about the time I chased her around the entire upstairs walkway at the Friendship Apartments, screaming that I was going to kill her when I caught her. In her story, worried residents called my mother, the apartment managers, maybe even the police. In my version, I never even caught her.

My brother Kim idolized me and I took advantage of that. He believed anything I told him, even when I made it up. He was convinced I was the smartest person in the world and would argue with his teachers whenever they disagreed with something I had told him. Instead of appreciating his hero worship, I took advantage. Suffice it to say that I found a complicated and tricky way of showing him how to count his toes so that it always appeared that he had four toes on one foot, six toes on the other. "Uh Uh!" he'd exclaim, my counting making a liar of his own vision. I was chagrined when I found him in the swimming pool, with his toes on, so no one would see his deformed feet.

Although there is a contrast in both stories, I must have been a trial. I was emotional, with more than a few anger issues, a bit conceited and a show-off. Even more significantly, what does it say that these are my sister's and my brother's *favorite* memories of me? I'm not even going to ask them about their *worst* memories!

32. One Medium Suitcase

Of course, I would pack my laptop first. That covers photographs, lesson plans, projects of all sorts, writing, passwords and account numbers. Wow! Maybe I just need a backpack?

If I were really leaving home forever and could only take what could be packed in one medium-sized suitcase, I would also take those physical things that have a sentimental value for me -- my personal poetry books dating back to the third grade, the jottings and scraps in my lap desk (assuredly an embryonic Great American Novel or Poem), essays and research papers I've written in college, scribbled red criticisms and all. I must also take writing others have done -- the best student writing I've saved over the years, and letters from friends, family, and former students.

Music, too, must be saved, especially the music that has waited for me year after year, revealing something new each time the changed person I have become returns. I'll sacrifice my albums with their marginal notes, scratches, stains, and torn covers bearing witness for my iPod. Not so classy and tactile, but way more practical. As long as I have room for the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, Leonard Cohen, Dory Previn, Janis Ian and Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Mimi and Richard Farina, Eric Clapton and Robert Johnson, Buffy St. Marie.

Somewhere in the corners I must squeeze in a few remaining items that are special because of the person associated with each. I'll just wear my granny's ruby solitaire engagement ring which cannot be left behind. I am the third generation to hold this legacy in trust and must pass it on to the next. I also must take the shawl crocheted by Aunt Mary just before she died, the clogs handpainted by my best friend Jackie (even though I never wear them now), and the soft Teddy bear my husband brought me in the hospital. This large medium-sized suitcase is probably almost full.

And . . . last but not least . . . just so I can relax and enjoy the other things I've saved . . .

I must

must

must

find room for one pair of

worn-out,

raggedy,

faded,

but *oh so comfortable*

blue jeans.

33. The Perfect Present

The perfect gift for me (though I hate to admit it) would be better control over my temper. When I was very young, there were two Sandra's -- a well-mannered little angel and a brat who kept getting that angel in trouble. I would bang my head (or someone else's) against the wall, break my mother's favorite vase (or my favorite toy), and get into fist fights.

When I was "on a tear," as my mother called it, I heard no voices of reason. I felt no doubt, no remorse, no pain -- until later. Afterwards, it seemed that I always hurt myself worst of all -- damaging my own property or hurting myself, driving away friends, hurting someone I loved -- so I felt guilty, as well. As I grew older, the damage I could do became truly frightening.

For example, when I was sixteen, I lost my temper about something I don't even remember now. Unfortunately, I was driving my mother's brand new baby blue Chrysler Imperial when the Evil Sandra took over, pulled into our driveway, and bashed the front of the car into the garage door. Not once. Not twice. But over and over and over again, until the garage door was demolished, the front fenders askew, and deep ugly dents scraped through the baby blue. And then my mother came out of the house. . .

Never since have I lost my temper so completely, and I am proud of my progress. I no longer hit people or expensive things. . . though I still grit my teeth and yell and mutter curses, I only beat up cheap stuff. If I had absolute control over my monstrous temper, I wouldn't have to apologize so often and I could probably save some money and keep some friends. My life would be so much easier!

34. Memorable Event

Not this year, but November 1, 2008, Sam and I went to hear Barack Obama speak live in Springfield, Missouri. It was a near last minute effort by his campaign to win Missouri (Oklahoma being hopeless), so three days before the presidential election the Obama Roadshow rolled in.



MoveOn.org sent out the call to supporters and Sam and I hit the road. A bit surprisingly, none of my Obama Buddies made the trip. Guess they didn't have a day to give.

When we got to Springfield, we were stunned at the length of the line. If this is not Obama territory, what the hell happens when it is. The line just kept going on and on, past thousands of people, most having the good sense to bring their long chairs and coolers.

Comraderie and jokes as Sam and I just kept going and going and going, winding away from the stadium, street after street. Even when anti-Obama cars

drove by, the chants and catcalls were not vicious or unkind.

The speech wasn't until 8:00 pm and we were in line by 2:00 pm and we were latecomers.

Ever so often, Obama campaign workers would come through, working the crowd, and giving special entrance tickets to the most enthusiastic. Everything perfectly planned, just so Obama would have a backdrop of gameshow crazy enthusiasts behind him.

Security at the gates, like you wouldn't believe. Camera got in, but they certainly looked all through my bag and xrayed everything.

Vendors just outside the gates, selling t-shirts, flags, posters, bumper stickers. Oh where oh where has my "Rednecks for Obama" bumper sticker gone? Perhaps it keeps company with the stolen yard signs and the magnetic car stickers that disappeared all through the campaign. And then it's time...

We're all in the stadium and we can see the bus caravan all lit up, approaching the long way, motorcycle troopers on all sides, and the band cranking out loud upbeat music.

First, the press bus unloads. Then staff and supporters. Then we have to hear from local politicians, jealous of their moments in the spotlight.

Finally, Michelle Obama comes out running, as if it were the first day of the campaign and her energy were limitless. Followed soon my her husband and daughters holding hands, running too, glad to be here, and hopeful of what America might be.

Obama worked that crowd - welcoming the audience from Oklahoma, from Arkansas, from Kansas, from Texas, and from Missouri - bringing everyone to their feet clapping and yelling, just because it felt so good to be part of these possibilities.

I know most people in that audience weren't Obama supporters, and Missouri didn't go for Obama, but for that hour we were all true believers in our best selves.

I remember when our yard boy ran over his foot with the lawn mower and mother couldn't let him in the house to tend his wounds. She couldn't even take him to a hospital to get it treated. And this was Amarillo, Texas, in 1960, not the Deep South at its worst.

I remember three years later, in May 1963, when "Bull" Connor unleashed the dogs on the protestors in Birmingham, Alabama, Walter Cronkite chose to run the film footage. On the evening news. During dinner. And my mother laid her head down on the table and sobbed.

I remember when I first began teaching in a predominantly black high school and everyone asked me why I couldn't get a job in a better school. Millwood had the hardest working, most gifted students I've ever had, no matter what color. No, I couldn't get a job in a better school; there was no such thing.

And November 1, I get to see a black man who might have a chance?

35. How to . . .

How to become morbidly obese . . .

Start with a low metabolism.

It helps if at least one grandparent was as wide as they were tall.

(Thank you for those Middle Eastern genes, Grandma Andrews.)

Add an indolent nature.

(Why walk, when you can drive?

Why drive, when you can sit?)

Mix in enough money

so that manual labor is not necessary

(Let someone else mow the lawn,

clean the house,

walk the dog,

even corral the shopping carts!)



BUT

be poor enough to have a diet high in fillers

like pasta

and potatoes

and bread.

If it's not breaded and deep-fried, why are you eating it?

Yes, I mean even Twinkies and Oreos and Snickers and bacon . . .

(though, truth be told, bacon can be fried and covered in milk chocolate)

(Thank you, Paula Dean, and all our other Southern cooks.)

See ya'll at the State Fair!

If it's not processed

and artificial

and chemically enhanced

and totally unnatural,

why are you eating it?

Never shop the outer circle of the grocery store

where all those colorful fruits and vegetables live.

Produce is a dirty word!

Eat more

and more

and more

Exercise less

and less

and less

and you, too, can be morbidly obese,

literally dying of too much food

in a world where the less fortunate are starving.

36. Always Say Never

I never ever want

to read *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco.

How dare he spend 50 pages trying to figure out
a computer password

so pointless

so distracting

let's try all the names of God

let's try 50 pages of clever word after clever word

no sentences of course

just password attempt after password attempt

"Do you know the password?"

And the answer is "No."

Throwing the book across the room,

I refused to read another word.

I never ever want

to visit Perryton, Texas, again

80 miles of the Panhandle

stretching interminably

so flatly

without landmarks

or towns

or even passing traffic

to arrive at a town

not even worth a stop in the road

to use the restroom.

I never ever want

to eat six Snickers in an afternoon

to ask for a seat extender when I fly

to be the fat one trailing behind the group

to be sliced and stitched during 8 hours of surgery

to grade Autobiographies for 189 kids

even if they are amazing and enlightening

and the highlight of my year.

37. Are You Hungry?

I think my favorite meal is Christmas Eve chalupas – a one-dish wonder with something yummy for everyone. Not your usual holiday fare, not an authentic Mexican meal, yet no Christmas would be complete without it.

All the parts are cooked, ready for each person to create their own way. We don't even dish everything up – assembly line begins at the stove. Ingredients include crispy small corn tortillas, baked flat in the oven; Ranch style beans (and only this branch will do); ground beef seasoned with taco seasoning; chopped lettuce and tomato salad (don't forget to salt and pepper the chopped salad because it should be a bit wilted and weepy); grated cheddar cheese; chopped onions, fresh sour cream; guacamole salad (made Sam's way just a little sweet, not too chunky); and salsa (Pace in a bottle, various intensities provided).



Traditional with my family, this was another of my mother's stretch-the-meat masterpieces. After my parents separated, my mother's meals always included a big batch of pan-fried potatoes (recycling Crisco over and over) and a big mixed green salad, mostly Iceberg lettuce with

homemade dressing (Mazola corn oil, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and lemon juice shaken like crazy in an old Miracle Whip jar). Those two "courses" accompanied spaghetti, soups, casseroles -- so many meat-thin recipes that tasted so good I never even realized we were poor. I thought we *chose* to eat ground beef. Chalupas stood all alone.

When Sam and I first married, what with our big schoolteacher paychecks, I turned often to her well-remembered meals and discovered how she had made every mouthful count. Delicious, inexpensive meals – too carbohydrate heavy for our own good perhaps, but the way poor mothers have managed to feed their families for centuries.

The chalupas work so well for a come-and-go eat-when-you're ready holiday casual meal that soon became our contribution to each Christmas. Not for us, the hours baking the perfect turducken, or any formal sit-down dinner.

Don't like onions? Don't include them in your chalupa.

Vegetarian? Stick with the beans.

On Atkins again? Skip the tortillas.

Many a "friendly" disagreement has broken out over the order of assembly, but everyone knows the cheese goes between the meat and beans, or how's it gonna melt? Really? I mean really, come on!

Imagine my surprise all these years later to discover that the word *chalupa* is the name of the boats Aztecs used to get around the canals of Tenochtitlan, their capital. Cortez conquered and then razed the city in the early 1500s, where now rises la Ciudad de Mexico. Chalupas are the specialty of the southern regions of Mexico, Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Oh, and Taco Bell.

Traditional chalupas are made with a deep fried flat bread, or corn tortilla molded into the shape of a small boat and stuffed with cheese, tomatoes, onions, sour cream, refried beans, beef or chicken and drizzled with salsa. Generally, the thought was to be able to pick them up like a taco and eat them by hand. The Americanized Taco Bell version is made generally the same way they make tacos but with a flat tortilla rather than the boat shape.

But I gotta say, our *boat* won't float, it's loaded. Ours require a plate, fork and a bunch of napkins should you dare to try to pick it up. Cortez, eat your heart out! And thanks, Mom.

38. Where I'm From *

I am from the home place, alone in a red dirt field,
proud, a little run-down
but once tall in the Oklahoma wind.
I am from the Chinese elms, guarding the old place,
chopping cotton in the summer,
green tomato pickles in the fall,
and sorghum popcorn balls for Christmas.
I am from paring knives and pyracantha bushes,
from Jell-O salads and raisin cookies.
from rocking chairs and the razor strap.

I am from do-it-yourself
and stand-your-ground,
from never-start-a-fight
but finish-them-all,
from pick-your-own-switch
and take-your-punishment.

I'm from Carter, Oklahoma,
the Preskitts, the McIntyres, the Stowers,
from homemade quilts a hundred years old,
from hand-cranked homemade ice cream,
from Granny Zem's hand-carved moon,
its stair steps filled with angels,
from Grandpa Bert whittling big sticks into little twigs,
from Great Grandma Preskitt,
blind eyes seeking the lightning.

I am from the "Amen Brother"
of Southern Baptist Churches
and the "Amazing Grace" of country choirs.
I am from the open-air sleeping porch,
from bedtime stories under the stars,
from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
in King Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace,
from Jonah in the Whale's Belly and
Joshua at the Battle of Jericho.

* Derived from the original by George Ella Lyons

39. 52 Inspirations for Weight Loss

Motivational Issues

1. Be realistic.
2. Can't have it both ways.
3. Celebrate every success.
4. DENIAL is Don't Even know I Am Lying (to myself).
5. Discover healing rituals.
6. Do it anyway.
7. Do NOT sabotage myself with doubt.
8. Does this choice help make me stronger?
9. Exercise no matter what.
10. Get back on track.
11. Give myself credit.
12. Hunger and cravings aren't emergencies.
13. It's OK to disappoint people.

All about Diet

1. Put dieting first.
2. Throw some food away.
3. Don't comfort myself with food.
4. Eat mindfully.
5. Eating well is a reward I give myself.
6. Food IS the consolation prize.
7. I don't eat crap.
8. I don't eat food just because it's there.
9. If not food, then what?
10. It's not okay to eat this.
11. I can have 3 bites of anything.
12. Protein, Produce & Fiber
13. Nothing tastes as good as being thin.

"I" Statements

1. I will start NOW.
2. I can do hard things.
3. I deserve to put myself first.
4. I'm different now.
5. What I really want is to be healthy.
6. I used to comfort myself by overeating, but I don't do that any more.
7. I will care later.
8. I'd rather be thinner.
9. I'm not that special.
10. I have not lost the will; I have just misplaced it.
11. Just because I can does not mean I should.
12. If I fail to plan, I plan to fail.
13. I will not give up what I want MOST for what I want NOW.

Everything

1. Just do it!
2. No excuses.
3. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic & Timely Goals
4. Say no choice, no choice, no choice.
5. Stop making excuses NOW.
6. Head Hunger
7. Heart Hunger
8. How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.
9. Set guidelines, not rules.
10. Morning affects evening.
11. Learn to savor every bite.
12. Enrich my life today.
13. Embrace the gray.

40. The Examined Life

Strengths:

My intelligence because it lets me choose the life I want and gives me the tools I need.

My principles because they allow me to stand up for the life I live.

My sense of humor because it lets me accept the things I can't control.

Weaknesses:

My temper because it is frightening when it gets out of control.

My moodiness because it bothers other people when I change moods suddenly.

My big mouth because it gets me into trouble I could avoid.

I can make my weaknesses into strengths by controlling them. In themselves, they're not bad. When I use my temper wisely, it accomplishes near miracles. It's perfect for bringing salesmen and students into line. Sometimes I overreact, however, and that's bad. If I stop, think, and then react, I can control my temper, my moodiness, and my big mouth.

41. Annual Report

One Year Ago

I was still teaching, staying up late every night grading papers and wondering why I was still doing it after so many years. I was tired and uninspired. I was very satisfied, however, with my weight loss and cosmetic surgery. It really felt like I was in the best shape of my life, at peace with how I look, and as good as I am gonna get. I was hoping to find interests to take the place of teaching and to revitalize and energize me the way teaching used to. I was also hoping to get more involved politically, to develop more as a consultant, to be more active, and to travel more. A girl can dream.

A year later, I am working part-time at Belle Isle Library, where I was before unretired the first time and started at Bishop McGuinness. A tech again. Most of the same co-workers; all of the same library groupies. It's a good reason to get out of the flannel PJs and flipflops and escape the local Walmart. One thing I do love about working at the library is the intelligence and versatility of my co-workers. Nothing like the close-mindedness of lifelong private school teachers! Trust me on this one. One thing I hate are the library groupies – boring, needy, lurkers with bad attitudes who feel entitled to special treatment. Aaaargh!

Now

I'm still satisfied with my appearance and more physically fit. I have become an aging gym rat. Who knew I was going to love yoga and pilates a year ago? I have tried every YMCA class and these two kinds of exercise satisfy me physically and mentally in ways I never suspected were possible. I've actually bought my own yoga equipment – mat, blocks, belt, you know, I could become an addict (but that's a good thing). At 80, they're gonna have to drag me off my yoga mat on the way to the nursing home! I'm almost as surprised about how much I've been enjoying getting politically involved. I may yet run for a real office!

My web presence has expanded so much that I even have a PayPal donate button on my teacher website and have developed an entirely separate website on weight loss and all that. Though smaller in scope, the personal is more satisfying than the professional. Some how the 400 hits on *An Informed Journey* mean more to me than the 90,000+ on *MsEffie's LifeSavers*.

I have become very involved in the College Board program and they treat me right. The Mentor Program meets in Las Vegas every year! I've done several APSIs and have offers for more. I'm also developing new presentation certifications so I can do more in the future.

OK, no travel yet. But...

This last year has shown me that I can make progress, though not as fast or as strong as I had hoped. I do have the innate "laidbackness" of the newly retired. One task accomplished a day feels like hard work.

Plans for the Future

I'm actually a precinct delegate and running for the Secretary of the Cleveland County Democratic Party. Hey, I've got a key to the county office!

I plan on taking more intensive private yoga classes. Seriously.

I've got five workshops scheduled for this summer (and, yes, that may mean I'll have to leave the library. Again. We'll see.)

I'm just beginning to develop a very personal blog - *2Words4U* - a domain I have owned for years and neglected. This may encourage me to write about more diverse topics, even if just for me.

I have become FaceBook Fan, reconnecting with students over my whole career. I find the sense of community surprising and love the serendipity of how things connect in unexpected ways. More will come.

Just today, I made a down payment on a trip to Venice in a year. Ciao, baby!

42. Ekphrasis



Dance Class by Edgar Degas

Point your toes says the instructor.
Routine demands, she does as she's told.
Her toes point, until they tremble.
If only everything she did were this bold.

Her bow tied tight, her shoes drawn up,
Everything is settling in place.
Make-up on, smiles drawn to perfection,
Her legs shake under the lace.

Sheltered girl in a sheltered world,
Dances to please the crowd.
The curtains come down, so do the tears,
Even if they are not allowed.

War of the Irises

Indigo silence
Fills the air,

Deep and heavy
Darkened by their colors.

Twilight drips.
It slips.
It seeps

Into the abyss.
It calls to me.

Alone and yet
Surrounded,

A single soul
Stands to fight

A war against
All things
That threaten
To suffocate
The light.



***Irises* by Vincent Van Gogh**

43. Visually Speaking



44. Lessons I Learned After It Was Too Late

The most important lesson I ever learned, I learned too late, of course --

The little things hardly ever matter,
and almost all things are little.

At one time in my life I worried about “little things.” These included paying bills, having the latest “in” clothes and other possessions, what others thought of me, and so on. Most little things related to me alone and were material in some way.

Because I can no longer remember the name of the boy I adored at fifteen or the girl whose snub hurt me at sixteen, I realize that most things, whether good or bad, pass in time. Integrity, pride in oneself, good health, an inquiring mind, family, and imagination are solid, lasting values which do matter. They are never “little” things.

45. The Door

When I walk out that door, I want . . .

to see President Obama begging me to take over the Department of Education and giving me total control. I want to see a newspaper announcing miracle cures for AIDS, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, overweight, and apathy. I want to see fresh flowers in the hands of friendly extra-terrestrials who invite me for an interstellar cruise. I want to see a cart piled high with an autobiography by every one of my students.

When I walk out that door, I don't want . . .

to see dope addicts dead in the hall, murderers lying in wait, or muggers ready to pounce. I don't want to see anyone carrying a subpoena or a bill or a telegram. I don't want to see any grave person delivering official news that someone I know has been hurt. I don't want to see rats, or snakes, or rabid dogs.

46. **Advice to the Young**

In 1972, I was listening to the evening news when I heard that Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Vatican had been vandalized, and I began to cry hysterically. At first I thought that I was crying because a great work of art had been damaged. Even though I love sculpture and painting, I do not love them so well as to weep the night away. It has taken me years to really understand why this event a continent away affected me so deeply.

When I was an 18-year-old, I had been in Rome, less than a block away from the *Pietà*. Not knowing it was anything I might ever want to see, I walked right by. The person I was then preferred shopping for sandals to looking at some old carved marble.

During the four years from 1968 to 1972, I changed. Pictures I had seen of the *Pietà* awed me and also awakened a lifelong interest in art. Like a converted sinner, my new passion was powerful and I went "crazy" for art. A little of the "madness" still lingers, and more than any other work of art from all time and all places, I had wanted to see the *Pietà*.

I knew that I would have ample time to return to Rome and touch Mary's cold alabaster hands. I was wrong. I have the time, I've been to Rome, I've stood before her in the Vatican, but her fingers are broken.

That's my advice to youth. Go to Rome or learn to fly or build a cabin NOW. Whatever your dream may be, do it now. You are young, but you really don't have time. In a flash, forever is gone.

47. Who Am I?

I am

a sister, a daughter, a grand-daughter, an auntie, a cousin,
a wife, a lover, a friend,
a worker, a shopper,
a reader, a writer,
a teacher, a learner,
a Texan, an Oklahoman, an American, a world citizen,
a wonderer, a wanderer,
a doer, a dreamer.

I am

a food lover who tastes Caprese salad
 and 20-year-old balsamic vinegar in my dreams.
a wine lover who recalls the taste of Brunello
 in the hills above Montalcino,
a book lover who carries two books with me ALWAYS,
a movie lover who knows all the lines in *High Noon*,
an art lover who yearns to touch an oil
 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
a music lover who hears Bessie Smith in her dreams,
a word lover who believes there is magic
 in a pocket-sized moleskin journal
 and a Waterman ink pen.

I am

a know-it-all, less confident than I appear,
a drama queen, lonelier than you'd believe,
a wannabe, yearning to be admired, to belong,
a bit of a poseur, less honest with myself than I want to be.

48. Rewarding Experiences

- 1 Reading *Anthem* because I realized I didn't want to be like everyone else (as a sophomore I thought I did).
- 2 Touching a moon rock at the Smithsonian because it was really "out of this world."
- 3 Walking in Rome because Roman men love larger women, and for the first time in my life, the whistles were for me, not for the skinny girls around me.
- 4 Talking with John Lennon in an English pastry shop because I admired him and didn't make a screaming fool of myself (though now I wish I'd gotten his autograph).
- 5 Writing original wedding vows because, first draft, from separate rooms, my husband and I wrote vows that were so nearly identical we seemed psychic.
- 6 Going out to sea on a boat trip in New York harbor because the land disappeared and the world seemed huge and liquid and weirdly metaphysical.
- 7 Awestruck by the simple power of the Vietnam Memorial, I searched for special names and made my own "separate peace" with the memory of the war and its cost.
- 8 Reading the comments Dr. Kendall made on my first graduate paper because I made an "A" and I respected his opinion.
- 9 Taking a tour of the National Art Gallery because the guide taught me how to see and appreciate art (an acquired skill).
- 10 Listening to the Boston Pops, directed by Arthur Fiedler, play the *1812 Overture* on the Bicentennial because for a few minutes I understood what America means to immigrants.
- 11 Standing by the plain graves of John and Robert Kennedy because the dignity of each man survived even tourists snapping photos.
- 12 Reading Katherine Mansfield's short stories for the first time and aching in envy of her incredible skill.

49. **VALUABLE LESSONS**

1. There's no such thing as a free lunch.
2. No one ever learns anything the easy way.
3. You always lose the fish.
4. Money isn't enough.
5. Mother was right.
6. The little things hardly ever matter and almost all things are little.
7. The mind makes its own heaven or hell.
8. There are no accidents.
9. Education is its own reward and ignorance is its own punishment.
10. Doneness counts.

50. **FUTURES -- Fantasy and Fact**

In a romantic future, I have my own private school, staffed by those people I know to be master teachers. I have published a revolutionary textbook that integrates the study of literature, composition, grammar, and usage. Of course, I have completed my doctorate (submitting a dissertation which not only astounded everyone on my committee, but also personally impressed the Bizzell librarian). I have started a company that manufactures and distributes innovative teaching materials. I am still happily married and all of my family are well.

In a realistic future, I am still teaching in a public school and still planning the textbook and the company. I have my Ph.D. because I worked five (or ten or . . .) hard years to get it. My marriage is still happy, but I have lost some older family members because they were mortal, as are we all.

The major difference in the two futures is that the romantic one assumes wishful thinking makes it so. For hopeful plans to become real successes, I must stop dreaming and start doing. I have the necessary ideas and skills, but I don't know yet if I want these things badly enough to give the time and hard work needed. I may be too lazy to work to make those dreams come true.

In the romantic future death is but a dream; yet illness, age, and death are realities. The unalterable, unavoidable truth is that grandparents and parents in time will die. The best I can do is remember to show them my love while I can.

51. **“That” Time of Day**

The worst time of day is from about 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. I always seem to have about eight hours of work to do in only four-and-a-half hours. It is so terrible because none of that time is mine. Those hours belong to errands and appointments, shopping, cooking, and other boring but necessary chores.

Sunrise is the best time of day. I love to sit on the back porch with a good book and a fresh cup of coffee and greet the new day. Of course, mornings are terrible if I have to rush around and have no time to enjoy the day's beginning.

I work best late at night, after 2:00 a.m. When I am the only one awake, I am free to read, to write, to just sit and think. It has always been a special time of solitude, a time when I have no interruptions, no pressing jobs, no place to go. It's as if I have the whole world to myself. Unimpeded, I always do my best work.

52. On Being Fat in a Thin World

Michelangelo could have used me for the sibyls of his Sistine Chapel. Ruben might have made me immortal, instead of the strawberry blond who now graces his canvases. The native Hawaiians would have dethroned Queen Leilani to place me in her stead. Yet in the thin world in which I live, I cannot be a beautiful woman.

Being fat shapes the mind and the heart just as surely as being female or being black, not because being fat is significant, but because others think it is. And eventually so do we. Being fat makes us neuter. No one imagines that we might be romantic, perhaps even passionate. Shrouded in dark colors, all crumpled in on ourselves, we hide the bodies too big to be beautiful.

When I graduated from high school, Twiggy was the model of the year, her curveless body an ideal my thinnest friends could not approach. I had always described myself as “chubby” or “pleasingly plump.” At eighteen, a navy blue hulk, scrunching my lonely way through life, I realized I was “fat,” and “fat” was oh so ugly. I would have been ugly all my life, had I never visited Italy.

I arrived in Italy in the company of skinny boys and slender girls. I ignored the whistles, knowing full well they could never be meant for me, nor need I fear the infamous Italian pinchers. My thin friends had little luck hailing a cab, until suddenly one screeched to a halt in front of us, the driver jumped out, took off his hat, and bowed chivalrously to me. Though I knew no Italian, I understood what his “elegante” meant and that it was meant for me. In Italy, for the first time in my life, I was beautiful.

Even today, I am surprised at the impact of that one moment. I could never have been beautiful, not even to myself, without Italy. That sincere, gracious gesture has been an enduring Valentine. If I smile and walk with head held high, wearing bright red and flirting with assurance, it is because I carry the memory of a forty-year-old compliment. Although today I must live, day by day, in a thin world that never entertains the possibility of beauty, jumbo-size, I move through that world shielded by a moment of traffic-stopping Beauty.

53. **Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library**



Thirty years ago, the city of Amarillo, Texas, housed its city library in a renovated four-story home. Located downtown, the house had once been the home of the Bivins family, founding fathers of a sort, and still retained the sense of being a home. Settlers in the Texas panhandle seemed to have a uniform concept of grandeur -- massive white stone columns, wide steps on all sides, covered verandas, an odd assortment of shuttered windows, simple red brick walls, a minimum of frills, all shadowed by huge trees. The showplace homes from pioneer times looked much alike, though none was precisely modeled on the pattern of the southern plantation mansion, all partook of its image to some extent.

The Bivins place borrowed the grand entrance from the South, and with its double staircase, mahogany banisters, marble mosaic floor, and hanging chandeliers, it impressively introduced a child to libraries. Because it felt like a home first, and an institution not at all, the library was a place to spend Saturdays in luxuriant companionship with books.

By the time I was eleven years old, my best friends and I spent Saturdays going to the library on our own. Being young was safer then and there was nothing dangerous about letting a group of fifth-grade girls take the bus downtown unattended by adults.

Looking back, it is hard to recapture how special those Saturdays were. And the whole day was special. Early in the morning we would gather and walk ten blocks to the nearest bus stop. We always had lunch in the Silver Grill Cafeteria. Evenings, we would return by bus, weighted down by the dozen books we each checked out.

For that, too, was a special part of the library visit. Unlike bookmobiles, the main library let us check out as many books as we could carry, and there never seemed to be an end to the books I wanted to read.



That love of books was undoubtedly partly due to the library itself. All the juvenile books were grouped together on the fourth floor, and someone with an elevated idea of juvenile interests had scattered Austen and Dickens and Cooper and Hawthorne in amongst the Nancy Drew's. Someone had placed Huxley right after Heinlein, Arthur Conan Doyle with Agatha Christie, Darwin's *Autobiography* with *I Was a Teenage Nurse*. No doubt there were older equivalents of Judy Blume and Sue Hinton, but they stood little chance against the heavyweights that spiced the shelves.

The library was a haven for quiet reading. Because it had been a home, the building offered a variety of little rooms, odds and ends, cubbyholes, each with its comfortable chair and reading lamp, centered on its Early American braided rug. The screened balconies on the fourth floor were special hideaways, right up amongst the leaves, and in the Texas panhandle the cool greenery of tall trees was a rarity. The bentwood rockers with wicker seats awaited a regular guest.

When I was eleven, I owned no books. Yet I could go to the most elegant house I knew and make myself at home, browse someone else's book shelves (and I always felt as if the books belonged to some kindly aunt), and as long as I was well behaved, properly respectful of the privilege offered, I could kick off my shoes, curl up in a rocker, and read undisturbed by household chores or little sisters.



Even then, I knew the old library was something special, though I could never have voiced my reasons. Later acquaintance with the sterile concrete monstrosities that masquerade as libraries has since made me aware of how much easier it was to meet books inside that kindly imaginary aunt's home.

Ten years ago I returned to Amarillo, and I had casual intentions of showing my husband the homes I lived in, the schools I attended, the places I knew. The city and all in it were alien to me, but it was not a crushing realization, for I had left it long ago. Perhaps the fourth floor of the Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library was the one place I expected to find unchanged, but, of course, it, too, was gone. Other buildings, not one a library, stand in its place.

The new library is undoubtedly new.

I didn't look for it.





Jillions of Books Read

Fifteen youngsters reported 100 or more books read in the Friendship 7 Reading Club sponsored by the children's department of Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library.

Approximately 1,000 youngsters attended the annual summer reading club party which was held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday at Municipal Auditorium.

Highlight of the party was the presentation of certificates to youngsters who had reported on 15 or more books during the summer.

Thomas Cartwright, chairman of the library board, spoke to the youngsters on the importance of reading before the showing of "Alice in Wonderland." Refreshments were served at the conclusion of the party.

Seven of the youngsters who read over 100 books represented three different families. There were three youngsters from the Jay U. Kirkman family of 1600 Bonham, two youngsters from the R. E. Steele family of 3501 Lynette and two youngsters from the Harvey L. Braswell family of 3609 NE 19th.

The children reporting 100 or more books are:

Elaine Hazlewood — 336; Donna Davis — 212; Bruce Braswell — 205; Jean Marie West — 184; Bobby Steele — 176; Cathy Steele — 176; Karen Kirkman — 160; Carolyn Braswell — 150; Carla Kirkman — 140; Dale Vernon — 116; Susan Butler — 113; Mary Rachel Garza — 110; Raymond Rodriguez — 105; Jay Kirkman III — 100; Tonie Valverde—100.



54. **Ah, Leonardo!**

“small rooms discipline the mind

LARGE ONES DISTRACT IT”

“How many changes of state and circumstance have followed since the wondrous form of this fish died here in this hollow winding recess? Now destroyed by time, patiently it lies within the narrow space, and with its bones despoiled and bare, it is become an armour and support to the mountain which lies above it.”

Ah! Leonardo! What a scientist -- geology, physics, chemistry, anatomy, botany, aerodynamics, maybe even psychology. What an artist -- pencil, pen, paint.

So intelligent, so imaginative, so tragic!

You were your own worst enemy! What Renaissance prince could understand submarines and helicopters? Why invent a code for your notebooks that took nearly 500 years to decipher? Your self-mixed paints have peeled from the fresco of *The Last Supper*. The most famous of your nineteen paintings that survive, *La Gioconda*, your *Mona Lisa*, hidden by triple-pane plate glass, smiles enigmatically, at tourists.

Ah, Leonardo!

“THE SUPREME MISFORTUNE IS WHEN THEORY
OUTSTRIPS PERFORMANCE.”

55. ***Memoirs* by Pablo Neruda**

Memoirs by Pablo Neruda, the Nobel-Prize-winning poet, is a loosely chronological, autobiographical journal, mostly composed of observations and commentary, not thorough, nor factual, perhaps not even sensible. Neruda can become tedious when he decides to tell the reader what he thinks the reader should know. But when he abandons messages and loses himself in the writing, *Memoirs* is too rich to eat in big servings.

The book has many flavors, but they do not blend: the man who owned a Stradivarius so beautiful he would not allow it to be played, even taking the violin into his coffin . . . the panther with eyes like yellow knives . . . the search for rich, white vellum and the feel of wicker . . . stairways . . . hairy spiders? Neruda writes, "The closest thing to poetry is a loaf of bread or a ceramic dish or a piece of wood lovingly carved, even if by clumsy hands." How easy! Poetry must be everywhere, and we must all be poets.

The section, "My First Poem," is typical of the others and, certainly, does not start with Neruda's first poem. Neruda begins with the brutal hunting of swans, poor flyers, clumsy, easily caught and killed with sticks. He recalls a battered swan he tended for twenty days when he was a child. Even though the swan was almost his size, Neruda carried him in his arms down to the river every day until he "found out that swans don't sing when they die." Half of a page, then Neruda writes of eating green plums dipped in salt . . . of writing poems in his math notebook . . . of catching bumblebees in his handkerchief . . . of reading books about breadfruit and Malaysia . . . of a day when he finally "set down a few words . . . different from everyday language" . . . Poetry?

When did Neruda write that first poem? The day he handed his stepmother a neatly-written poem? Or the day a swan died in his arms?

And what is to be made of the following passage:

You can say anything you want, yes sir, but it's the words that sing, they soar and descend . . . I bow to them . . . I cling to them, I run them down, I bite into them . . . I love words so much . . . The ones I wait for greedily. . . they glitter like colored stones, they leap like silver fish, they are foam, thread, metal, dew . . . I stalk certain words . . . They are so beautiful that I want to fit them all into my poem . . . I catch them in midflight, as they buzz past, I trap them, clean them, peel them, I set myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline texture to me, vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae, like agates, like olives . . . And I stir them, I shake them, I drink them, I gulp them down, I mash them, I garnish them . . . I leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished wood, like coals, like pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves . . . Everything exists in the word.

Whether writing about familiar friends or famous people, his native Chilean cities or foreign places he visited as a diplomat, Neruda's memories are intensely lyrical. No foreign city is more beguiling than his beloved Valparaiso, "secretive, sinuous, winding," where every hill has a "profound" name and the stairways that spill down those hills are "shed like petals." With "his reedy, almost childish voice," Fidel Castro seems "but an overgrown boy whose legs had suddenly shot up before he had lost his kid's face and his scanty adolescent's beard." After Neruda's generous friend Alberto Rojas had given away his material belongings, he "would jot down a line from a poem on a scrap of paper" and offer it "as if he were putting a priceless jewel in your hand."

Each exotic city becomes an eccentric friend, and the famous become equally as familiar as Neruda's friends. Every memory he shares with us reveals a poetic sensitivity, a magical juxtaposition of the mundane and the mysterious. *Memoirs* is a book to pick up for minutes and think about for hours. Few books make it so easy to see the poetry in our own lives, to turn so satisfyingly to our own memoirs, to hunt so eagerly for our own pens and paper.

What was Neruda's first poem? He never tells us.

56. Essay on Academics

My academic performance has almost always been good. I graduated from high school with a 4.0 grade point. In college I seemed to be a “whiz kid” at first, earning almost enough credits to graduate in two years rather than the usual four. Unfortunately, only nine hours away from my degree, I discovered an exciting social life and eventually dropped out because I had withdrawn from so many classes. There wasn’t much point in pretending I was really interested in college. Eighteen months of unrewarding, poorly paid work renewed my interest, so I returned to OU, completing my B.A. and M.A. Even though my record shows that I have made good grades in all subject areas, I have both strengths and weaknesses in the four major academic areas.

I teach English, my strongest academic area. Though it may sound like boasting, I really have no serious problems in English. I am a good writer and a voracious reader. I have broad experience, not only in the traditional areas of English classes, but also in journalism, speech, and drama. If there is an area in English where I am weak, it is in spelling, but since I know I sometimes make mistakes, I carefully proofread anything I write and check the dictionary any time I am in doubt. I practice correctly spelling words with which I have difficulty, so this is a minor weakness I am overcoming.

Social studies is another area in which I am strong. I minored in a mixture of them for my B.A. and am certified to teach United States history, world history, economics, sociology, psychology, geography, political science and civics. I hated history in high school because I had teachers who didn’t seem to know or like history themselves; it was always “read the chapter, answer the questions, take a multiple choice test.” In college, I finally met teachers who loved the subject and who told fascinating stories which made history seem like a grand adventure. I began to read independently in the field and tested out of nine hours of U.S. and world history. I also discovered a strength in sociology, political science, and political (not physical) geography. The only social studies with which I had any problems was economics (macro, for those who know the difference), and I am absolutely convinced that economics is as difficult as physics or chemistry.

In the field of science, I finally encountered serious difficulties. I had been in advanced science programs in junior and senior high school, so I thought I was a brilliant science student. In college I learned that I was a good biology/zoology/chemistry student but an abysmal physics student. My freshman year, I actually tested out of five hours of college zoology, but I met my downfall in college physics. In physics I discovered what it felt like to be unable to understand a course. I never knew what I was doing. I could memorize enough formulas to make a "C" or "D" on exams, but I forgot everything that I had memorized the minute the test was over. It made no difference whether I studied five hours a night -- I remained a "know nothing." I did pass the class, earning a "C" by sheer determination and by pestering the professor daily, but I still remember that physics course as the most frustrating experience of my life.

In mathematics, I believe that there are two kinds of thinking -- algebra thinking and geometry thinking -- and never the twain shall meet. In junior high I was also in an advanced mathematics program and took Algebra I in the eighth grade and Algebra II in the ninth. I loved both algebra classes. To give you some idea of the kind of algebra student I was, I liked story problems. Then, in the tenth grade, I took geometry, something completely different. Since I had made an "A" in Algebra II, I thought geometry would be easy. I had confidence, but proofs drove me crazy anyway. I worked so hard for my "A" in geometry that I gave up on advanced mathematics classes. In college when I was required to take mathematics or chemistry or physics, I chose physics (mistakenly thinking it would be easier for me than more mathematics). Perhaps physics requires one of those geometry brains?

Since I have done well academically, I think I have done what is needed to make the best grades possible. Though many subjects come easily to me, I have learned that I can make a "C" in the subjects that are difficult for me if I work hard. I have had to accept the fact that there are areas like physics which will remain a mystery to me no matter how much I study. This frustrating inability to understand a subject has made me more understanding when my students have similar trouble with English.

57. MARKINGS for . . .

Things That Have Moved Me:

1. Great-grandmother Preskitt watching the thunderstorm's lightning
2. Anti-litter commercial - Iron Eyes Cody, Cherokee Indian with a tear
3. Vietnamese monks immolating themselves in protest against war
4. Assassinations -- JFK mostly, but King and Bobby, too
5. Mental patients -- especially the children
6. Space -- Kennedy speech, moon walk, the Challenger explosion
7. The movie *Pueblo*
8. The novel *Atlas Shrugged* -- all Ayn Rand's books.
9. Ambulance sirens
10. Thank you's
11. Those who hurt the young, the weak, the little, the defenseless
12. Real homecomings -- POW's, MIA's, hostages, family reunions

People Who Have Influenced Me:

1. Granny Alice Zem Preskitt Stowers
2. Grandpa Bert Burton Stowers
3. Mrs. Wilma Smart, junior English teacher
4. Sam Effinger, my husband
5. Martha Hallock, friend, roommate, weirdo, psychologist
6. Jackie Prickett, friend, artist, teacher, real home maker/builder
7. Coleen Oxley, my mother
8. Jim Oxley, my stepfather
9. Karen Andrews, my younger sister
10. Kim Andrews, my younger brother
11. Lewis Andrews, my father
12. Mackey Carder, first and worst love

Places in My Life:

1. Grandparents' old farm, especially the hay loft, the basement, and the top of the garage shed under the Chinese elm branches
2. Big house on Adirondack (6102) in Amarillo -- entire top floor
3. Friendship Apartments in Altus, especially poolside
4. Room 201, Muldrow Tower, OU, first college dorm room
5. McGuire Air Force base, New Jersey, transport terminal for student/emergency overseas flights -- three times
6. Yorkshire Apartments, Norman -- first apartment with friends
7. Efficiency apartment -- first all my own
8. Brandon, England, my parents' little English house
9. Sheraton/Atlantic Hotel, 34th & Broadway, New York City -- United Nations Pilgrimage
10. Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D. C.
11. Arbroath, Scotland -- cliff walks, monastery, Parliament building
12. European trains -- mainly Italian and German, small towns, Alps

Major Stepping Stones:

1. First day of school – in corner, walked home, “learning some manners”
2. Parents’ divorce – loss of trust, ugliness, violence, their remarriages
3. Moving to Altus – starting over, different kind of friends, economic loss
4. College entrance, drop-out, and return – “blonde,” drug experiments, sexual liberation, knowing what I wanted to do
5. Working in mental hospital – the mighty can fall, kindness matters, disgusting work can make me better, what really matters, “loved you but didn’t like you”
6. European trip – reborn, excitement, wrote, read, ate, drank
7. Weatherford catharsis – do you love me, no, will you ever love me, no; damn
8. Year the world tried to kill me – tornado, assault, abortion, friend meltdowns, drug overdo, car wreck, suicide
9. Marriage – you can never do anything that will make me leave you; if you are going to leave, leave
10. Teaching start – Millwood, scared in black school but belonged, made difference, lived my yearbook staff
11. First death – LaJeana Johnson, car wreck, blood clot; rearranged room, couldn’t grade papers
12. My Renaissance – weight loss, surgery, becoming active again

Soundtrack to My Life:

1. “I’ve Got to Get You into My Life” by the Beatles
2. “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen
3. “At Seventeen” by Janis Ian
4. “Reckless Blues” by Bessie Smith
5. “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday
6. “Sweetheart Like You” by Bob Dylan
7. “Doppelgänger” by Dory Previn
8. “Tears in Heaven” by Eric Clapton
9. “Glory Days” by Bruce Springsteen
10. “Ooh La La” by Goldfrapp
11. “Fire and Rain” by James Taylor
12. “Want Me” by Red Delicious

Library of My Life:

1. *Anthem* by Ayn Rand
2. *Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley
3. *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens
4. *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison
5. *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode
6. *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin
7. *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
8. *Shogun* by James Clavell
9. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
10. *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
11. *The Writer’s Journey* by Christopher Vogler
12. *Jazz* by Henri Matisse

58. The Paradox of How I Write

I am a wasteful writer. I have no trouble writing page after page after page (or poem after poem after poem), yet I always throw away half of that before I'm "finished." I would like to think I am like Michelangelo, chiseling away excess marble so that a masterpiece can emerge from the stone mass. Instead, I will admit I am a careless, wordy rambler who gets carried away with her own words and am consequently forced to discipline myself in retrospect.

Journalistic training was both bane and blessing for this wastefulness. Because deadlines are merciless and inflexible, journalists learn to plan, to write, and to revise at the typewriter. There is never time for leisurely outlines, jot lists, drafts ad infinitum. Precious prose written after a deadline doesn't get printed. Precise length is equally crucial in both newspaper and yearbook, since there is a limited space to fill with the words that do get printed. I remember moaning when my adviser would say, "Cut this to 30 lines." I, of course, had 83 lines of golden prose to reduce by two-thirds. No way!

Yes, way! Journalism also introduced me to copyreading marks that made editing and revising easy, if not painless. Ever since, I have sought the thrill of proofreading and its magical power to bestow second and third and fourth chances.

Then the master magician arrived -- the word processor. I could delete this, rearrange that, insert such-and-such, change single words or entire pages, and still recover my untouched original when my meddling was finished. Soon I cried, "Free! Free at last!" for I could write and rewrite with reckless abandon and STILL print out the pure, unblemished final copy that satisfies my compulsive nature.

Yes, I confess that I am also a compulsively organized writer, regardless of the paradox that implies. Office supply stores are my candy shoppes. I lust for tab dividers, highlighting pens, color-coordinated file folder labels, index cards in assorted sizes, and crisp packages of notebook paper.

I seem to write exposition and poetry best. Paradox, again! I flourish in a literary analysis of Charlotte Brontë's obscure novels or precise student directions for learning projects. Yet, I am equally comfortable and proud of the poetry I have written since the third grade.

There must be some connection between these inclinations and the fact that I am probably at my best in small chunks. I can tinker with a sentence until it becomes a correctly written nightmare for sentence-diagrammers. I can also reduce a fat, sentimental poem to a sleek little sentence or phrase.

Because I tend to focus on these small chunks, I have a horrible tendency to sacrifice meaning for sound. Once I get an alliterative act ambling around I pounce predatorily on properly pronounced words, putting them purposelessly where the sound suits but slaughters sense. I can also become obsessed with parallelism, bewitched by nicely balanced phrases, enamored of coordinate conjunctions, trapped by cumulative constructions, which layer endlessly, adding little meaning, but neatly specifying, introducing irrelevant ideas, disappearing ultimately into the unending sentence.

Finally, I curse all those kindly teachers who mistook correctness for worthiness, attaching smiley faces and A's to properly punctuated and capitalized nonsense. Looking back, I see their casual willingness to accept penmanship as writing as a vicious cruelty. I thought I had been writing WELL when I was only writing correctly. But, of course, that misapprehension was itself corrected in college, and that's another story.

59. MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

Santiago's Vision

Sea-colored eyes
Dream lions at dusk,
Pry a hundred fathoms
 deep,
Where purple marlin
 feed.

Under the moon,
La Mar undisguised
 Dances naked
For his cheerful,
Undefeated eyes.

DARK MOONSHINE

Beowulf or Grendel, which is which?
Evil or good, savior or witch,
Prison or key, lady or bitch?

One and One is always One . . .
Diamonds and coal, shadow and sun,
Part and whole, done and undone.

Which is which? Why bother to ask?
Canvas to paint AND wine to cask,
Faith to saint AND persona to mask.

Beowulf or Grendel, what's in a name?
Victor and Victim are one and the same . . .
Yes and no, puzzle and piece,
Stop and go, man and beast.

Need a clue? Can't you see?
You is You; I is Me.

Brainstorms

Watch the way Brutus
an honorable man
deceived by wily Cassius
sticks his knife into
Caesar's ambition
then pick up your pen
and drive the point
deep into the heart
of the play.

Now stand in the Forum
with Mark Antony
and speak
for all the noble Romans
poets and teachers.

Show the slashes
in your toga
your bloody hands
the scars from your battle
with Shakespeare.

Great-Grandmother Preskitt,
blind, dying alone,
in a little room in a nursing home,
while I swam in YWCA pools,
busy being alive and young.

FAILURE

bitter metal
a door slamming
a bell tolling
a flooded wheatfield
a turned shoulder

Oklahoma K. O.

Smitten by the robber
or the robber's smile
I'd most likely
turn the other cheek

Like hell I would

Small bruises to the brain
An accumulation
of years
of being hit

And hitting back

Forced Ceremonies

I have shared
my life with
others, and
like breaking the bread
and wine, it is ritual as
only these
things
can be.

Sad Notes from the Middle Ages

Last night
They had a superduper TV show
All about the Sixties.

My youth has become History:
Golden Oldies
Peace signs,
Causes no one cares about,
Funny-looking pictures
In the last chapter.

Tie-dyed t-shirts,
Leather chokers,
Hand-painted clogs,
Clothing was a **STATEMENT** of belief
And now finds itself
Mildewing in Good Will stores.

Double-knit slacks,
Dacron blouses,
Wash-and-Wear polyester,
And sensible shoes,
Sooner or later,
Everyone sells out.

The Uses and Abuses of Ambiguity

Trying to say impossible things,
and I remember
that words are not enough,
are impossibly inadequate,
flimsy stuffing for feelings,
another form of disguise.

Watch me.
My actions don't tell lies.

Love with an Improper Stranger

Within my head
that softly blends with yours
and with the night,
there is a part of you,
like a charade
I am called upon to solve.

Fairy-Tale World

THE WOLF SPEAKS:

Those rotten, no-good little pigs!
Don't they know
that life is savage
and each animal has his part to play –
 some to eat,
 some to be eaten –
THE WAY THINGS WERE
until . . .
some rabble-rousing outside agitator
came in, organized those little pigs!

“Give us homes! Not pig sties!
“Bigger!” “Better!”
“Protect us from the Big Bad Wolf!”

Now all Creation,
is turned upside down,
 my downside scalded raw,
and who knows what those uppity little pigs
 will develop a taste for tomorrow?

I only hope
it's
not
wolf
steak.

Loose Talk and Stacked Cadavers

Hospital Thoughts

Bright colors –
Precise times – 7:53, 8:09, 9:47 –
Old magazines
Vending machines with Twinkies
and smoked almonds –
Rows of anxious eyes –
Life and Death in battle
So near.

No one really reading,
Just looking at papers and magazines,
Talking in quiet tones,
Eyes unfocused,
Aimed at blank walls,
cheap prints,
and no smoking signs.

A woman walks by,
carrying a brown-and-white stuffed puppy,
and I hear something about cantaloupes,
gasoline prices, Obamacare – loose talk,
then a loud voice paging
mysterious people on the intercom,

And
behind this wall
against which I lean
the slash of the scalpel,
blood, wounds, guts,
pain not felt yet.

Star Trek Again

Do you remember
lusting after the alien,
just devilish enough
for a teenage girl
to know it was so wrong
to want his hands on her,
to ache to see yearning
in his cold intellectual eyes?

How might that first forbidden desire
have encouraged
other adventures,
other dark quests,
for reluctant passions?

Say that I wanted you

that cold night
starless and dark with shadows
my cheek soft against your chest
myself suddenly small
safe in the circle of your arms
nuzzled against that spot
where your neck meets your shoulder
and you smell just of you

Say I wanted you
inside me
touching all the right places
in all the right ways
passions reborn
pleasures re-discovered
old wounds healed

Say that I wanted you
but it wasn't enough

Words from the Edge

Now
How can I capture
the moment of such
contentment,
sitting here, jotting words
as though I owned them,
forcing out the voice next door,
the grumble of my stomach,
proud as this power
captures my pen and let's me
lock the door on all the things I am,
writing a hole
in the universe
that is mine?

Embrace

How did I fool myself
Even as I told myself
I see you
I know when I lie?

What I felt as passion
Hot enough to burn,
Pleased me,
Deceived me.

Not heat,
Ice, ice, ice,
A burning embrace,
Hurt, hurt, hurt,
Hidden as pleasure.

Cold, cold, cold.
Something empty
Where your heart would be.
I'm done.
I will not embrace ice.

Six-Word Memoirs

Honeycrisp apples are proof god exists.
Kiss me like you mean it.
Curl my toes, if you can.
I believe in life before death.
Doneness counts, but not done yet.

Text Poem

How cn it hurt so much
2 say bye 2 somethng
I nvr evn had
Just held in memory
cherished like life
wanted like sun
needed like breath?

Metapoem

my poem is a
small sound,
an empty road,
rain,
a shadow,
a gauze curtain
fluttering in the eyes
of an abandoned house.

FOUND POEMS

A LIVING DOLL

Mommy, but I don't want to go.

I worked all night on this stupid costume
and you're going to smile
and dance
and have
a good time!

Mommy! Don't tie my shoe so tight.

"Children should be seen, and not hurt."

--McDonald's slogan, 1979

* * * * *

A M.A.S.H. Note

When a doctor will cut into a patient
and it's cold
-- like it's cold today --
steam will rise from the cut
and the doctor will warm himself
over the opened wound.

Could anybody look on that
and not be changed?

* * * * *

"Why don't you feel what I feel when I care?"

-- "Pleasant Valley Sunday," the Monkees



before he was my father

a young man
barely 21
loose-limbed
jug-eared
gawky
in his bombardier leathers

lined in fleece
even his boots
were designed
to keep him warm
as he clung

to the belly
of the plane
in his gunner's bubble

an Oklahoma boy
in an English field

not yet limping

his wartime souvenir

dark-haired like my sister
dusky like my brother

what kept him alive
to die estranged
50 years later

I look for myself
in his hooded eyes

Sandra Effinger
Quartz Mountain Fall 2002



Adopt a Relative 25¢

by Sandra Effinger



The faces change, the houses change,
but the form of the family group photo
is eternal. A visual tradition.

The row of relatives,
trying to look unposed,
as they pose, in front of the house.

Careful notes on the back of a photo
you've seen hundreds of times
in your own family albums.

Written in that beautiful script
our grandmothers learned,
Those crooked back r's
and curlicue ascenders,
Must be a copperplate nib.

Did blue ink fade to purple?

Home

from an OWP presentation by Freeda Richardson

EPILOGUE

The woman who wrote *Sandra Effinger Version 6.0* is nostalgic, sometimes even sentimental, as evidenced in all the old-fashioned keepsakes she describes in “Room Sweet Room.” Although she cherishes many objects from her childhood, she doubts most of the beliefs she held as a child. In “Sensory Experiences,” this ambivalence is clear.

Sensitive and observant in “A Mysterious Place,” compassionate and humane in “Ultimate All-Purpose Excuse,” bad-tempered in “The Perfect Present,” a bit pompous and pretentious in “Rewarding Experiences,” this aging hippie (“Flashback”) is a World Class Procrastinator (“As Time Goes Bye-Bye”). Sometimes this writer gets carried away -- check out the “Likes/Dislikes List” and “How I Write.” Even the excess free choice choices screams “Too much!” (I do hope you like some of the poems.)

And like Tennessee Williams’s Blanche DuBois, the writer captured in these pages has “always depended upon the kindness of strangers.” You are invited, kind stranger, to discover whatever you may in these fragments.