

Writing 420 Evolution Essay

I don't particularly enjoy writing. But I still write, anyway.

I'm not the prodigal son of a well-versed father or a poetic mother. They're both great thinkers, but not masterful writers. There is no lineage, no history, no legacy of writing in my family on either side. If anything, it's mocked and looked down upon, like the Christmas gatherings or nights at the bar. I've never been called a brilliant thinker or sought for my expertise. Friends in school rarely called me for help, I called them. Teachers rarely thought of me when they looked for an answer. I struggled with math and science, was bored by history and politics and didn't pick up Spanish quick enough, so I stuck to writing. My colleagues at the newspaper rarely believed I was the best at writing, too, just experienced enough to write a story. After all, I still haven't figured out how to use a damn semicolon properly; grammar wasn't my strong suit. But I still write, anyway.

I am rarely comfortable while writing. It's usually when asked that I write for myself, always writing for others to grade or critique, with many others available to judge. Writing became synonymous with opinions, and it only takes a few bad opinions to shake my confidence. And my confidence, given my skinny and blemished appearance, average intelligence and unusual sense of humor, is hard to come by. Still, I continue to write.

Even as I do so now, I've rarely taken writing serious enough to really explore my development because I've never enjoyed it enough to do so. But over these last 2 ½ years, writing has been important because it's been something for me to tell stories. Writing has never been about myself, nor has it been about rehashing a book for an assignment. Rather, writing has been the means to which I can give something to readers. I can share new information, reveal the history of someone else's life or recap something to remember. Writing has been the means to

look outward at the world, rather than inward on myself, and serve some utility that I so desperately crave. The Minor in Writing has been a vehicle for serving that purpose, and if I've developed in any facet, it's understanding why I still write, anyway.

Writing wasn't fun in the beginning because assignments weren't interesting in the very beginning. The few that were, were the opportunities to get out and explore, to conduct interviews. They were the ones that felt like journalism, a chance to share information. I began with an English 125 course in my first semester, writing about whatever I was instructed to write about, until given the assignment to write about something I "had never done before." It physically required me to get outside and observe something, rather than read and digest material. So I went out to Zingermann's Creamery for a tour, took notes, conducted interviews, listened closely. I wrote in that paper, "With a blank look on my face, I informed the nearest employee that I was searching for something, and without even asking, he pointed me in the direction of the tour, and so my 'journey' began" (Page 1). It was still raw, awkward sounding, but it was a start. Most importantly, the assignment was one of the first examples in which I didn't sound like I disliked writing. I began to find what I enjoyed, was the experience of sharing the story (occasionally adding my own flare).

And it's here, though very early, I chose to tailor my schedule and studies. I began writing at the Michigan Daily, and subsequently with this minor, where I did so because I could talk about sports and other people. I chose the Daily because it was the best opportunity to watch the games I loved and to communicate with people who also loved the same thing. When I thought I could write a story as good as anyone on the staff I finally joined, and as I wrote more and more, I soon learned the intricacies to telling others stories. Story by story I figured out

which questions worked best and which ones fizzled. I learned how to develop a lede that captured the attention.

I wrote about a track athlete who otherwise wouldn't get to tell his story of learning the sport less than a year ago. I told the story of volleyball player Molly Toon, who comes from a lineage of athletes in the family. And then I told the story of hockey player Lee Moffie's journey to finding his role in the final year of playing. I learned, that with each story, the more people I talked to, and the more scenes I was able to observe, the better my story was. And it wasn't until one year later where I first put the pieces together. My story, "Off the Gridiron, onto the Ice," I dived into the story of another hockey player, Andrew Copp. I told his story of turning down a chance to play hockey in college just to finish out a season with his JV football team. And I ultimately finished after speaking with seven people to add layers of details that would otherwise be out of reach. As I retold, "Before he was hit, Andrew slid with his left leg forward and heaved the ball to an open receiver eight yards down the field from the line of scrimmage." And it's not as if this phrase is special, but it does have an extraordinary (if it can be called that) amount of detail for one play, really for one sentence. It gives a sense of how talented Andrew is, and more importantly, it taught me how important the detail is to writing and telling others' stories.

I liked telling stories, but not always writing them. The long features, such as Andrew's story, were more stressful than they were enjoyable because I worried about the thoughts of not only Andrew, but also about what the readers of *The Daily* thought. More so, I questioned if writing these stories was the path I wanted. Why not tell a story through some other medium? Which is why the Minor in Writing's gateway course — notably the "Why I Write" piece was so important to my development. For one of the few times, the story was about myself, not about someone else, and it forced me to look inward. I said the feeling from writing was "addicting"

and I said that writing, as a field, was special in that it could be controlled, whereas history, math and science can not. I had the power to rewrite. I added, “I am unique in that I enjoy telling others’ stories, too, regardless of the attention that comes with it. I should have known that my story would be boring or difficult, that I would need to move on to the stories of others.”

I never went back to writing about myself much, usually deflecting, but if anything this exploration was healthy for how I approached writing in the future. It was important to think of my work at *The Daily* being about more than my own frustrations with writing, and instead focusing on the details of someone else. Writing often felt like a selfish act until then, but it was the realization it doesn’t have to be that made me feel more comfortable.

So I took that writing into my next course, “The Art of the Essay” (English 325) where I was encouraged to investigate myself. So I dove into my relationship with an ex-girlfriend, tackling a personal issue in which I couldn’t deflect to someone else. And it helped in my “Advanced Essay Writing” course (English 425) where I was instructed to “make the private public” and open up about something within the “human experience.” So I opened up about my body perception over my time. But once I was able to write about myself, it became easier to replicate the process, as with anything. Though it wasn’t always enjoyable, I had learned to share those details and to capitalize on other stories within my own to successfully pull it off. One of the most important things to writing about myself, even if it felt uncomfortable, was expressing some sort of vulnerability. I don’t write about others because I’m afraid of being vulnerable — really, there’s some vulnerability to doing that itself — but it’s a strange concept to open up to others about things that would otherwise be kept inside, especially because it doesn’t serve much of a purpose as sharing information does. In a way, it was easier and more informative to write about someone else’s vulnerabilities than my own.

So I found ways in my English 325 course to write a personal essay (as was instructed) without writing about myself. This time, I tried investigating the topic of Karma, sporadically weaving my experiences in, but making sure to stay on the topic outside of myself. I broke down an investigation of sorts into a day-by-day examination, using Karma as the vehicle to move my experiences. I developed the ability to put myself into the story without being the focus, which has long been important to my work at *The Daily* and beyond. There was no singular moment that stood out, more of gradual ascension. It wasn't that I was escaping something with which I was uncomfortable (though it likely seems as if I were), but rather I was taking writing to suit my own desires. I exerted a special sort of control over writing that I hadn't had in my first English 125 essay on cheese.

And everything in class was put to use outside, as I wrote features, columns and game recaps with a distinct tone, always keeping myself out of the story. In late September I explored the state of Michigan football's fans, whether there was a generational divide and what could work for them in the future in a piece titled, "Filling the stands: The evolution of Football Saturdays." I went out and talked to more than 10 people, used details and research to peak the reader's attention, opened up about the human experience and managed to keep myself out of the story. It was long and hit on several points, going through five to six rounds of edits before the final draft, and for one of the rare instances, writing was enjoyable.

Still, the long process in writing, the meticulous revising some days, make me think of writing as a chore, not a chance to "explore myself." Many days I'd rather write 140 characters and nothing more. Other days, when it comes to writing, I just hope to get the process over with. Somewhere there is food to eat, beer to drink, friends to philosophize with, girls to hit on, games

to play and a bed to sleep on. That's all more entertaining, more enjoyable, more immediately gratifying. But I still write, anyway, because I want to be useful to this thing we call society.

Writing, at least as I've worked to use it, has been the means to which I can give something to readers. I certainly can't prescribe medicine or practice law, nor can I build houses or repair cars. But I can spread information, so that someone, somewhere, ends his or her day with a better grasp of what's going on around him or her. Perhaps it's the story the lawyer can use or the doctor can reference. It's my writing, not my voice over the radio or my picture on the TV that can reach those people, really an infinite number of people. I don't make art with my writing, nor do I write academic theses, just the stories about others in a time when it's easy to look inward. There's still some utility for others, and that, I think more than anything, is why I wanted to become a stronger writer.

Even now, 2,007 words into this essay, I have an uneasy feeling writing about myself. For a rare moment, I've failed to talk about something else. If there's one common thread in my writing, it hasn't been a topic or a style; it's been the decision to exclude myself from stories, or to at least avoid making myself vulnerable. But before, I wouldn't have acknowledged that feeling, rather going through the motions to talking about myself — the ones that feel as if they're a chore. I've developed in that I'm honest with myself, even if I didn't enjoy the process, because I understand I'll be able to do it again. I'm confident I leave this essay being able to serve society in some way. I'm confident I'll still be writing.