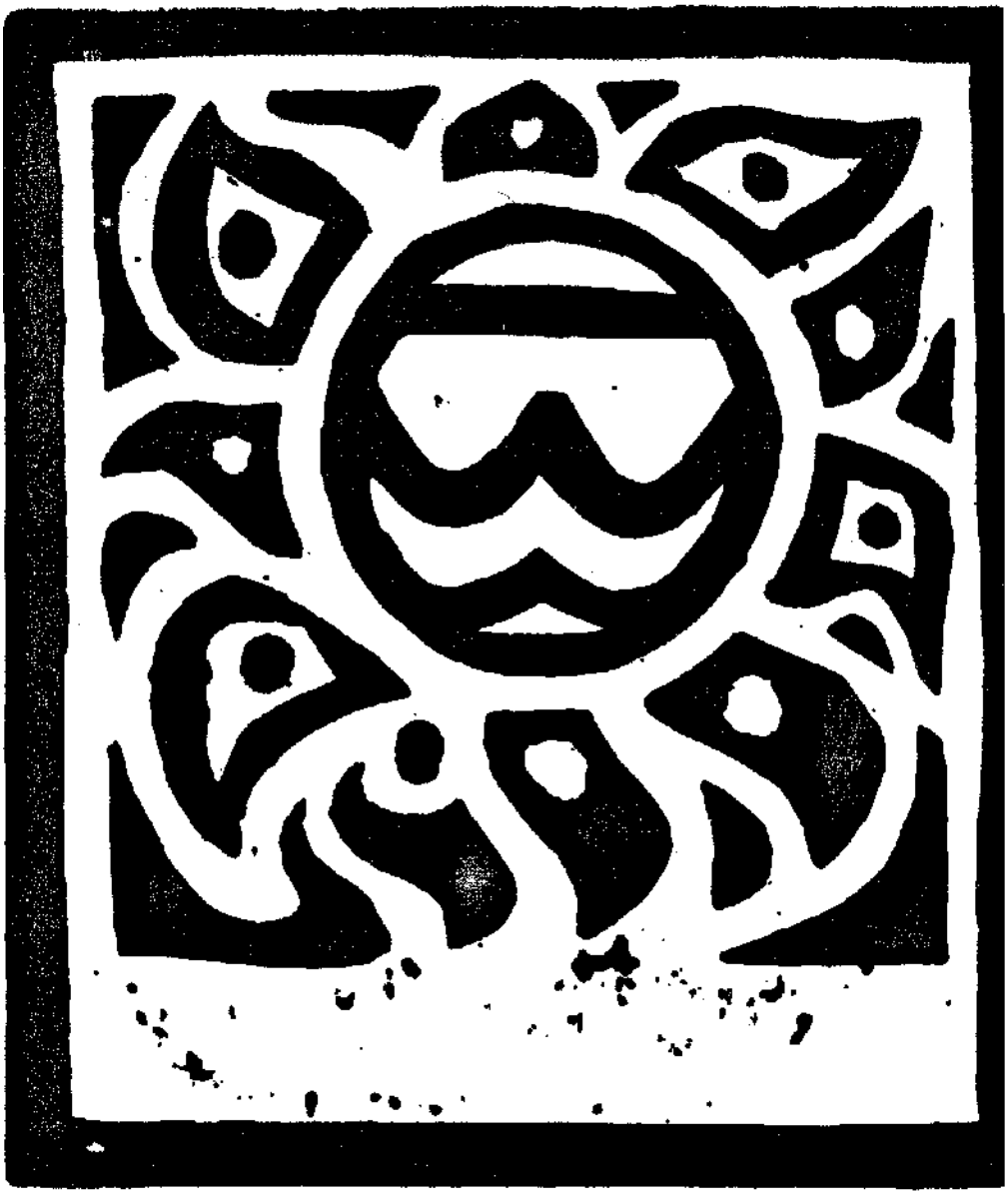

February 5, 1982

Dear Colleague:

The problems that some of our students have in learning to write well sometimes blind us to the good writing that so many others produce. I thought you might like to read a sampling of that good writing selected from freshman papers by Barbara Mallonee and Paula Scheye and published in this essay booklet.

Each of these essays reflects the vital qualities of good writing:

- a controlling thought precisely limited (in the freshman course, students pursue original thought)
- top-to-bottom coherence
- rich detail to develop the central thought
- transitions from paragraph to paragraph
- explicit links from sentence to sentence

When you assign and grade papers and essay tests, these are qualities that you can expect of students who have successfully completed the writing course.

Ken Trainor

To Students in Effective Writing:

"Create something of your own, out of your own interests, knowledge, and experience." This advice in the first chapter of Kerrigan's *Writing to the Point* is reinforced in a later chapter: "Students can write only what they know and understand." This same message is further reinforced by your teachers. But students often respond, "Who would want to hear about my experiences?" This booklet of essays, written over the last few years by students in CA 113, is an answer. These students represent the many students who have discovered, within their own experience, something they felt strongly about and wanted to express. This *discovery* is the real work of writing; in each case these students' essays evolved from a chaos of thoughts and feelings into a clear structure.

Students often feel that the structure of "X-1,2,3" imprisons their thoughts or refuses to let their feelings free. That can happen if the structure is viewed as a set of blanks that must be filled in, the form of an essay "done for class." But when students break through this sense of confinement to discover within a topic not only *what* has happened but *what meaning* that has for them, the "X-1,2,3" becomes a framework that supports any structure the writer wants to build: a tent, a duplex, an office, or even a castle in the air. Even more, it is the structure itself that helps to release these ideas; in looking for connections, students perceive what they really want to say.

These essays succeed, then, not just because each student is "writing to the point." Each began with what he knew; he was then aided in expressing what his heart and mind prompted him to say by the tools of language and logic.

The poet, Donald Hall, describes poetry as "the communication of one inside speaking to another inside." As these essays show, prose and poetry have much in common. They demonstrate clearly what Loyola students "got" from this course; at the same time they give something back, as through their writing these students speak to our "insides."

For the entire writing faculty,
Barbara Mallonee and Paula Scheye

The Other Side of the Menu

There is an old expression which goes something like this: "You never truly understand another's situation until you have walked in his shoes." This past summer, the meaning of that old cliché-to "walk in someone else's shoes"-was brought home to me in its most literal sense. That is, I had the opportunity of working at one of the most often stereotyped, satirized, and generally misunderstood professions in our society—that of the waitress—and received an education which could never be duplicated in a classroom. This lesson in human behavior effected a noticeable change in my own actions, one which has persisted long after I turned in my uniform. In short, my experiences as a waitress made me a more sensitive customer.

Most importantly, I have developed more patience. Before working in a restaurant, I considered the employees of such establishments to be mere automatons, programmed for efficiency; delays were, to me, the result of malfunctions which could not be tolerated. Upon being hired, I learned two important facts: first, that most customers shared my sentiments; second, that they (and I) were wrong. I soon realized that each employee could not be described as "an integral part of a well-oiled machine"-on the contrary, we were simply a group of well-intentioned, but fallible, human beings, at the mercy of a temperamental oven whose effectiveness varied with the weather, a freezer which did not know the meaning of the word "defrost," a hyperactive air conditioner, and a host of other capricious devices. When the hungry gentleman at table 3 complained that "the slow waitress" must have forgotten his chicken dinner, I longed to defend my professional honor (not to mention my wounded pride) by crying that I could not be held responsible for a novice cook who had not yet mastered the art of deep-frying. And on that humid day when the party of ten grumbled about the "inferior service" which made their pizza so slow in coming, I had to restrain myself from referring them to the poor chef, who was struggling with the overheated oven.

At first, I held my tongue only because I had discovered that in the hustle of the restaurant business, there were ex-

tenuating circumstances (such as the overheated pizza oven) connected with most kitchen delays- I had no more right to blame them on my fellow employees than had the customers to attribute them to me. However, this impersonal fairness of mine became something much deeper after I formed friendships with others at the restaurant. Then, regardless of whose inefficiency had caused the delay in service, I hesitated to criticize, as such expressions of my impatience might wound the feelings of the hapless busboy or cashier in the same way that the customers' complaints hurt and discouraged me. Such, then, was my lesson in patience: as a waitress, I began to consider all circumstances before becoming impatient with the delay and then to refrain from expressing my impatience in the form of criticism toward those who, even if at fault, certainly intended no harm. As a customer, I can do no less. And if, from that detached position (so far from the kitchen), I am sometimes tempted to complain, a glance at the harried waitress (who might easily have been I) is usually enough to inspire me to accept the situation with good grace--if anything, too leniently.

However, although I am loath to criticize those who serve me, I am equally averse to remaining silent when the service is good -- a judgement which I now feel I am qualified to make. Because of my job, I am much more appreciative of all that is required for good service. I had formerly considered waitressing to be a profession requiring little skill and even less intelligence; a person in dire straits, I thought, could "always make an easy living waiting on tables." That, in fact, is what I planned to do last summer. However, after two days of misplaced orders, forgotten silverware, and other elementary errors, I realized that I had either underestimated this job or far overestimated my own ability. Humanly, I decided that I had made the former error, and I grudgingly admitted that one needed more than pure stamina to be a good waitress. The histrionic talents required are great; the waitress who can maintain a cheerful countenance, despite the state of her health, her emotions, or the world, performs no mean feat. The coordination necessary is especially impressive; I now value the great accomplishment of the girl who carries four cups of steaming coffee on a tray meant for three, or the waitress who is able to balance three plates of hot spaghetti in two arms, while

dodging other waitresses. No less important, though equally overlooked, is the actual intelligence required for the job, which involves much memory work (embarrassed, indeed, is the waitress who has forgotten which of her fourteen customers ordered those extra, rapidly melting sundaes) and even more mathematical computation (of sales tax and discounts). And the mechanical skills which figure in behind-the-scenes work are another requisite which the girl must possess -- or learn; I can recall the occasions on which I was called upon to repair vacuum cleaners, blenders, and even soda dispensers.

Whenever I am happy with my service, I consciously express my appreciation of all of these aspects of good service, recognizing that I have met a waitress who has mastered all of the skills which I had to learn. A natural result of this new sensitivity to good service is, then, my willingness (even desire) to express it. An encouraging word, a compliment, a smile, and, especially, a few "thank-yous" are now common characteristics of my behavior in restaurants.

One may notice that I did not mention tipping when speaking of expressing my appreciation for good service. This is no mere oversight. For, as a result of my job, I have developed a new attitude toward tipping. The gratuity, contrary to popular belief, is *not* an optional expression of gratitude from the customer to the waitress. It is, rather, a mandatory payment which forms a major part of the waitress' salary. Of course, I had no notion of this until that surprising job interview, when I discovered that I would be paid only about *half* the minimum wage ($1.60 per hour), yet taxed as if I earned the entire sum. It takes no mathematical genius to figure that I had to earn a minimum of $1.80 per hour, in tips, to make the job worthwhile. The role of the customer, with his "15%," was crucial here. Before long, I looked upon the family of six who, after accumulating a $30 check, left no tip, as thieves. Yes, they had paid for the food and for its preparation, but they had walked out without paying for something else they received: service. Now, when I enter a restaurant, I keep in mind that the waitress is *not* doing volunteer work; she is earning a living from my 15% tip. I cannot, in good conscience, take miserly refuge in my old idea that a good tip only accompanies superlative service -- and that, since most waitresses

could improve in some way, none deserved the full amount.

My experience as a waitress, then, was a positive one. If I did not emerge from it a perfect waitress, I certainly emerged the epitome of a good customer. And my discoveries were certainly far-reaching in their implications; if I could be proved wrong in my simple assessment of the waitress' job, how much more incorrect were my assumptions about the cashier, the bellboy, the secretary...

Karen Wilson

Thought-free Living

With telephone calls bouncing off satellites and Concordes flinging us back and forth between New York and Paris in the time it takes to drink a leisurely cocktail, the world appears to be growing smaller. And as the media tries to envelop more and more of this world in its audience, I find it progressively easier to lose myself in the views of this overwhelming majority. As a matter of fact, I find little need to think creatively in today's mass media oriented society.

I have grown up expecting the world to entertain me. When my mother was a child, she was happy playing "pretend" with her collection of lifeless plastic dolls. As a child, I was not content unless I could pull a string and make my dolls speak or, at the touch of a button, lengthen their hair. I grew up surrounded not by the thought- provoking strategies of checkers or chess, but rather by such mechanized gimmickry as "The Voice of the Mummy" or other such games stamped "batteries not included." Hobbies refused to hold my interest as my stamp collection didn't glow in the dark and my needlepoint kit wasn't electric. They just sat there waiting for me to learn about and enjoy them all on my own. When I told my mother fifteen times a day that I was bored, her standard response was, "Go create something." But she didn't realize that I had grown up filling in the lines in coloring books, not drawing pictures. Growing up with movies where a kiss marked the beginning instead of the end of the scene, I found little need for any imagination. And besides, when all else failed to engage my attention, I could always turn on the television set.

It has always been much easier to turn on the TV than my mind. The familiar patterns of police show strategies and Waltons-style sibling rivalries, while not exactly exciting entertainment, have the comfortable safe feeling of old friends. No need to think or worry. I am assured that the good guys will always win in sixty minutes minus commercials. The bright lights and gadgetry used by the game shows and the sci-fi wizardry of "Star Trek" placate the remnants of my childhood love of toys that "do" something. That picture tube projects a world of its own, and it allows me to be a part of it as long as I promise *not to* think too hard. The gods of mass media promise to entertain me, but only if I agree

not to figure out whodunit before the last ten minutes of the show. Having followed this rule ever since I figured out how to pull the "on" button, I am probably no longer capable of thinking while watching television. The creativity required makes me shudder, why bother?

I have found my schooling infiltrated by this same entertainment technology, leaving little room for individual thought and interpretation. While the only "learning tools" my father's teachers used were chalk and a blackboard, pen and paper, I have grown up with New Math *and* SRA. From the brightly colored quisinaire rods of kindergarten to the electronic keyboard and headphone sets of eighth grade music class, my teachers have tried to dazzle their way into my brain. But bombarding my senses with records and tapes, slides and films, or so many notes that my hand aches has not made me think. On the contrary, I find any creative thought quite unnecessary as I know all my questions will be answered before they even occur to me. I don't have to gaze off into space in history class trying to imagine living under the rule of an Egyptian pharoah because by the time the teacher is done with two lectures, a movie, and a recorded reenactment of life in that era, I have nothing left to wonder about. It becomes a simple thoughtless matter of remembering enough to write down on the test. I went into high school chemistry labs prepared not to observe and interpret whatever results I got, but rather prepared to do whatever I could to get the "correct" results which had been explained thoroughly in class the day before. I accepted the big-bang theory of the origin of the universe as unalterable fact and got an "A" when the test was returned. The intelligent girl sitting next to me in biology class received a "C" with most of the original theories she offered marked "irrelevant." How could she have doubted two technicolor movies and a slide presentation? Accepting whatever a teacher tells me has become a simple alternative to battling the barrage of audio-visual equipment used to convince me. Why should I fight it?

My technological upbringing has conditioned me to accept the thoughts of others. By the time a movie is actually shown near my home, I have been informed by an onslaught of television commercials, magazine advertisements and, above all, the talk show guests exactly what I

am expected to think of this movie. And stemming from my promise not to see through the mechanical plots of "Medical Center" or "The Waltons," accepting these media-provided opinions has become a matter of habit. Although I am shown politics in action with live television coverage of Democratic and Republican conventions, I do not need to consider the effects of such history-making decisions on my own life. With more press than delegates, I can be sure that all my possible questions will be raised and answered in tomorrow morning's newspaper. Indeed, I need not even wait that long if I prefer to listen to the running commentary of the newscasters who will explain to me the possible significance of everything, from the choice of vice-presidential nominees to the number of political buttons being worn by the delegates. The President makes a twenty minute speech on television and I am subjected to forty-five minutes of in-depth analysis immediately afterward. The media can bring the experts into my living room at the touch of a button to tell me what, in their esteemed opinion, I should be thinking. I doubt it would be possible for me to disagree after having spent most of my life discovering the ease of going along with the majority. Like the girl who offered alternatives to the big-bang theory, disagreeing with what are considered established facts seldom brings the reward due such effort. And so I have come to accept what is told me on all sides by magazines, movies, glossy textbooks and slide presentations, and above all television, as an alternative to the effort of thinking things throught for myself.

Worry free, hassle free, thought free -- my mind decays quietly as I watch Perry Mason reruns, trying not to remember whodunit.

Valerie Cabral

Then I Cried

I didn't cry when I took the risk of letting him love me. I didn't cry when the pregnancy test proved positive. I didn't even cry when the doctor began the operation to terminate the life inside me. But when the suction machine was turned off and I was no longer pregnant, then I cried. I cried from the shame, the embarrassment, the fright, and most of all from the guilt that I felt as a result of having had an abortion. Now, nine months later, I am beginning to resolve these feelings of guilt.

It was a many-faceted guilt. I felt as if I had let down many people -- my parents, myself, and my unborn child. Now I am beginning to overcome the feeling that I was guilty of not living up to my parents' expectations of me. My parents were wealthy, religious, upper middle-class people who had raised "nice" children. Everyone knows that "nice" girls don't get pregnant. But I was a nice girl who had done a naughty thing, a thing my parents could never accept from me. When I was young and told a lie, they forgave me because everyone tells an occasional lie. When I was young and I took something that wasn't mine, they forgave me because everyone steals some small thing at one time in his life. When I was seventeen and I became pregnant, I couldn't ask their forgiveness because not everyone gets pregnant as a teenager. And especially, they believed, not someone who was raised properly as I had been raised.

I never told my parents about my pregnancy. It didn't seem necessary because after the abortion there would be no evidence. I didn't have to shatter their confidence in me; they would never know of my failure. But I knew. I knew that they expected so much more of me that they couldn't deal with this disappointment. I often had visions of their discovering my awful secret. I could hear my mother's sobs in the background while my father told me decisively to leave his house and to never return. I could feel the cold March wind on my face as I walked helplessly down the road, my thumb out and my back to the home I would know no more. And I could feel the guilt inside me, and could hear the little voice in my conscience saying, "Mary, you deserve this. They taught you right from wrong, moral from immoral, and you let this happen. Yes, it is your fault

this has happened. You deserve to be shut out. You have broken their hearts."

Later, when the abortion had been behind me for a few months, I began to listen to another little voice inside my conscience. This voice said that times have changed since my parents were teenagers, and nowadays thousands of "nice" girls just like me are getting pregnant. The new voice helped me to see that although my parents may have expected better from me, they could realize that I was just one of the thousands of adolescents who wasn't quite strong enough to fight against the overwhelming pressures of today's society. Maybe they could forgive me for a human weakness such as this.

But could I forgive myself? Now I am beginning to overcome the guilt I felt because I believed I had been careless with my body and with the gift of being able to reproduce. I was an ardent believer in birth control, but that one fatal time I was caught unexpecting and unprepared. I could give many reasons why I didn't abstain that night, even though there was a great risk. I could say that it was the right time in my relationship with John to express love physically. I could say that I needed to prove to myself that I was really ready to be in love again after the traumatic experience of the death of the last man I had loved. I could say that I was simply unable to control my physical impulses. Whichever I chose as the reason, I still felt guilty of something, whether it was irresponsibility, poor timing, or lack of control. I began to play the "if only" game that often accompanies guilt. "If only I had waited a day or so," I would taunt myself. I had lists of "if only's" in my mind that served to augment my guilt by making me feel as if a simple "if only" would have protected me and my body which I had abused. I had let my body conceive; I had let it spend weeks preparing for a new life; and then I had subjected it to the rigorous and painful suction and scraping operation that had stolen from it the precious new treasure. My body had the ability—the gift of God -- to reproduce life, and I felt I had shamefully abused that gift.

This guilt seemed valid and it persisted until I discovered a few facts. For instance, at seventeen an abortion is nine times safer than a full-term pregnancy for both the mother and the child. I began to feel as if the abortion had pro-

tected my body in a way. I had guarded my body's gift of being able to reproduce by not making it do so before it was ready, I couldn't justify becoming pregnant, but I learned to feel less guilty about my decision to have the abortion because I felt I had not carried the crime to the point where I was physically injured by it.

I had protected myself, but what about my baby? By saving myself, I had sacrificed her (I was sure my child would have been a daughter). It took a great deal of time before I ceased feeling guilty because I had not considered her future. I believed that I was protecting myself physically and emotionally by deciding on abortion as my best alternative. I believed that decision was protecting my parents from the anguish they would feel if I continued the pregnancy and was forced to tell them of my shortcomings. I believed that I was protecting John with this decision by not placing upon him the responsibility of suppporting a wife and a baby. But what was the decision doing for my daughter? I felt I was murdering her to save all of the other lives involved, and for this she got her revenge by causing me the deepest guilt I had experienced. She came to me in my sleep and awoke me with her crying. I soon began to dread going to sleep because almost every night I would hear her desperate screams. I would answer her, too, telling her that I wanted her, that I loved her, and that if I could do everything over I would protect her above all of the others.

Soon I realized that I couldn't do everything over. I had sacrificed her life to ease the life of others, but what kind of life could I have given her? She would have known only loneliness while John and I both worked to provide for her the bare essentials. Other than food, clothing, and shelter, there would have been very little that we could have given to her. I began to realize that at that point in my life, I had nothing to offer a child. If I had instead chosen to offer her life, it would have been a desperate and unfulfilled one for her and for John and me as well. I began to feel relieved that I had not subjected an innocent life to that kind of future. The ultimate realization was that my unborn daughter, too, had suffered less as a result of my decision to have an abortion.

I am glad that after many months of desperation I have reached that ultimate realization. I feel now that my parents

could have forgiven me, that I can forgive myself, and that my child can in turn forgive me. I am guilty only of human weakness. But I won't ever be that weak again.

The Art of the Still Life

It seems that almost anywhere you look these days, you can find somebody in a rush-trying to get someplace by a certain time, attempting to catch a schedule-bound bus, or just in the habit of doing things in a frantic hurry. Life to so many of these people is a never-ending battle with the clock, a battle which is too often fought and seldom won. So was the case with myself before I suffered a tragic accident which left me paralyzed and permanently confined to a wheelchair. Being a rather strong and ambitious young man, I had allowed myself to get intwined in the busy, demanding life of a high school scholar-athlete. In the millisecond that it took for my head to hit the bottom of an all-too-shallow lake, my neck was broken and I was transformed from a hurried student into a seemingly lifeless body with barely enough strength to talk. There would be no more hectic rushing about for this person, just an awful lot of sitting still in a wheelchair, watching the world go busily by. Now that I have been forced to slow down, sit patiently, and physically do nothing, I have learned to observe and appreciate many things that I had previously missed and never enjoyed experiencing.

It was at Good Samaritan Hospital, not long after my accident, that I learned of the excitement of observing and absorbing my surroundings. Those first dreary days when I began to sit outside in the courtyard I was extremely depressed, uneasy, and, above all, bored. My instincts said to do something physical -- jog around the grounds, or toss a frisbee about. These were obviously impossible, and I was left with the task of finding something to do to occupy myself for the next couple of hours until I could go back inside and once again escape from reality in front of the T.V. set. I sat looking down at my lap for a good while, until my attention was aroused by the faint but definite sound of a squirrel rustling about in the fallen leaves. I looked up and discovered my furry friend busily searching for nuts amidst a colorful array of autumn foliage. I watched as he ran from place to place, now and then venturing courageously towards my chair, but always retreating to the safety of the nearby tree. "How beautiful it must be to be so ignorant," I thought, "scurrying from here to there not knowing the first

thing of what a wheelchair is or what it is like to be able to do little more than watch everything going on without you." What I did not realize at the time was that the busy, little squirrel was a simplified version of my past self -- someone too wound up in his affairs to stop and just observe the world around him. As I lost sight of the squirrel in the treetops, my interest switched over to a bird bathing in a small fountain about fifteen feet away. I found myself watching intensely as the small, brightly-colored bird dipped in and out of its ornate bathtub. The more I looked around the seemingly quiet, boring courtyard, the more I found to observe and enjoy. There were butterflies fluttering about, insects performing their daily duties of finding food, and just below me a tuckered out worm, painstakingly trying to reach the safety of the tall grass where it would be safe from the birds. I wanted to try to get someone to help it along (for I was now very aware of what it is like to need and suffer for something -- in my case a renewed interest in life), but everyone seemed to be in such a rush! Doctors were hurrying to see patients, nurses to get to work on time, and visitors trying to make it inside before visiting hours were over. No one had just five seconds to spare to help this struggling little creature. Was this how I used to be? Just how much had I missed in my daily fight to get places and do everything on time? I came back to that place almost every day until I was discharged from the hospital. I knew that I would miss my special sitting place, but there were bound to be others around home -- if I only knew where to find them.

Having learned the fundamentals of the art of observation, I searched out and found the perfect place -- a nice spot on a hill in Herring Run Park. From this high secluded vantage point I could see for miles around, in almost any direction. I ask someone to take me there at times when I need to think, or just want to forget the complicated problems of the world and reaffirm the beauty of the simplistic creatures and creations of mother nature. When I go there I usually spend a few minutes in shallow thought, going over my school plans or thinking about any events coming up, but soon begin looking about in search of something to watch, listen to, smell, and appreciate. My eyes scan the distant horizon and slowly pan along the swaying, green treetops. A

gracefully flying seagull swoops down from the baby -- blue sky, only to disappear behind a group of towering maple trees. A slight breeze holds a kite suspended in the fresh, spring air and now and then gusts ever so slightly, causing it to dance about as if it were happily enjoying its morning flight. The same breeze brings the damp, clean scent of the deep woods and newly-blossomed wild flowers to my special place, and I breathe a sigh of contentment as I savor the sweet aroma. I shut my eyes for a time and listen to the sounds of the season -- a mocking bird singing its repertoire of songs with the inborn talent of a symphonic orchestra, the laughter of young children running across the plush, green field, the soothing rustling of the billowing leaves in the surrounding trees, and, most gratifying, the sound of a playful squirrel scampering about in the remaining leaves fallen from the past autumn. During those times when I am in my private, secluded spot, it is as if I am in a separate world that knows nothing of guns or wars or troubles; I am living in a timeless, scheduleless, peaceful world of simple bliss and tranquility. There is enough going on here to keep one content to look and listen for hours on end, provided he comes to realize the beauty and hidden significance of such a spot. My one regret, however, is that my place is a ways from my home, and there is not always somebody that can take me there. There are times, in fact, when someone must leave me in a place that is dirty or not at all pleasant to be a part of.

But now, no matter where I find myself, even if it is a drab or totally undesirable spot, I have learned that there is always something interesting and worthwhile to observe. Many times I find myself having to wait in a seemingly boring room or area, faced with a certain amount of time which I must somehow or another "kill." There are no playing children, woodland animals, or scenic views in these places, usually just the ordinary furniture of a dull waiting room or the dreary surroundings of my kitchen. It is in these places where I put my skill of -- "occupation through observation" to the extreme test. "What in this place is there that I can somehow use to entertain myself with, or somehow use to educate myself with?" I ask myself. This question is sometimes nearly impossible to answer, but an answer is always present in some form or another. I most often will

center on some object and play a Sherlock Holmes game with myself, trying to deduce as much about the object as is possible. Something as simple as an apple sitting on the table, for instance, is suddenly transformed into an object full of hidden secrets and pieces of information. This idle piece of fruit, which at one time would have been no more to me than just a snack after swimming practice, begins to evoke all kinds of challenges. It is a near-spherical structure with an unknown volume (unknown to me, that is), containing specific nutrients, exhibiting a definite shade of red, and giving off a shiny luster as it reflects the overhead light. The apple starts to stir my mind: I begin to go through a series of equations to try to determine its volume. My past lessons in chemistry are rehashed as I try to remember just what the chemical composition of an apple is. I picture the primary and secondary color charts which my art teacher made me memorize, to try to determine how I would mix colors to recreate that shade of red, and I once again hear my physics teacher lecturing to us about determining the amount of light an object radiates. I never would have expected I could get so much pleasure and get so involved in a single, stupid apple. My attention is turned to the swinging of the pendulum of our dining room clock, and a whole new group of questions comes to mind: What is the momentum of the pendulum? By the coloring on the faded, worn wood of the clock, can I determine its age? By the design, age, and make of the clock, approximately how many gears should it have? This same clock which I used to so strictly live by had become the subject of a simple but entertaining game.

Since my accident I often find myself asking the question of just how much I am missing by being confined to a wheelchair. I have learned, however, that I am only confined physically and not mentally. Beginning with that busy little squirrel at the hospital, I have learned that the essence of life lies not in rushing about, enslaved to a schedule and clock, but rather in realizing the beauty and significance of each other and our world around us. This is not to say that schedules and appointments are not necessary; by ail means they are. It's just that all too often people get too caught up in them to stop and watch the birds or take a casual stroll through the park. What is the sense of living a life which

satisfies a calendar instead of a person?! I deeply regret that it took such a drastic happening to make me come to this realization, but in a way this makes it a bit more important and meaningful to me. It took an accident and a wheelchair to make me slow down and see what I had been missing—I can't help but think it was a blessing in disguise.

Bernard Jorn

Kerri

At approximately 5:30 p.m. on October the twenty-eighth, 1969, the waiting room in North Shore Hospital was filled with many people, all anxiously awaiting those three suspense-breaking words -- "it's a boy" or "it's a girl." Among these people were my father, five brothers, two sisters, and I. At 5:46 I became a big sister to Kerri, the youngest of nine children. Everyone was thrilled, but little did we know what was in store for us. The celebration quickly declined when we heard that my baby sister, everyone's pride and joy, was born brain damaged. But what did this mean? To me, at the age of eight, this meant very little. It wasn't until my sister began to walk and talk, which for her didn't begin until three, that I realized what the words "brained damaged" meant. My sister was indeed different from normal children her age. !t took a great deal of realization and adjustment before we really began to appreciate the effect Kerri had upon us. Although my sister is retarded, she is a very effective teacher.

She has taught me to be thankful for what I have, and not to take being normal for granted. As a child I thought of walking, talking, writing, and playing, as things everyone could do. But after being exposed to so many handicapped people at Kerri's school and camp, I not only realized that there were people incapable of doing these things, but also that they are not as rare and as small a minority as I thought. At times I'll watch Kerri trying to tie her shoe (a task only accomplished this past year of which we are all quite proud), just the look of determination on her face and the built-up frustration she experiences when she fails her first five attempts makes me stop and think how lucky I am the next time I quickly tie my sneakers and run out to play lacrosse. As my whole family, I, too, am quite sports orientated, and yet, I did not begin to participate in them until I was about twelve because of the strong feelings of guilt I had concerning my sister. I thought, "Why should I get to play if she can't?" It didn't seem fair and I refused to accept things as they were. Eventually, after numerous talks with my mother, my way of thinking began to change. I now feel that I'm so fortunate to be able to participate that I should do as much as I can. I only wish Kerri could do the

same. Kerri's inabilities have made me look deeper into myself, searching for all my potential and, thus, giving me a feeling of determination to put it all to use. For example, I often think I've got everything it takes, nothing to hold me back or hinder me, so I should be able to do anything if I put my mind to it. If there's something I can't or don't want to do, I say to myself, "She's got an excuse. You don't. So, if there's something to be done, do it." Most of these thoughts stem from having Kerri as a sister. While writing is one of Kerri's favorite hobbies, her poor ability and motor skills limit her to writing the letters of the alphabet a thousand times over, never quite succeeding, yet never giving up. It is because of her strong will to succeed that I will never quit.

She is extremely friendly and, in watching her, I find myself making an effort to be friendlier. Kerri has taught me to be less critical of people. In addition, she has taught me to be less afraid of, or uneasy with, the handicapped. Most people have never really been exposed to handicapped people and, therefore, are uncomfortable in their presence. I, too, was this way until Kerri made me realize that they are not monsters. My sister is one of them, and I love her very much. One such incident, which stands out in my mother's mind, took place when I was four. I was approached by a quadriplegic man with no arms, and after one look at him I ran to my mother historically crying because I thought there was a monster after me. It's true I was very young, but many people of all ages have similar feelings which tend to make them shy away and avoid any contact with these people. My mother, of course, apologized, and the man -- not monster- told my mother he was used to it. It amazes me to think that I could have acted like that and am now interested in making a career of working with these people. It saddens me to watch Kerri teased or ignored by the normal children when I take her to the park. Children can be very cruel, and though I don't think Kerri actually understands that she is retarded, I do think that she is beginning to feel different from the other kids. It's a shame because handicapped people are more friendly and less critical of people; they are more willing to talk and be kind to almost anyone. I have always been a very strict critic when choosing my friends, but this, too, I feel has changed tremendously. Five years ago, if there was something I disliked about someone,

I would immediately categorize and treat them as mere acquaintances. Very often if good friends began gettin on my nerves, which they very often did, I gradually discontinued our friendship instead of overlooking the minor things about them that were bothering me. My outlook on friendship is totally different now. I am no longer as critical of people, being much more willing to overlook their faults. I must constantly remind myself that Kerri has faults and I love her. I should like my friends, whose faults are not as great. Gossip was something of which I was always in the middle, but recently I find that I am making comments such as "But she means well," or "He's basically a nice person." Because of Kerri's condition, I have also learned great patience. Kerri is extremely curious and boisterous; these two qualities combined can be a deadly weapon against your patience. She asks what seems like fifty million questions. After about the twenty-fifth millionth question, when you can feel your patience slipping, you have to stop and think about whom you're dealing with, respond with a smile, grit your teeth, answer the question, and prepare yourself for the next twenty five million. It will take time and a lot of exposure to the handicapped before people begin to understand that, though these people are different, they are still people. They, along with all their needs, can be beneficial to all.

While trying to satisfy her strong need for affection and attention, I've learned to express my feelings outwardly towards those around me. Kerri, like most retarded people, lives for praise. When someone sets a goal for her, she strives to reach it, and is satisfied with a simple "good girl" or "great job." Almost everything that Kerri does is in hope of making us proud of her. For instance, if Kerri is to blow a bubble with chewing gum (another task she just accomplished), she quickly runs from person to person, as the bubble slowly deflates, trying to get as many rewarding remarks as possible. You can see she requires a great deal of attention. Retarded people are very open and rarely ever hide their feelings. I am not quite sure whether the words "like" and "love" are synonyms to Kerri. However, if she has distinguished between the two, then she loves family, neighbors, teachers, friends, mailmen, some strangers, and almost every animal (real or stuffed). Several years ago the words "I love you" were hardly ever heard in our house, ex-

cept from our parents who would reassure us of it once and a while. It was the same thing with kissing; although this occurred more frequently it was never between brother and sister. On his birthday I might get over the embarrassment enough to kiss my brother. But because of Kerri's constant hugging, kissing, and saying "I love you," our whole family has transformed. When returning home from school, I kiss everyone, family and friends, telling them how I've missed them. I very often tell my parents, brothers, and sisters, that I love them. My friends, who used to consider me "a jock" because I would never let my emotions show through, can't believe how I've changed, as I greet them with a big hug and a kiss. I cry when I'm overly happy or sad, something which was previously done only in the privacy of my own room. After saying "I love you" to Kerri at least five times a day, the words just seem to flow much more easily when I'm with others. These changes, and more, I have noticed within my family.

Stepping out and objectively looking at my family, I see that Kerri has been a learning experience for all of us. Are these changes the result of my growing up? Apparently not, because looking at my thirteen year old brother, Danny, and comparing him to me at thirteen, I see him as a much more mature thirteen year old. Danny, who thinks the world of Kerri, did not always feel this way. Midway into his third year at grade school, I overheard Danny talking to his friends about our family. He mentioned that our family consisted of eleven people: two parents, five boys, two girls, and one retarded one. It was at this moment that I felt the impact of Kerri's condition. Her own brother was disassociating her with humans and putting her in an "it" category. I was so angry, and yet I knew he was too young to understand, as I was when I was that age. I was so caught up in what I should do. I felt like hitting him, but, at the same time, I felt like holding him; I felt like yelling at him, but I wanted to explain to him. All I could do was retreat to my room and cry. Since then I have watched him learn to love Kerri like a sister and treat her like a queen. Many families of retarded people are embarrassed by them and try to hide them. My family is just the opposite. We are all proud to have Kerri as a sister; she is shown off more than she is hidden. How many families are lucky enough to

live with a special person? The entire neighborhood has learned to accept and love her, not as a retarded person but as a warm, friendly little girl. Kerri's First Holy Communion, (performed within her school) this past month, was as big a celebration to my family as my brother's graduation from law school. When Kerri first learned to write "I love you, Mommy" on paper, it was as big a deal as my sister making the dean's list at college.

In short, my family has become more united as they overcome such problems ranging from Kerri's extremely expensive tuition for school to whose turn it is to babysit for her. Little did we know October twenty-eighth that the cute little baby in the hospital would require us to change our whole life style. Our new life style is based primarily around Kerri, and though it's true our set schedules become quite inhibiting and restricting, it is something we must do for her. Because of this we've learned to be more responsible. Times have been rough and extremely frustrating; however, having Kerri as a part of our family has been a great asset to us all. I love her. I wouldn't trade her for the world. And I wouldn't want her any other way. She is the most inspiring teacher I have ever had.

Jacki McCarthy

Last But Not Least

As I sit here, writing furiously at seven zero one (as the digital clock reads) on the morning of December thirteenth, I must admit that I am a first-class procrastinator. However, it is not something that I am proud of. Procrastination, thoughout my experiences, has not had any good effects at all. According to me, one of the most experienced in the field, procrastination is my biggest curse.

This curse does not afflict my entire family; only I must bear the stigma that shouts "Procrastinator!" from all sides. Procrastination is misunderstood by those who do not procrastinate. This misunderstanding often leads to arguments. For instance, one pleasant afternoon recently, Michael, Patty and I were driving down York Road when the oil warning light in my car began to glow. "Damn," I hissed, "I've been meaning to get that checked." "How long has it been since you had it checked?" asked Michael helpfully. "I never have." After the torrent of noise from Michael and Patty subsided, I thought that I understood that it was "my own damn fault" and they "had no sympathy for such an expletive deleted procrastinator." Funny, but that was also my mother's attitude when my goldfish died. "But Mom, I really was going to change the water soon," I lamented. But my laments were to no avail as my mother turned a cold shoulder and said, "If you really cared about those goldfish, you would have changed the water more that once in the past eight months." I have tried to explain to these lucky, heartless, healthy people that procrastination is a sickness and needs to be recognized as such to aid me and the other unlucky victims, but their reaction was not a positive one. They went rollicking off in gales of laughter as I sat with only a dead car and a dead goldfish to comfort me.

Yes, they laugh while I struggle with the most ordinary tasks; procrastination makes tasks more difficult. It is amazing how, after a little time slips away, the task at hand suddenly takes on monstrous proportions. When my tenth-grade biology teacher gave my class a list of twenty-five types of leaves to collect, I snapped my fingers and said,"Piece of cake." Needless to say, I was wrong. I ignored the early warning signs. Every day students came into the classroom trading leaves and asking Mr. Hollens if their

leaves were really the right ones. Those busy little beavers started well in advance and by the time the last weekend before the assignment was due they were all finished and sitting pretty. You can imagine my shock when I set out to collect all of my leaves that same weekend and discovered that winter had set in and all the leaves were gone. Instead of several beautiful fall afternoons spent happily plucking leaves off of trees, I had a hurried ride up to Longwood Gardens, with two very harried and angry parents, where we furtively slipped leaves into our pockets to save me from repeating Biology. Even that experience did not cure me of procrastinating; it did not stop me -- rather, start me -- packing my possessions any earlier when we moved from our old house to a new one we had built. A year before the move, before ground was even being broken for our new house, my father was already packing away things we did not use often and inventorying them with color-coded boxes and a master key sheet. What a sharp contrast to me, who stayed up all night on the day before we moved, throwing anything that crossed my path into any open container. Of course, my father rubbed salt in my procrastinator's wound, saying how my things would get broken and I would never sort all of them out while his possessions would go into place as planned as clockwork. Naturally, he was right, but for once I did have one consolation. His boxes had been in storage for so long that they became infested with bugs.

Of course, I did not let my father forget those bugs soon, but he is right in saying that procrastination leads to poor quality work. There are those of the school that argue that the deadline pressure put on a procrastinator causes him to do well in a pinch. I say fiddlesticks to that. All throughout my education, I, the eternal procrastinator, waited until the very last moment possible to complete any assignment. It did not cause me to do well in a pinch. Rushing into the public library at one minute before closing the night before a report on the theatre of the absurd was due, I found that the early birds had not taken all of the worms, but instead they had taken all of the reference books on the theatre of the absurd. With a situation like that, deadline pressure does not cause good work. Instead, it causes f's and mania. An even worse situation occurred when a group of procrastinators got together. Somehow we all recognized the

procrastinator in each other and banded together for moral support. Unfortunately, we carried this alliance over into our schoolwork, and, as a result, found ourselves due to present "The Leader" in our senior English class. The night before it was due we got the book, read it, assigned roles, and rehearsed. However, we were all too tired the next morning to make much sense of it. There was one good point to the whole situation: we were all back at our desks asleep when our teacher announced the grade.

It is a blessing for procrastinators that no one 'grades' people on their performances in daily life outside of school and work situations. Unfortunately, these people are all too easily spotted anyway. A procrastinator's plight is painfully obvious to those who come into even the slightest contact with him. Procrastinators show this affliction throughout all aspects of their lives. The procrastinator is the person who gives the cashier at the supermarket outdated coupons because he "just got around to it." Procrastinators always run out of gas; indeed, it is the procrastinator's car that breaks down and needs towing because the procrastinator keeps putting off a trip to the garage. Procrastinators are always closed out of the courses they want and instead end up taking a course that meets both at five a.m. and five p.m. daily, entitled "The Life of the Tse-Tse Fly in Nigeria: an Introspective." Procrastinators never pay parking tickets on time and often have poor credit ratings because of their animosity to deadlines. Procrastinators always have overdue library books. What a life to lead, littered with broken doctor and dentist appointments. The person you see outside the seventh World Series game at the stadium trying to get a ticket as the national anthem begins to play is a procrastinator.

That person standing outside the stadium, the one with the overdue library books, and I, writing this composition at eight twelve now, all deserve some help. We are misunderstood as we struggle through tasks made more difficult as time passes. We get poor results and everyone sees the procrastinator in us. Yet, they have no sympathy. The biggest curse in my life, procrastination, will be recognized as a sickness, and the first step in a cure is recognizing the problem. I can see it now, a meeting hall full of people, repeating over and over again, "I am a procrastinator. I am a

procrastinator..." "When is that meeting?" the reader asks, probably a closet procrastinator himself. "Oh, whenever we get around to it...."

Jennifer Hegarty

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