

The Writing Life

Spring 2015



Table of Contents

Just Let Me Write the Damn Song	2
Giselle Tran	
Competition	4
Micayla Reed	
Journey of A Thousand Miles	5
Aaron Thein	
Melancholic Writing	7
Elizabeth Barrera	
The Science of Getting It off Your Chest	9
Andrea Heine	
Gimpgirladventures; A Dying Girl's Blog	11
Nicole Bracciotti	
Breaking Down the Fourth Wall	13
Victor Hernandez	
The Shocking Truth	14
Michelle Guelff	
Get in the Game: Video Game and FilmBased Writing	16
Andrew May	
A Deaf Person's Haven	18
Vanessa Mendoza Palencia	
A Lonely, Early August Afternoon	19
Philip Perry	
Textual Healing	21
Thao Nguyen	

Staff Acknowledgments:

Managing Editor: Mark Thompson

Layout & Design: Laura Nguyen (Lead), Philip Perry, Robin Brown

Graphic Editors: Giselle Tran (Lead), Stephen Neeley, Micayla Reed

Copyeditors: Michelle Guelff (Lead), Dina Eastwood, Emily Fox, Micayla Reed

Proofreaders: Andrew May (Lead), J. Johnson, Memo Alvizar

Department of English and Comparative Literature

San José State University

1 Washington Square

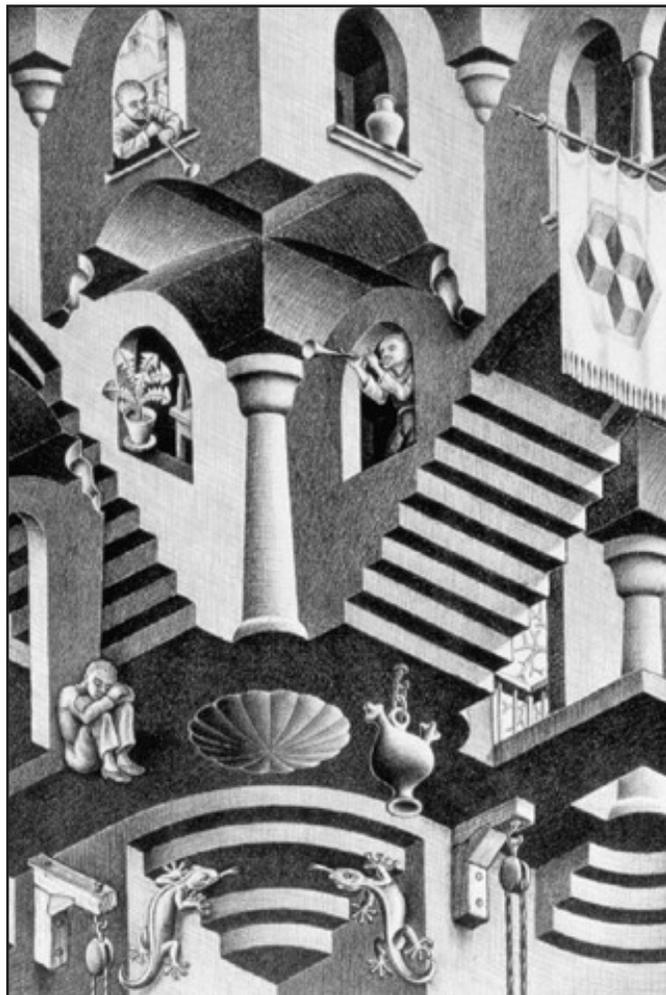
San José, CA 95192

Just Let Me Write the Damn Song

Giselle Tran

I wish I spent all my time like my peers: writing short stories, poems, and nonfiction pieces that are ripe for publication, but the reality is most of my free time is spent writing songs with my band. I don't tell people I write songs, unsure how to answer them when they ask what I write, hiding it away as if our songs are some secret shame that doesn't count as real writing. Hell, when we started writing three years ago, our songs weren't even good writing.

It didn't matter to me that our songs were bad (I knew everything took practice), but why the songs were bad troubled me. Full of nonsensical lyrics lacking thought or purpose, poorly chosen words, and clichés, our songs began as something every writer hates, and even though I could see it and knew how to make them better, my bandmates were too stubborn to listen.



M.C. Escher, *Relativity*

I remember always getting in arguments with them over lyrics, debating what a song was and what we wanted it to be. We'd argue over rhyme schemes, the amount of words per line, diction, and whatever we could think of.

"We don't need to rhyme," the lead vocalist, my best friend, would insist.

"But rhyming sounds good. It helps with cohesion," I'd say.

"I don't care. I don't want to rhyme all the time. I want to be different." We'd keep arguing until one of us would eventually shut up from frustration.

Arguing had always been a part of our process, beginning with our first song "Sunburned." The hours of work we spent trying to wrestle the song into a (well-suited in my opinion) ABCBCA rhyme scheme with intricate metaphors is now hazy in my mind, but the rejection the song ultimately received is still vivid. At first, they seemed happy, but I quickly realized they were just happy the song was finished. When they looked at the lyrics again a week later, they immediately seemed uneasy, dissatisfied. Another week after that, I was asked to help them rewrite the lyrics to their liking, the original work labeled 'too poetic' for what they thought a song should be. And so I did, hurt and begrudgingly.

It was a pattern that would continue over the next year or so as I tried hard to stand my ground with the songs we wrote originally before I had to rework them to fit their liking. The arguing never stopped between the lead vocalist and me, both bitterly and stubbornly insisting we were right until we would get headaches; afterwards, we would spend some time apart, and then reconvene to try again. It got to the point that I would not even help with the lyrical process unless I was asked, and even then I would ask what they wanted to the song to sound like first, stifling my creativity and voice. I started writing to please my bandmates instead of myself and was left questioning everything I knew about writing and my competence as a writer.

Simultaneously, I was in school studying and learning all about the careful craft of writing—rhetorical devices, meter, sound patterns, poetic forms, grammatical structures—small but powerful tools that subtly separated good writers from bad writers. There were songwriters in my literature anthology books among the great poets, like Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison, that we barely discussed in class and that I explored alone more intimately, and I remember an essay question that asked me to analyze song lyrics once. It was evident to me my bandmates were wrong, confused about how poetry and songwriting fit together, but my self-doubt drowned out my discontent.

I never left the band, too stubborn and loyal to give up so easily. I loved the music but disliked the lyrics, and I was determined to change their minds as I got further along in my studies. Then one day, without warning, we finally worked together instead of against each other. We called the song “Gears”—about the dependency of people on technology. Our lead vocalist was getting bored with uninteresting, unoriginal lyrics and finally took the time to listen to my ideas as I guided the band through the grand vision I had of the song, subtly rhyming, using vivid imagery and metaphors, employing the effects of enjambment, and using interesting diction.

But more importantly, I realized I had been too strict in wanting to follow poetic forms. I had to compromise things I wanted—like meter and exact rhyme schemes—for the good of the song, inventing forms to go with the music and varying them along with key changes for a more powerful experience overall. To grasp what I mean, here is the last verse of “Gears”:

Walking. Automate.
The best new shoes will step me
from place to place.
I’ll digitize my essence:
silicon fingers and copper strings.
Send out the tin man
for my experiencing
self. Automate.
That old food will be pre-chewed
and lectures a pill to take.
Machine in the routine.
Machine in the routine.

I learned that collaboration demands compromise, but beyond that I started to think it was strange that I questioned (and continue to question) my identity as a writer because I write songs. Obviously songs are poetry and songwriters are poets; I studied a few in school. But if that were so blatantly obvious why would I question myself at all? Why would I hesitate to tell people I write songs? And why don’t we study more songwriters in school?

Writers and professors say to be a great writer you must constantly consume great writing, but how often do they recommend songwriters to students? This is not to say songwriters are not accepted in the world of poetry, but rather that they are unconsciously considered a lower tier of writing. Consider the fact that SJSU does not offer any classes for songwriting specifically, in either the Music or English departments, which seems odd given the explosion of songwriting in the last hundred years. There are classes that study humor, game narrative, nonfiction, children’s literature, young adult fiction—all genres of writing that have also developed or became popularized in the last century—but still there is not a single class for songwriting. Perhaps then, I question my identity as a writer because writers question my identity as a writer of value.

This is a problem directly related to what is happening in the songwriting world right now. Songwriters are generally one of two things: musicians trying to be poets or poets trying to

be musicians, usually falling short on one side of the spectrum. Often, the result is bad songs. It is rare that someone is both a musician and a poet at once; without classes that closely study this sort of writing, a lot of young songwriters don’t know what songwriting is and fall into the same trap of bad writing that my band and I did at the beginning. Three years later, I am just barely grasping the concept of what it truly means to be a songwriter, a poet, and a musician, but I never would have understood it without my band and the constant arguing.

Ultimately, Randall Man, a contemporary, formal poet, captured my thoughts best, saying “I like to know where the walls are, so I can punch up against them.” Knowing how poetry and music works individually is great, but to be a songwriter you have to know how both poetry and music work together. I had to learn to see the wall dividing the two and punch up against it until it was no more, until my identity as a songwriter became both the writer who writes songs as poetry, and the musician who uses words for their sound and effect, their gravity. Songwriting is, after all, a collaboration between music and poetry which demands compromise.

Giselle Tran

Giselle Tran is a junior at SJSU with an interest in composition. She writes songs, poetry, short stories and nonfiction essays.



Competition

Micayla Reed

You wake up at 3:19 AM with an idea that you think would change the history of all publications. After struggling to find a niche in the writing sphere, you find it. The perfect combination of food, science, and fun has come to you in an easy-to-write idea. You spend the next few months putting spontaneous additions to your new book on random surfaces: a quote in crayon on your little brother's homework, a nice conclusion to chapter four on the back of your Chipotle receipt, and a statistic that you learned in your nutrition class on the Memos app in your smashed-up

smartphone. Along the way, you ask many types of readers what they think of your writing, and it's all positive. Your excitement is building, and it's all coming together when, one day, your mom calls and tells you that Cameron Diaz was on Ellen today and announced the release of her new book. It's got a different title but, hey, that was your idea! Almost exactly! Has Cameron Diaz been stalking you? No, she hasn't. If you've had a good idea lately that you haven't followed up on because someone else has already published it, fear not. There may be an even better idea out there just

waiting to be found.

This was the predicament I was in about a year ago. I had a book that was only partially completed and it was dying for my attention, but at this point it was already considered old news. I felt like my efforts were worth nothing, and I became discouraged from picking it up ever again. Every once in a while, I would learn something new; something that I could twist to fit into my book. I had many opportunities to fill the pages with wonderful thoughts and theories that could have changed lives, but something was holding me back.

I took a closer look at my situation and decided that I needed to find an alternate path. My job had little to do with writing, as I was working on an increasingly popular food truck in the South Bay Area. Since I was working with customers and had the chance to talk a little, people were always asking me what an English major was doing trying to get a cook's position. I would say something silly like, "My professors tell me to keep a stable day job." I never gave a true answer, until one couple wouldn't walk away without knowing the real story. They were food writers that had been especially interested in learning more about our business's background, as we were frequently featured on their food truck blogs. Since I had the best communication skills at the time, my boss asked me to maintain a professional relationship with this couple. I would let them know when we had new additions to our menu and set up days that we could photograph the items for their blogs. Once I had built a good rapport with them, their blogs had grown to be very popular. I was one of the first to know of their plans to take a road trip to visit various food trucks across the nation, and the first to secure 2 two-page spreads in their



book that was to follow. I couldn't let this book be the second one that got away. So I took a chance and sent my partial book to the writers. I had once poured my passion into this book, and I knew that the right audience could understand it. People that would read a book about food truck recipes would appreciate the time and effort it takes to create a meal that may be eaten in a short lunch hour. My confidence in my book must have shown because they loved my approach and recruited me to be involved in the development of their book.

Even though it seemed like my book was a lost cause, I was able to re-evaluate my situation and share my ideas with people who appreciated them. After learning that I had the passion for food and the articulation to share my knowledge, my boss was coming to me for advice. I helped build our company policies handbook, created a few promotional flyers, wrote an article about our feature in the food truck road trip book, and even contributed a couple of popular (and healthy!) items to our menu.

I thought that something was hold-

ing me back from finishing my original book. It turns out that something was me. Somewhere inside myself, I knew that I could do better and that one day I would be able to use what I had to reach my full potential. It's not that I forgot about my book, it's that I found a way to use it to my advantage in new and unexpected ways. From that, I was able to create many new connections that broadened by writing application and experience.

So, what happened to my book? Well, it is sitting in my desk drawer

waiting for more inspiration and opportunities. It's still a book of interest in the food truck sphere, but I have come across many new possibilities since I last shared it, and I'm excited to see what else comes of it. This book was just one lucky step in my career, and many great things have stemmed from it. I hope to use it to inspire writers to stick their necks out for something they believe in. I may not have gotten the outcome I was expecting, but I can't expect to plan every step in life. I'm glad Cameron Diaz stole my idea.

Micayla Reed

Micayla Reed is a junior majoring in Career Writing. She has strong interests in editing and food science.



Journey of A Thousand Miles

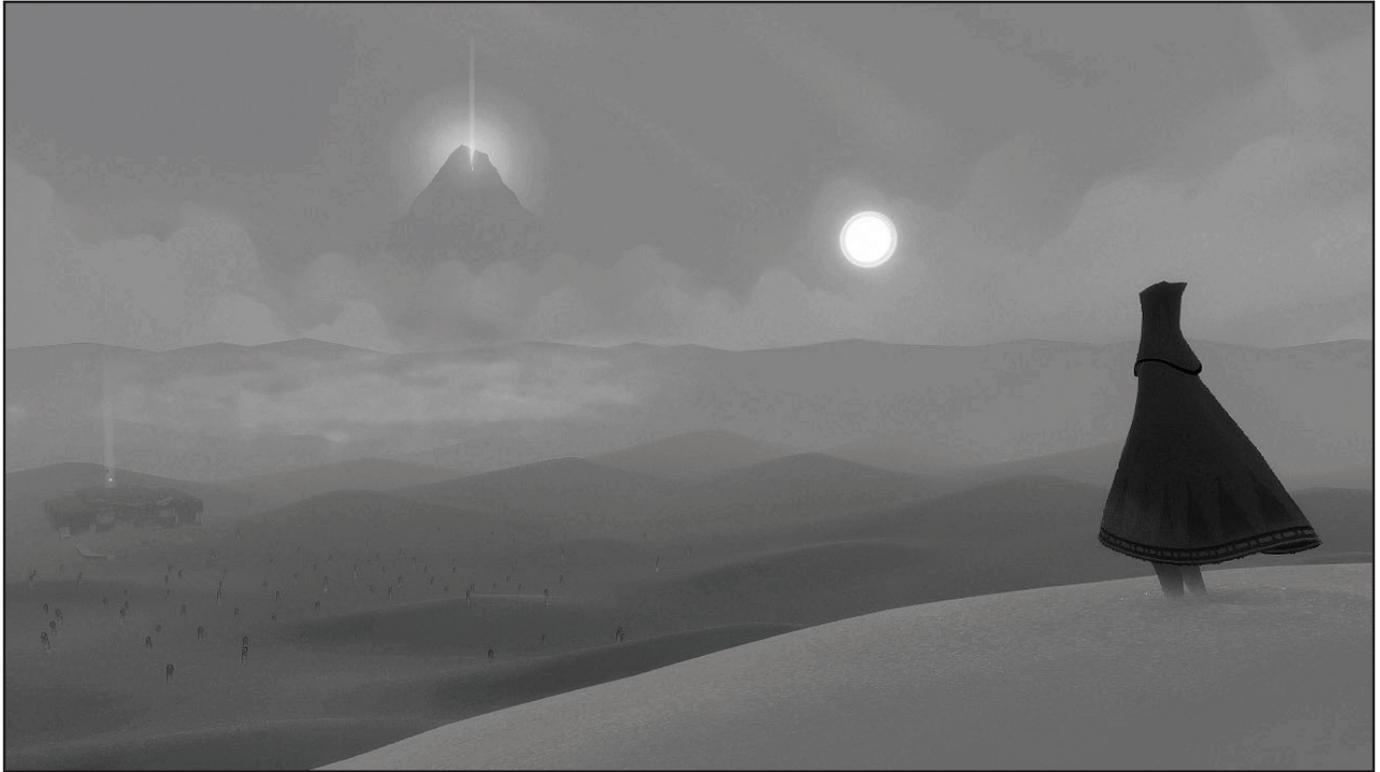
Aaron Thein

You make it to class just in time with a green book and pen in hand. You take your seat haphazardly and wait for your professor to hand you the writing prompt. "You may begin as soon as you get the prompt," he says. After you fill in your name, class, and professor's name, you open your green book to a blank page, and soon your mind is blank too.

This often happens to me whenever I want to start writing. Whether it is for self-interest or mandatory for my classes, inside or outside the classroom, it becomes instinctual for my mind to go blank. I wish that my mind could just turn on like a phone or a computer with a push of a button. I want to write, but more often than not, there is an obstacle I have to vault over before I can start. But I realize that there is a reason for my blank state; I know why it's there and how it came about. I

want you to explore with me and see if we can come to same truth while keeping this question in mind: why is it difficult to start?

One reason it may feel this way is because we aren't sure how to assess starts. For example, try to analyze the big names that made it, like J.K. Rowling or J.R.R. Tolkien. If you're like me, you might address them with a face of amazement and a hint of cynicism. This is, obviously, the incorrect way to approach an analysis of anything for two reasons. The first reason is we shouldn't feel too amazed at the work. Sounds disrespectful, I know, but when it comes to being amazed, I feel that the amazement alone is enough to stop me from assessing the actual work. It's almost like seeing a magic trick; we might ask the question, "How did they do that?" but never really go out to learn how to do the magic trick (which is



Journey, 2012 video game

mostly why magicians still have jobs today) because we want to know, but we aren't motivated to actually want to know. The second reason concerns cynicism. Other than making you a disgruntled, disturbed, and dehumanizing human, cynicism stands as an obstacle when it comes to the analysis of a start, because instead of being distracted by how good something is, we become distracted by what bad went into making that something good. As much as the general population hates him, look at Justin Bieber: His start came from making videos on YouTube of himself playing a guitar and singing songs. This led to him having the second most viewed video on YouTube, next to Psy's *Gangnam Style*, despite, however, how he turned out today.

But why is it a "journey" of a thousand miles? Why not a marathon or a race? When colonists in America fought against the British Empire, it wasn't done in a day; it took days, months, and years to accomplish their goal of forming a more perfect union. There wasn't an exact date that said "begin

"I focus not on the beginning, but at the middle and the end."

American Revolution now." Nor was there a finish line that signaled rebels exactly when the war would be over. Journeys can be spontaneous; marathons and races must have a distinct starting and finish line. Journeys are just like us; they can start whenever, they're ambiguous, they're not mechanical or systematic. That is why it is called a journey. Like in the classroom exam example, I know what I will write about, but the beginning and ending are not clear. Not yet.

Journeys, however, still have a starting point; even if it isn't made known to the journeyer. We may know what kind of journey we are taking, such as maturity or self-growth. So why might it be the case that it is difficult to start? The realization came to me when I took not a step forward, but a step back. I looked at my situation and I found myself in the middle. We are in the middle of the journey. We see ourselves not at the beginning, but at the middle of what seems to be a long and daunting journey. Our parents hold ideals for us because they want us to be something or do something they couldn't finish. They passed the baton and said, "Go forth." This is the predicament I face every time I want to write. I focus not on the beginning, but at the middle and the end. How will this pan out? Will it work? How do I end this? Indeed, a burning question that applies to our situation. How can we end difficult starts?

I don't know the answer. Actually, I can't give you the answer. I can't give you the answer because the answer isn't a singular entity, rather it's a multitude of several smaller components enmeshed into one thing. The answer is like a building; it looks like one thing, we grammatically reference "it" as a singular subject or object, but it isn't made of one single thing. A building is made up of cement, structures, columns, chicken wire, scaffoldings, foundation, glass, plastic, metal rebar, pipe-

lines, a sewage system, concrete, ceramic, and much more. The answer is like a building.

Don't fret; this isn't an exam. We don't have to know all the answers to understand the answer, just like we don't have to see every part of a building to know that it's a building. Over time and experience, we come to accumulate the pieces together until it forms into something we can understand. That is why it is called a journey. You may not know what day the answer comes to you, but it will. I can only give a piece of advice; don't focus on the middle or end. Remove yourself from that position and place yourself in the beginning. "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," Lao Tzu said. You may begin as soon as you receive the answer.

Aaron Thein

Aaron Thein is a senior pursuing a degree in English. He enjoys reading and writing when he has free time, particularly dark humor. And yes, that is a T-shirt won from doing the Buffalo Wild Wings Blazing Challenge.



Melancholic Writing

Elizabeth Barrera

“**T**he ocean waves begin to drown you. Little by little the water consumes you, and you're nothing but minuscule in this sea of life. Your presence is dying while every other creature around you is ready for the attack. Your movements are slow, yet the blows are rapid. Your surroundings are overwhelming, and you fight not to give in, but to close your eyes is the best sensation you've felt in so long. So you decide to give in, to let it consume you, to rip every part of you until there's only a vague memory.”

That journal entry is dated from March 25th, 2013, which was when I began to take my creative writing more seriously by dedicating an hour per day to this journal. For some strange and inexplicable reason, writing became a method of coping with pain for me. It provided itself as an outlet to express my thoughts and loathe at my own necessity. The beautiful thing about writing while experiencing hurt and pain is that there is no right or wrong answer. Creative writing comes from the heart and mind. Emotions are what create beautiful writing, and slowly every piece of the puzzle begins to come together in order to form a poem or story. It begins with only a blank space, where words will begin to cover it all. Choosing to write creative work while experiencing some form of depression can be essential to careers, because the writing can become more elaborate and descriptive. In my experience, the language used is more colorful, meaningful, and imaginable.

Let me fill you in on how my writing has developed through this coping method. When I was twelve years old, I began keeping a journal. I noticed that every time I wrote in it, it was whenever my parents and I had an argument. This behavior became consistent as time progressed, and the roll-

ercoaster ride intensified. Unfortunately, my grandfather and childhood friend passed away while I was in my second year of college. Never had I experienced so much loss and anguish at the same time. Every time I look back at my older journal entries, I am astounded at how far I've come along. No longer were words written down simply to finish an assignment or to feel comfort in knowing that I took the time to write in my boring journal. I wrote because it was a necessity. My pen guided me through every line, while the thin paper listened to every word I wrote. At that moment in time, my work became motivational and positive, because that's what pain and loss can do to us. We seek pleasure in keeping a happy life and telling others about how our journey led us to where we are now. We create work slightly exaggerated from our realities and morph it into something worthwhile and compelling. At least, that's what I did with my writing. It began with the hurt, and continued to develop until it was something happy—filled with illusion and hope.

As humans, we find no need to talk because most of the time others don't understand us. Perhaps, our closest friends and family are hearing us, but not listening. We want to be heard with no judgment, and just let the hurt out without hesitation or fear of appearing vulnerable and pathetic. As writers, we're very critical of our own selves, as well as of others. We search for mistakes and analyze everything, when many times there's nothing more than the simplicity of reality. So, how, you may ask yourself, is it that I create such impactful work out of essentially nothing? The answer is quite simple, because I find my most sincere work to be written during moments of loneliness, when all I want is to take a break from the realities



of the world and put down on paper how it is that I truly feel. As humans, we naturally seek a comfort zone, and as writers, we focus on how to prevent our emotions from consuming us by writing creative pieces and sharing them with others. Now, I've always considered myself a happy person. No matter the situation I'm encountered with, I find a way to smile and learn from it. As a happy writer, every journal entry was about the same thing. "Today in class, I caught a boy staring at me for quite a long time. I looked away, shyly, but haven't seen him look my way since." My writing was typically desperate and based on illusion. It craved romance and all of the extra escalated emotions of love that we gag at now.

However, when my grandfather passed away, I experienced an array of emotions that fatigued my spirit and exhausted every bit of me. Never in my life had I endured such a strong set of emotions, even though I had my fair share of heartbreaks that made me feel as if the world was ending. I took desperate matters to the extreme and did things that don't make the stereotype of Latinas diminish any less. I cried and thought that there was no greater loss than that of the one you truly loved (romantically). Yet, losing my grandfather taught me how wrong I was about depression. It came so unexpectedly, like a thunderstorm arriving immediately after days filled with sunshine. There was no slow and easy transition. It came without warning, without a moment to gain preparation—at least that's what I continued to think. On the contrary, I disregarded the fact that my grandfather's Parkinson's was not getting any better, I ignored that he was aging, and that he could no longer fend for himself—I was in denial because I knew the hurt would be new to me.

After my grandfather's death, I began to write more; poet-

ry, stories, journal entries, you name it. They were all inspired by him, even if they weren't necessarily about moving forward in life, or learning to value the people who surround us. No, thanks to him, I've written suspenseful work, I've tested the poetic waters (though not quite as successfully), and embraced the talent I've been given. If there's one thing I've learned through loss, it's that death is inevitable and so is pain. Thus, we choose whether to embrace it with open arms, or neglect it and drown in our sorrows.

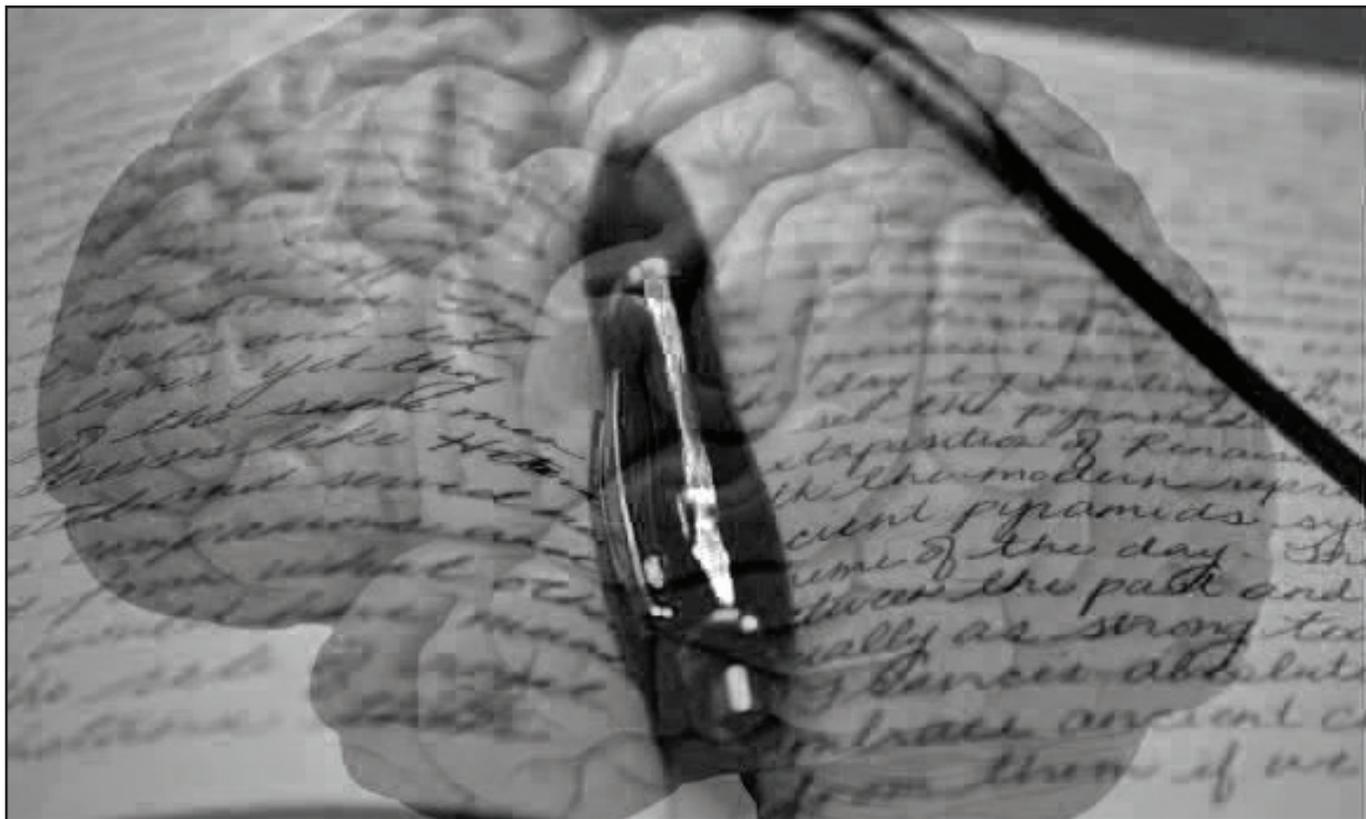
Elizabeth Barrera

Elizabeth is majoring in Technical Writing and minoring in Psychology and Business (for who knows what reasons). She enjoys frying her brain in sexy Netflix nights with *Grey's Anatomy* and writing embarrassing stories in her journal and blog, while keepin it a hunnit.



The Science of Getting It off Your Chest

Andrea Heine



“**T**his pouring of thoughts out on paper has relieved me. I feel better and full of confidence and resolution.” This quote, by author Diet Eman, perfectly captures the experience many of us have when we pour our thoughts and feelings onto a page. For many, writing is a therapeutic tool. If we experience a death, a breakup, or a traumatic event, writing about it can help us feel better. The therapeutic aspects of writing are why so many people keep journals, write poetry, and even create stories. You don’t have to be a professional writer to benefit from the effects of getting things off your chest through writing. But why is it that putting things on a page makes us feel better? Is there some sort of science to back this up?

A psychology researcher from the University of Texas, Dr. James Penne-

baker, has extensively studied the effects of writing about personal and emotional experiences—what he calls “expressive writing”. He has found that yes, writing things down really does help many of us feel better. His research has shown that writing about our major life events can improve immune system function, help us get better grades, and help us to work through trauma and significant life transitions. According to Pennebaker’s research, we get the most out of expressive writing when we write about our personal experiences every day for at least twenty minutes, and for at least four consecutive days. Surprisingly, however, he suggests we stop not long after that. He feels that continuing to write about these events or traumas for longer than a week may suck us in to what he calls a “cycle of self-pity”.

Another useful tool Pennebaker sug-

gests is to take another person’s perspective when writing about our experiences. For example, if someone is writing about going through a divorce, they may take on the perspective of the person they are divorcing. Pennebaker’s research shows us that writing about things can help us to process our emotions and heal from major events. But it still leaves us wondering why it is that the writing process helps us heal.

Recent research from UCLA has used brain imaging studies to examine the phenomenon of how writing helps with healing from a neurobiological perspective. This research has shown that when we write about our emotions, we actually begin to process them in a different part of our brain. In one study, researchers hooked participants up to a brain-imaging scanner. The researchers then showed the participants pictures of

people experiencing certain emotions, such as sadness or anger. In response to these images, an area of the brain involved in emotional reactivity, called the amygdala, lit up. This is a normal response. It's already well established in the field of neuroscience that the amygdala is linked to our processing of emotions. What's interesting is what happened when the researchers told the participants to attach an emotional word to the pictures they saw.

In one group, participants were told to give the person in the picture a name. This produced no significant changes in brain activity. But, when the participants labeled the emotions represented in the pictures, a different area of the brain, called the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, lit up. Furthermore, the response in the amygdala was reduced. Simply attaching a word to the emotion in the picture reduced emotional reactivity in the brain.

The prefrontal cortex, the area at the front of the brain, is involved in the processing of higher-order thinking and logical reasoning, whereas the amygdala is found towards the base of the brain, often considered to be a more primitive

area. Perhaps when we process things in the prefrontal cortex, we are able to look at them from a more logical standpoint.

Another study from the same UCLA researchers showed a similar phenomenon to that of the first, but this time the participants actually participated in a writing activity. In one group, participants wrote about a neutral experience, and in the other group participants wrote about an emotional experience they had recently had. The group writing about the emotional experience showed some activity in the amygdala, but once again, the area in the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex showed a high level of activity. These findings imply something amazing; that when we put our emotions into words, we begin processing them in an entirely different area of the brain. Writing about our emotions literally changes the way our brain processes them.

Results like these are fascinating indeed, but there are further implications from these findings. Not only can writing be a therapeutic tool for the average person, but it turns out writing may also help to augment psychotherapy

treatments. Along with Pennebaker's research, numerous studies have shown that adding journal writing to an existing therapy regimen can greatly improve successful outcomes. In one study, mothers of children with disruptive behavior disorders (like autism or ADHD) had the stress they experienced significantly reduced when they participated in an online journal program. In another study, people in therapy who participated in written emotional disclosure saw greater reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms than those who didn't. These studies show that writing can be an extremely useful tool for those with mental health issues.

Even if you don't have mental health issues, these results apply to almost anyone. Simply keeping a journal or writing poems or lyrics when we are experiencing a difficult time in our lives can have a number of health benefits and can greatly improve our emotional well-being. Also, writers everywhere can take comfort in the fact that the terrible poetry they wrote after their high school break up really was an effective way to help them deal with their emotions.

“[Pennebaker] feels that continuing to write about these events or traumas for longer than a week may suck us in to a ‘cycle of self-pity.’”

Andrea Heine

Andrea Heine is a senior majoring in Psychology, with a Minor in Professional and Technical Writing. She enjoys neuroscience, cats, books, and espresso.



Gimpgirladventures; A Dying Girl's Blog

Nicole Bracciotti

A lingering, dusty smell of old cardboard boxes filled the air. Put among the wreckage stood a lime green technological innovation. A layer of dust slimmed across my fingers as I rolled the computer screen towards me. The extendable pole on top of which the computer was attached squeaked with the old movement. This piece of technology has a sensor that finds the pupils of the eye. The pupils then become the computer mouse and blinking becomes the right click. This technical innovation is an eye gaze system, the brand name, DynaVox. The eye gaze system, at 6 feet tall, had not been turned on in over a month. A screech filled the air as my mother pulled a piece of packing tape from its roll. We were packing the communication system that was the most prized instrument of my sisters writing. This piece of technology was being sent to another individual who was diagnosed with A.L.S.: the disease that took my sister's life. In high school, Megan wanted to be a thespian; she loved dramas, plays, acting, all of it. As she aged, she studied nursing but soon dropped out to work full-time to make more money. At first, my sister used a pen to start jotting down her experiences. Physical limitations started to affect her though.

The first thing to go was her grip.

Megan was diagnosed with A.L.S. (also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease) at the age of 23. This diagnosis, for her, meant that she had roughly six months to live without the

assistance of feeding tubes and a machine to breathe for her. Her motor neurons would slowly start dying and any muscles would lose voluntary control and cease to work. The brain, however, is perfectly intact and the same as it was before diagnosis.

Even though she was 23 years old and fighting a diagnosis, she didn't lack a sense of humor. She expressed the uncommon pair, humor and death, at a young age. Through her blog, *Gimp Girl Adventures*, she posted about her illness through her computer keyboard, at first with questions to God such as, "Now if I do get the golden ticket into Heaven, I have a few curious questions. Do I have access to dead celebrities?" and "Does the Chipotle franchise extend to heaven? I would give my left leg for a steak burrito. I know that may not be much since my legs don't work to begin with."

Even though after a few months her legs couldn't work, her creative process still did. Now, every writer has an instrument for writing to get his or her idea on paper or on screen. The most common of these are the keyboard, which is what I am using to type out the thoughts in my head right now, or a pen. What happens when the hand cannot write—not from writers block, but from limited mobility?

A few blogs in, not only was the function of her grip unsuccessful, so were a lot of other functions in her body. Tasks became more difficult. She could no longer walk and breathing was labored. She added many medical technologies to her daily life such as a vent, feeding tube, and DynaVox.

One of the most difficult decisions made was to get "vented". This means to get a tube surgically placed into the trachea through a dime-sized hole. The tube coming out the neck is attached to a breathing machine that exudes a monstrous beeping if there is a leak, or the very common, detachment of the tube. This decision, along with adding a feeding tube, gave Megan another year with life.

With this extra year of life, Megan turned solely to using her computer. My sister had used her keyboard for her blog in the beginning stages of her disease. The problem a few months in was that her mobility was falling fast. The DynaVox, what she used to speak with, started to constantly go off in a woman's voice that was supposed to



Me, my sister, and my brother, Michael

represent my sister's: "Help! Help! There is a bug on my face!" or "DEFCON 5!" I still am unsure as to how the word DEFCON originated, I just knew it meant she had to GO. As in, go to the bathroom. As in, emergency status. As in, if the family couldn't help her make it in time to the bathroom, it would be our sorry asses who had to clean up the aftermath. It was a very interesting relationship my older sister and I had as you can see.

With this relationship, I was able to experience the affects of her blog, *Gimp Girl Adventures*. Megan had many supporters, gave advice to people, and even got some negative feedback for her word choice. For example, "At that moment I knew what necessary task was about to commence...operation cork the cooter. I soon found myself tilted back in my wheelchair with my legs propped up in the gyn position and Jason with a tampon trying to achieve success in a task no man should undertake. Failure was not an option."

It seems some did not like her diction, such as when she used "cooter" (one of the many slang words in our household for the vagina). As her writing grew, so did her knowledge. While she helped a lot of families, she also got a silent judgment that I was able to see from afar.

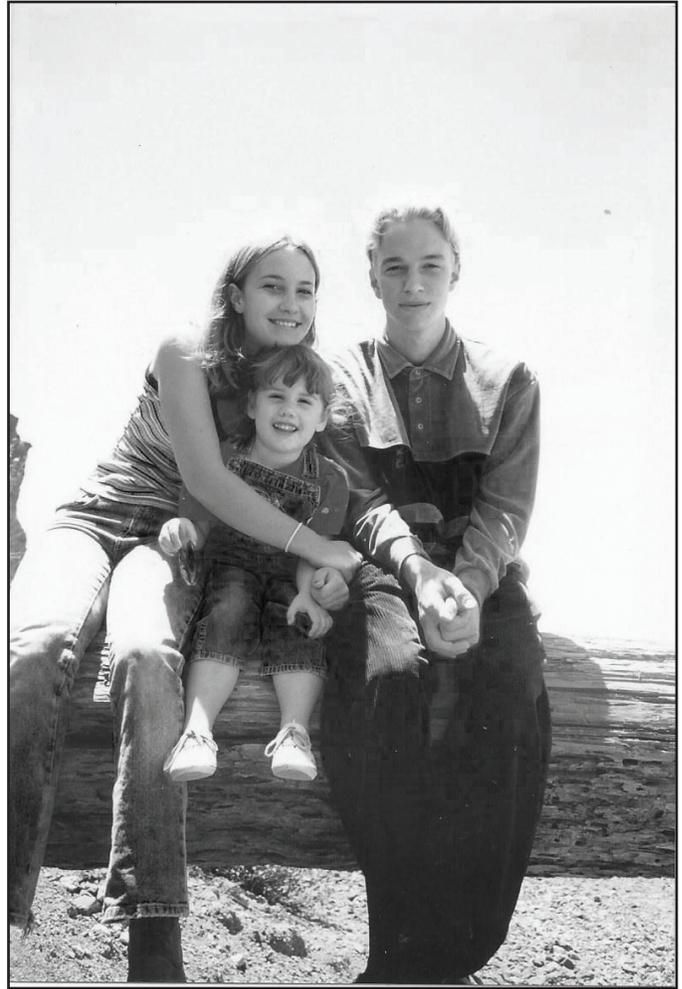
The blog post she made titled, "A Dose of Humility, Period" (see above quote) was what taught her to be careful with her audience. They would not always be so accepting, even if her body was progressing into a state of immobility.

Imagine a blog or any piece of writing with substance in it. That piece would have a 500-word count or more. Now, imagine being unable to move any part of your body except for your eyes and eyelids. Using these two tools of the human body to write out a 500 or more word blog. Each character individually selected for hours in order to get a message out.

A big motivational reason for Megan when it came to writing her blog was her family, who she believed was in denial. You see, A.L.S. has two forms. It comes sporadically, meaning any individual can get this disease. The reason, unknown. The second form is genetically, meaning that the gene within an individual's DNA has a mutation or flaw. This flaw is passed down, generation by generation. My sister had the second type.

Her family, a large part of it, *was* in denial that this disease could affect them, even though the chances of getting A.L.S. is 50% if you have a parent with this gene. While it is up to interpretation if this blog helped her family come out of denial, it did help bring together a community all on its own. Strangers, people scared at their fatal prognosis, families tormented and with no options, and people from out of the country read this blog. I invite you to go see for yourself how she incorporated humor into a humorless disease (<http://gimpgirladventures.blogspot.com/>).

Her story, how she used writing in her life as an outlet, as a way to express herself when her physical body shut down on her, when she couldn't express her personality, was shut off due to the inability to choose what clothes to wear, or how she wanted her make-up done, and how she wanted her hair to look in the morning. Everyday people go through a similar



My sister, me, and my brother

struggles of not being able to express themselves, either because of culture, a parent's judgment, or the feeling that peers will not understand. Writing is our outlet from that world. Writing is our freedom and our message. All writers have limitations.

It may not be easy to be a writer, but it is damn well worth it.

Nicole Bracciotti

Nicole Bracciotti is currently majoring in English with a concentration in Technical Writing, and minor in Spanish. She is also pursuing a career in publishing and editing for LGBT, women's, and cultural texts.



Breaking Down the Fourth Wall

Victor Hernandez

I like to believe that my group of friends and I are people with the ability to talk about any sort of topic. We often converse with a cunning, sharp wit that requires quick thinking to respond to one another in a snappy way. Unfortunately, not every day is like that. There are just days where none of us have anything interesting to say. Our conversations tend to follow a linear pattern and, on the worst days, conversations are so skeletal that it sounds like this: “News headline. Dark humorous joke. Controversial opinion. Topic shift.” When this happens, my mind is so dull that it begins to wander and think that this conversation is a reflection of our society right now. Then, I realized that train of thought actually had some sense to it.

Today, we have embraced the ideals and concept of the metanarrative, albeit a more lazy and twisted version of it. Metanarrative is going beyond the story as written to further tell the story. It involves being aware of the medium you use and utilizing said medium, such as a book or a film or a game. When Vladimir Nabokov wrote *Lolita*, he knew that his protagonist, Humbert Humbert, wouldn't exactly be the most likable character. He's a pedophile, he manipulates others, and he doesn't feel any shame about his actions. However, Nabokov writes the entirety of *Lolita* from Humbert's perspective, forcing the reader to enter his twisted way of thinking. Humbert often talks directly to the reader, eloquently justifying his actions and occasionally showing bouts of empathy. Through this perspective, the reader can understand and even empathize

with Humbert.

The way people often see metanarrative today is through the form of humor, most notably breaking the fourth wall. This is when characters acknowledge the audience as a form of entertainment. A common example would be when the character directly talks to the viewer to confirm something, while all the other characters are confused at who that person is talking to. In a video game, you would often see:

“Press the ‘A button’ to jump!”

“What's this ‘A button’ you're talking about?”

The problem here is the original intention of fourth wall breaking. It was used to shock the audience and offer them a new type of entertainment. Deadpool was one of Marvel's most popular characters, mainly due to his ability to play with the metanarrative. His conversations with the writer and artist of the comic book were new and refreshing. However, it's becoming difficult for Deadpool to stand out now when so many other Marvel films have small jokes that break the fourth wall. Even completely serious movies are poking fun at their metanarrative, even when it negatively affects the experience. *Avatar*, a Hollywood blockbuster that seeks to immerse its audience, calls the unobtainable element of the Na'vi world “Unobtainium.” Excellent use of immersion there, James Cameron.

Since we often use metanarrative for humor, we often forget to use metanarrative as a storytelling tool. This is especially true when I played the popular 2014 indie game, *The Stanley Parable*. In this game, players are frequently given two very



M.C. Escher, *Drawing Hands*

clear options: take the left path or the right path. The decision decides how the game is played, sometimes going places that are unexpected. In one ending, the narrator traps the player into playing a dumb mini-game 100 times, questioning the possession of any free will at all. *Parable* goes in both directions, saying that free will is meaningless in games and that free will can change how the player will view and experience the game. Many reviewers applauded *Parable's* deconstruction of free will and determinism in a video game. Admittedly, I also thought it was a wonderful game, at first. Upon reflecting, however, I find that this game lacked a coherent message. Yes, it had themes, but the game never *did* anything with those themes. The creators simply presented it in an entertaining way. It was a game to entertain, not a game with a story in mind. When I finished, I enjoyed myself—but only on a surface level.

A story that uses metanarrative correctly can truly be a masterpiece for ages. *Pulp Fiction's* use of metanarrative made viewers see crime-life in an entirely different aspect. Instead of high-speed car chases or ideas of betrayal floating around, we see two lowly henchmen talking about cheeseburgers before their next hit. Not everything needs to be spectacular. Another point in the film is that there are no protagonists or antagonists; there are just simply people. Vincent Vega, the so-called protagonist of the movie, eventually gets killed by the other protagonist, Butch Coolidge. His death was completely inconsequential. Butch did not care about his death, for he was simply another henchman. Director Quentin Tarantino did not care about Vincent's death, as they filmed the scene as if it was just another fight in the movie. The only people who cared were in the audience, as they observed and empathized with Vincent's life during the first half of the movie. Using the film's overall narrative and the filming of Vincent's death scene,

Tarantino was able to make his point using metanarrative and without breaking the fourth wall.

These are the types of stories and messages we get when properly using metanarrative. I would much rather see and experience a film like *Pulp Fiction* than go through 100 one-liners of fourth-wall breaking. I have always been in love with metanarrative and it hurts to see its potential go misused. Ultimately, my feelings can be summed up by the 2012 horror film, *Cabin in the Woods*. Director Joss Whedon breaks the fourth wall multiples times through the storyline. His movie is considered to be both a love letter to horror movies and a plea to stop the making of them. So, like me, while he enjoys the fourth wall breaking and the humor, he also believes it harms the creativity of storytelling.

Victor Hernandez

Victor Hernandez is a senior majoring in History and minoring in Technical Writing. He enjoys all types of genres, as long as it's something that's well-written.



The Shocking Truth

Michelle Guelff

A Marine convoy is making its way down the dusty streets of Iraq. Up on a rooftop watching over them is a bearded Bradley Cooper looking through the scope of his sniper rifle. He spots an Iraqi man on a cell phone and zeros in on him. Could he be a threat? The man steps away out of sight. Moments later, a woman and a young boy step out of a house and begin walking towards the approaching convoy. Cooper sees this and watches as the woman pulls a grenade from beneath her clothes. She proceeds to hand it to the young boy. The boy graciously takes it and runs towards the Marines. Through the scope, the child is seen getting closer and closer.

Then silence.

The *American Sniper* trailer sent chills through viewers this holiday season after seeing the trailer play on their televisions many times. The anticipation of wanting to know what happens next sends many people to the theater to find out for themselves and to learn the story of the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history: Chris Kyle. However, many did not have to wait to see the trailer to know that they wanted to see it. *American Sniper* is Chris Kyle's autobiography, recounting his many tours in Iraq and the stress it put on his family. It is also a #1 *New York Times* Best Seller, having sold millions of copies.

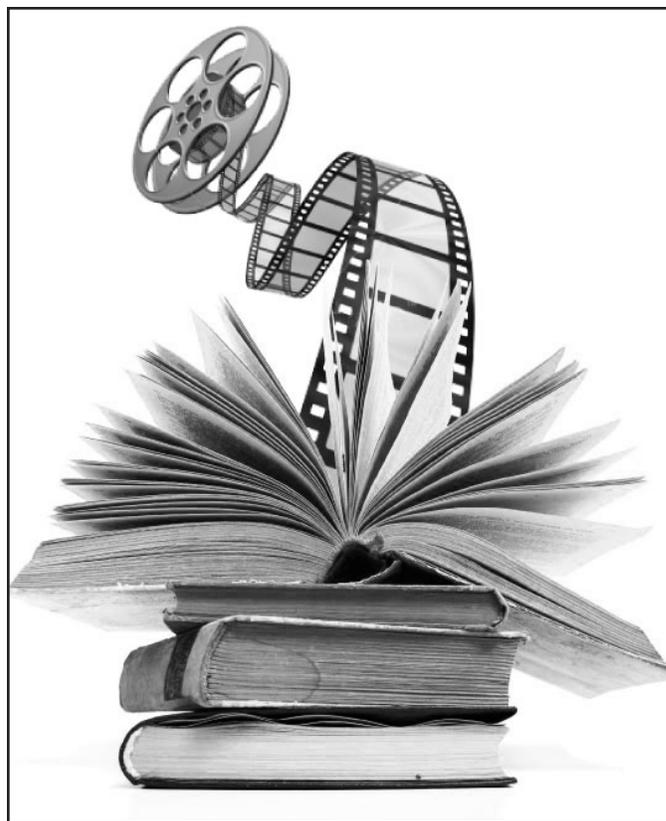
Being one of the millions, I went into the movie expecting to see the story I read in the book. However, there were facts changed between the book and the movie that seemed to serve no other purpose than to create a bigger reaction from the audience. Kyle's first kill was only the woman whose intentions were to kill dozens of Marines. The movie changed that to a child and the woman. Killing someone is shocking enough, why make this change? Why do the screenwriters have the authority to twist the truth and get away with it saying it is "based on the book," yet writers have to fact check numerous times before they go to print?

A nonfiction writer and a screenwriter seem to play with a different set of rules. Screenwriters are allowed to spin the truth a little to get a larger audience; yet, if a nonfiction writer exaggerates the truth a bit in order to sell more books, there is a larger risk of being sued for libel. When Kyle's autobiography came out, there were some people that weren't happy with the outcome of how scenes and people were represented. Jesse Ventura, Navy veteran and former Minnesota governor, claims a bar fight that resulted in Kyle punching a celebrity in the face (Ventura says it was him) never occurred. Kyle never stated in his book who the person was, nor was it in the movie. However, in several interviews before Kyle died, he said that it was in fact Ventura. Kyle didn't even publish his side of the event, yet his estate is being sued. The consequences for nonfiction writers are more detrimental than they are for screenwriters, who have a movie studio backing them.

There is more risk in writing an autobiography or memoir than any other genre, because even though it is being told from the individual's point of view, there will be someone who is not happy with how the events were portrayed. What is considered "real" can be skewed by a person's perception and their viewpoint. This is because no two people look at the world the same way. You could go to a baseball game with hundreds of other people and ask them to describe the events that occurred, yet you won't receive two of the same responses. So can reality be captured in literature? I say no; capturing every perspective that encompasses the reality of a situation is impossible.

So what happens when the author of an autobiography is perceived as being an unreliable narrator? Jordan Belfort's memoir, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, is a great example of an unreliable nonfiction narrator. His book is his version of what occurred during his time of committing fraud through stock

“When I go to see a movie that is ‘based on a true story,’ I know not to believe a lot of what I see.”



market manipulation and a penny stock scam. Belfort's memoir was adapted into a movie in 2013 of the same name and sent shockwaves throughout many viewers. Sex, drugs, money, and crime; the recipe of *The Wolf of Wall Street* leaves many people wondering if the events portrayed actually happened. The story and its events are controversial, and several people have come out stating how a lot of it is either exaggerated or not true at all. However, Belfort stated that the movie version doesn't exaggerate the use of drugs and outrageous sex enough; he claims his life was even worse than the film portrayed.

Belfort had a say and authorization of a lot of changes that were made for the movie; yet, after the release, he says the movie doesn't accurately portray what happened. So that leaves us to wonder what was truer, the book or the movie. Belfort has admitted to being on a ridiculous amount of drugs during this time in his life, so how is he a reliable narrator to recount the events that took place? The truth is, he isn't. He is simply telling his story the way he thinks will sound more dramatic and interesting to people, even though he probably doesn't accurately remember the details of that part of his life. He wants the attention. Through his comments, Belfort has turned himself into an unreliable narrator, flipping his memoir into a work of fiction.

When I pick up an autobiography, I expect the words I'm about to read to all be true. However, when I go to see a movie that is "based on a true story," I know not to believe a lot of what I see. But why not tell the truth all the time? Audiences love a true story, but definitely do not appreciate being lied to. If it comes out that one thing was a lie in nonfiction literature, it makes everything else also look like a lie. Stating the absolute

truth with every fact of what occurred when writing about true events is tricky.

Creating a reaction from readers of nonfiction has become more important than fact checking. Emotions sell more books and more tickets to movies. People want to see if Kyle takes the shot on a young boy. They want to watch Leonardo DiCaprio, playing Belfort, flail around as if on drugs as he tries to get into his expensive car. These are stories that are merely “based” on reality. Yet, audiences will never be able to grasp the full story because reality cannot be accurately conveyed through the written word.

Michelle Guelff

Michelle Guelff is an English major with an emphasis in Professional/Technical Writing. She enjoys writing short stories and critiquing films.



Get in the Game: Video Game and Film Based Writing

Andrew May



O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? Sorry Juliet, Romeo is in another castle, leveling up in the latest story-rich, role-playing game. Or maybe he is watching a critically acclaimed movie with Mercutio. Those two love hanging out, after all. *But what about the REAL world? Why do they make knaves of themselves with such drive!* Juliet, this isn't the 16th century anymore! Video games and movies are considered multimedia and have huge teaching potential.

Poor Juliet. She doesn't grasp the latent learning value of multimedia. Yet, sadly, neither does most of the traditional

scholastic community—teachers and students alike. Video games, especially, get looked down upon in society as being for basement dwelling, antisocial shut-ins. The problem with these stereotypes is that they inhibit creativity in learning situations. This article will focus specifically on writing classes, but it is a much broader topic than just that. The benefits can reach into pre-college computer sciences, graphic design, traditional art, or even marketing.

A diverse setting, complex characters that are involved in dramatic plots and subplots, well-written dialogue, captivating

imagery; these aren't just the marks of a good book. These are the hallmarks of good video games and movies, as well. Yet, for some unfathomable reason, the latter two aren't worked into reading and writing curriculum.

As it turns out, some video game development companies take existing popular literature and turn it into games. One company, Telltale Games (an apropos name if ever there was one), used the ultra-famous book series, *Game of Thrones*, and remodeled it into a video game series, replete with known and new characters, new plots, and retconned background lore. And, of course, it would be impossible to neglect mentioning the fact that the same book series was made into a mega-popular television show. Both of these artistic mediums require a slightly different form of creativity that is not being fostered or practiced in the average school.

The average school is only using traditional creative writing, which is, in essence, limited to writing short stories in class. Perhaps later in a student's school career they will be challenged to write a longer story. Fine. But what about challenging students to write *game synopses* with ultra-detailed crafted worlds and deep characters that have meaningful interactions with the player character? What about asking students to write *movie scripts* with industry standard formatting, heavy use of dialogue, camera angle write-ups, and descriptions of the perfect character attributes? Tasking a student to write in new genres helps them to be more adaptive and balanced, and it helps them to possibly realize their full potential as creative writers.

Writing isn't the only skill benefiting from multimedia education, though. It is not uncommon for a youth to get a large portion of their daily reading through video games. A student in a past English class of mine told of how he didn't become a proficient reader until he played through a *Final Fantasy*

game, which jumpstarted his still-burning passion for reading. Previously, video games that featured large amounts of reading were for a niche market and did not have mass appeal. Today, though, many big-budget, role-playing games involve a plethora of readable content. Players of *Skyrim* or the *Dragon Age* series will be able to tell of the immense quantity of scrolls and texts, scattered throughout the maps, with flavor text. Whole works of poetry, creative fiction, history, and political intrigue are kept in these items for players to discover and read. And that is on top of being engaged in the "true" story of the game.

What is so commonly forgotten about movies, video games, and books is that they are all cut from the same cloth; one may be fashioned into a shirt, another a jacket, the last as socks, but they all serve a similar purpose. Video games and movies are the interactive and visual representations of a book. If book reading is looked at as a meaningful and enriching pastime, why should the other two be vilified? The other two should be celebrated for their unique applications and advantages.

As a culture, we need to stop pushing against "deviant media" when it comes to education. So many students (likely a portion of you readers, too) have experienced a video game with a captivating story. I daresay, everyone has seen a movie. Students can build off their preexisting knowledge and use it in school. Remember, curriculum is presented to the student and the student either chooses to engage in it, or not. In many cases, students don't do good work because they don't feel an attachment to the curriculum. They simply don't feel motivated to start trying. Video games or movies can be a pathway in for these unenthusiastic pupils. Now, more than ever, is the time for all of us to lay down our swords pointed against "nerd culture", and to pick up our pencils aimed against eight-foot tall orcs.

“Sorry Juliet, Romeo is in another castle, leveling up in the latest, story-rich role-playing game.”

Andrew May

Andrew is a Technical Writing Certificate student. He got his BA in English Education at Chico State. He hopes to work as a technical writer for a high-tech company. He is also an avid video gamer (who is console agnostic!).



Writing: A Deaf Person's Haven

Vanessa Mendoza Palencia

I once heard that food is the way to a man's heart. But I've also heard of some of the best cooks being dumped by their lovers, so I'm not sure if I can vouch for that. However, the belief that writing (aside from sign language) is the way to a deaf lover's heart is something that I can speak for.

I was diagnosed at the tender age of four with complete hearing loss in my left ear and a mild to severe hearing loss in my right. After finding out about my hearing loss, my mother enrolled me in a deaf school. While there I learned to communicate with others via sign language, which involved a lot of interpretation from body language and visuals. More than halfway through my first year there, my teachers and audiologist conferred with my mother and agreed that I had more than enough hearing to attend a regular public school.

That first day in kindergarten is nothing but a distant memory but I can remember hearing my teacher's voice and not being able to clarify what she was saying. The next thing I knew, my classmates and I were sitting in a circle and I remember watching them in awe

as they began to clap their hands and chant along to a catchy beat of gibberish words. My little five-year old self never once thought that I was the only one who wasn't able to make out the words being sung. With time came the realization that I wasn't like the other little boys and girls in my classroom. Feeling exposed and vulnerable, I tried to find another means of gathering information. I stumbled upon the art of lip reading early in my elementary school years and learned to become proficient at it, but even then I was still left with blank spaces in everyday conversations.

It wasn't until I was given my first book that I realized that I could read as a way of gathering information. Instead of straining every day in the classroom to hear the teacher talk about adjectives and pronouns, or how Abraham Lincoln emancipated the slaves, I could turn to texts that explained in detail how to word a sentence or how events led up to the Emancipation Proclamation. I became so immersed in the reading world that I figured out that by gaining what information I could, I was able to fill in the blanks when it came to class discus-

sions or teacher lectures. More than that, reading allowed me to experience an alternate world in which I was a normal hearing character. Whether it was in the form of a ghost story or a summer romance novel, the authors wrote in such a way that permitted me to communicate mentally with the other characters in the story. In essence, reading was an outlet for me; a temporary time frame that allowed me to forget the reality of my hearing impairment. I loved how normal I would feel during my reading experiences, so naturally my love for reading led to my passion for writing; thus, my writer's soul was born.

As I grew older, I realized that despite being connected to the hearing world by being able to hold an oral conversation with people, I found it more comfortable to converse through writing. Whether it was writing a letter to someone, typing up an e-mail, or sending a text, writing was the more effective mode of communication for me. Not only was I able to read the words on the page in front of me, I was able to soak in the meaning of every letter and feel the emotions behind every word. With writing, there are no blank spaces. There are only words and the connotations you associate them with, and that's what makes writing such a beautiful subject for me.

While I have met people who share my passion for writing, our reasons tend to differ. They generally love writing because of the power that words hold. I, too, believe that words can be empowering; however, my passion for writing stems from its simplicity. Writing has the ability to bridge the gap between me and the blank spaces. Just as braille is a communication haven for the blind, writing is bliss for the deaf. The art of writing is a sanctuary for the hearing impaired because it connects us to the rest of the world. It appears that sometimes



people get so wrapped up in dissecting the meaning of a piece of literature or searching for that perfect word, that the value of the precious connection between different worlds writing possesses is often overlooked. You can try to concoct a luscious lemon-roasted chicken to win over your sweetheart, but writing is an invaluable skill that can help expand your knowledge of communication with those who have limited access to oral communication. I have garnered many friends over the course of the years, but it was those who learned to pass me notes in class or text rather than call me every day that grew closer to me, not the ones who whispered inaudible words or ignored the importance that writing held in my life. Communication is the key in a successful relationship and writing

provides that to those who have a barrier to oral communication. In my world, writing is the perfect bridging tool; a tool that many tend to take for granted. With

all that writing is able to convey, it truly is the way to a deaf lover's heart, lest one forget that.

Vanessa Mendoza Palencia

Vanessa Palencia is a junior majoring in English with an emphasis in Technical Writing. She enjoys writing lyrics, blogging, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. She just recently received the opportunity to have one of her lyrics professionally produced and hopes to continue to contribute her lyrics and one day positively impact her listeners. A mother of one, she loves having her son by her side and strives to teach him everything she knows along the way.



A Lonely, Early August Afternoon

Philip Perry

Louis Dyer, *The Apparition of Escapism*



Allow me to be blunt with you, dear reader; none of us inherently deserves to be happy. However, we can earn happiness by striving for it and by doing all we can to create situations where happiness can be obtained. Being an adult in our world is difficult; retaining a sense of magic, joy, and childhood is often impossible. But efforts to preserve it should never be abandoned.

Personally, I know how much of a struggle it can be to retain the child in my heart now that I've begun to finally grow up. Sure many of us easily find happiness as young adults, yet finding happiness and becoming whole as a person can be monumentally confusing. We have to retain our childhood wonder in adulthood, and for some it's the only way to stay alive. For me, it was an emotional, ghostly, and existential moment that made me understand. If I have remained unclear, and now that this tirade has come to an end, allow me to illustrate my point with a story.

Once upon a time there was a desperate Young Man who dreamt of becoming far more than he thought he could be (though to be fair saying 'once upon a time' is quite ironic in this context). He would sit in his room and dream that it was a box containing a separate reality; a reality where not only anything was possible, but everything was encouraged. As a boy, the Young Man would turn on video games and get lost in realms filled with light and dark as the driving forces. He might have also built forts with his best friend and his brother, and the three of them would invent games outside of convention. It was truly a magical time where he didn't have to be anything.

But now that boy was a Young Man-or at least he looked like one. As he sat in his room, he could not help but think of the reality outside of his box. A reality where he had two crappy jobs, a girlfriend who would soon leave, breaking his heart, and a mountain of overwhelming choices that were constraining his dreams. The Young Man had just turned 21, but he did not celebrate like many of his peers. He thought that he was better than them, even though he knew he was no different. He was pathetic, alone by choice, and he felt lost. As the remaining weeks of summer waned on, he continued to isolate himself out of stupidity.

Then came a lonely, early August afternoon, when he stopped for a moment. It was a particularly memorable and infinite moment as he looked around the room where he once fought monsters and flew with unrestrained magic. The Young Man felt anger welling up once again. It was a familiar and unwanted anger.

Either to haunt him or just out of spite, an apathetic apparition appeared in front of him. The Young Man stared at his old self across the room. It was just a mirror, but it showed someone he hated. Suddenly, he heard a voice he had not heard in many years.

"Come on now, don't let this clown beat you."

The Young Man turned to the door and saw another image; a man standing in the doorway. The man was, in fact, the main character of the fantasy novel the Young Man had started writing years ago. He belonged to a reality created out of the Young Man's desire to escape his own teenage trials. That

"He used writing to become something he wanted to be, and that made him happy."

reality granted him power and freedom. The character, named Ryden, now stood confidently in the doorway, smile unwavering, hair hanging effortlessly, and eyes sharper than tacks. Ryden was an allegory for everything the Young Man wanted to be.

"But...I can't make him go away," said the Young Man. "I've tried so many times. I just want to be you."

Ryden smirked, "But you are."

"Only in this room! Out there...I can't live my dreams. There just isn't any time."

"You want to know something? That world out there," Ryden said coyly motioning to the rest of the house, "is just as real as the room you're sitting in now. After all, it's only a room. There isn't a difference on the opposite sides of this door. The question you should be asking is what you think the room really is."

"I suppose...ugh...I know you're right," the Young Man whispered to himself. "So what do I do? How can I be more like you more often? How can I...get rid of him?"

"You can't be more like me. You are me."

The Young Man closed his eyes in confusion, and squeezed his temples as though a migraine had come instantaneously. When he looked up once more, Ryden had disappeared. The Young Man ran out of his room as quickly as he possibly could, and stared down the hall; but he saw nothing. The Young Man turned back into his darkened room and looked to the corner. And there, where the apparition had come to haunt him, he only saw a corner.

And then, on his computer screen, a familiar title had become clear, made visible by his breaking the illusion. He walked over tentatively and saw the title of his novel, *Arthinian*, sitting there waiting for him. The Young Man realized that he had opened the file many times before, but had not focused enough to write anymore; however, Ryden had different plans for him.

Even though the Young Man had not written a single word of his story in months, the Young Man somehow found himself smiling. He opened up his bedroom windows, sat in front of the screen, and began typing at a rapid pace. The words came pouring out of his mind and onto the screen as if the dam of frustration had been obliterated.

The next day, the day after that, and every day until the beginning of a new school semester, one which would see a great

deal of adulthood and heartbreak, the Young Man continued to write and smile.

The room was still only a room. But what the room had been—though it had never truly been anything else—became his imagination. And he took it with him wherever he went. The Young Man finished his book on November 25, 2014, and he was finally proud of himself. It is not difficult, dear reader, to decipher who the Young Man in the story is. It is also not difficult to understand that the room, and the visions that appeared within it, were not real—though the Young Man did see them. What is important is the smile. From the end of August until Christmas, the Young Man would suffer. But unlike all those times before, he was not unhappy or alone. He learned to trust others with his dreams and his joys. And when he was all by himself and thinking of Ryden, he continued to smile no matter how hard life could be. Ryden was who he was becoming.

The man no longer saw the apparitions of what once was. He simply continued to write, and it saved his life.

And that, dear reader, is how you earn happiness—or at least that's how the Young Man did. He earned it by writing, letting the words on the page become his reality, and envelop-

ing his childhood in a package he could revisit as he grew. The Young Man used writing to become something he wanted to be, and that made him happy. How you will happiness if you have not already found it is a question you must ask yourself.

Philip Perry

Philip Perry is a 21-year old junior majoring in English with a Concentration in Technical Writing. When he isn't writing, Phil is usually playing with his band or collecting games to play with friends. His goal in life is to succeed with his creativity and make it his career, whether that be music, writing, movies or anything else.



Textual Healing

Thao Nguyen

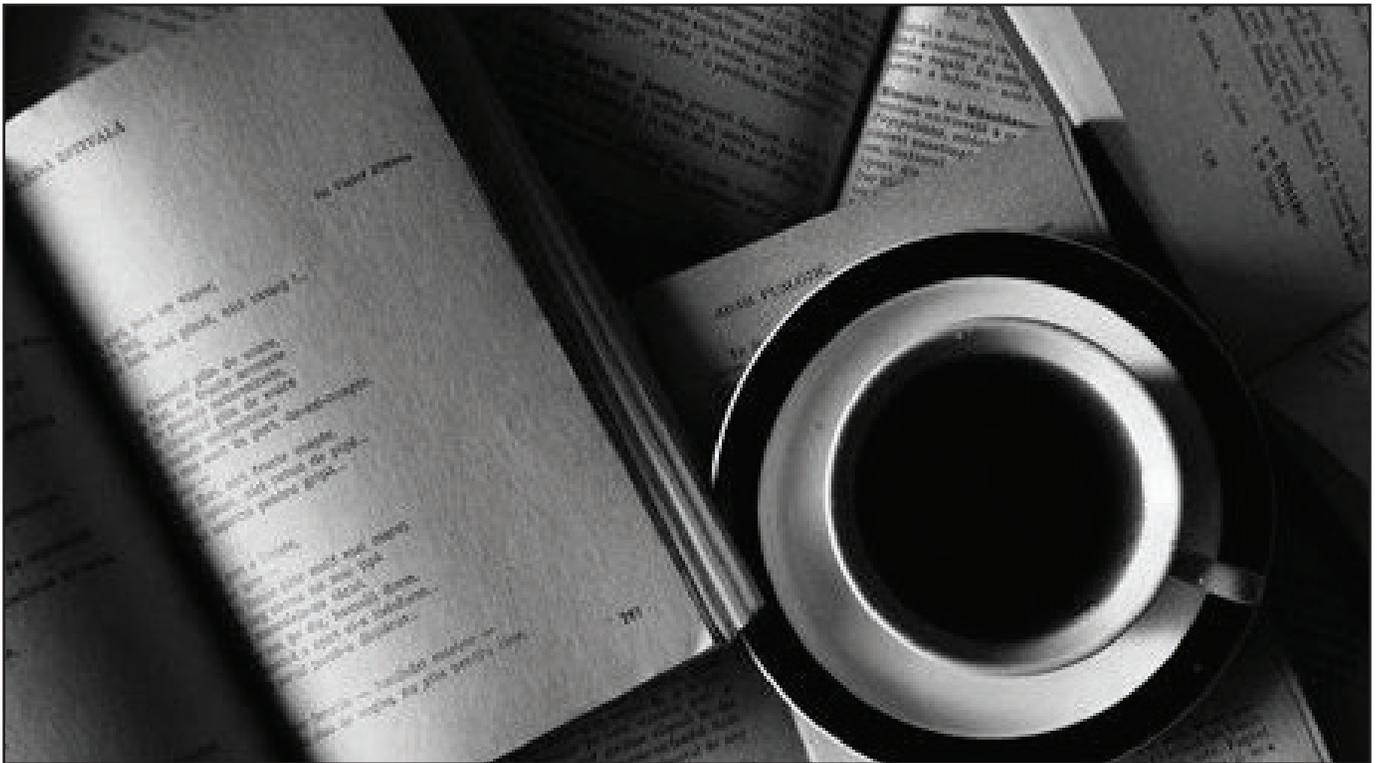
“Palms are sweaty, knees weak, arms are heavy/ there’s vomit on his sweater already” (Eminem, “Lose Yourself”). Nobody aptly describes the physical manifestations of anxiety like Eminem, and as somebody who has suffered from anxiety and mild depression, I am more than familiar with what he is describing. Unfortunately, that is where our similarities end. Unlike The Real Slim Shady, my head spinning, cold sweat inducing, stomach at my knees, there-is-no-hope anxiety that affected me was not assuaged by losing myself in the music (or in Xanax for that matter). Instead, I found solace between the pages of books.

Anxiety attacks and bouts of depression have taken over my life several times. When this happens I shut people out, stop eating, cry uncontrollably for no reason, and stay in bed until there is a Thao-sized indent in the mattress. In these instances of gloom, reading became the only thing that could stop my downward spiral. Smelling the papery sheets and seeing the black type marching across the pages became the panacea to the chokehold that stress had over my life.

I noticed that books made me feel better at a young age. By the time I was six, I had gotten into the habit of crying over everything. My parents would hand me a book, often times from the *Ramona* or *Junie B. Jones* series, and within seconds my crying would subside. By the end of the first chapter, my

tears would be forgotten, the stickiness on my cheeks the only clue that they were ever there. Of course, back then my outbursts were merely the result of having fought with my sisters or having gotten in trouble at school. But as I got older, and my anxieties and depression grew stronger, I always turned to books. A.A. Milne, C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, Lemony Snicket, and Anthony Burgess have all been my therapist at one point or another. It was as though the spines of their books were soaked with magic.

It was incredibly easy for me to get lost in the books I read, and I have taken my fair share of trips through Middle Earth and Pemberley. These books showed me that hiding from my problems would not make them go away. The Ring of Power did not lose power by being hidden in an envelope, and Elizabeth Bennet did not find happiness by staying in Longbourn. The novel that influenced me the most in this aspect was *The Screwtape Letters*. I remember thinking to myself, “Wormwood and Screwtape persistently worked to bring this man to damnation. However, this man prevailed in the end; he made it through by getting through each day.” I began to think that like Wormwood, I had to consistently work at calming myself down, but I also had to be like his Patient and overcome all of the dark thoughts that were crowding my mind. Reading taught me not to use my anxiety and depression as an excuse



to find fault with myself. It taught me to not to allow these illnesses to cripple me.

These feelings of doubt and fear that inhibited me were often magnified by my own criticisms. I hated myself for feeling the way I did, and especially for not being able to fight back. The books I read allowed me to get away from that. When I was reading, I did not feel lonely, or scared, or hopeless. Instead, I would get swept up in the action of the novels and all of those feelings would go away. My brain would stop the constant whirlwind of thoughts running through it and focus on the action of the story. Reading allowed me to feel calm in the midst of the chaos that took over my mind. However, the books I read were not just a haven from these overwhelming feelings. They also taught me to stop hating and judging myself for these feelings that were out of my control.

The clearest memory I have of my first real encounter with anxiety is also a memory of a realization that would change the way I viewed my anxiety. I had just spent days in my room staring despondently at the wall. In an attempt to make me feel better, my parents had bought me a first edition printing of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. My eyes were bleary from crying and from reading. My stomach felt sick. What made it worse was knowing that my discomfort was all in my head. In addition to feeling self-pity, I was mad at myself for letting my desolation get the best of me. I had believed that my response to my distress was a sign of weakness. But then J.R.R. Tolkien, or rather Gandalf said, “I will not say, do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.” Reading that line immediately lifted the suffocating haze of misery that had settled around me. I began to understand that I did not have to hate myself for feeling the way I did. It was then that I truly began to understand what books were capable of doing for me. They became more than just a

means of escape from my worry and tension. They taught me to work through my problems, rather than against them.

Many of my favorite books, especially *The Lord of the Rings* and *Pride and Prejudice*, are one anxiety attack away from crumbling completely. There is something comforting about that. They remind me that I have gotten through countless ordeals and have the tools to get through many more. As Eminem said, “I just can’t seem to get out of this slump/.../ But I need something to pull me out of this dump/.../I just can’t sit back and wallow/ in my own sorrow” (“Beautiful”). He summed up exactly what reading has done for me. Reading has gotten me through some of the hardest times of my life, while also teaching me that I already have everything I need to get through anything that comes my way.

Thao Nguyen

Thao is a majoring in Technical Writing. She likes big butts and she cannot lie, and planning fake weddings to soccer players (with big butts).



