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Biographical Sketch

Élan Potter is currently a graduate student in the MLA program at Henderson State University with plans to pursue a Ph.D. in English in the future. Professionally, she has significant experience in teaching English as a Second Language and currently works to assess the speaking and writing proficiency of English language learners for the international agency, Educational Testing Services. She has also had fiction and poetry published in such venues as *Eclectica Magazine* and *The Local Writers' Workshop Anthology*, an organization for which she once served as administrator. Her academic interests include an obsession with the Greco-Roman era, its literature, and animalistic transformations.

Raisin' the Dead

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Abstract:

Having taught Advanced Human Growth and Development for the past eight years, the students' paper and presentation is entitled "The Hero's Journey;" which seeks to capture the defining moments and experiences within their lives which helped to produce the teacher and counselor persona. Each semester, the students have asked me to write my "Hero's Journey." Several years ago, I wrote a series of essays which seek to chronicle the archetypes and teachings of childhood and adolescence. The latest contribution (Summer, 2009) is presented in its entirety.

The text of the essay:

Last Thursday afternoon, Buford, my thirteen pound silver-point tabby, started chattering (like only a cat can do) and moving from window to window to watch the show going on outside. When I stopped long enough to see what or who she was talking to, I witnessed a true miracle of nature.

As I followed Buford's gaze, I saw a baby bird unable to fly. As I went outside to see if I could help, the mother and daddy bird were flying strafing runs at me and at the ground. A mockingbird had perched himself upon the television antenna nearby providing color commentary of the incident as it unfolded.

The grounded baby bird had fallen from its nest in the eaves of my home. I had watched Dr. Young and Gail place even younger birds back into their nests with hopeful hearts that the impending disaster could be avoided, that the baby bird would not only survive but thrive. So, emblazoned with memory, a plan and an image beginning to form, I proceeded to get the ladder out of the garage, to see if I could reach the nest. Yep, one rung higher than made one comfortable and I would be able to assist Mother Nature in what I hoped would be an avoided mishap and, ultimately, a happy ending.

The baby bird was a barn swallow and looked a little like Red Skelton with his hair all askew as he portrayed Gertrude and Heathcliff, the two seagulls. In fact, now that I think about it, the baby bird had that bewildered Gertrude and Heathcliff look.

I caught Heathcliff on my first attempt and placed him back on the ground, relatively sure that I could catch him again, if necessary. He seemed addled and bewildered and quite possibly injured. I retrieved an old Easter basket from the garage and placed Heathcliff into it. He jumped out as I was attempting to climb the ladder. I realized that I would have to place one hand over the top of the bucket to keep Heathcliff within his enclosure as his strength and fear seemed to grow with each moment.

As I reached the highest rung, I felt for Heathcliff and he was most agitated. In the tussle that ensued, I found myself holding him by his legs as he attempted to fly away. Afraid of injuring Heathcliff further and, with the realization that release was the only option, I let go of his legs.

His large graceful wings came to life and he floated gently and unaided to the ground. Upon his startled landing, he seemed quite unsure of how to reposition his wings post solo flight; looking as if they were stuck in the open, flight position. With a flick of his newly discovered wingtips, his wings assumed their preflight position. Well, he was really enlivened now, walking a little taller, a little prouder, and with a knowing look.

As I proceeded to chase him and try one last time to place him in the nest, he was really brave and strong just like a fighter pilot who had faced and vanquished the enemy. He ran from me this time while waving his wings in defiance. I thought, "I taught him to fly." I taught Heathcliff to fly.

I pursued him all over the yard, into the fence row, backed off and then saw him take flight and hop and glide a short distance, getting braver and more skillful with each attempt. In moments, as if in a dream, he was gone. I was filled with parental pride and that profound sense of life purpose that comes with trying to assist Mother Nature in all of her many forms and intricacies.

This episode put me in mind of a childhood memory centered on resuscitating birds that had drowned in our watering trough, specially made for the horses and the few head of cattle that were housed in the backyard of our store, Brown's Grocery & Station. When Daddy bought new cattle (at the sale barn or from a neighbor) he usually housed them in the "two acre patch" that was bounded by the family backyard to the north and by Cale Road to the south.

The old water trough was made by Mr. Cliff White for just this purpose. The welding beads were perfect and the weld was seamless, the standard of Mr. Cliff's workmanship. It was five sheets of sheet metal, probably iron, welded together. It was about a yard high on all sides, a perfect cube without a top, so that it could be filled daily for the livestock. I was just a little taller than the water trough and five years old at the time.

Birds would try to perch on the trough and, in their attempt to slake their thirst, many would fall in. When I would find them, I would tell Daddy. His reply was always the same. "Well, pull them out of the water, Baby, and place them on that table near the backdoor and gate and I bet when they get dry, they will be just fine." In his attempt to console my sadness at the death of the birds, this plan seemed to pacify me. Many days, I did as directed and returned later in the day to find that they had "flown away." I was a healer from a young age.

Now let us fast forward about three years and I am about eight years of age. Daddy's sister, Aunt Irene and her young daughter, Cousin Pam had moved from Chicago after the death of her husband, Uncle Woodrow Young. They lived in the rent house right next to the store and our house that had served as a safe haven to include several renters and displaced family members across time. Granny, Uncle Loyd, the Farrar's, the Thome family, and even the Eldon Dillard Family had lived there when I was quite young.

It's summer time, and Aunt Irene and Pam have Yankee friends visiting from up North. There is a twelve year old boy named Jimmy, who is quite taken with Daddy, Mother, and me. I think he probably really only understood every other word of the Southern dialect, scored with the rich cadence which we spoke fluently. Jimmy was enamored all the same.

This particular afternoon, Jimmy and I are sitting near Daddy (behind the store counter) as he is telling tales; tailor-made for Jimmy, that Yankee boy. True to my family tradition, I begin to regale Jimmy with the tale of my ability to resurrect dead birds. Daddy gets this really funny look on his face.

Daddy interrupts my story to tell me "Those birds were dead, Baby," and "when you went back into the house, I threw them across the back fence." My horrified reply was "Huh Ugh, Daddy! I resurrected those birds and they flew away." Daddy made his statement again. My reply was "NO, Daddy!"

As his eyes softened and his voice lowered, Daddy reminded me of how heartbroken I had been when I found the birds floating in the water trough. His kind explanation was that he had told me the tale so I wouldn't be so hurt, knowing that in time, he would tell me the truth. He saw it as a loving gesture of protection, not intended to hurt or harm the baby.

Lying was not permitted in my family and even then I realized he had used the omission of truth for my good until I was able to know and understand the truth and thereby to be made free. Not only were Daddy and Mother aware of Holy Scripture, they lived it daily in front of me; what a legacy and treasure.

At this exact moment, Jimmy decides to ask about the chewing tobacco that he has watched Daddy consume. With present day-descendents of the War Between the States, a.k.a. the Civil War, seated opposite each other and in my presence, Daddy asks Jimmy if he would he like to try some. With an enthusiastic "Yes Sir and Yippee!" from Jimmy, Daddy rises to get a twist of Bull Durham.

It was at this exact moment that I decided to go back into the house and visit with Mama. I could see the clouds beginning to gather for our Yankee friend, Jimmy.

As Daddy told the story for years, here is the rest of that fateful incident entitled "Chewing Tobacco for the Yankee Boy".

Now, Daddy chewed Red Man and Beechnut in the soft pouches. He had been raised on Bull Durham plug tobacco. The strongest we carried in the store was a twist of tobacco made by Bull Durham. He kept these twists for several of the older gentlemen in the community who just swore by it.

Daddy was retrieving the infamous Twist, when I went to tell Mother. Mother just shook her head and suggested that we pray Daddy doesn't get the daylights beat out of him at the hands of Mr. Herschel, Jimmy's dad, for what he is about to do to that poor Yankee boy.

Like spectators drawn to witness the fate of the Christians, the Gladiators, and the Lions, I walked back to the doorway which separated our home from the store. I witnessed Daddy saying to Jimmy, "Chew it up, Son," and, with even more encouragement, like "It's bread."

And with those fateful words spoken, I watched Jimmy gingerly continue to chew the wad of tobacco growing larger with each movement. I witnessed the entire lump of tobacco travel down Jimmy's small throat.

Daddy's immediate and stunned reply was "No, Son, I didn't mean for you to swallow it!" Trying to maintain some semblance of his budding manhood in the presence of his newest male role model, Jimmy bravely assured Daddy that he was fine. He was not.

According to Granny's report the next morning, Jimmy had thrown up all night long. Granny lived in the pink Jim Walter rent house, out behind where Aunt Irene and Pam lived. Mr. Herschel and Jimmy stayed with Granny and Uncle Loyd to protect the chastity and honor of Aunt Irene and Cousin Pam, respectively, as well as to respect the sensibilities of Mother and Granny. She had been awakened at about midnight to the sounds of retching coming from the bathroom and had done what she could way into the morning to alleviate Jimmy's suffering while the tobacco poisoning ran its course.

The rest of the story...

As I remember, Jimmy's dad, Mr. Herschel, did come to visit with Daddy that fateful morning. Somehow, with Southern wit laced heavily with charm, and bolstered by Mother's prayers, Daddy escaped the righteous and well deserved thrashing that Mother and I just knew was coming at the hands of Mr. Herschel. With the sound thrashing averted, I even remember them sharing a highball and laughing about it like old friends as evening approached.

When Jimmy tried to join the menfolk that evening, it was permitted and he was even invited to share his first sip of Jack Daniels' Black Label. Standing between Mr. Herschel and Daddy, he sipped first from Daddy's glass and then from Mr. Herschel's. From that moment on, Daddy addressed Jimmy as Jim and he became a living soul, walking a little taller, a little prouder and with a knowing look.

Daddy continued to get letters and pictures from Jim until Daddy's death in 1988. Each Father's Day, Daddy received a case of Redman and on his birthday each year, Daddy received a fifth of JD Black, compliments of Jim. Daddy was a good daddy to all who needed him.

Meanwhile, back at the farmhouse, as I watched Heathcliff use the skills of his birthright, his training, and life experience, I thought that I've helped birds all my life; real and imaginary.

Daddy witnessed my first attempts at being a healer. He taught me to be a helper to Mother Nature with every opportunity that presents itself. Shakespeare wrote that "Any interaction with Mother Nature and the moment is Divine." Jung wrote that "Nature is archetypal, making the interaction larger than life."

In my professional life, I am charged with the teaching and training of School and Clinical Mental Health Counselors. It's kind of like teaching a bird a fly, roots and wings.

Sometimes, many times, in trying to live their lives (even after graduation), students or former students are grounded and injured. Most will find their way(s) back home and ask for the help that they need. "The mark of an educated person is to know when to ask for help" to quote one of my favorite mentors, colleagues, and friends, Dr. Charles Weiner.

You do what you can to alleviate their suffering during their addled and bewildered state(s) as they discover how to reposition their wings post solo flight. You even hope that they will learn the process that they might teach their own hatchlings one day. Ah, the similarities of parenthood, whether we be barn swallows or humans.

Sometimes you may even have to resurrect the dead or know what to do about an acute case of tobacco poisoning. Thanks to Daddy, Mother, and the memories of childhood, I am prepared for the job.

I'll end with one of my favorite Henry David Thoreau quotes: "The natural world is but a canvas for our imaginations."

As always,
Linda~

P. S. Did I tell you that I can "resurrect the dead"... L~

Biographical Sketch

Linda G. (Brown) English is a native of Prescott, Arkansas. She taught for twelve years within the public schools of southwest Arkansas before running away from home to pursue her doctorate and return to her alma mater, Henderson State University, to teach. Currently, Linda is an Associate Professor of Counselor Education in the Teachers College of her beloved Henderson.

Kmart: A Capstone Case

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Kmart's collapse into bankruptcy in early 2002 provides useful discussion for a capstone course. Kmart had a host of problems that cover many business topics. It had marketing issues, supply chain problems, issues with productivity, information technology gaffs, staffing and ethical issues. Although these issues are interrelated, we have attempted to separate and summarize them here. Many of these problems can be found in the financial ratios and financial statements from that period, making it an interesting case for financial discussion as well.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1962 saw the beginnings of Target, Wal-Mart, Woolco, and Kmart. Since Kmart started from a pre-existing retail establishment, it had advantages of corporate backing and experience that Sam Walton of Wal-Mart did not have [Belsie, 2002]. Given this competitive advantage, one would expect to find that Kmart had excelled. Instead, Kmart stockholders endured decades of dismal results which found