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Written in Stone

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WRITTEN IN STONE

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree

Bachelor of Arts in News/Editorial Journalism with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Michelle Day

* * * * *

Western Kentucky University

2011

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ABSTRACT

John Peter Zenger, Elijah Lovejoy, Gordon Parks, Walter Winchell and Katherine Graham were five famous journalists who impacted the industry in enduring ways. Whether writers, publishers or a photographer, these storytellers have had their stories told countless times over many years. This project seeks to combine journalistic research with a personal experiment in creative writing. Each chapter consists of story about one of the journalists, told either from their own perspective or someone else's. Each piece should be considered historical fiction — not nonfiction — but the overall message and basic facts are true. Each story is different but reflects an overarching theme — that notable journalism often requires personal sacrifices and can even result in destroying the journalist. Still, it is evident that these five great people dealt with the sacrifice because of passion for their industry.

Keywords: John Peter Zenger, Elijah Lovejoy, Gordon Parks, Walter Winchell, Katherine Graham, historical fiction

Dedicated to my friends and family and journalists everywhere.

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Major Field: News/Editorial Journalism

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PRESENTATIONS

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FOREWORD

A personal experiment, fulfilling experience

“Fiction reveals the truth that reality obscures.” —Jessamyn West

Topic

Writers like Jessamyn West, Ernest Hemingway and countless others claim that the basis of good fiction is truth. How can these reputable writers claim that fiction is truer than reality? The argument goes that following the facts to a tee can present a good history lesson, but it won't necessarily present the *essence* of people or events. Fascination with this topic formed the foundation of a personal experiment, a maiden journey into creative writing.

Question

Quizzical eyes turned my way when I explained that my thesis is a creative writing project, rather than a purely journalistic one. I had juggled the idea of extensive project stories in various storytelling media and even started some thesis proposals with just that kind of project in mind. It would have fit in perfectly with my major. But one day, I read the above quote, and an idea hit me: I could write individual short stories about five famous journalists. The more I considered that idea, the more I knew that's what I wanted to do.

In four years, I've learned the conventions of journalistic writing but haven't been pushed to expand my literary writing skills. A creative writing thesis appealed to me as a challenge that could stretch me as a writer. I would be exercising the same muscle a

different way, I thought. Could a creative writing endeavor improve my journalistic writing?

Methodology

Each of my story subjects is so well known that it would have been easy to look up the facts of their lives and write a standard report about them. I wanted to do something different — to find a greater truth within the facts of their lives. So I wrote short stories.

Because I had never written fiction before (maybe a piece here or there before college), I compensated for my insecurity by doing more of what I am confident in — my research skills. As a journalist, much of what I do is research, whether on the Web or through interviews or in books. I spent the largest chunk of my time on researching these journalists before I wrote about them, whether that meant sifting through entire websites, 700-page books or a lot of shorter articles. After I gleaned the hard biographical facts, I looked for things they had written, or recordings of them speaking, or their published works. Those items helped me understand how they spoke and thought and who they were perhaps even more than biographical details did.

As all of these subjects have different personalities and come from different time periods and backgrounds, I couldn't tell all of their stories the same way. So I experimented with form, because I intended this project to be somewhat of an experiment anyway. For example, the structure of Walter Winchell's chapter is reminiscent of an inverted pyramid, a typical journalism term that also symbolically represents the slope of demise from importance to near oblivion. With other chapters, I chose to be more straightforward. The chapter on John Peter Zenger is a traditional structure with a

third-person omniscient point of view. Still, that chapter is told from the perspective of Zenger's lawyer for a reason. Zenger's contribution to journalism was mainly one decision, and the other pieces fell into place around him.

I struggled a lot with writer's block during this project, largely because I was so intimidated by the idea of fiction writing. Rather than remain frustrated, I chose again to do more research. I studied the biology behind creativity and methods for manipulating it to avoid or overcome writer's block. This often included finding the right sensory environment for writing (usually my front porch or comfy couch with hot tea at hand). It also included a lot of positive self-talk to counteract feelings of incompetence. This struggle and my solution are the topic of my research paper for this project (see AFTERWORD, page 35).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, I was looking for a challenge — and I got it. When writing an article in journalism in the past, I didn't do a lot of rewriting (though I always of course go through a normal editing process). Creative writing was different. I can't count the number of times I rewrote entire pages or chapters for this project.

But the more I tried, the less intimidated I was with fiction writing. Backed with solid research, I eventually cranked out chapter after chapter, doing dances of joy after the last period in each last paragraph. And this fulfilling journey of perseverance improved my main craft. I realized how frequently on journalism projects I let myself off easy on the writing portion rather than using my literary knowledge to add a degree of beauty to the truth of my writing. For my thesis, I was always questioning the best way to present a given subject, the best word or literary technique to show who they were, not

just what they did. That principle applies well to journalism. Now, when writing articles, I spend more time crafting the right words to tell nonfiction stories. I hope future practice will enrich my journalism even more.

To me, the history lessons in the following pages were inspiring tales of personal sacrifice and working for the greater good, often at a high risk. Even in Walter Winchell's case — the tale of a fallen hero — I saw a man who suffered for things he believed in, though he got caught up in the fame. In all, the chance to study some of the legends of my profession was incredibly fulfilling, as was the chance to tell their impressive stories in a different way. My words here won't last, but their legacies are written in stone.

Thank you.

Michelle

CHAPTER 1

Red

Gordon Parks became more than a famous photographer. He blended into the worlds of writing, composing and film, directing movies such as Shaft. Throughout his life, he tried to maintain compassion for his subjects in journalism projects, promoting to others that it is best to be a human first, a journalist second.

Parks once worked on a long-term project about the Midtowners gang in Harlem. During that time, he took one of his most famous pictures — a portrait of Midtowners leader Red Jackson standing guard at a window after running from a rival gang. Parks ran into Red in New York years after he was done with his project. Red thanked Gordon for his former work and asked him to go back to Harlem. Red wanted Gordon to help those whose adolescent lives were as violent as Red's had been.

Gordon promised he would.

* * *

Red. It was everywhere.

Red lips. Red dress. Red shoes.

Red fire.

Red lights flashing on top of a police car.

Red fluid flowing from a 16-year-old stomach, chest and head.

The burning color had become the theme of Gordon Parks' existence, like an artist had painted broad strokes of it into both of his lives — his life as a fashion photographer and his life as a photojournalist. And those strokes were flowing together seamlessly all the time.

Gordon looked at the tall, blond model in front of him. He looked at her curvy frame draped in the latest, most fashionable version of a red dress. He looked at how the dress complemented her body and how her red shoes and red scarf would complement the knee-length satin fabric. He noted how all of these things, when set against a neutral background and lit correctly, would make the color pop, make it seem sexier and make the dress more enticing.

But Gordon had a filter on his internal lens. The flow of the model's dress ran in the same direction that the blood of a young gang member ran away from his limp body, finally escaping that life of violence. Images of dead young men, slain during one of countless conflicts, were before him, like an endless, subconscious picture story popping in and out of view with each flash.

His editor had given him a lot of freedom in his work ever since hiring him in 1944. Alexander Liberman trusted Gordon to portray models and not let his work with *Life* interfere with the needs of the designers and advertisers that kept *Vogue* going. The arrangement worked out nicely. Photo shoots by day, crime stories by night.

A few more frames, he thought. A few more frames then back to work.

Gordon was fortunate that day to have good weather. It was sunny, but not so bright that the prints would be blown out. And there was a slight breeze, so the scarf

flowed with the wind's changing moods. That would make the whole outfit seem even more inviting, more carefree, the way people really wanted to feel.

Gordon loved fashion photography. He loved the escape of viewing something beautiful about life. In the controlled environment of a set, he knew what to expect. He could manipulate the light to illuminate or darken shadows, or to highlight a model's particularly interesting facial features. His visual brain could pick out which background colors would best work with or challenge the colors of the dresses or hats or shoes or coats or purses that would decorate the pages in the next issue of *Vogue*.

But this — the elegant extravagance of perfumed sets that was a manifestation of the dazzling life of the elite — was a far cry from the horrors of the less privileged life.

"And one more..." Snap. "Okay, all done."

"Got some good frames? I want that model looking like Aphrodite," Liberman shouted.

"Aphrodite?" Gordon said, laughing.

"Yeah. Red is the color of love, after all."

Gordon grunted and stroked his graying hair. Funny. He hadn't thought of red as the color of love since he started following the Midtowners gang in Harlem.

Gordon loved New York. His camera had taken him a long way from his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas, where there was so much racism that his mother insisted he move to his sister's home in Minnesota. The far-reaching arm of racism affected him even in the far north, but instead of keeping him down, it gave him inspiration. Gordon smiled and pulled at his thick mustache as he remembered his white teacher advising him not to bother with college, because he would just be wasting his family's money. If he

finished high school, he could find a good job as a porter someday, or perhaps clean rich people's houses, but nothing more. She'd said it smiling, thinking she was doing the black kids in her class a favor by telling them what they could expect from their lives. But now, Gordon was the first black photographer for *Life Magazine*. He'd traveled to Paris for fashion week and did crime stories for one of the most famous magazines in the world, but he never finished high school.

Gordon's fondest memory from his teenage years wasn't in a classroom, where he ignored the ignorant chatter of classmates about his appearance and endured the "help" of teachers like Miss McClintock. He'd dropped out of high school by 16 and found himself living meal to meal, odd job to odd job. One day, on a train on his way to work (he was working as a porter on a train), his eyes locked on a magazine left by some rushed passenger. The magazine was open to a series of pictures documenting the plight of immigrants and their dangerous working conditions. Gordon studied the slouching stances and forlorn faces of the workers, whose dirty, dry and damaged skin made him cringe. Awe filled his face. To be sure, he was entranced by the story, stricken with sympathy for the afflicted immigrants. But the admiration that widened his eyes was for the skill of the storyteller who had been able to capture those images with nothing more than a small black box and some film. Gordon held in his hands the proof that there was something very wrong with the world and that the hope that people would see that story and do something about it.

And that was it. He knew in that moment, at 16, what his purpose was. He wanted to make pictures. So he bought a camera, his weapon against injustice.

The wrinkles on Gordon's forehead and the lightening of his curly hair signified that he wasn't 16 anymore. But because he was around the teenagers of the Midtowners gang so much, he'd been reliving his younger years more often. Their lives were all about surviving, just as much as his was, and they had weapons of their own. But their shots could kill people.

Gordon turned in his prints and walked out of the *Vogue* office into the waning early evening sunlight. He hurried along to meet Red Jackson, the Midtowners' fearless leader. Soon, he saw Red in front of him. Gordon smiled and lifted his hand in the usual greeting, and Red did the same. But the closer Gordon got to the casually-dressed teenager, the more Red's demeanor confirmed that he didn't have any good news to share.

"It's Harvey," said the young, husky voice. "Harvey... he, uh..." A long pause. A sigh. "He's gone."

Gordon matched Red's sigh and posture. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah." Red pulled out a cigarette slowly and lit it before speaking again. "We're going to the morgue to get him if you want to go."

"You sure? I don't want to be —"

Red cut him off with a shake of his head. "It's okay, man. You're cool. Harvey liked you, and he deserves for someone... for there to be a record that his life mattered to people."

Gordon nodded, looking straight at Red's face, though Red was looking at the ground. A few more puffs of the cigarette and Red threw it on the ground.

"Meet you there in about an hour. I got a few things to take care of."

"Okay."

"And Gordon? Travel light." He patted the .45 automatic in his pocket out of habit. "We might have to run."

Gordon was still thinking about that warning when he pulled up to the morgue. He took a deep breath before sliding the gear shift into park. Gordon the photographer was walking into a building where he was sure to capture a powerful moment inside a small, black box. Gordon the human being felt intrusive. He'd come to know these young men and loved their stories, as much as it hurt him to hear their metropolitan war tales. Opening the door with his camera at his side, he meshed heart and mind together, determined to show with sensitivity a side of the city the rich, white majority never wanted to see.

The looks on the mourners' faces were solemn, yet there was a hint of acceptance. Carrying a weapon couldn't save them from the weapons others carried. So he picked up his own small, well-worn weapon and shot them, hoping the resulting pictures could change something. Maybe someone would see these faces in front of him and finally understand — understand the pain and danger these kids faced not far from the classy streets of Manhattan, the very place where high-fashion boutiques graced the roads and millionaires popped in and out of their high rise apartments.

Gordon wondered what compelling story could be told without pouring a piece of one's soul into the story. Robotic indifference did no justice to the people he was documenting. The weapons they shot with were the apathetic ones. A gun can take a life at any minute with no more than mechanical obedience. But Gordon's weapon combined thought and empathy to (he hoped) undo some of the damage only cold hard, metal could inflict.

The backbone of the American press was free speech, but Harvey had no voice anymore. So Gordon took his picture to speak for him. That was why he knew at 16 that he wanted spend his life learning the language of images. And he hoped this last picture of Harvey would scream.

Red glanced over his shoulder almost thoughtlessly from his spot near Harvey's body. He gave the window a nod before turning back toward his lost friend, a signal to make sure someone was on the lookout.

Several of the gang members reached instinctively for the pockets that held their weapons. Others stole their own glances toward the window, searching the last bits of daylight for any sign of an enemy. Even death wasn't enough in this world they lived in. You had to come out the winner, tougher, and winning meant your enemy had one less name on the roll sheet.

The air in the Harlem sky had an orange-red filter. A few steps outside with Harvey's casket, and the group was swimming in it. The cool evening air felt warmer on Gordon's skin as he snapped each shot, and his fingers started to sweat. But he kept snapping. Harvey didn't have to be just a number. Someone would look at these pictures and remember him.

Snap. Snap.

In Gordon's frame, the gang members' eyes were somber but alert. Red, with his practiced stoic stare, looked the most unaffected, the most in the moment. He was certainly scanning, checking his periphery, but he was giving his lost friend the attention and mourning he deserved.

Snap. Snap.

No tears dropped from his face as they loaded Harvey into the car. It didn't seem like he was looking at anything. He was just looking, his lean frame moving gracefully on beat with the pulse of the moment, a slow sad song of memory for another friend lost. The setting sun behind the scene bowed its head too in solemn acknowledgment. The otherwise empty street showed a respectful moment of silence to the group. A soft wind floated a cloud of soft dust up to tickle Red's face, but he didn't move.

Snap. Snap.

The people in his frame were still now. They waited for the signal for their next move. Red patted the hood of the car and dropped his head in the most obvious show of emotion Gordon had seen in the entire process. His hand lingered on the car as if it were detached from his body while he started to turn — and a black car spun on its wheels down the street.

Time to run.

They flew.

Being around these boys made Gordon absorb their ability to adjust to any situation, usually the arrival of an unwanted guest. Light feet were essential tools in their belts. He slid in the car between two heavily-breathing teenagers. And he kept snapping.

Gordon could only hope his frames were in focus. Later, he would have to look through the car windows in his outtakes to figure out where they had been. There were sharp turns, excited chatter, a few quick popping noises, and not much else that registered.

"Right here! Right here! Turn!"

"Herbie, you got me covered back there?"

"Almost there. Calm the fuck down, and stop yelling."

Around corners and down alleys, they soared in a flood of popping and screeching and screamed commands and silenced gasps. Gordon kept his head down and his camera up as the Midtowners turned on a dollar worth of dimes and spent more than nine lives dodging unfriendly fire.

"No way they'll follow us here."

"Drive around to make sure."

"But Red—"

"Do it! You want us all to get shot?"

At some point, they stopped. The whole group trotted, half hunched over, to the safe house, the place where they could wait out the night..

The hide-out was musty and dirty, but it was safe. The sole window looked right out onto the street, a perfect lookout. The glass was opaque with caked-on dirt, so Red took the end of his gun and broke part of it in order to see, and in case he needed to use the gun. The gang members all stood around, waiting and watching, some chattering, others quietly cleaning their guns or fidgeting with the scraps of paper on the ground. Red, cool as always, lifted a cigarette to his mouth and asked for a light. He might have been the only one to see his hand shake as he took the lighter.

He was a hardened criminal, though only a teenager. He would pull the trigger in an instant on someone at the right distance from the wrong side of town. Who knew if he would be alive next week? How many outside of this community would know what had happened or remember his story in years to come? His violent lifestyle was something the

high-fashion world couldn't fathom enduring. Models smoked all the time on set, but the noticeable similarities between them and Red stopped at their tobacco company.

Red flicked the cigarette through the hole in the window and shifted the .45 in his front pocket.

For a minute, the whole scene looked to Gordon like little boys playing in a tree house, defending it from the neighbor's kids. The youthfulness hiding under the fear and anger was still visible, and the way they acted around each other reminded him of when he played with his brothers and sisters as a child. They joked around and pushed each other and at all times tried to be cool and tough.

Red stood apart from the others at the window, turning only periodically from his post to tease one of his brothers. The smile on his face, though it disappeared when he turned back around, was a small glimpse through the hardness of his demeanor. Gordon snapped just one more image of the event and caught him in the transition stage between teenage boy and gang leader. He was pensive, yes, but still a teenager, and Gordon didn't know anyone who would have been afraid of him just then. To Gordon, he looked human, caught in the common struggle between life as it is and life as he would like it to be. He hoped to God he would never have to attend Red's funeral, at least not for a long time. But if he did, he would want this image of him standing at the window in the hide out to be near the casket. Gordon didn't think anyone saw Red the way his camera did — a human and a survivor. Young but still with a hint of underlying softness, able to go with life's ever-changing flow, just like a red scarf blowing in the wind.

CHAPTER 2

Choice

As publisher of the New York Weekly Journal, John Peter Zenger was faced with a tough decision: whether to publish editorials about New York Governor William Cosby. For two months, he printed scathing editorials until Cosby finally had enough. In what is still known as a brilliant defense, Andrew Hamilton convinced a jury to go against New York judges and Cosby to rule that Zenger was innocent, because the material he printed was true.

It is Hamilton who often comes off as the hero of the landmark case. But Zenger's decision to publish the editorials ignited the controversy that would redefine libel law. He made a choice, and the pieces fell in around him. More than 50 years after the 1935 ruling, the principles Zenger and Hamilton defended would be embedded in the First Amendment of the Constitution to protect free speech.

* * *

"...for printing and publishing several seditious libels dispersed throughout his journals or newspapers, entitled *The New York Weekly Journal*; as having in them many things tending to raise factions and tumults among the people of this Province, inflaming their minds with contempt of His Majesty's government, and greatly disturbing the peace thereof."

Andrew Hamilton analyzed the words methodically in his mind. He read warrant again, and again, and again, looking for any legal loopholes, like he would for any of his cases as a Philadelphia lawyer. On this bench warrant was proof that another New Yorker

had fallen victim to Governor Cosby's legal dominance. John Peter Zenger was in jail facing trial only for printing what he knew to be verifiably accurate — that Governor Cosby was damaging the public liberty.

“Looks like that Zenger fellow is in quite a lot of trouble,” said Benjamin Smith, Hamilton's associate. “Did you hear that his two lawyers have already been disbarred for criticizing the court? Who will want to take up his defense with such foreboding developments?”

Hamilton smiled. “It would have to be someone willing to risk his legal practice.”

“Quite true.”

“Someone confident and competent enough to take on His Majesty's appointee.”

“Yes, but even then, the law makes no ambiguous statements about it. Libel is libel, whether true or not. How can even the most competent lawyer argue against the unwavering permanence of the law?”

Hamilton set down the bench warrant and leaned back in his padded chair behind his oak desk, picturing John Zenger sitting in his jail cell. The cell would be cramped, the air stagnant. He would have little to occupy his time other than contemplating the seriousness of his fate. The governor, who could replace state chief justices on a whim, was a formidable opponent indeed.

Smith dragged on as Hamilton thought of these things. “...and to think that *his wife* is now charged with keeping the *Journal* alive and well — a woman in charge of the whole publishing business for the newspaper of the popular party. As if Zenger needs more agitation on his mind.”

When news of Zenger's arrest filtered through to Philadelphia, Hamilton had no doubt that the publisher of the *New York Weekly Journal* was being oppressed. It was wrongful imprisonment if anyone could be jailed for complaining of an injury, like the ones Cosby had subjected the entire population of the New York province to. He bent the legal system to his will to get his way, to get more money and prosecute those who tried to stop him from infringing on their God-given freedoms.

So Zenger had challenged him, choosing to publish for two months scathing and unforgiving editorials, candidly exposing Cosby's offenses to the public. As a lawyer, Hamilton was fascinated by the subsequent legal question. Should people be allowed to publicly criticize others for their offenses — as long as the criticisms are true — without facing legal repercussions for libel. The courts currently said no. But those were the same courts that Cosby effectively owned.

"Hamilton, are you asleep?" Smith said suddenly.

Hamilton looked him directly in the eyes without moving his hand from his chin.

"I'm going to take the case."

"You... are?"

"I'm going to take Zenger's case, I'm going to do it for free, and I'm going to win."

"You... but Hamilton, have some reason. Two lawyers have already been disbarred for going against New York's governor. He owns the courts. There's nothing you or anyone else can do but plead to His Majesty about the offenses and ask the governor be removed. Your career is too esteemed and too valuable to spend on a hopeless case."

Hamilton had been thinking about it all morning and was now quite sure what he was going to do. There was always risk; it was just more clearly defined in this case. Zenger, too, had known of Cosby's power and chosen to publish the details of dictatorship in spite of that knowledge. On the pages of the *Journal*, he willingly printed blasting commentary about a man with bottomless pockets and the law in his hands. But Zenger followed through on his commitment to the public knowledge and welfare anyway. And he was paying dearly for his high standards of truth and morals with little chance of reward for his sacrifices.

"Hamilton, it will not matter that what Zenger printed is true. The law is the law, and no man can change it save if he is in charge of the legal system."

Smith saw no way around the Cosby roadblock, but Hamilton did. Though the judges were sympathetic to Cosby, the people of New York were just like Zenger. They had grown tired of Cosby's tyranny and selfish power grabs. Cosby currently had the backing of the King of England, but the Magna Carta could back Zenger. It specifically said juries could limit the King's ability to control the life of an Englishman. So Hamilton did not have to convince the already corrupt legal system to see the light. He would appeal to a jury of colonists to protect one of their own.

"Think of your career. Pennsylvania attorney general, speaker of the state House of Representatives, much-acclaimed lawyer who anyone would want on their side, and anyone would fear coming against in a court of law. Would you throw that away on the case of a publisher who got a little carried away criticizing a greedy governor? Let some babbling young lawyer have his career destroyed instead!"

With a deep breath and a pensive sigh, Hamilton embraced the challenge. Smith was right. It would be a deadly move for most lawyers to go against such a powerful man. But Hamilton was sure he could depend on his wide-reaching reputation that would be harder to tatter than Zenger's previous lawyers. The democratic principle of holding leaders accountable would be the most important client he had ever had, just like Zenger probably thought printing those editorials would be some of the most important words ever to come across his press.

"Shall we have a meal, Smith," Hamilton said, cutting his associate off.

"Now Hamilton, I'm not —"

"The matter is closed. I'm taking the case."

"At least charge the man for your services. He's getting a more high-quality lawyer than he probably knows."

"I will defend him for free. Zenger has already paid dearly enough for protecting public liberties. How can I charge him to protect the freedoms I myself enjoy? Now, lets have a meal. I've made up my mind on this matter."

Flustered and mumbling, Smith stood, tripping on his chair on his way out the door.

Picking up his hat, Hamilton too stood, setting down the bench warrant in the center of his desk. Approaching his associate's confused mumbings, he mulled over the task ahead of him, convincing a jury of New Yorkers untrained in the law to change it.

CHAPTER 3

Name

At the height of his career, Walter Winchell was the voice heard across America, known for his rapid speech pattern and additions to the English language. To his tales of the rich and famous, he eventually added politics in his column and radio broadcast topics. He helped turn U.S. public opinion against Hitler, but went too far in his support of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who criminalized anyone with any ties to communist groups.

Winchell's celebrity was a slippery slope, and his popularity diminished by the 1960s. Despite his fall from favor, Winchell is still credited with inventing the gossip column used today and for inventing commonly used words like G-man and scam.

* * *

The whole world was my office and every dame and playboy in it was my source. With every shy stare and admiring attention I felt my reputation grow. It was quick. It wasn't easy — I sniffed out information like a bloodhound on a trail. I dished the dish and gabbed the gab that everyone wanted to hear. It was for the common man — it was for the hardworking family that deserved to know the truth about the dirty details and blessed events of the illicitly elite. The more they loved me the more they hated me. I channeled the celebrity of the sly senator — the booming businessman — the adored actress. Lives, candidly displayed across airwaves and newsprint to Mr. and Mrs. North and South America and all the ships at sea. I was famous and doing journalism no one wanted to do.

Journalism no one wanted me to do. I stood up to the powerful and became powerful myself. I was — I am — Walter Winchell.

And everyone knew me. It lasted more than 15 minutes — my fame. First it was a column. Then it was a broadcast. Then it was a room at the St. Moritz and any dame I wanted. It was endless nights at the club with the who's who and the what's what of New York City. Then it was reputation and money. The esteem of Roosevelt. The popularity to influence politics. It was more than a fame game. It was passion. It was all I wanted to do — what I would live away from June and my two kids for.

Even the hatred was worth it. In my time, I've seen the love-hate relationship between the famed and the unnamed. I know people envy the power of celebrity. I also know that sometimes on the way to the top you have to step on a few toes and make a few sacrifices. In the business of fame people get offended — but that's the nature of the beast. I knew both sides well. I came from lowly beginnings and climbed the ladder up to the voice heard in every American household. The American Dream. My American Dream.

So I knew want and I knew fame and I knew which was better. And yeah some people hated me. They called me a quack — unethical — a disgrace — a shame. But I don't regret what I've done no matter who tells me to.

What I did was say what needed to be said about the powerful and the corrupt and I did it with words no one has used before. I chronicled sordid lives and told stories the public salivated to hear.

They say my ethics kicked the bucket. They say I was wrong for getting involved in politics. They can say what they want.

My career is over but my reputation is far from dead.

When my life is over, on my lips will be:

No one can

touch my

name.

CHAPTER 4

Stand

By 1837, three of Elijah Lovejoy's presses had been destroyed. He had been printing anti-slavery editorials in his St. Louis Observer, and those articles incensed the pro-slavery whites in the area.

The son of a preacher and a seminary graduate himself, Lovejoy believed that slavery was inherently anti-Christian and fought fervently to convince others the same. But on Nov. 7, 1837, with a small group of supporters at a warehouse in Alton, Illinois, Lovejoy lost his fourth press and his life.

News of Lovejoy's death circulated throughout the country. Though tragic, his death gave steam to the abolitionist movement and inspired other journalists to take on slavery in their publications.

* * *

The angry mob has discovered my secret, leaving me with nothing but a prayer that my press — and I — will outlast their violent tempers. The trembling friends in the press building bring no comfort. They slouched with wide eyes and clenched their weapons in a half-aimed stance because they had nothing yet to aim at. As if a few guns will be enough to save us from a crowd of 30 incensed townspeople, should it be God's will we perish!

"Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me," I whisper. I clench my hands into fists and squeeze my eyes tighter to focus on the words. "I will fear no evil."

This, the lone structure on the street, stands protected only by the Mississippi River to the back of the building and the 20 men stationed in the various rooms; otherwise, the building is surrounded by no other houses, rows of open space, and a line of 30 angry townspeople that had gathered at about 10 o' clock this Wednesday evening.

I had not asked these men, my friends and coworkers, to follow me on this path. After the first threats against the Observer's office, I had taken all the credit for any editorial causing offense with the St. Louis slave owners. I had even agreed to move the paper's office to Alton, Illinois, a free state, thinking the abolition cause would meet with less resistance there. Alas, moving across the Mississippi was not enough. This, my fourth so-called Abolition Press, is surely doomed, and what else with it, I cannot say. The mob is not yet demanding my blood, but for how long can they persist in this crazed state without drastic action?

Will Gillman, one of the Observer's proprietors, suddenly makes a move toward the window. He has been looking more agitated than the others, and we are surprised by the strength of his voice as he addresses the townspeople.

"What do you want here?" he shouts through the window.

"The press!" answers William Carr, clearly the leader of the group, many of whom had just been belched into the streets from local drunkeries.

"You may not have it! We have no ill feelings toward any of you and should — WE SHOULD much regret to do any injury," he shouts above the erupting emotions.

"But — BUT! we are authorized — we ARE authorized by the mayor himself to defend our property and shall do so with our lives."

"And we will defend against this disease of abolitionism with our own lives," Carr says to the delight of his followers. Armed with stones, guns and pistols, they shift round the building. The crash of glass signaling the demise of several windows.

I must survive this onslaught. I have already lost three siblings and a father. My beloved mother — ah, it would break her. I flinch at the thought just as the first gunshots break through the air.

No screams signal that anyone is hurt, but there is still a round of return fire. I breathe a deep, shaky breath. "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

I can see some of the mob being carried away, and I initially feel relief that some of my attackers have been dealt punishment. But then the guilt hits. The Lord has commanded that we treat our neighbors as ourselves, and I cannot be happy at the sight of another's pain. Is that not why I joined the abolition cause in the first place? I had cringed, disgusted at the pro-slavery "Christians" and how they used the Bible to justify the abominable way they treat some of God's children. Our Lord taught tolerance, compassion. He said nothing to promote hatred, nothing to suggest that whipping and raping and murdering African slaves was for the betterment of the Kingdom.

Looking down, I see that the mob has dispersed to care for their injured. Can this be? Have we been spared for one night from the vengeance of the slave owners?

I remember the days when I was not obedient. During a dark time, for too long I forsook the religion of my childhood, rejected the same Bible I had been reading as a

child of only four. After moving to St. Louis, I had turned away from my father's legacy of good ministry and struggled with the temptations of the Midwestern world I had just become a part of. Though away from the faithful influence of my family, the Lord yet drew me back to himself when he brought religious revival to St. Louis. I remember the date — it was the 12th of February 1932, just five short years before this night. It was a cold day on which I was the warmest I had ever felt in my life. My pen almost flew out of my hands as I wrote to my mother, who I knew would burst with her own maternal joy. That former excitement has turned into calm joy.

I dwell on these things for only a minute. The mob is back.

"Burn them out! Burn them out!"

"Don't stop until the press is destroyed, and the slave-lovers with it!"

The crowd has returned with ladders and fire. News of the Mayor's arrival has come to my part of the building. He has brought a message from the mob — surrender the press and live. The Mayor is afraid. He has tried to command and persuade the men away, to abandon their violent cause and not injure the peace of the night, to return to their drunkeries and be merry. But he cannot dissuade their desperate mission. Gillman's response to the mayor is that we will not back down. It feels like one drop too many in the bucket.

Though many are clearly intoxicated, they still have enough wits to move to the side of the house without windows, so our defenses are further weakened. We will not be able to engage our attackers unless we leave the safety of the wooden walls now enveloping us.

The mob is learning of our refusal to back down, and they are not pleased. A cry of displeasure fills the air, signaling their willingness to react.

"Ladder! Get the ladder!"

"Shoot every damned Abolitionist as he leaves!"

I look up to the sky. A full moon, high in the sky. No cover of darkness is available to us if — when we must go outside and face the men. "Yea though I walk through—"

"Elijah! Help me," says Royal Weller.

The smell of smoke reaches my nose as I move. Down the stairs and through the back door we go, undetected by our enemies, pulses pumping and eyes wide. The townspeople are just now placing a torch in the hands of a boy — just a child — and sending him toward the ladder.

"Now's your chance, boy; do your part."

The boy did not look afraid at what he was told to do. He did not seem to be questioning the morality of such destruction of property or possibly of life. He too was caught up in the excitement that only the slavery issue could summon to such a high degree. The sound of crackling wood and the timber-flavored incense rushed around the whole scene, and the boy approached my building.

The Mississippi River is so close, yet too far away to be an ally. We cannot get enough buckets of water undetected to quench the fire's bloodlust. Perhaps I can swim the mighty river. I have always been a strong swimmer, nearly as long as I have been a strong reader. I remember splashing through the murky water of the pond near our home with my brothers, fighting off their claims that I had started too quickly in our most

recent contest. It was not the competition against them that I had longed for. It was pushing my own physical limits. I yearned to swim farther faster, to beat fatigue and conquer the deep pond's ominous reputation. If only tonight I could swim away from my persecutors...

We can hear the worried muttering upstairs. I cannot make out the exact words, but the sentiment is clear. They think all is lost and are afraid for their lives. They are wondering if this stand is worth the cost. They are wondering how long it will take for me to authorize a surrender. But I will not surrender, just like I would not let the water best my swimming abilities. My convictions will not let me yield to the angry, arrogant farmers with non-arable hearts. This is too important. God has called me to make a stand for righteousness, which slavery directly contradicts. If I give in now, if I succumb to the fatigue of constant social battle, will that not give power to such an evil system?

Why should I fear what mortal men can do to my earthly body? God has saved my soul. And so, though no other man in the house may stand behind me, I decide that I will not forsake the calling God gave me in my position of earthly authority. Should I keep my life tonight, it is a blessing. Should I lose it, it is a sweeter blessing.

"Ready, Weller?"

"Ready."

"Now!"

We sneak out to face the enemy, aiming to dismantle the ladder, and everything else is out of focus. I am moving toward it with no regard for the blurry figures moving in agitation around me. I am almost there, only a few steps away. But now I am close enough that something else comes into focus. A pile of lumber hides glowing pairs of

eyes illuminated by the fire in the crowd's hands. They are hiding by the door because it is our only means of counter attack.

I can now see two metal barrels protruding from the wood. The rifle and its operator are focused on me.

I am frozen by the chill both of the night air and the hatred aimed toward me. I hear Weller gasp behind me as he too realizes we are being stalked by a clever predator, like a lion hiding in the tall grass. I take a deep breath as I lock eyes with the gun-wielding farmer and his intent becomes clear. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

The moment suspended. The blood in my head reminds me of the sounds of the press at work. The moon acting as a spotlight, framing the inaction. I think only of swimming.

Then a slight movement. Then a click.

And a bang.

A pang in my stomach. A warm, wet sensation from the wound.

A vicious smile. Another bang. And another. And two more.

A scream of approval.

A scream of pain.

My God. I am shot. I am shot.

I want to escape. I turn and leave my attackers. The grass is beneath my hands and knees. How have I made it to the door? I cannot recall what I have done or seen in the last few moments as I open the unusually heavy door. Where is Weller? Is he still

outside? I cannot say. My vision is failing. I am midway up the stairs. How did I find the stairs? I must find my friends at the top.

I fight the searing pain with each drag of my legs and yank of my arms. I am leaving a trail of blood behind me — so much blood. I cannot see out of one eye, but I know when I have reached the second floor. I smell smoke and burning wood. I see frightened faces and opened mouths. And then they disappear as I fall. With a thump, my legs, then my torso, then my arms, then my head hits the floor, before cold, sweaty hands grab me tightly in fear.

"Elijah!" A million ghostly voices repeat my name.

I can only think of one thing to say.

"My —" Am I the one coughing? "My God. I am shot."

Time has become meaningless, and my vision is a blur of moving shadows and light.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...

Yea though I walk...

"Let them have the press. Elijah is dead. All is lost." I recognize Mr. Harned's voice. "Perhaps they will let us keep our lives if we let them keep the press."

...walk through the Valley...

...walk through the Valley of the Shadow...

"What is their reply? Will they still demand our lives too?"

"They will let us leave unmolested. Quickly! Get out, and let them have the building."

"Get out! Quickly!"

... *walk through the Valley...*

"What about the press?"

"Save yourself!"

...*through the Valley... the Valley...*

"What about Elijah?"

"Leave now!"

...*shadow...*

... *death.*

CHAPTER 5

Strength

Katherine Graham had a long career as both a reporter and publisher. Coming from a wealthy background and marriage, she always enjoyed elite social circles consisting of famous politicians, artists, poets and other well-known figures. After her husband's suicide, she took over as publisher of the Washington Post, which her father has resurrected from near oblivion and financial ruin. Graham identifies her husband's death and her acquisition of the post as a turning point, when she began to embrace herself as a powerful, capable woman.

As publisher of the Post, she oversaw the publication of articles by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward exposing the Watergate scandal. She also won a Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for her autobiography, "Personal History."

Graham died in 2001 at a business conference in Idaho for media professionals. According to colleague Mary McGrory, she "died as she lived, doing only what she would have seen as her duty."

* * *

My dearest Elizabeth,

Before I get to the meat of my letter, I will answer the first (and easier) question you posed to me in our last correspondence. The *Post* is doing well, though not without the usual ups and downs and reader complaints about this or that unfair editorial. The

Star is formidable competition and has scooped us several times lately. But in all, I think the competition is good for our reporters and readers. It certainly makes for interesting internal entertainment.

Meetings with the Board have lately made me think back to my first speech to them as head of the *Post*. I remember shaking all the way from the car to the meeting room and back. I remember all of the forlorn, pitying faces at the visitation just before. But the image I remember most vividly is the site of your strong hand on mine, my darling daughter. I could not have convincingly announced my plans to the Board had you not kept your wits while I lost mine. I'm sure your pain was no less acute, which is why it's with so much amazement I remember we practiced and practiced my speech on that gloomy day, as if it were the only concern on our minds. I'm proud to say that you have the pesky resilience of a Graham woman.

You have asked me why, right at the end, I took Phil back after he finally ended his escapades with Robin. After the humiliating, loud affair, the unreasonably emotional breakdowns, the manic depression and frightening confrontations, the embarrassing public spectacles and manipulation that he subjected me to, yes, I let him back in the house. I haven't given you a fair answer as to why, only because he was still your father, and I thought it best to keep such grim details away from my children.

Your father was disturbed and needed help no one could give him at the time. I couldn't turn away my husband, no matter what he did. I felt it was my responsibility, that this was "for worse" in my marriage vows. But even more than that, I felt that Phil had created me, and I didn't know what to do without him. When he was off on his escapades, I felt unsure of how to behave or what to do with myself. It isn't that your

father was giving me constant direction of every behavior, but he taught me to converse freely with anyone and whom to sit next to at dinner parties and how to build alliances with powerful people. I often looked to him for direction on what to do next. Deep down, I had to believe there was still hope that he would get better, and I really thought he would. I thought, if he was just with me, in a stable loving home, then our broken family could heal at least a few of the cracks and find peace.

Whatever my mental state during my marriage with your father, it wasn't really a question that I would keep the *Post* within the Meyer bloodline, not the hands of a manic-depressive son-in-law. I think the most important driving force in my decision to take over at the *Post* was my relationship with my own father, your grandfather. I wasn't so concerned with losing the *Post* itself — I didn't think I had the skill necessary to make the paper thrive. It was the fact that the man who so completely betrayed me might one day own the company that a most beloved father had poured time, sweat and equity into for years. It was the one concession I would not make to Phil as he was gallivanting with Robin all over the country, forcing her on our friends. Though I was no longer sure I could fight for our marriage, I would die before I shamed my father's prized accomplishment.

I won't recount the stories I've already told you about breaking into the boys club of the newspaper world after years as a doormat wife. I had to conduct mental surgery on myself to remove my doubts about my business acumen and news sense. Overcoming conglomeration of men who saw me first as Phil Graham's wife came second to the task of breaking that image down in myself. For years, I defined myself in terms of my

relationship to Phil, the gifted politician and businessman who had a direct line to the President. Then he was gone, and I had no one to direct me on how to behave.

With each step as publisher of *Post*, I learned to trust myself as a single woman and evolved my view of women's roles. All women have a right to a frame of reference other than that we were put on earth to catch a man, hold him, and please him. I have finally come to realize that, if women understood this and acted on it, things would be better for men as well as for women.

I don't mean to speak ill of your father, but I do hope you'll take this away from my experiences. My dream for you, is that you only continue being who you are — breathtakingly beautiful, endlessly kind and intelligent and unwaveringly strong.

Glad to hear your family is doing so well. Give them all my love. I'm afraid I probably won't be able to visit for some time, as has become apparent from a meeting with Ben Bradlee today. Of course, I can't divulge too many details yet, but the *Post* may be taking on the upper levels of the Nixon administration, which will take a lot of careful writing and editing. Not sure yet how the story will end up, but we have two capable reporters assigned.

Please write me again soon. I love hearing from you, though sometimes I not prompt in my response. I send the warmest thoughts your way.

All my love,

Kay

AFTERWORD

The Brain, Biology, and Beating Writer's Block

The practice of Yoga dates back at least 5,000 years to the Indus Valley in India. But the brain yoga that is writer's block likely predates that practice of exercise, breathing and meditation. Rather than inducing calm and balance, writer's block often leads to a frustrating search for release — the right words, the next step in the plot or a new character. In the midst of contorting their brains in search of literary inspiration, writers probably are not concerned with the biological causes of their frustration. But understanding the neurological components of writer's block — and how to manipulate them — could ease much of the frustration of those staring at an empty white page.

Writer's block was a particularly tricky problem for me while writing my thesis. Because I wasn't comfortable with fiction writing, feelings of incompetence often led to intense creative frustration. So, instead of remaining a victim and failing to produce a completed thesis, I did some research into potential cures for writer's block. The science behind the problem and techniques for fighting it gave me coping tools that any writer should be able to use too.

First, it's important to realize how much of the writing process is related to the neurology of the brain. The science behind creativity can be dizzying and inexact, and there is more to creativity than scientists have been able to study. But as neurologist and writer Alice Flaherty points out, there are basic principles that point to some biological

causes of writer's block. The brain's temporal lobes — which are mostly behind the ears — deal with sound processing, memory storage, emotional response, and language, among other things (Flaherty 22). Both temporal lobes interact with each other constantly, and with the frontal lobe, the part of your brain that controls judgment, initiation of action and movement (72). The temporal lobes also interact with the limbic system, which is involved in emotions, motivations and memory (43).

Flaherty says that it is these areas of your mind that control creativity and the desire to write (from a biological standpoint). That's because memory, emotions and writing are intertwined. She says the parts of our brains that stimulate vivid memories can also drive us to write, whether that's to have a concrete way to recall those memories or because we think expressing ourselves will bring some kind of healing (43). In other words, as some parts of the brain store memories and control emotional responses to them, other parts of the brain are controlling the physical action and motivation to write it down.

Flaherty points out that the same processes that induce writing can also inhibit it, depending on the circumstances. In the introduction to her book *The Midnight Disease*, she points out that understanding biological causes of writer's block make it a more surmountable problem, since scientists can then study practical ways to avoid it (2). But perhaps more beneficial is that understanding the biology makes writer's block *seem* like a more surmountable problem. Feeling the weight of a seemingly impossible writing task depresses writing ability (32). Flaherty suggests that if there are definable scientific concepts for the initiation of creativity — though they might not explain the whole process — the problem becomes less intimidating.

Karen Peterson, a psychologist and writer, explains another approach to analyzing the same issues. She focuses on the relationship between the left and right sides of the brain. The left brain is more logical and adult-like with a “just do it” attitude (99). Conversely, the right brain is more emotional, focused on the senses and childlike with a “just say no” attitude. So, Peterson says that when the left brain tells us to just grow up and write already, the right brain “stamps its foot and says, ‘No’” (99). And, the right side of the brain is the command center for the fight-or-flight anxiety response (26). So try as the left brain might to encourage writing, the right side can simply become too anxious and choose to “freeze” (26).

There are plenty of theories about which characteristic of brain biology cause writer’s block, but as both Flaherty and Peterson point out, more writers are concerned with how to actually overcome the frustration. Fortunately, science lessons from both authors and many other seasoned writers offer similar pieces of advice for those who find themselves forced into brain yoga.

One potential solution is regular yoga – or any other form of exercise. Both authors point out that physical activity allows writers to focus on something positive — such as breathing and meditation — instead of the daunting task ahead of them. Running, walking, hiking, aerobics, etc. all counteract the negative processes that tell writers that trying is fruitless (Peterson, 114).

Along the same lines, Peterson suggests several ways to inject other positive sensory stimuli into the writing process. Those stimuli can be simple, such as sitting in a pleasant smelling room with aesthetically pleasing décor. It could be drinking herbal tea or having a healthy, non-sugary snack. Peterson said that the right sensory elements will

promote positive activity in the right side of the brain, so that it does not fight the task-oriented left side.

Because the brain's memory and writing faculties are so intertwined, remembering and focusing on personal life experiences can ease writer's block (Flaherty 61). Peterson claims that the more details one can remember, the more fuel the brain has to come up with something creative. So, keep a journal and focus on the sensory details of life, such as the cologne a professor wears, or how the sun felt on the day of a big sporting event.

Many successful authors such as Ernest Hemingway have suggested ending a writing session while ideas are still flowing freely. It makes the prospect of starting up again less daunting because the writer knows he or she has somewhere to start the next day and may even be excited about it. New Mexico-based writer Steven Kotler advocates this practice for all writers, saying that it allows the brain's pattern recognition system to engage, meaning your brain has something to play around with ("Overcoming," 1). Allowing your brain to follow tangents in the initial writing process works the same way, he says. It gives your creative faculties something to feed off of, making writing less menacing than if no ideas at all were coming to mind.

Kotler, in addition to Flaherty and Peterson, also suggests not waiting until close to approaching deadlines to start writing. The extra pressure of a swiftly approaching deadline is negative stimulus that can impede creativity's flow. If a writer has time to write, he or she can take a break and go for a run, which gets oxygen to the brain and promotes clear thinking. It allows time for research, brainstorming and seeking advice.

Writer's block is already an unpleasant experience, and an added time crunch reduces the ability to try out some of the previously mentioned solutions.

Above all, Peterson says don't panic. Recognize that everyone encounters difficulties, and they can be overcome. Instead of worrying about the consequences of performing, focus on the internal reason for writing, and find a reason to love it. Internal motivators are much more effective for finding creativity, Flaherty says, quoting Thomas Edison's statement that "Genius is one percent talent and ninety-nine percent perseverance." Flaherty says that a significant portion of the battle is about the writer remaining confident that he or she can successfully finish a writing task.

So, writer's block is not a completely hopeless condition. Though there are times when creativity is elusive, manipulating biological processes can, to an extent, induce inspiration. Whether writing a collection of short stories, a poem, a novel, or even a class paper, these techniques are poses anyone participating in brain yoga should learn and use.

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