

1. PROLOGUE

I don't want anyone, certainly not my students, to know the real "me." So, like T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, I "prepare faces to meet the faces that I meet."

I equivocate, yet offer a few clues --

Even my record albums and spices are in alphabetical order. I still use a forty-seven-year-old cartridge pen. Storage boxes are correctly labeled and file folders color-coordinated. (Of course, I have a filing cabinet at home.)

I read approximately a book a day and always carry two books with me: one serious, solid, meaningful "classic" and one joyfully escapist piece of "trash." I also read every issue, cover-to-cover, of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *TV Guide*. (Yes, I once watched an entire hour of "The Dukes of Hazzard".)

I collect letters, quotes, quilts, crochet pieces, bookmarks, epiphanies.

Unintentionally, in play, thinking I was giving them a bath, I once drowned five Cocker Spaniel puppies. And continued to play with their bodies, not realizing they were dead, or that I had killed them, even though their mother whined and nipped at my hands. It is an ugly story.

Showing off, I once proudly counted and foolishly pointed out every bird nest in every tree near my grandparents' farmhouse. Kerosene-soaked rags on the end of a long pole burned every nest, every egg, every chick -- even the ones I heard shrieking as I hid in the cellar, my hands over my ears, screaming with them. It, too, is an ugly story.

When he was only four years old, I convinced by little brother that he had four toes on one foot and six on the other. His "deformed" feet hidden by tennis shoes, he was an odd sight in the swimming pool.

I have an “attack” cat, strangely harlequin-marked and gingery, who shreds my arms without provocation, and tigers hiss and spit whenever I look them in their eyes.

I love thunderstorms and lightning because of my great-grandmother who was almost completely blind. She would stand on the front porch, wind in her face, rain splattering all around her, turning her face upwards toward dark clouds she could not see, waiting for the brief flashes of lightning -- the only thing she could see. (I hate the moral of this story and would prefer to believe it untrue.)

When Golden Oldie radio plays the music I loved as a teenager and my adolescence turns up as the last chapter in a history book, I am reminded that my students may think of me as a middle-aged English teacher, no more than a Mrs. Grundy in blue jeans.

Over the last six years, I have lost 145 pounds, and I’m not looking to find it. The weight loss was inspired by Siena, Italy, in a story I tell elsewhere, but the loss ultimately led me to health, to a summer in Normandy, to another summer in Costa Rica getting rebuilt, and to rediscovering a passion for life I had lost.

The title of my autobiography, *Sandra Effinger Version 6.0*, is an allusion to my age, my techie nature, my newer and improved version of myself (Yes, there is a *Version 5.0*), and my true belief in the multiplicity of each of us. At sixty I thought I was all grown up and finished. Ah, what a comeuppance, or rather, downfall that arrogance foreshadows.