

## 21. These Words Belong to Me

1. **scar:** a mark left on the skin or within body tissue where a wound, burn, or sore has not healed quite completely and fibrous connective tissue has developed; a lasting effect of grief, fear, or other emotion left on a person's character by a traumatic experience

*How ironic that a scar is a sign of healing. No scar, you didn't survive, you didn't heal.*

2. **metamorphosis:** a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means

*Did you know I have a butterfly tattoo on my left ankle?*

3. **brouhaha:** a noisy and overexcited critical response, display of interest, or trail of publicity

*I have a blog named this - me a brouhaha?*

4. **serendipity:** the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way

*I love it when a plan comes together.*

5. **nonpareil:** having no match or equal; unrivaled; a flat round candy made of chocolate covered with white sugar sprinkles

*It is so sad to admit which definition I knew first.*

6. **façade:** the face of a building, esp. the principal front that looks onto a street or open space; an outward appearance that is maintained to conceal a less pleasant or creditable reality

*My whole life*

7. **eclectic:** deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources

*the way I decorate my home; the person I am becoming*

8. **transcendent:** beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience; surpassing the ordinary; exceptional.

*Still hoping I will transcend*

9. **fey:** giving an impression of vague unworldliness

*This is the word I like better than "senior" moment or dementia.*

10. **awestruck:** filled with or revealing a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder

## 22. In Other Words

*The tragedy of life is not so much what men suffer,  
but rather what they miss.*

--Thomas Carlyle

**Every sin is the result of collaboration.**

--Stephen Crane

**Money often costs too much.**

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Nothing is wonderful once you get used to it.**

--Ed Howe

**DON'T MAKE EXCUSES, MAKE GOOD.**

--Elbert Hubbard

*Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion.*

--Arthur Koestler

Ignorance is a voluntary misfortune.

--Nicholas Ling

**I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.**

--Wilson Mizner

**A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.**

--Lily Tomlin

The man who does not read good books has no advantage over  
the man who can't read them.

--Mark Twain

**Even a lie is a psychic fact.**

--Carl Jung

**And still I am learning.**

--Michelangelo Buonarroti

## 23. FLASHBACK

If I could relive any day, I would choose to relive a day late in August of 1970. I had temporarily dropped out of college and was working as a secretary in the Sociology Department at OU. I made little money, but I also had few responsibilities. That particular day someone had organized a pig roast picnic at what we called the Pink Pavilion out near Lake Thunderbird. Times were informal, free and easy, and word of mouth invited everyone to the picnic.

When my closest friends, Jackie and Martha, and I arrived at the lake that afternoon, someone asked us to donate whatever we could, a couple of dollars, to help pay for the party. The pig had been roasted whole overnight in a pit and, though a gruesome sight, smelled and tasted wonderful. People brought other food as well -- potato salad and baked beans, homemade bread, fresh organic vegetables. The Library Bar had donated several kegs of beer, so the mood was festive. Local bands like Green Corn played, poets read aloud, political activists pontificated, and frisbees flew. There were over a hundred of us, and everyone laughed and sang and talked into the darkness. As we sat on blankets under the stars, dogs and children played around us.

I would choose to relive that day because at the time I did not realize how special those lost carefree days would become in retrospect. Idyllic and unappreciated, that day typified the best of the era that had just passed. The friends I loved were all there that day, and the time and tragedies that would separate us over the years were unanticipated. Talking earnestly late into the night, none of us thought to hold those moments precious.

If I had the day to live over, I would hug Monty and Ronnie, who would die soon. I would take special time to talk with Martha and Earl and James, who would have such terrible experiences that they would become people I no longer recognized. I would take time to say goodbye to Ted and Jackie and Bob, who would move elsewhere, until we lost touch over the years. Since I know now how the intervening years have passed, I would try to capture every moment of that last perfect day.

## 24. Remembrance of Things Present

**Who I Am Now:** So *not* the proper English teacher I appear on the outside, for I lead a rich secret life – which will *stay* secret -- quite unlike anything I ever until three years ago. I am even more intelligent than you may think, but always tone it down a bit so I won't be so off-putting. Since I lost so much weight, I have become a bit of a know-it-all and strive mightily to keep my mouth shut when I see so many people around me on the same wrong path I walked.

**What I Enjoy and Value:** I enjoy elegant food (gelato, sushi, Thai, fire-grilled snow crab, Godiva chocolate) TV crime shows (All the *CSIs*, all the *Law and Orders*, *Bones*, *Criminal Minds*, *Psych*, *Monk* reruns) and makeover fashion shows (*What Not to Wear*, *You're Wearing What!*, *How Do I Look?*), black and white movies, and thick thick books.

I value loyalty, honesty, intelligence, ambition, and kindness.

**What I Do with My Time:** too much TV, cooking and eating, writing for my various websites, workout about four times a week (love yoga and pilates, but feel powerful after weight training), primp, try on expensive clothes and get free facials, email and Facebook, petting Roscoe, juggling my many lovers (LOL), reminiscing, daydreaming, writing in my journal, and reading, reading, reading.

**Specifics I Want to Remember:** favorite glamour coffee (Starbucks one pump sugar-free vanilla nonfat Caramel Macchiato) and favorite everyday coffee (Blue Bean blend with a splash of half-and-half), my ancient Sheaffer cartridge pen and my elegant copper Waterman, the sweetness of a nice kiss and the warmth of a good hug, the heady exhilaration of hot sun on my face and the pleasure of being safely inside during an Oklahoma thunderstorm, Five Flavor LifeSavers and cinnamon square lollipops, blues and classic rock, Siena and Caen, ambiguity and juxtaposition.

## 25. **As Time Goes Bye-Bye**

### Carpe Diem?

I'm already past sixty and still have not done the one thing I have promised myself over and over to do -- to learn how to fly an airplane because of two influences. First, Dana, a boy in my high school speech class, who had his pilot's license, used to talk about flying in such a way that it fascinated me. Second, my stepdad Jim and I have long been intrigued by small planes and tried to talk anyone we knew into taking us up for a spin. For more than forty-five years, I have looked at courses offered in aviation and every year I can't find the time or the money.

All talk, no action. All plan, no lessons.

Yet as I read over this for the upteenth time, I've decided I've been too hard on myself. I finished my Master's (though not my PhD). I quit smoking fifteen years ago after two decades of nicotine addiction. I finally lost the weight my mother begged me to lose -- lapband surgery, 145 pounds gone, a detour to Costa Rica for rebuilding -- and I am the woman I never was. I've been to Europe five times, at last revisiting the *Pietà*. I taught myself calligraphy. Damn, I have even touched a moon rock and been close enough to touch *The Beata Beatrix* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. I've hobnobbed with the glitterati -- LBJ & Leonard Nimoy, Harlan Ellison & John Lennon . . . Well, maybe "hobnobbed" isn't quite the right word?

Mostly talk, some action.  
Lots of plans, one big lesson.

I swear I'll learn to fly . . . maybe by the time I'm sixty-five?

**Seize the day!**

## 26. My Own List of Lists

### Places That Make Me Happy:

1. my home
2. Siena, Italy
3. London (almost anywhere)
4. the National Art Gallery
5. OU's Bizzell Library
6. my classroom
7. airplane terminals
8. the open road

### Places I Would Like to Go:

1. Macchu Picchu
2. boating on the Nile
3. the space shuttle in orbit
4. Moscow
5. Tokyo
6. another planet
7. Siena, Italy
8. Costa Rica

### Things in People Which I Like:

1. wit
2. intelligence
3. commitment
4. determination
5. courtesy
6. discipline
7. responsibility
8. sense of humor

### Things in People Which I Dislike:

1. narrow minds
2. unexamined opinions
3. apathy
4. prejudice
5. rudeness
6. self-pity
7. irresponsibility
8. ignorance

### Things That Worry Me:

1. blindness
2. dumb politicians
3. AIDS
4. paperwork
5. the decline of values
6. stupidity
7. dogma
8. tooth decay

### Things I Would Like to Know How to Do:

1. fly an airplane
2. sculpt
3. sew
4. read, write, and speak Italian
5. carpentry and woodwork
6. program a computer
7. write a good sonnet
8. accessorize

### Things I've Said Goodbye to:

1. childhood
2. innocence
3. belief in Santa Claus, tooth fairies, and Easter bunnies
4. wild and crazy friends
5. religion
6. the home place
7. obesity

### Ideas That Intrigue Me:

1. space travel
2. selective memory
3. how the brain works
4. religious belief
5. parapsychology
6. literary theory
7. somatyping
8. nutrition

### People I Would Like to Meet:

1. George Gordon, Lord Byron
2. Gabriel Garcia Marquez
3. Toni Morrison
4. William Shakespeare
5. Lewis Black
6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti
7. Bob Dylan
8. Michelle Obama

### Interesting Words:

1. scar
2. metamorphosis
3. brouhaha
4. serendipity
5. seraglio
6. façade
7. suave
8. transcendence

## 27. Cheer Yourself Up!

- ♥ Chocolate, chocolate, chocolate.
- ♥ Isn't it odd that listening to (and singing with) the blues, cheers me up?
- ♥ Driving in my little Ford Focus, the sound ratcheted way up, no particular place to be.
- ♥ Cruise around Facebook, looking for old friends, former students, famous people.
- ♥ Read a good book.
- ♥ Read a bad book.
- ♥ Go to a coffee shop, order a skinny non-fat cappuccino and write in my journal.
- ♥ Take a long hot bath.
- ♥ Go to an exclusive department store (i.e. Balliet's) and get a free facial and make-up. Don't forget the free samples.
- ♥ Ride my bicycle.
- ♥ Go to the YMCA. It's hard to believe that will cheer me up because I so do not get an endorphin kick, but exercise will take my mind off whatever worries me.
- ♥ Try on expensive clothes I would never ever really buy. Really high high heels, too.
- ♥ Sit on the back porch and answer email.
- ♥ Download apps for my iPhone.
- ♥ Browse iTunes and get some totally new music recommended on some stranger's playlist.
- ♥ Doodle.
- ♥ Indulge in a manicure and pedicure -- weird color polish a must.
- ♥ Go to a museum and have high tea in the café.
- ♥ Take photographs as if you were a professional, strange poses, snap snap snap, in everyone's way.

## 28. Metamorphosis



I used to be . . .  
younger  
heavier  
sicker  
sadder

Now I am . . .  
older  
thinner  
healthier  
happier

I used to behave,  
carefully  
coming  
oh so close  
to the line,  
but never  
crossing it.

Now I question,  
stumbling and  
fumbling,  
even forgetting  
there is a line.

I used to observe.  
I used to fear.  
I used to embrace.  
I used to teach.

Now I do.  
Now I reach.  
Now I yearn.  
Now I learn.



## 29. **Picture This**



*La Chute d'Icare*, Plate 8 from *Jazz* by Henri Matisse  
Mixed Media Collage Composition

Despite its initial apparent simplicity, Henri Matisse's *La Chute d'Icare* is evocatively ambiguous. A single figure against a simple background, in the midst of six equally simple objects -- yet what do we see? Is this the triumphant Icarus rising into the blue sky, reaching for distant stars? Or is this the tragic Icarus, his flight over, feathers loose in the air around him, plummeting toward a deep azure sea? That is the significant question about the picture, and also about the myth.

This simple yet vividly colorful portrait of Icarus juxtaposes the joy of escaping gravity with the ultimate fall. Are those irregular yellow shapes feathers floating downward or fragmented stars? Are we looking up at the sky or down at the sea? Are his arms rising in powerful mid-stroke or flailing outward to stop his fall? And is that single red spot his triumphant heart, or a broken one? The forms are uncomplicated and the colors pure, yet Matisse still manages to convey both the story's triumph and its tragic end.

Matisse's execution of the work is crucial to its strength. The blue sky background, painted with wide brush strokes, using tones of light to medium blue, produces an airy, light, ethereal backdrop on which the brilliant yellow shapes glow and the stark blackness of Icarus's figure almost recedes in stark contrast. The catastrophic nature of the fall is underscored by this contrast and the simple construction: there is nothing to cover or mute the tragedy of the moment. Nothing distracts.

Certainly the title focuses us on the inevitable end, but the execution draws us back to the beginning. Though nowhere in sight, Daedalus is in every stroke. Ovid's Daedalus was a skilled architect-inventor-sculptor, who jealous of his talented nephew Talus, flung him headlong down from Minerva's sacred citadel. The goddess Pallas rescued Daedalus's nephew Talus from his uncle's wrath, changing him into a bird, clothing him with feathers in mid-air, saving his life through that transformation. That crime trapped Daedalus and his son on Crete, where Daedalus built the famous Labyrinth. Unable to keep his accomplishment secret, Daedalus revealed the mystery of the Labyrinth, allowing Theseus to kill the Minotaur. When Minos found out what Daedalus had done, he imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus in the Labyrinth themselves. To escape from the Labyrinth and from Crete, Daedalus designed sets of wings made of feathers and wax. Before flying to freedom, he warned Icarus not to fly too low -- for his wings would touch the water and get wet -- nor too high -- for the sun could melt the wax. But young Icarus, overwhelmed by the thrill of flying, forgot his father's warning and flew too close to the sun. Sure enough the wax in his wings melted down and he fell into the sea killing himself. How ironic that Daedalus's son is not saved.

More poignantly, perhaps Daedalus's son is punished for his father's overweening pride. Daedalus uses his knowledge to gain power over his limited nature. In a metaphorical way his technology aims at matching his power with that of the goddess Pallas. But only gods can convert falling humans into birds. Daedalus, and humankind with him, is humiliated and punished with the death of his own son, for daring to overreach. Icarus, the impulsive and inexperienced youth, too daring and deaf to his father's wisdom, makes a rash use of the powers given to him and pays with his life. The folly of the ambitious artist, his inevitable failure to attain his lofty goals, and the misuse of his rude technology ends in tragedy.

The motif of the fall resonates, whether it be Icarus, Adam and Eve, or Lucifer. Is it a cautionary tale about over-reaching our human bounds? Is it an inspirational story about amazing possibilities? Is it a parable about age and youth? Because this version is so simple, we are compelled to interpret it, and each of us brings our own perspective to that interpretation. For me, the thrill of the flight might well be worth the fall.

## 30. Look Who I Look Up To

Admiration is a strange emotion. Jean Rostand said, “The only things one can admire at length are those one admires without knowing why.” Though this may be true of things, careful reflection can reveal why we admire certain people. Often they are role models for us to emulate or representatives of the best we already see in ourselves. Sometimes the people we admire highlight a weakness we would like to overcome. Whom we admire and why reveals much about ourselves. I admire three people who share similar qualities.

Marva Collins, the Chicago educator, is someone I admire, and envy somewhat, because she is a great teacher (while I may be only a good one). She teaches Homer and Emerson to “hopeless” fourth-graders. She insists upon excellence, allowing no one to take the easy way out, and not too surprisingly, her students become scholars.

I also admire Harry Truman. He had to make what was perhaps the hardest decision in history: whether to use the first atomic bomb against Japan. Though no one truly realized the horrors that would become Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Truman’s Potsdam diaries reveal how well he himself recognized the crossroads at which mankind stood. Clearly tormented by his dilemma, Truman had the “guts” to take full responsibility. “The buck stops here,” especially when it hurts.

Finally, I admire the British poet John Keats for his courage. Even though he knew he was dying, this young man wrote poetry so marvelous that it became “a thing of beauty [that] lasts forever.” Can any poem be more poignant than his lines, “when I have fears that I may cease to be . . .”? Maybe flames that burn out quickly burn more brightly?

These three people that I admire all have the courage of their convictions, an unwillingness to whine or pass the blame or curse the heavens. Perhaps it is the beauty and the power that come from staring long at one’s own choices that makes each admirable, whether in education, or politics, or literature. By assuming responsibility for those hard choices, all three have transcended their fears, resolved their problems, and gloriously met their own standards for admiration.

## 31. Remembering the Child

It is sadder than I expected to realize that I have no one left to ask about myself as a toddler. I'll have to focus on my teenage self and the only two people who knew me intimately then. My sister Karen's memories of me are always a bit warped by the jealousy between us – always! My brother's Kim's memories of me are equally warped by a kind of hero worship. So, these views of me...

My sister Karen always tells stories about how much I bullied her. If true, it is remarkable that she survived. Though, truth be told, she was an irritating manipulative child who often provoked me into yelling or smacking her – so I was frequently punished for mistreating her. I don't think I ever actually drew blood, or left bruises. Her favorite story is about the time I chased her around the entire upstairs walkway at the Friendship Apartments, screaming that I was going to kill her when I caught her. In her story, worried residents called my mother, the apartment managers, maybe even the police. In my version, I never even caught her.

My brother Kim idolized me and I took advantage of that. He believed anything I told him, even when I made it up. He was convinced I was the smartest person in the world and would argue with his teachers whenever they disagreed with something I had told him. Instead of appreciating his hero worship, I took advantage. Suffice it to say that I found a complicated and tricky way of showing him how to count his toes so that it always appeared that he had four toes on one foot, six toes on the other. "Uh Uh!" he'd exclaim, my counting making a liar of his own vision. I was chagrined when I found him in the swimming pool, with his hoes on, so no one would see his deformed feet.

Although there is a contrast in both stories, I must have been a trial. I was emotional, with more than a few anger issues, a bit conceited and a show-off. Even more significantly, what does it say that these are my sister's and my brother's *favorite* memories of me? I'm not even going to ask them about their *worst* memories!

## 32. One Medium Suitcase

Of course, I would pack my laptop first. That covers photographs, lesson plans, projects of all sorts, writing, passwords and account numbers. Wow! Maybe I just need a backpack?

If I were really leaving home forever and could only take what could be packed in one medium-sized suitcase, I would also take those physical things that have a sentimental value for me -- my personal poetry books dating back to the third grade, the jottings and scraps in my lap desk (assuredly an embryonic Great American Novel or Poem), essays and research papers I've written in college, scribbled red criticisms and all. I must also take writing others have done -- the best student writing I've saved over the years, and letters from friends, family, and former students.

Music, too, must be saved, especially the music that has waited for me year after year, revealing something new each time the changed person I have become returns. I'll sacrifice my albums with their marginal notes, scratches, stains, and torn covers bearing witness for my iPod. Not so classy and tactile, but way more practical. As long as I have room for the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, Leonard Cohen, Dory Previn, Janis Ian and Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Mimi and Richard Farina, Eric Clapton and Robert Johnson, Buffy St. Marie.

Somewhere in the corners I must squeeze in a few remaining items that are special because of the person associated with each. I'll just wear my granny's ruby solitaire engagement ring which cannot be left behind. I am the third generation to hold this legacy in trust and must pass it on to the next. I also must take the shawl crocheted by Aunt Mary just before she died, the clogs handpainted by my best friend Jackie (even though I never wear them now), and the soft Teddy bear my husband brought me in the hospital. This large medium-sized suitcase is probably almost full.

And . . . last but not least . . . just so I can relax and enjoy the other things I've saved . . .

*I must*

*must*

*must*

find room for one pair of  
worn-out,

raggedy,

faded,

but *oh so comfortable*

blue jeans.

## 33. The Perfect Present

The perfect gift for me (though I hate to admit it) would be better control over my temper. When I was very young, there were two Sandra's -- a well-mannered little angel and a brat who kept getting that angel in trouble. I would bang my head (or someone else's) against the wall, break my mother's favorite vase (or my favorite toy), and get into fist fights.

When I was "on a tear," as my mother called it, I heard no voices of reason. I felt no doubt, no remorse, no pain -- until later. Afterwards, it seemed that I always hurt myself worst of all -- damaging my own property or hurting myself, driving away friends, hurting someone I loved -- so I felt guilty, as well. As I grew older, the damage I could do became truly frightening.

For example, when I was sixteen, I lost my temper about something I don't even remember now. Unfortunately, I was driving my mother's brand new baby blue Chrysler Imperial when the Evil Sandra took over, pulled into our driveway, and bashed the front of the car into the garage door. Not once. Not twice. But over and over and over again, until the garage door was demolished, the front fenders askew, and deep ugly dents scraped through the baby blue. And then my mother came out of the house. . .

Never since have I lost my temper so completely, and I am proud of my progress. I no longer hit people or expensive things. . . though I still grit my teeth and yell and mutter curses, I only beat up cheap stuff. If I had absolute control over my monstrous temper, I wouldn't have to apologize so often and I could probably save some money and keep some friends. My life would be so much easier!

## 34. Memorable Event

Not this year, but November 1, 2008, Sam and I went to hear Barack Obama speak live in Springfield, Missouri. It was a near last minute effort by his campaign to win Missouri (Oklahoma being hopeless), so three days before the presidential election the Obama Roadshow rolled in.



MoveOn.org sent out the call to supporters and Sam and I hit the road. A bit surprisingly, none of my Obama Buddies made the trip. Guess they didn't have a day to give.

When we got to Springfield, we were stunned at the length of the line. If this is not Obama territory, what the hell happens when it is. The line just kept going on and on, past thousands of people, most having the good sense to bring their long chairs and coolers.

Comraderie and jokes as Sam and I just kept going and going and going, winding away from the stadium, street after street. Even when anti-Obama cars

drove by, the chants and catcalls were not vicious or unkind.

The speech wasn't until 8:00 pm and we were in line by 2:00 pm and we were latecomers.

Ever so often, Obama campaign workers would come through, working the crowd, and giving special entrance tickets to the most enthusiastic. Everything perfectly planned, just so Obama would have a backdrop of gameshow crazy enthusiasts behind him.

Security at the gates, like you wouldn't believe. Camera got in, but they certainly looked all through my bag and xrayed everything.

Vendors just outside the gates, selling t-shirts, flags, posters, bumper stickers. Oh where oh where has my "Rednecks for Obama" bumper sticker gone? Perhaps it keeps company with the stolen yard signs and the magnetic car stickers that disappeared all through the campaign. And then it's time...

We're all in the stadium and we can see the bus caravan all lit up, approaching the long way, motorcycle troopers on all sides, and the band cranking out loud upbeat music.

First, the press bus unloads. Then staff and supporters. Then we have to hear from local politicians, jealous of their moments in the spotlight.

Finally, Michelle Obama comes out running, as if it were the first day of the campaign and her energy were limitless. Followed soon my her husband and daughters holding hands, running too, glad to be here, and hopeful of what America might be.

Obama worked that crowd - welcoming the audience from Oklahoma, from Arkansas, from Kansas, from Texas, and from Missouri - bringing everyone to their feet clapping and yelling, just because it felt so good to be part of these possibilities.

I know most people in that audience weren't Obama supporters, and Missouri didn't go for Obama, but for that hour we were all true believers in our best selves.

I remember when our yard boy ran over his foot with the lawn mower and mother couldn't let him in the house to tend his wounds. She couldn't even take him to a hospital to get it treated. And this was Amarillo, Texas, in 1960, not the Deep South at its worst.

I remember three years later, in May 1963, when "Bull" Connor unleashed the dogs on the protestors in Birmingham, Alabama, Walter Cronkite chose to run the film footage. On the evening news. During dinner. And my mother laid her head down on the table and sobbed.

I remember when I first began teaching in a predominantly black high school and everyone asked me why I couldn't get a job in a better school. Millwood had the hardest working, most gifted students I've ever had, no matter what color. No, I couldn't get a job in a better school; there was no such thing.

And November 1, I get to see a black man who might have a chance?



# 35. How to . . .

## How to become morbidly obese . . .

Start with a low metabolism.

It helps if at least one grandparent was as wide as they were tall.  
(Thank you for those Middle Eastern genes, Grandma Andrews.)

Add an indolent nature.

(Why walk, when you can drive?  
Why drive, when you can sit?)

Mix in enough money

so that manual labor is not necessary  
(Let someone else mow the lawn,  
clean the house,  
walk the dog,  
even corral the shopping carts!)



BUT

be poor enough to have a diet high in fillers  
like pasta  
and potatoes  
and bread.

If it's not breaded and deep-fried, why are you eating it?

Yes, I mean even Twinkies and Oreos and Snickers and bacon . . .

(though, truth be told, bacon can be fried and covered in milk chocolate)

(Thank you, Paula Dean, and all our other Southern cooks.)

See ya'll at the State Fair!

If it's not processed

and artificial  
and chemically enhanced  
and totally unnatural,

why are you eating it?

Never shop the outer circle of the grocery store

where all those colorful fruits and vegetables live.

Produce is a dirty word!

Eat more

and more

and more

Exercise less

and less

and less

and you, too, can be morbidly obese,

literally dying of too much food

in a world where the less fortunate are starving.

## 36. Always Say Never

I never ever want

to read *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco.  
How dare he spend 50 pages trying to figure out  
a computer password  
so pointless  
so distracting  
let's try all the names of God  
let's try 50 pages of clever word after clever word  
no sentences of course  
just password attempt after password attempt

"Do you know the password?"  
And the answer is "No."

Throwing the book across the room,  
I refused to read another word.

I never ever want

to visit Perryton, Texas, again  
80 miles of the Panhandle  
stretching interminably  
so flatly  
without landmarks  
or towns  
or even passing traffic  
to arrive at a town  
not even worth a stop in the road  
to use the restroom.

I never ever want

to eat six Snickers in an afternoon  
to ask for a seat extender when I fly  
to be the fat one trailing behind the group  
to be sliced and stitched during 8 hours of surgery  
to grade Autobiographies for 189 kids  
even if they are amazing and enlightening  
and the highlight of my year.

## 37. Are You Hungry?

I think my favorite meal is Christmas Eve chalupas – a one-dish wonder with something yummy for everyone. Not your usual holiday fare, not an authentic Mexican meal, yet no Christmas would be complete without it.

All the parts are cooked, ready for each person to create their own way. We don't even dish everything up – assembly line begins at the stove. Ingredients include crispy small corn tortillas, baked flat in the oven; Ranch style beans (and only this branch will do); ground beef seasoned with taco seasoning; chopped lettuce and tomato salad (don't forget to salt and pepper the chopped salad because it should be a bit wilted and weepy); grated cheddar cheese; chopped onions, fresh sour cream; guacamole salad (made Sam's way just a little sweet, not too chunky); and salsa (Pace in a bottle, various intensities provided).



Traditional with my family, this was another of my mother's stretch-the-meat masterpieces. After my parents separated, my mother's meals always included a big batch of pan-fried potatoes (recycling Crisco over and over) and a big mixed green salad, mostly Iceberg lettuce with

homemade dressing (Mazola corn oil, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and lemon juice shaken like crazy in an old Miracle Whip jar). Those two "courses" accompanied spaghetti, soups, casseroles -- so many meat-thin recipes that tasted so good I never even realized we were poor. I thought we *chose* to eat ground beef. Chalupas stood all alone.

When Sam and I first married, what with our big schoolteacher paychecks, I turned often to her well-remembered meals and discovered how she had made every mouthful count. Delicious, inexpensive meals – too carbohydrate heavy for our own good perhaps, but the way poor mothers have managed to feed their families for centuries.

The chalupas work so well for a come-and-go eat-when-you're ready holiday casual meal that soon became our contribution to each Christmas. Not for us, the hours baking the perfect turducken, or any formal sit-down dinner.

Don't like onions? Don't include them in your chalupa.

Vegetarian? Stick with the beans.

On Atkins again? Skip the tortillas.

Many a "friendly" disagreement has broken out over the order of assembly, but everyone knows the cheese goes between the meat and beans, or how's it gonna melt? Really? I mean really, come on!

Imagine my surprise all these years later to discover that the word *chalupa* is the name of the boats Aztecs used to get around the canals of Tenochtitlan, their capital. Cortez conquered and then razed the city in the early 1500s, where now rises la Ciudad de Mexico. Chalupas are the specialty of the southern regions of Mexico, Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Oh, and Taco Bell.

Traditional chalupas are made with a deep fried flat bread, or corn tortilla molded into the shape of a small boat and stuffed with cheese, tomatoes, onions, sour cream, refried beans, beef or chicken and drizzled with salsa. Generally, the thought was to be able to pick them up like a taco and eat them by hand. The Americanized Taco Bell version is made generally the same way they make tacos but with a flat tortilla rather than the boat shape.

But I gotta say, our *boat* won't float, it's loaded. Ours require a plate, fork and a bunch of napkins should you dare to try to pick it up. Cortez, eat your heart out! And thanks, Mom.

## 38. Where I'm From \*

I am from the home place, alone in a red dirt field,  
proud, a little run-down  
but once tall in the Oklahoma wind.

I am from the Chinese elms, guarding the old place,  
chopping cotton in the summer,  
green tomato pickles in the fall,  
and sorghum popcorn balls for Christmas.

I am from paring knives and pyracantha bushes,  
from Jell-O salads and raisin cookies.  
from rocking chairs and the razor strap.

I am from do-it-yourself  
and stand-your-ground,  
from never-start-a-fight  
but finish-them-all,  
from pick-your-own-switch  
and take-your-punishment.

I'm from Carter, Oklahoma,  
the Preskitts, the McIntyres, the Stowers,  
from homemade quilts a hundred years old,  
from hand-cranked homemade ice cream,  
from Granny Zem's hand-carved moon,  
its stair steps filled with angels,  
from Grandpa Bert whittling big sticks into little twigs,  
from Great Grandma Preskitt,  
blind eyes seeking the lightning.

I am from the "Amen Brother"  
of Southern Baptist Churches  
and the "Amazing Grace" of country choirs.  
I am from the open-air sleeping porch,  
from bedtime stories under the stars,  
from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego  
in King Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace,  
from Jonah in the Whale's Belly and  
Joshua at the Battle of Jericho.

\* Derived from the original by George Ella Lyons

# 39. 52 Inspirations for Weight Loss

## Motivational Issues

1. Be realistic.
2. Can't have it both ways.
3. Celebrate every success.
4. DENIAL is Don't Even know I Am Lying (to myself).
5. Discover healing rituals.
6. Do it anyway.
7. Do NOT sabotage myself with doubt.
8. Does this choice help make me stronger?
9. Exercise no matter what.
10. Get back on track.
11. Give myself credit.
12. Hunger and cravings aren't emergencies.
13. It's OK to disappoint people.

## All about Diet

1. Put dieting first.
2. Throw some food away.
3. Don't comfort myself with food.
4. Eat mindfully.
5. Eating well is a reward I give myself.
6. Food IS the consolation prize.
7. I don't eat crap.
8. I don't eat food just because it's there.
9. If not food, then what?
10. It's not okay to eat this.
11. I can have 3 bites of anything.
12. Protein, Produce & Fiber
13. Nothing tastes as good as being thin.

## "I" Statements

1. I will start NOW.
2. I can do hard things.
3. I deserve to put myself first.
4. I'm different now.
5. What I really want is to be healthy.
6. I used to comfort myself by overeating, but I don't do that any more.
7. I will care later.
8. I'd rather be thinner.
9. I'm not that special.
10. I have not lost the will; I have just misplaced it.
11. Just because I can does not mean I should.
12. If I fail to plan, I plan to fail.
13. I will not give up what I want MOST for what I want NOW.

## Everything

1. Just do it!
2. No excuses.
3. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic & Timely Goals
4. Say no choice, no choice, no choice.
5. Stop making excuses NOW.
6. Head Hunger
7. Heart Hunger
8. How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.
9. Set guidelines, not rules.
10. Morning affects evening.
11. Learn to savor every bite.
12. Enrich my life today.
13. Embrace the gray.

## 40. **The Examined Life**

### **Strengths:**

My intelligence because it lets me choose the life I want and gives me the tools I need.

My principles because they allow me to stand up for the life I live.

My sense of humor because it lets me accept the things I can't control.

### **Weaknesses:**

My temper because it is frightening when it gets out of control.

My moodiness because it bothers other people when I change moods suddenly.

My big mouth because it gets me into trouble I could avoid.

**I can make my weaknesses into strengths by controlling them. In themselves, they're not bad. When I use my temper wisely, it accomplishes near miracles. It's perfect for bringing salesmen and students into line. Sometimes I overreact, however, and that's bad. If I stop, think, and then react, I can control my temper, my moodiness, and my big mouth.**

# 41. Annual Report

## One Year Ago

I was still teaching, staying up late every night grading papers and wondering why I was still doing it after so many years. I was tired and uninspired. I was very satisfied, however, with my weight loss and cosmetic surgery. It really felt like I was in the best shape of my life, at peace with how I look, and as good as I am gonna get. I was hoping to find interests to take the place of teaching and to revitalize and energize me the way teaching used to. I was also hoping to get more involved politically, to develop more as a consultant, to be more active, and to travel more. A girl can dream.

A year later, I am working part-time at Belle Isle Library, where I was before unretired the first time and started at Bishop McGuinness. A tech again. Most of the same co-workers; all of the same library groupies. It's a good reason to get out of the flannel PJs and flipflops and escape the local Walmart. One thing I do love about working at the library is the intelligence and versatility of my co-workers. Nothing like the close-mindedness of lifelong private school teachers! Trust me on this one. One thing I hate are the library groupies – boring, needy, lurkers with bad attitudes who feel entitled to special treatment. Aaaargh!

## Now

I'm still satisfied with my appearance and more physically fit. I have become an aging gym rat. Who knew I was going to love yoga and pilates a year ago? I have tried every YMCA class and these two kinds of exercise satisfy me physically and mentally in ways I never suspected were possible. I've actually bought my own yoga equipment – mat, blocks, belt, you know, I could become an addict (but that's a good thing). At 80, they're gonna have to drag me off my yoga mat on the way to the nursing home! I'm almost as surprised about how much I've been enjoying getting politically involved. I may yet run for a real office!

My web presence has expanded so much that I even have a PayPal donate button on my teacher website and have developed an entirely separate website on weight loss and all that. Though smaller in scope, the personal is more satisfying than the professional. Some how the 400 hits on *An Informed Journey* mean more to me than the 90,000+ on *MsEffie's LifeSavers*.

I have become very involved in the College Board program and they treat me right. The Mentor Program meets in Las Vegas every year! I've done several APSIs and have offers for more. I'm also developing new presentation certifications so I can do more in the future.

OK, no travel yet. But...

This last year has shown me that I can make progress, though not as fast or as strong as I had hoped. I do have the innate "laidbackness" of the newly retired. One task accomplished a day feels like hard work.



## **Plans for the Future**

I'm actually a precinct delegate and running for the Secretary of the Cleveland County Democratic Party. Hey, I've got a key to the county office!

I plan on taking more intensive private yoga classes. Seriously.

I've got five workshops scheduled for this summer (and, yes, that may mean I'll have to leave the library. Again. We'll see.)

I'm just beginning to develop a very personal blog - *2Words4U* - a domain I have owned for years and neglected. This may encourage me to write about more diverse topics, even if just for me.

I have become FaceBook Fan, reconnecting with students over my whole career. I find the sense of community surprising and love the serendipity of how things connect in unexpected ways. More will come.

Just today, I made a down payment on a trip to Venice in a year. Ciao, baby!

## 42. Ekphrasis



***Dance Class by Edgar Degas***

Point your toes says the instructor.  
Routine demands, she does as she's told.  
Her toes point, until they tremble.  
If only everything she did were this bold.

Her bow tied tight, her shoes drawn up,  
Everything is settling in place.  
Make-up on, smiles drawn to perfection,  
Her legs shake under the lace.

Sheltered girl in a sheltered world,  
Dances to please the crowd.  
The curtains come down, so do the tears,  
Even if they are not allowed.

## **War of the Irises**

Indigo silence  
Fills the air,

Deep and heavy  
Darkened by their colors.

Twilight drips.  
It slips.  
It seeps

Into the abyss.  
It calls to me.

Alone and yet  
Surrounded,

A single soul  
Stands to fight

A war against  
All things  
That threaten  
To suffocate  
The light.



***Irises* by Vincent Van Gogh**

# 43. Visually Speaking

