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Written Rorschach

When a patient walks in to a therapist's office and sits down on the inviting chaise lounge, I imagine that she is seeking help finding direction in life. Introspection has led her nowhere; she cannot make sense of the various cogitations surrounding her parents' divorce; her recent breakup; the death of her close friend; her brother's illness. So, she has sought out professional help. Surely, a seasoned veteran can sort through her tangled neurons.

Therapy. Most are afraid to ask for help when they need it, whether it be from a licensed psychologist or simply a friend. I have become one of those people. While I used to take fears and concerns to friends and family, I quickly became overwhelmed by differing opinions and ignorant advice. When speaking with friends left me more confused and lost than I was before our discussions, I began withholding my thoughts and picking up a pen. A notebook will now suffice for the purpose of getting all of my feelings out of my head and into the open. I write to self-reflect, to synthesize ideas, and to attempt to find some sense of direction.

Throughout college I have witnessed my thoughts gradually evolving with experience and knowledge, yet I have begun to realize that to witness is not to make sense of. It has become evident this year, my junior year, that finding who I am and who I hope to become is the first step I must take before making any more significant life choices. And I'm not talking about choices involving what to do or where to go after my time at the University of Michigan ends. Those choices are easy; I will move to Chicago and join the corporate world for two years, attend graduate school, and return to the corporate world. The significant life choices I am referring to

include figuring out how much family time I am comfortable sacrificing in order to achieve my professional goals; how I can be there for my worried mother, demanding father, and lonely brother; and what to do with my long-distance non-committer.

Regardless of the type of writing I am working with, whether it be an academic discourse, an argumentative essay, or creative prose, there are personal thoughts to sift through in order to reach a definitive conclusion by the end of the piece. Furthermore, each of those newly re-examined ideas then becomes part of a bigger picture of myself that I am slowly uncovering. Although my canvas still looks more like a Rorschach than a Rockwell, it is slowly taking shape with each new word that I commit to paper.

As a result of all of this reflection, the writing process becomes somewhat of a self-assessment. Self-healing through writing took on a more prominent role in my life during sophomore year when I wrote a piece entitled *Inhale*. *Inhale* chronicled my time spent watching my brother struggle with epilepsy during the previous summer. Without question, observing my little brother, my best friend, lose complete control of his body and grapple to regain it was the most frightening experience I have endured thus far. So, when I returned to school as summer ended, I naturally began to harbor plenty of unsettling feelings. I wrote everything down in an attempt to find some life-raft to cling to.

I normally begin writing by forming an outline of my piece, beginning with a thesis and ending with supporting details. *Inhale* was no exception. I carefully plotted the organization of the essay and made a list of all the details I was comfortable revealing. Those steps alone are indicative of my affection for control and order. Following the completion of my outline, I commence each essay at the most natural, albeit not the most logical, place to start: the

introduction. An anecdote, a quote, or maybe a short history behind the topic I will explore always prefaces the body of the essay. In the case of *Inhale*, I chose not to follow chronological order. Instead, I placed a peaceful story from the end of the summer at the front of the essay to ease the reader into our situation. Delaying the body of the essay is my way of making small talk with my therapist before really cutting to the topic at hand. Once I have artfully skirted around the issue for an appropriate length, I delve into the subject of the piece. The messy emotions, if you will. I, of course, try and box those as neatly as possible into paragraphs with clean topic sentences and strong supporting details. Before the completion of *Inhale*, writing had helped me sort through more emotions than any single person could.

As in life, the conclusion is oftentimes the portion of each writing project that I grapple with the most. I have yet to write an academic essay on a topic in which I consider myself an expert. When dealing with creative prose, such as *Inhale*, I always question whether the arrangement of words I have chosen leaves the reader with the right impression. For me, summarizing my thoughts into one succinct conclusion is never a graceful task. I have never truly finished anything worth writing about, nor written about anything I could truly finish.

When I write, the paper becomes my chaise lounge and the pencil my own personal PhD taking notes on her notepad. An hour spent wrangling my notions into the confines of an eight-and-a-half by eleven piece of paper and then corralling those feelings into commas and periods is equivalent to an hour spend with a therapist. Paragraphs and punctuation harness all of the messiness that is real life, while neatly jotted-down notes fill the role of a therapist, directing me towards the right answers. Writing is the ultimate form of self-controlled therapy. I decide what to talk about. I decide when and what to explore. I make my own diagnosis.