



Spring
Forward

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FINAL REFLECTION

The four rotating seasons of the years are usually compared to the cycle of life, particularly winter and spring: death and birth, respectively.

Before this spring semester started, I hoped that like the life this season brings, will also revive my willpower to finish school. Because of the seasonal differences, fall semesters always seemed to take longer to finish. It would start off fine. It felt relieving almost; finally escaping the scorching summer heat and enjoying the cool shades. But slowly, the trees die, and the birds migrate to warmer climate. It was always more difficult to wake up and leave work or school in total darkness. I was always excited for spring to return so the sun no longer shies away two-thirds of the day.

Last semester was my first time attending all online courses during a fall semester. I learned that remote learning was not something I enjoyed over in person lectures. Of course, there were the pros to online classes; the comfort of my own home, my cats sitting by my side, and the chance to eat whenever I was hungry! Or use the bathroom; you get it. But I also missed seeing my friends and professors in the halls, attending workshops, and maybe stopping by a lab class occasionally to sneak in a bite of Pastry II's delicious fruit tarts. (They're terribly addicting)


Though I felt my motivation for school waning, I had to finish; there was only a year's number of credits remaining. One of the required classes left for me was any free elective. Usually, I would have considered a challenging course where I would learn a completely new skill but also required a lot of studying. But while looking through the open classes I found myself looking at courses that sounded more personally intriguing than practical. I should do something fun, I thought. Then I saw the course labeled Creative Writing.

Okay, I thought, Creative Writing! How creative can a person really get for writing? I'm imagining we just make up things with our imaginations and write them down. Nevertheless, it sounds fun and interesting, I'll give it a shot.

The class curriculum definitely caught me by surprise. Memoirs as the first writing topic? I thought this was creative, not realistic. What is so creative about writing past memories? Personally, I thought that we should let go of those and keep moving forward. This is kind of silly, we're not creating anything new but shuffling through what we already have. We moved onto writing journals. The prompts that were given were simple and easy to answer, but also questions we would normally not ponder about on our own; at least not for me.

I particularly enjoyed writing about a close friend and recording the environment around me. The content itself isn't anything special, but there were unlimited ways to describe what would normally be a mundane setting. One assignment that stood out to me was the one where everyone in the class had to make up their own scenario for their assigned photo. There were three photos total, and the class was split into three groups. Even though we had the same photo, our stories were wildly different.





In another in class activity, we were provided with cropped photos, and we had to guess what the photo was showing and the setting it was in. Everyone had a different idea of what the photo was showing. In the end, we were surprised to find out that the photos were actually part of one image.

Then, I realized. Creative writing isn't really about conjuring works from thin air. It's about how we individually interpret different writings and situations. We were given the same material and left alone to decipher the situation and meaning behind them, but most of us came out with different perspectives. For someone to be creative doesn't mean that they need to create things, but it's the different ways they can see things.

We often revisited old assignments to either revise them or use them as inspiration for later assignments. After a few times, I found myself with a different understanding of the things I wrote about before. My first assignment on memoir writing was about my first time learning how to swim. I wrote about the events but didn't focus on the trauma that stuck with me, when the instructor took me and threw me into the water without any instructions. It was supposed to be fun, but not knowing anyone there and having no experience with swimming, I was scared. I can still feel the water choking down my throat and veins bulging from my neck. For a long time, that experience controlled my confidence in the pool. When I returned to the states and was enrolled in actual swimming classes, it took me a longer time than the other kids to learn because I had to first overcome what I experienced before. But relooking at how I wrote about it, it had a more lighthearted tone, and I realized that in hindsight, it is a funny story. I actually overcame the fear of water; now, I am a swim instructor myself!

My second short story drew inspiration from a friend's experience, which I thought was a bit similar to my journal entry just mentioned. The memory of a moment from the past that changed me; I had forgotten how much shame and embarrassment stuck with me since that day. How much it has impacted my actions and as a person today. I wrote about how I don't like asking people for things and favors anymore, and the sort of defining moment in my childhood that led to it.

I noticed that I was drawn towards writing about embarrassing things that I would normally have forgotten about. But because of these prompts, I am almost forced to look through my memories to answer the questions honestly. I would like to be honest and transparent in my work. It's not for anyone else but myself, I like to know that the things I write about aren't entirely fiction.

Widening my perspectives wasn't the only thing I learned from this class this semester. Because this course is based off of a more open-ended curriculum, we also had the chance to talk about things other than writing. There were conversations about politics, social issues, controversial topics that one would avoid talking about. (Especially with my parents, I'm not sure about yours)

It was eye opening; I forget how diverse City Tech is and how much I learn from my classmates. I guess that is one of the downsides to online classes. Normally we would chat in person but through Zoom that's near impossible. Anyways, I learned a lot about other people's culture, their beliefs, the discrimination or success they have experienced, or whatever journey it is they're going through right now.

If I were to describe this class in one word, or the emotion I feel towards this class, it would be grateful. I'm so happy that we had funny excerpts to read from and discuss about, I learned a lot about myself and others, and most importantly it was a great reminder that any situation can be flipped (good or bad), depending on our perspective.

MEMOIR

I learned how to swim when I was around 7 years old. Before then, I had no experience with swimming other than at water parks, I was actually very afraid. I didn't know how to hold my breath and breathe out under the water, and had this irrational fear that no matter what, I was going to sink.

After 2nd grade was over, during the summer my grandma, brother, and I took a trip back to China. It was a nice change of scenery and good opportunity to hang out with relatives there. I stayed at my aunt's house with her husband and daughter.

They lived by my cousin's high school. They had a pool there and it was opened to the public during certain hours on the weekdays. Many people in the community went there to exercise, or just to socialize. During the summer there were swim classes during the day for various age groups, and open swim at night.

My aunt suggested that my brother and I learned how to swim. She was friends with the instructor, and it was a good activity to keep us busy during our two month stay. She said, after we got the hang of it, we could swim together during open hours with my cousin; she was a competitive swimmer for her school. We were excited to learn something new and cool, and then have more fun after!

First day of class I was dressed in my little tutu swimsuit, marched in there, confident and ready to conquer the waters. As I walked past the pool to the shallow side, I couldn't help but notice the darker blue for the deep end. It felt... so ominous. When I got to the other side, I saw that the instructor was a massive man- he had a lot of muscles and was loud. There were about fifteen kids bouncing in the pool already, and the instructor was splashing water on all of them. They were laughing and having fun, it made me even more excited!

When my foot dipped into the pool, boy was it cold. I tried to sit on the edge to warm up, but my grandma pushed me in. It was cold. "Go go go! Join the other kids! Have fun!" She promised she would get me in an hour when class ended and walked off.

I was standing there, shivering. Some water got into my nose, but I didn't know how to get rid of the feeling! It felt like I couldn't breathe so I inhaled harder for breath. It only made me feel worse-like soda going up my nose!

I began walking around- the pool was only 3ft deep and I followed the other kids. Walking- trying to walk, actually. It was hard to move with half my body under water. As I looked around, the pool seemed to have expanded in all directions. The other side looked so far...

"Alright! Let's get started! Hello everyone! My name is [teacher], and we'll be practicing how to put your face underwater today!"

The kids started yelling in excitement. "Me first! Me first!" The kids crowd around him. What are they so excited about? I want to join!!

The instructor picks up the first kid, and he.... throws him into the pool. Like a freaking RKO. The kid emerges from under, screaming. "YESSSS! AGAIN!"

I am. Freaking out. Internally.

My legs lock. I don't feel the cold anymore. In fact, I don't feel anything except numbness. Then, my body regained its senses. My confusion of what just happened turned into a sour realization. This is how I'm going to learn how to breathe underwater?! Absolutely not! I start running (sorry, trying to run) to the stairs to get out. My legs feel like jello, they're not moving fast enough against the pressure of the water. Oh man, I'm almost there, I'm almost at the edge--

"Hello, new student. You're [aunt's] niece yeah? Your turn, let's go!" My heart stops and my involuntary reflexes kick in. I'm kicking. I'm kicking my instructor, writhing in his strong grip, trying to escape. He's ready to throw me. I'm screaming no please let me go I'll go last let the other kids go first but-SPLASSHHHH!!

It was a different world underwater. It's as if someone took the remote and muted the world. My screams were replaced with the bubbles escaping from me. I sounded like a fish glub glub glub glub. It was pretty cool, actually, until I tried to take a breath.

The 'air' was so heavy. It was suffocating me. I couldn't speak, breathe, nor think. I thought I was going to die right then, but the instructor pulled me out of the water. I was so shaken; I couldn't say anything.

"See? It wasn't so bad, was it? Next!" The other children push past me to him, like pigeons they gathered around to be thrown.

It was awful. I was terrified and asked to use the bathroom. I stayed there until class was over. When my grandma picked me up, I cried and said I never wanted to go back.

Long story short- they didn't give me an option to quit. I drank so much water that summer I evolved into a fish. Eventually I learned how to hold my breath to not let water in and blow bubbles out through my nose.

But man, that was a wild first class and those kids were even wilder.



SHORT STORY

Bubbles and Giuseppe sat down next to their favorite window in the apartment living room. They live twenty-eight floors above Fifth Avenue in one of New York's busiest neighborhoods. Many kinds of people frequented there, workers, shoppers, tourists; from above it looked like armies of ants swarming around.

They both like to observe the streets from the window. Bubbles liked to watch the double-decker buses zip down the block, Giuseppe enjoyed people watching more.

It wasn't like that now.

Shops used to stay opened until late hours, now every place shut their doors at 10pm. The crowds of people have disappeared with only billboard lights filling the streets. It was a very odd phenomenon, Bubbles and Giuseppe had to discuss.

They perched themselves up on the couch, paws crossed.

"Strange, isn't it?" Giuseppe pondered. "Everyone is gone. It looks barren out there."

"Indeed," agreed Bubbles. "Where do you think they went?"

"I think everyone stayed home. Ours did." They synchronously looked over at the two humans. They were sitting by their desks, staring into the light boxes and clacking on the keypads. Normally at this time they weren't home. They left the apartment in the mornings and usually returned after sundown. Since last March, they've stayed in almost every single day. It was bizarre to say the least.

"I think the news said something about a disease going around," said Giuseppe. He liked to watch television with the humans, and was very happy they the time on it had increased exponentially since they started staying home. They watched the news a lot and Giuseppe had learned quite a lot about their current predicament. "No one is allowed to go out, or rather, it's a little dangerous."

Bubbles sighed. She missed going outside. Sometimes the humans would put her in a transparent bookbag and walk around. She hated feeling cooped up. Giuseppe disagreed.

He thought that it's been a great. "We've been receiving so many Amazon packages. We have so many new toys! Since they've been home, they built all these new things for us."

True, Bubbles thought. They had a new tree, scratching post, and even a window hammock! That was her favorite.

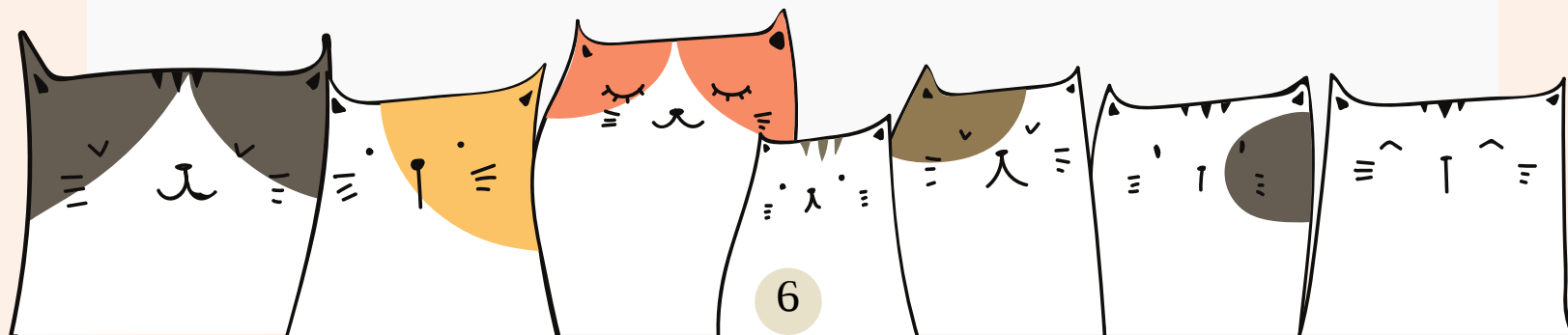
Bubbles and Giuseppe didn't like change. Whatever their routine was, they like to stick to it straight. But this year's shift in lifestyle wasn't all too bad. They loved spending more time with their humans and enjoyed all the new things bought for them.



POEM

FEED ME!

Hello, my favorite human, it's time to wake!
The sun is almost rising, for goodness sake!
I see my food bowl is only sad but pitiful
For you to leave it empty for this long, it's quite despicable.
But no worries, I still love you, just as you love me, you say
When I decide to chew up your remaining lingerie!
And don't you dare give me that dry ass kibble,
You know I love my wet food, and don't portion too little!



JOURNAL I

My parents didn't really allow me to eat junk food growing up, especially things like chips and soda. Every time we went to BJ's or Costco we would roll right past those sections and only get what we needed like cleaning supplies and other things. With snacks seemingly so out of reach, it only made my cravings for it stronger. At school almost every kid had their own snacks. They would whip out their little bags of Lays and Doritos and chow it down. I never brought anything because I didn't have any to bring. Sometimes I would be lucky to have a bag of grapes or carrots.

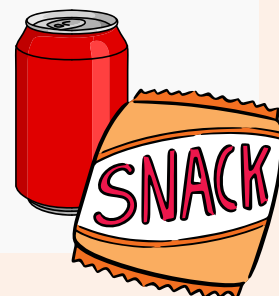
The kids would share their snacks. It was cool, they were really nice and gave me chips. I started asking more and didn't really know that it was rude to keep asking. They always gave, so I thought it was okay. In fourth grade, I learned it wasn't okay.

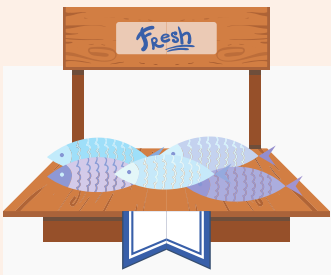
I was called into the school office. I didn't know why; I didn't do anything wrong, I was on top of my school work, and didn't fight with anyone. When I got there, I saw one of my classmates with her mom. The school lady explained to me that I had been asking my classmate a lot for food and she didn't like it. I understood, but before I could say anything her mom came up to my face and started yelling at me.

"Why do you keep asking my daughter for food? It's rude. You ask her so much. Do you not have food? Do your parents not feed you?" I was shaken up and wanted to explain that I didn't mean to be rude. Her daughter offered, so I took. Sometimes I was hungry and wanted a tasty chip to satiate it.

"Don't ask my daughter for anything, anymore! If you're hungry, get your own food. Get your own snacks."

For a long time after that incident, I never asked anyone for anything; snacks, drinks, pencils. I was embarrassed. I didn't want people thinking that I was poor or mistreated at home.





JOURNAL II



"Come on, give me a better one, that one doesn't look fresh!"

"Lady, this is one of the best ones we got, take it or leave it!"

The lady stands her ground, pulling the granny cart besides her. She doesn't care that she's blocking the sidewalk. She wants her fish. "I said, that one doesn't look fresh! Give me the one next to it. Let me see it." The butcher sighs and shows her another fish. "Thanks, I'll have that one." She pays, puts it in her cart, and resumes her journey down Mott Street.

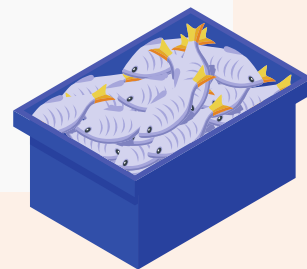
This street in Chinatown is known for their fresh markets, especially for seafood. It's also known for its aggressive vibes. It ain't no Citarella, but some of their products are just as fresh. It's popular not just among the Asian community, but its customer base has also been expanding due to gentrification in the Lower East Side. Almost all day it would be impossible to walk from one end of the block to the other, for half the sidewalk is taken up by the stands and people shopping there.

A butcher is taking a break on a doorstep next to his shop, smoking a cigarette. His black rubber boots glisten in contrast with his work whites. A regular customer walks by and greets him. "Hey! How you been? What you got today, give me the freshest selection!" He flicks the cigarette onto the street.

"You already know everything we have is the best, come take a look!" He maneuvers through the crowd in front and disappears into the back of the shop.

Everyone is moving. Everyone is haggling. And for those who aren't part of this scene, they're just trying to walk from Hester St to Grand. Some are tourists, who grimace at the smell and wetness of the air. They're bumping into locals and their granny carts. As they further down the block, you see their legs moving faster as if they need to escape this smelly fish hole.

Regardless, everyone is moving.





cre•a•tive

krē-'ā-tiv

adj.

producing or using original and unusual ideas

ideas