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English reads into 'writing life'

Love of words, expression inspires career in teaching

"It's easy, after all, not to be a writer. Most people aren't writers, and very little harm comes to them," — Julian Barnes.

ERIN HILL

Columnist



He's right. It is easy not to write. Writing is a burden. This explains the long lines behind phones in the computer labs. Students are dying to escape their word processors; even someone's answering machine provides respite.

I am an English major so the question asked of me most frequently is "Are you going to teach?" Yes, I'm going to teach.

"I hated English," they tell me. These are the same people who asked if I was planning a career as a teacher. Perhaps they detect something askew in my genetic coding and want to avoid all future contact. Perhaps they see me as a creature from another land — a world totally foreign to them.

I am, after all, someone who wants to spend her future in a high school English classroom.

Freedom as a writer is life at its most free, if you are fortunate enough to be able to try it, because you select the materials, invent your task, and pace yourself."

So says Pulitzer Prize-winner Annie Dillard in "The Writing Life," a book called "a small and brilliant guidebook to the landscape of a writer's task."

Even more than wanting to teach, I want to write. That freedom she describes is my goal. To publish the stuff I come up with. To continue my love affair with words.

It's a difficult field to break into, a difficult life to live, I am well aware. But all lives are difficult. And someone has to be published. Someone is getting paid to do it and I figure I ought to be that someone.

"Writing appeals ... to the subtlest senses — the imagination's vision, and the imagination's hearing — and the moral sense, and the intellect. This writing that you do, that so thrills you, that so rocks and exhilarates you, as if you were dancing next to the band, is barely audible to anyone else. The reader's ear must adjust down from loud life to the subtle, imaginary sounds of the written word."

Committing oneself to a writing life is like committing oneself to working with cobwebs. It is a delicate craft and only the

careful, conscientious and patient survive. But it is, I might add, totally worthwhile; when it clicks, nothing is more satisfying.

"The impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."

One of my composer friends told me once that he heard melodies, harmonies and the like in his head. The music he wrote came to him in the night, at dawn, even in the shower. His mental composing puzzled me.

Then I started to write prose and sentences came to me from out of nowhere.

I say them aloud or write them down, just to see if they are keepers or not. Most aren't. Most of the stuff I write — the prose, poetry and even the academic jazz — isn't worth saving; but every so often a chain of words comes to me that insists on staying. A thing of beauty I can call my own, though it rarely seems like I created it.

I just hear it in my head, like someone gave me a Walkman and as I listened words came out instead of notes. That's how I know I need to write; if I don't the words get backed up and give me a headache.

The last thing I want is the regret that comes upon discovering ashes, where creation should be.

"Writers surround themselves with other writers, deliberately to enforce in themselves the ludicrous notion that a reasonable option for occupying yourself on the planet until your life span plays itself out is sitting in a small room for the duration, in the company of pieces of paper."

That's why I work at The Battalion, I guess.

"Why are we reading if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened and its deepest mystery probed? Why are we reading if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom, courage, and the possibility of meaningfulness? We still and always want waking."

I want to be one who rouses the world from sleep or at least provides it with something to smile at and take comfort from when life is too much to bear.

That's why I am embarking on the writing life.

Erin Hill is a senior English major



THE BATTALION Editorial Board

Belinda Blancarte, Editor in chief
Mark Evans, Managing editor
Jay Robbins, Opinion editor
Jenny Magee, Assistant opinion editor

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorial board. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff.
Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors.
Contact the opinion editor for information on submitting guest columns.

EDITORIAL

OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS

Newspapers serve to inform readers

The news media sometimes can be incorrectly perceived as a participant in controversies when it reports tense or sensitive subjects. To clear up any misunderstandings — The Battalion exists to inform the students of both the facts and opinions around them.

The news presented in The Battalion is neutral. News stories are based on facts and interviews, and contain no "opinion" content. The news reflects what the readers need to know to be well-informed on the topic, not what they need to think.

A "conservative," "radical" or "liberal" viewpoint has no bearing on what is reported in a newspaper. A reporter's job is to discover and write about events — whether they concern sports or politics, the MSC or the world.

The Opinion section of The Battalion contains columns that express the opinions of various writers. Columns are written by different individuals who practice almost every belief. They do not represent a single doctrine — the ideas they express try to present unique viewpoints and perspectives.

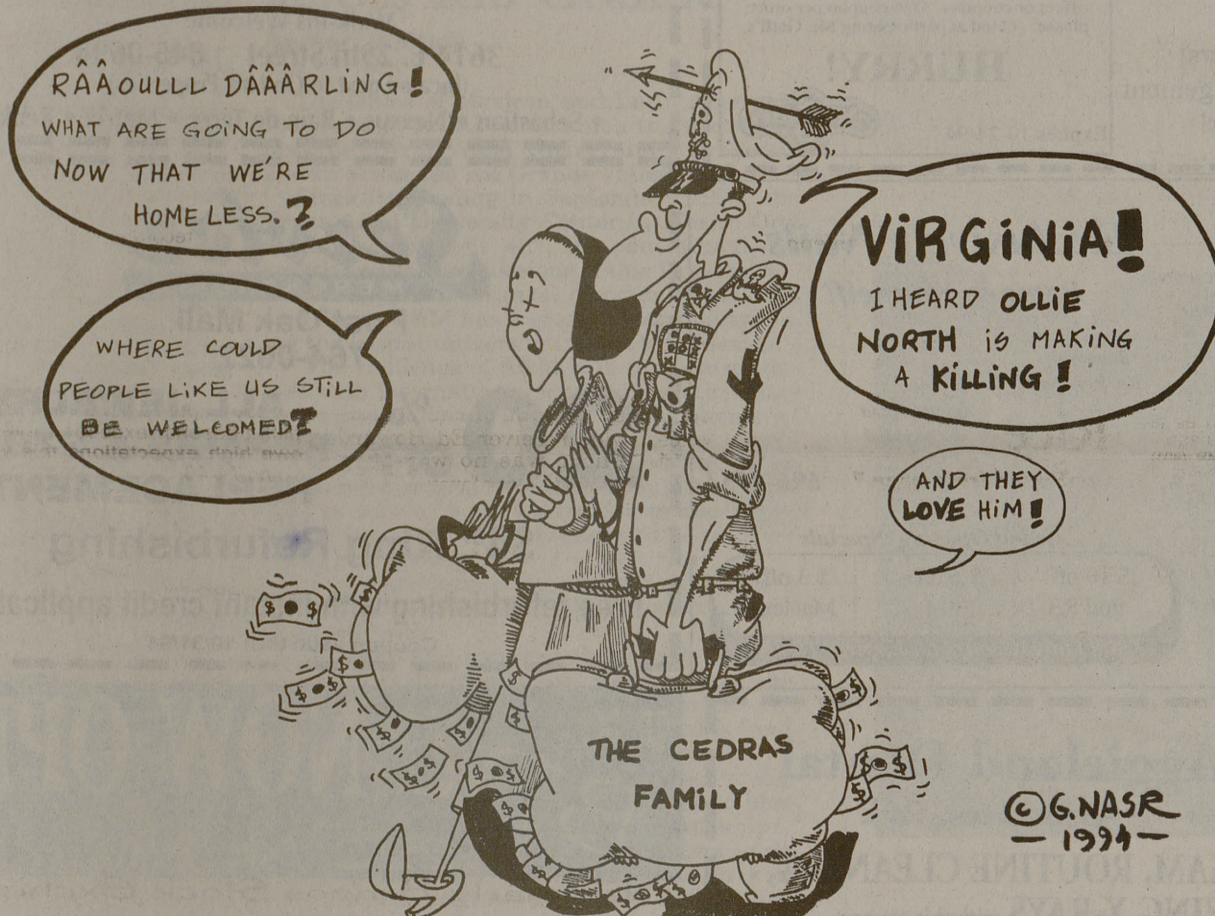
When the Opinion page is most successful, it presents arguments from several sides of an issue, not just the most popular or sympathetic.

Editorials are written according to the opinion of the editorial board, not an individual staff members. The editorial statement, which appears on the Opinion page to define its perspective, states: "Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorial board. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff."

The Editorial Board, consisting of the Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Opinion Editor and Assistant Opinion Editor, discusses topics for editorials that are important in current events or popular concern. However, they do not expect to subvert or control other beliefs.

The Battalion staff is made up of writers from countless different backgrounds, beliefs, political orientations and nationalities, all of which help contribute to a well-rounded newspaper. The Battalion's only agenda is to preserve and expand its objectivity, diversity and expertise.

As a news source for students and faculty, The Battalion does not endorse any doctrine. It simply serves to inform, entertain and enlighten — the three aims of any newspaper.



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MAIL CALL

Senator clarifies new preregistration bill

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify a few miscommunicated issues. The Battalion reported that at last week's Student Senate meeting a decision was made concerning the student workers preregistration bill. This information, reported by The Battalion, was incorrect. The actual made by the Student Senate last week, after an hour and a half of deliberation, was the following: senior and junior student workers register on the last day of honors registration; sophomores register on the last day of senior registration; and freshman register on the last day of junior registration. The reason for all the debate and questioning revolved around two main issues. The first reason was that the system that had all student workers registering on the same day of senior registration was logistically impossible. Last year when this was done for the first time, the phone registration system overloaded and crashed. The second issue of debate was the concern that seniority should be taken into account. The other aspect of this concern was that we need to take into consideration that without these jobs, some students wouldn't be able to stay at A&M. Through debate, we worked out what the Student Senate felt was a compromise regarding the issues at hand.

This whole issue has turned out to be a miscommunication. The Battalion incorrectly reported the original bill passed by the Student Senate. Then a concerned student, rightfully, aimed his comments at me based on what The Battalion reported. Upon sorting out this miscommunication, the student who wrote to Mail Call on Oct. 14, has apologized for the misunderstanding. The lesson to learn from this situation is easy to see. Take the time to call your senators and voice your questions and concerns, and remember, the media aren't perfect and do report things incorrectly at times.

Ryan Shopp, Class of '95 Student Senator

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows.
Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.
We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy.

Address letters to:
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Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: Batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu

Cuban rockers use death to find freedom

'Revolutionaries' infect themselves with AIDS

There is a lot of talk around the world about freedom, about democracy. There are people who speak of freedom, rally for freedom, fight and kill for freedom.

Some people, however, die to find freedom. Some are those whose fellow human beings, in rage or evil determination, slaughter them for their beliefs and values.

Some decide to take their own lives. The New York Times Magazine recently published a story on young men in Cuba, self-described rockers, who were so hated and despised by their own society that they fought back — with AIDS.

In Cuba, young people are not allowed to have the kind of independent childhoods that the common American enjoys. From birth, they are told that the state is everything, that thoughts and actions not prescribed by the state are evil.

Then they hear rock and roll, angry lyrics from across the ocean, and realize that the thoughts they have — the disappointments and the confusion of being young — are not just theirs. Around the world, teenagers are discovering that life is nothing like they thought.

From black market record covers, these teens find idols. Men, dressed in ripped blue jeans and T-shirts, long hair flying through the air, guitars slung low across one hip, become their voice. Like the rest of the world, they want to copy their idols, so they start playing that music and dressing that way.

The local authorities, however, see things differently. These kids are "revolutionaries," "problems," and "different," and for this they must be punished. Constantly beaten, the Cuban rockers quickly learn a lesson so many of us forget, freedom is not free.

So the rockers, abused and disenfranchised, decide to take fate into their own hands and inflict a cash loss and bad publicity on the government in the process.

Learning about AIDS, the rockers find the means to do harm, the only weapon left in a society that hates them.

Some take syringes, dipping into infected friends, and inject themselves with the deadly virus. Some find young ladies, dying and needing companionship, whom they join and quickly leave after a caressing moment that leads to horror and death.

Many of the rockers' girlfriends, young girls in love, decide to go with their mates to the grave, so that they will be together forever. These living horrors then are dependent on the government. The rockers, girlfriends in tow, are left in sanitariums, far away from the rest of the population, and in the grasp of a

We blast ourselves for being so entertainment-oriented ... Without our poetry, our movies, our literature, our music, would we, as a people, be worth anything?

slow death. Their deaths are bought and paid for by the country of Cuba, which provides them with better food and housing than are available to common Cubans.

And then they wait. It must be horrible, knowing that the diseases spreading through your body, weakening your mind and soul, were caused by your own extreme hatred of the surrounding world.

That no one around you could appeal to the basic sense of all people to survive and be happy. That an evil regime could simply crush your

soul to nothing but bitterness. Rock and roll stars, busy changing girlfriends and making money, probably have no idea how important they have become to the young of the world. When a young man wants to show defiance, he can rip his jeans, grab a drum set or guitar and scream his thoughts to the world.

While in the United States, this is normal and part of growing-up, young people around the world are relying on our entertainers to speak for them.

So many young people find themselves in circumstances without help or support, without anyone to care for them ... They need someone who can express their desires for them.

Someone who can help them dream past their unfortunate circumstances. We blast ourselves for being so entertainment-oriented, not realizing that maybe what we consider entertainment can save souls.

When all these rockers die, people will again forget how much people need the freedom to express themselves, how dark and worthless a life is without pure interaction. Without our poetry, our movies, our literature, our music, would we, as a people, be worth anything?

Can life without expression be more worthwhile than death as the ultimate expression?

As these thoughts accumulate, we must look around ourselves and decide if we have done our duty to assist the special, if failed, patriots of a long-forgotten cause.

Have we lived our lives to their full potential, have we stood-up for what is right and just in America, one of the few places that allows this kind of power to flow freely?

Maybe such self-evaluation will protect future generations from deciding if liberty is worth dying for.

Josef A. Elchanan is a senior business management major