



Vincent Bruckert (left) with Dr. Paul Heilker (right)

Introduction

On March 6, the Assessment Committee hosted Dr. Paul Heilker from Virginia Tech University for a retreat on critical thinking. We discussed the meaning of a chair, we studied the history of shoelaces, and we slowly read Langston Hughes' poem "Mellow." Well, we did that, but that really doesn't explain what happened as those statements are too brief and, ultimately for our journey into critical thinking, too certain to really capture the warm energy that captivated us on that cold Friday morning.

Paul's insights into critical thinking are based, as he said at the outset of our Friday meeting, on the notion that critical thinking happens in the places of our uncertainty. This means that if we already feel sure about something, our brain turns off its critical thinking component. It also means that if we are challenged to

think critically, then there must be something we are unsettled by, an event that appears unfamiliar to us, or a fact that is clearly different from what we expect.

This pursuit of the unfamiliar and the unexpected, even if it is disturbing, reminds me why I love to teach—because we humans like to learn, or at least I'd like to think we like to learn. Really trying to learn, though, forces us to exhaust ourselves. We may even have to fundamentally and repeatedly contradict ourselves. And if to learn means to face that which is disturbing and unsettling, we may even find out things about others or, more troubling, about ourselves that we were not really looking or wanting to learn.

This pursuit of the unknown and unsettling is at the heart of Paul's essay "On Running," reprinted here in this newsletter. In it, Paul begins a lengthy meditation on running,

something he knows very much about and maybe took for granted until one bitter morning. His response to that morning gradually transforms into a powerful autobiographical moment of a man in his entirety, not just the man as a runner. In my social media world where so many of my shared intimacies with others just show us smiling broadly in our best-dressed Saturday night clothes, or with our families at those special happy moments like birthdays and graduations, I find this essay a really fresh breath of human honesty and exploration. I have asked him if we could share this essay here as a means of demonstrating exactly what we were getting towards with those chairs, shoelaces, and slowed-down lines of verse: a journey into ourselves and our ability to find, or make, meaning in an uncertain world. I hope you enjoy it as well.

Submitted by Vincent Bruckert



The Words in Our CT Definition: How They Matter to Us

The following paragraphs from our faculty on the Assessment Committee each focus on a particular word in our definition of Critical Thinking and explain a significance that word has in our approach to teaching and learning. As a reminder, here's our Committee's definition of critical thinking:

"Critical thinking is a process of identifying patterns or ideas within a set of ideas, texts, and/or points of view; interpreting or explaining that pattern; and justifying that interpretation or explanation as meaningful."

"Points of View" by Sandra Shawgo

I am part of the radiography team that has been tasked with moving the Wright Radiography program to Malcolm X in the coming year. As such, the words that resonate with me from the above definition of critical thinking are "points of view".

As we have tackled this complex project, we have had to incorporate multiple points of view as so many factions are affected by this change. First and foremost, the student perspective must be used as a constant guide. Additionally, though not in order of importance, the faculties from both Malcolm X and Wright Radiography programs must be considered along with the point of view of the District Office and Administration at Malcolm X.

To be honest, I don't think I have ever worked on a project that had so many essential points of view. Aligning the 2 programs to function under 1 accreditation often seems to be an insurmountable task. Critical thinking from every angle and incorporating all points of view in regards to curriculum alignment, calendar alignment, SLOs, equitable faculty load, shared clinical sites, shared classroom and lab space, student evaluation procedures (to name just a few) is overwhelming from a global view. As with any massive operational change, one piece must be examined at a time and all views

considered.

"Patterns" by Matthew Greif, PhD

Short statement on the word "patterns":

It is human nature to look for patterns in the world around us, but sometimes this behavior can have negative consequences. When investing in the stock market, for example, it is tempting to try to predict the movement of equities and time the market. If a stock has gone up in the past it will go up in the future. Such patterns are often figments of our imagination and can lead to empty wallets and a reduction in our options for the future; dreams of retiring in London England may have to be replaced with dreams of retiring in London Ontario. Seeking patterns can also be beneficial if it can lead to positive change. As we are currently investigating how our students use critical thinking to solve biological problems, we are essentially looking for patterns. How do our students use critical thinking? Do our students use critical thinking? Are we actively building this skill into our curriculum and how do we empower our faculty to create lectures and labs that cultivate critical thinking both inside and outside the classroom? By carefully looking for patterns and using data and not opinions to bring about effective change, we can answer these questions, and develop both faculty and students who have more options in their future rather than less.

"Patterns of Logic" by Ted Jankowski

Patterns of Logic in Math 118 General Education Mathematics:

In Math 118, students are introduced to logic and are required to search for patterns of ideas. These ideas form statements, which are then combined into compound forms with key words, called logical connectives, such as not, and, or, as well as if...then. It takes a bit of critical thinking, but students eventually learn how to decipher patterns in verbal and written ideas, and then to construct these ideas into mathematical symbols, which are later analyzed by standard mathematical

Assessment Committee Members

Vincent Bruckert (Chair) - English
Matthew Grief - Biology
Timothy Andriano - Social Service
Susan Colon - VPA
Adrian Guiu - Humanities
Fred Hernandez - CIS
Adrienne Leyva - OTA
Merry Mayer - Social Science
Beverly Bennett - Social Science
Jane McNiven - Paralegal
Andrew Kruger - Physical Science
Julius Nadas - Math
Sandy Shawgo - Radiography
Andrew Spiropoulos - Physical Education
Helen Doss - English
Jeanette Bruno - Library
Paul Croitoru - Business
Krzysztof Ochwat - Physical Science
Ted Jankowski - Math

techniques.

Consider this sentence, "I am not saying that I don't want you to never be unable to not be incapable of never being incompetent in learning how to analyze logical arguments." If you are an English major, you may have well determined that I do indeed want you to learn how to analyze logical arguments. In math, two negatives means a positive, three means a negative, and so on. We count 8 negations in the sentence, an even number. So, the sentence comes out as a positive. Am I not right?

Logical arguments have introductory statements called premises which validate a final statement called the conclusion. For complicated arguments, students create and analyze truth tables. The argument in symbolic form is broken into smaller pieces. The first right hand columns of a truth table consist of the premises. The middle columns consist of smaller compound statements, sequentially combined step-by-step, to yield the final argument in the left most column. Students then write either T for true, or F for false in every cell of the truth table. The truth table essentially covers every conceivable combination of true and false for the premises. In the end, if the last column contains all T's, then the argument is valid and is called a

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

tautology. Otherwise, it's not valid and is called a fallacy. Sometimes, students can avoid the time consuming process of creating truth tables if they can recognize specific well known logical patterns of commonly used arguments. These are so well known, they are given names like Modus Ponens, Modus Tollens, Disjunctive Syllogism, and Reasoning by Transitivity. There are even well known invalid forms of arguments, such as the Fallacy of the Converse and the Fallacy of the Inverse. By recognizing various patterns, and in analyzing those patterns, Math 118 students gain valuable practice in critical thinking. Hopefully, these skills will remain long after graduation.

"Patterns" by Beverly Bennett:

In doing our assessment of our classes, it is valuable to look for patterns with regard to areas where students are more and less successful, so that we can address issues for improvement.

"Within" by Vincent Bruckert

The word "within" from our definition of critical thinking has come to life for me sometime after we included it in the definition. I think it has done so because "within" emphasizes that critical thinking emerges from the activity of learning and studying and therefore is a constituent of our discipline's content itself. That is, to study literature is to engage in a process of critical thinking. Knowing dates of Shakespeare's plays is great, but truly thinking about the plays themselves provokes us to think critically.

This point re: "Within" has been relevant to me this past school year as I have put greater emphasis on creating more research and analysis assignments for my Comp 101 and Lit classes. I usually use lots of "freewriting" assignments that allow students to explore their own reactions to our reading. But this year, I pushed them to root their own reactions in the ideas and responses from other writers, especially those who have published on

our selected writers. I first ask students to describe how they felt reading a particularly tricky moment in a story's narration. Then I ask them to find a reviewer or critic who describes a similar reaction to that scene, or not, as sometimes the published critic has a totally different sense of what has happened in the story. I call these assignments "free-researching." This kind of activity has proved successful as students have learned to describe their own insights and to compare and contrast them to how others are reading the same writer. Though many different eyes and voices can react differently, still these reactions are rooted in something "within" the fiction itself, and by noticing where that reaction comes from, students have been more detailed and concrete in explaining their points.

"Patterns" by Jane Mc Niven, J.D

Patterns, what is a pattern? I see patterns in everything, materials, the cut of cloth, the fit and drape of fabric on the human form. Most of all I see it in students throughout their first semester of college. They think they are unique, special individuals, yet they fit into common patterns; the studious, the nerd, the geek, the slacker, the know-it-all who knows nothing. The pattern is wavy, crinkled. They go through the semester in the same way. They start out ambitious, yet scared in a deer-in-the-headlights, frightened kind of way. In this environment, we educate, IF they choose to learn. They build confidence, the pattern evolves, the lines straighten, the building blocks form. The foundation of education solidifies.

"Interpretation" by Adrienne Leyva

From the definition of critical thinking, the word that matters most to me is the word "interpretation". To my way of thinking, this word relates to an understanding of a circumstance or envisioning a version of a given situation. The action that this word conveys is something that seems foundational to my role as an instructor, as an Occupational Therapist (OT) and for the Occupational Therapy Assistants

(OTA) that my students will become. From an Occupational Therapy perspective, interpretation of a person's needs based on their values, abilities and limitations is crucial to the OTA in being able to create interventions that re-connect the person with performing meaningful daily activities following a disabling condition. Wright's OTA students have offered much insight into this construct during preparation for the clinical phase of their education.

During a professional development seminar, OTA students were given the task of creating treatment activities for a given patient scenario. In the process of role play of this treatment session, each student group was given additional obstacles or complications that required on the spot problem solving, achieving a safe and effective outcome for the simulated patient. Each student group responded to the given circumstance by "interpreting" the circumstances, that is, understanding what the problems were, what options were available, and what worked for the specific needs of the patient. What impressed me most with this process was the generation of multiple options and the integration of acquired knowledge from the semester to consider what worked for the situation. From these possibilities, the students were then eager to "interpret" what option would match the patient's specific needs and preferences within the given context. Each student group was able to envision a version of a given situation toward a beneficial outcome. The results of this assignment's emphasis on clinical "interpretation" were student engagement, acknowledgement of success with critical thinking, and confidence building toward clinical readiness, a rewarding experience.

"Justifying" by Andrew Kruger

Research and inquiry include the gathering of data and interpreting the experimental results, and a large amount of work goes into justifying those interpretations. Conclusions can be

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

easily made when we look at data, but they shouldn't be taken seriously if those conclusions can't be thoroughly supported. To properly justify a claim, a person has to include all relevant information that is in support of or against the claim, look critically at all assumptions being made, and search for any holes in their logical reasoning. It is in this justification that critical thinking can actively take place.

For example, in each of my physics labs, I have my students write a report that discusses the theories behind the experiment. They have to justify why the experiment can be used to measure the values they are investigating. After they have gathered the data, I have them analyze the results and discuss whether their findings were consistent with expected values. If the values are similar to expectations, they discuss whether the value was consistent between multiple measurements. If not, they have to come up with explanations for what may have caused them to differ. In having them write these reports, I am expecting them to think critically about their work by justifying all aspects of their experiments.

"Ideas" by Adrian Guiu

The word ideas appears twice in the definition. The premise of my teaching is that ideas are not mere constructions, projections or inventions of the readers; thus the readers are not the ones who put the ideas into the texts (understood broadly). Rather, the role of the reader is to discern and grasp what lies at the core of these texts; her role is to open oneself to what the text discloses and opens.

Moreover, ideas are not mere neutral facts; rather they have a meaning, they have relevance and last but not least they have a transformative value: they transform or change the views and sometimes the life of the person/reader. Thus, critical thinking is an exercise of discovering, explaining, interpreting and applying ideas which

allows the students to clarify and broaden their view of the world and their own place in it.

"And" by Helen Doss, PhD

"And" is a coordinating and correlative conjunction, with the power to conjoin both similar and dissimilar linguistic phenomena. Its function in both written and verbal syntax provides a useful metaphor for the kind of thinking in which students are encouraged to engage in my classes. As a community of learners, who are involved in the critical interrogation of complex texts, students are asked to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the value and validity of claims, evidence and conclusions in critical essays, literary texts, films and other media. In the crafting of their statements about the texts explored in my classes, I encourage (nay, *require*) them to consider the possibility of multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings in order to expand their awareness of that which is possible – for themselves, their communities and the world. The exercise of embracing contrariety and seeing the value in juxtapositional thinking, sometimes, enables students to imagine beyond the essentializing binaries of "either/or" thinking that both characterize and limit many of their lives, e.g., one is either poor, uneducated and powerless *or* rich, educated and powerful. Construed in this way, critical thinking is the process of finding productive connections among the texts they study and their lived experiences. Thus, "and," is an unlikely, but essential, partner in the process of achieving social justice with and for our students.

CAAP Critical Thinking Test Questions

Our students periodically take CAAP assessment as they did this April. The most recent CAAP results indicated low proficiency in the area of critical thinking. It might be in our, as faculty, interest to take a closer look at the nature of the CAAP Critical Thinking test.

After reading a CAAP Critical Thinking Sample Test Questions Booklet my strong impressions were as follows.

It is rather long, multipage, 4-passage, 32-item, 40-minute test. It requires analysis, evaluation, and extension of arguments and subarguments presented in a multitude of statements of multiple characters, accumulating to lengthy passages.

It appears to be above all a reading comprehension test rather than critical thinking. It requires concentration and ability to track an idea through a number of statements of several people.

The context of the test is far from neutral. The topics are morally and ethically sensitive. Quite often answers to the questions might possibly be influenced by variety of cultural and religious perspectives of its test takers.

A positive outcome from this type of assessment is certainly indicative of good critical thinking skills. However, a negative is that it is open to too vast a number of reasons why, only one of them being low/poor critical thinking skills. It is uncertain what the assumption regarding the test takers, or the exact intention of the writers of such assessment, if any, is. In my opinion it is not a useful tool to measure and draw any conclusions specific to the skill of critical thinking of our students. There are simply too many factors and variables, other than critical thinking, affecting the outcome of this test.

Submitted by Krzysztof Ochwat



Critical Thinking in the Practice of Occupational Therapy

As an emerging Occupational Therapy practitioner, I was introduced to the concept of critical thinking, not fully recognizing the impact of this term. I did not realize that every interaction with a patient would involve using critical thinking skills. I did come to realize quickly that in order to really help patients, I needed to understand what was important to them. I needed to understand their diagnoses and precautions. I needed to appreciate how they were able or unable to perform the basic and meaningful activities of daily living and find solutions that would work for them in consideration of all these factors. I also needed to apply principles of intervention to promote a positive change for these individuals. At the same time, I needed to reflect on how I was offering the information and working with the patients, how the therapy was being accepted and how I interacted with patients within the system that employed me and offered therapy services. I needed to be able to explain everything to the patients, their families and the interdisciplinary team that worked with them. At the end of the therapy day, I then needed to document everything that happened and how the patients were progressing in achieving their goals to be able to be as independent as possible. Lastly, I needed to plan the next step or steps to achieving optimal outcomes while engaging each patient in this collaborative process. As I reflect on this process, I believe this is essentially the description of the profession of occupational therapy and a working

definition of critical thinking for the profession.

Occupational Therapy (OT) is a helping profession that is dedicated to assisting people who have a medical condition, development disability, or a mental health concern, to reconnect with the activities that they value most but are unable to perform because of their limitations. In the profession of occupational therapy, critical thinking involves engaging knowledge and understanding to solve problems, apply principles, generate goals or a plan, evaluate the outcomes and then create options. This definition of critical thinking assists OT practitioners in approaching individuals in need (the patient, the client, the consumer) and offering effective treatment that is personalized but observant of how the body functions, develops, and interacts. At the same time, the OT practitioner understands and applies principles of how to intervene to progress individuals toward reconnection with the ability to participate in their meaningful activities, known as occupations.

Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) students in the program at Wright College bring their life experience and problem solving abilities to their studies as well as their interests, knowledge and understanding to develop critical thinking skills in the framework of the profession of occupational therapy. Critical thinking skills for the OTA student involves using foundational knowledge to understand, describe and explain concepts, apply these concepts in novel or unique circumstances and then analyze the outcomes, creating new strategies to assist with enhancing human performance. Implicit in this process is the students' ability to evaluate their therapeutic role and

professional performance which advances the critical thinking continuum. These advanced thinking skills are not unique to OTA students. It is however, a concept that is vital to effectively working with people in need. To this end, the OTA program values the development of these skills by placing learning outcomes for their emergence and practice in each class of the program.

Many years have passed since I became an OT practitioner with many patients reaching their fullest potential in being able to perform valued activities because of the development and use of my critical thinking skills. Although the context my professional life as an OT has shifted from the clinic to the classroom, I am reminded of the struggles to become an effective OT critical thinker as I witness the development of each OTA student in the program. Although the process of becoming an OT practitioner is not always easy, using critical thinking skills to help others can be very rewarding. So, as the Wright College OTA students complete each exam, treatment plan, activity analysis, practicum, role play, and fieldwork experience, they build skills to be effective OT critical thinkers to serve others in need meaningfully.

Submitted by Adrienne Leyva

“On Running” by Paul Heilker

Whenever I am in Tulsa visiting my in-laws, I run along the Arkansas River. The bike path there is pleasant and well-maintained, with clearly marked distances and a crushed gravel path paralleling the asphalt one for much of the way, a boon for those of us nursing sore shins and the like. The path runs

(Continued on page 8)

Center *for* Teaching and Learning

Wilbur Wright College • Room S-243 • Email: wwc-ctl@ccc.edu

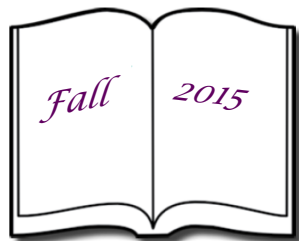
CTL Mission Statement: The college envisions a faculty and staff-led approach to foster a sustainable culture of engagement, development, and lifelong learning among all stakeholders. The CTL will empower participants to excel in teaching, learning, and leading in a collaborative college environment.

Thinking about attending a CTL Professional Development Session?

All attendees will receive a *Certificate of Professional Development* and credit through Continuing Education!

**All faculty and staff are welcome to attend
CTL sessions.**

***Be on the lookout for upcoming announcements
and flyers regarding Fall 2015 CTL sessions!***



**And be sure to participate in one of the CTL
Book Clubs!**

Go2Knowledge®

Your Link to On-Demand Professional Development

*Unlimited access to professional development
trainings with the click of a button!*

Website: www.go2knowledge.org/WrightPD

Login: Wright • Password: Go2Wright

Innovative Educators

Fall 2015 Learning Communities

POPULAR CULTURE in AMERICAN SOCIETY

Sociology 201 2LC Monday/Wednesday 12:30pm (Keith Jones)

Philosophy 106 2LC Monday/Wednesday 2:00pm (Russell Hamer)

Exploring Eternal Human Questions from Rational and Emotional Perspectives

Philosophy 106 9LC Tuesday/Thursday 12:30pm (Roumiana Stankova)

English 101 9LC Tuesday/Thursday 2:00pm (Terrell Isselhard)

- *Great Books Learning Community*

Latin America at the Movies

Humanities 205 78LC Tuesday/Thursday 12:30pm (Anna Proffit)

History 215 78LC Tuesday/Thursday 2:00pm (Victor Padilla)

- *Global Studies and Latin American Learning Community*

Spiritual Technologies of Non-Western Cultures and Traditions

Humanities 212 89LC Tuesday/Thursday 2:00pm (Jessi Choe)

English 101 89LC Tuesday/Thursday 3:30pm (Jessi Choe)

- *Global Studies and Great Books Learning Community*

**Please support Wright College's
Learning Communities by
recommending students to
enroll today!**



**Learning
Communities**

(Continued from page 5)

along both shores of the quarter-mile wide river, across a series of bridges, through wooded sections and playgrounds and parks, past bandstands and fountains and ball fields. From the path I can see the tall buildings and churches downtown,

the oil refineries and power plant in West Tulsa, the green affluence of the Gilcrease Hills to the north, neat complexes of contemporary townhouses and apartments, street upon street of small, working-class homes, and the imposing concrete mass of the dam and spillway and old railroad bridge near 31st Street. The view of the river itself is equally varied and interesting. Depending on how much water is released from Keystone Lake upstream, the river can be a mere thread of water barely visible in its own wide and sandy bed, for instance, or a flat mirror reflecting the pink and gold and white of a midwest sunset, or an angry black-grey washboard punctuated with white and frothy sawteeth. Over the fifteen years or so that I have been running along the river, I've come to appreciate its familiar, comfortable friendship.

But something odd happened one December when I was in Tulsa for the holidays, something that has pestered my thinking ever since and won't go

away. I went running along the river one particularly cold and windy morning-- the windchill was down around eight degrees, as I recall--and as I reached the turn-around point and did my 180, I realized--to my disappointment--that I hadn't been running against the wind after all, but had, in fact, been running

with it at my back. I pulled my hat down and leaned forward into the wind to start back toward my car, but as the frosty blast stabbed through my layers and blew tears out of my eyes and freeze-dried my nostrils and seared the back of my throat, a disturbing thought imposed itself: "*Why am I running? What in the world would make me come out here on a day like this and do this to myself?*" A rapid cataloging of the typical answers (to keep my weight down, to reduce my cholesterol, to stay fit, etc.) quickly revealed that no one reason, and certainly no stock reason, could account for my willingness to endure what I was enduring at that moment. But then again, I found myself wondering, how is this slicing

cold any different, really, from the blast furnace heat of a prairie summer's day? I've run along this river in those conditions, too. And when I am home in Virginia, I regularly elect to experience the stultifying boredom of long runs. I likewise frequently choose to feel the desperate and nauseating hypoxia of speedwork. And I've been doing this for years now! The reasons why I run, I quickly sensed, must be multiple and complex and continuously evolving and deeply

interwoven into some kind of flexible yet compelling network of need. What else could explain it? What else but some kind of incredibly dense and powerful and shifting and growing knot of motivations could explain why I continue to lace them up and head out, day after day after day, year after year, in good times and bad, through happiness and sadness and tranquility and agitation, through injuries large and small? On any given day, some fresh and unique mixture of individual and specific reasons must rise to the fore to replace the previous day's amalgam of motivations in a never-ending and unconscious ebb and flow.

Within that one day's concatenation, any number of diverse and perhaps even contradictory impulses for running must be operating. Some days these reasons might be equally weighted, I suppose. But on most days, I suspect, they are probably arranged in a richly layered though hidden hierarchy.

I

Why am I (still) running? The most obvious answer, I think, is that I am running *away*.

I am running away from my family, it pains me to say. I am running away from my wife, Aileen, even though I love her in ways that I can scarcely express. When she left town a few years back for her first professional convention, it flattened me. All I could do was prop up my life and go through the motions until she got back. We have a strong marriage, too. We work hard at it, talking and listening carefully. But there are things about her that I feel the need to escape, it seems. She admits that she is lazy about housework, for instance, so I end up doing the vast majority of the shopping and cooking and cleaning around the house. She always seems to be sick in some way--back pains, neck pains, shoulder pains, headaches, coughs, sore

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

throats--so much so that I long ago started joking about her apparent "roving tumor." Like every other woman in America, she has issues with her weight and food and dieting, and the sound of my voice telling her that she is beautiful just the way she is cannot compete with a lifetime's worth of media telling her that she is desperately flawed. And she seems incapable of writing down her appointments, so every day is full of unhappy surprises and unexpected conflicts that I have to work around.

I am running away from my son, Eli, who reveals to me that life is a bizarre and wondrous thing on a daily basis. Eli has Asperger's Syndrome, which can most easily be understood as a kind of high-functioning autism-- astonishing gifts paired with equally astonishing deficits. On the one hand, he is sweet, sensitive, and incredibly intelligent, having a photographic memory, perfect musical pitch, and the ability to find patterns and connections across the most divergent data sets. Eli can also apparently multi-task, running two or more entirely different operations in his head at the exact same time, like singing Beethoven's Fifth while simultaneously figuring out how many words in English have the "kw" letter combination in them (*silkworm, awkward, backward*, etc.). On the other hand, he is a maddening, frustrating, clueless innocent profoundly baffled by the simplest social situations and conventions, like taking turns in a conversation, for example. He is also always in danger of becoming trapped in an ever-shrinking world constructed of his own obsessive-compulsive rituals, like eating cheddar cheese, raisins, and pretzels for lunch *every* day.

I am running away from my daughter, Madeleine, who regularly makes me wonder "How could something *that* beautiful, that *vibrant* come from me?" Mad is apparently perfectly normal, which means, of course, that she is even more difficult to deal with than her brother. She is physically and mentally active in ways that just wear me out. Every day the house ends up strewn with the evidence of her boundless imaginative play and countless art projects.

Moreover, she is just plain smarter than me and she knows it. Sometimes she can barely contain her disdain for my stupidity, a dismissal which usually manifests itself as a quiet but steadfast will to ignore what I tell her to do paired with

an equally unspoken and iron-willed preference for her mother's company. She is

an excellent, poker-faced liar who schemes for sugar so often that I have begun to tell her that "I don't negotiate with terrorists."

Moreover, I am running away from my roles in my family, from being a husband and father and disciplinarian and teacher and accountant and maintenance man and cook and maid. I am running away from shopping at

Wal-Mart, from balancing checking accounts, from Spanish homework and math sheets, from loading and emptying the dishwasher, from loading and emptying the clothes washer and dryer, from loading and emptying the garbage and recycling cans, from putting dinner on the table, from fixing leaky showers and cracked grout, from sweeping and vacuuming, from picking up after everyone in a vain effort to maintain order in our environment. I am running away from what poet Robert Hayden once called "love's austere and lonely offices."

I am running away from work, from permanent budget woes, from institutional inertia, from office politics and cynicism, from difficult and indifferent colleagues, from endless, pointless meetings, from the fear that I *am* my job, from the unsettling and continuous question of "What is the real, ultimate value of the work I do, anyway?"

I am running away from the world, from the inevitability of the next terrorist attack, from dirty bombs on Main Street, from the West Bank and Indonesia, from Bird Flu, from the \$5 trillion dollar U.S. debt, from the stasis of two-party politics, from racism and classism and homophobia, from the 5 million pornographic websites and half a billion pornographic web pages on the

internet, from fundamentalists of every stripe, from the hatred of simple difference that still permeates our culture, from the stupefying shallowness and vapidness of popular culture, from global warming and the one million species of living things that will be disappear forever between now and 2050.

I am running away from myself, from my own history, from my memory. I am running away from the horrid ways I treated my first girlfriend, from being a thief and a liar, from all the days and nights--from the *years*--I wasted in drugged and drunken stupors, from the ways I abused both the trust

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

and forgiveness of friends, from my squandered potential and the shocking depths of my selfishness, from the long parade of mortification, shame, guilt, regret, and remorse that appears when I look back.

I am running away from mental illness and death, from the depression that stalks my sister, from the emphysema and congestive heart failure that killed both my parents.

I am running away from helplessness, from powerlessness, from my utter inability to exert any control whatsoever over all these things--my family, work, the world, my own past, mental illness, death.

But eventually I turn around and run back. No matter how far or how long I run away, I eventually turn around and run back to the world, come running back to my family, to work, to myself, to the preciousness of my mortality. I come running back better able to deal, cope, and respond, better able to be *present* because I was temporarily absent.

I run to disconnect, so that I might better connect. I run to tune out, so that I might better tune in.

II

I run to go out of my mind. I run to go mindless, brainless, to zone out, go animal, get oblivious. I run to become an engine: fuel and air in, power and velocity out. I may start out by cogitating over my problems, but pretty soon the committees in my head shut up, and I go blank. I perceive without conceiving. I merely sense: sunlight, shadow, heat, wind, moldering leaves, crickets, birds, salt, moisture, gravel, dirt, asphalt, rhythm, movement. I run to go out of my mind; that is, I run to stay sane.

III

I run to stroke my ego, to stand out, to be different, to be *apart from*. The hype about a health craze in America is wildly myopic: about 20% of us are really active, the other 80% are still mostly sedentary. Even within the active folk, I run to stand out. I am *not* a jogger; I am a runner. I'll be passing you on the bike path, running much faster than you on the treadmills at the gym. Look at me! I run marathons--and you don't. I run because I am pretty good at it, because it really impresses people. I run so that I can one day qualify for the Boston Marathon and prove that I am a *real* runner, even more elite than I see myself now. The skinny kid who ultimately "failed" at competitive football, baseball, and basketball, who proved himself a quitter, runs to prove that he is one helluva jock after all.

While I enjoyed the teamwork of cross-country in high

school, I run now because it is *all* about me. I don't have or want training partners. I don't run to support charities like the leukemia or arthritis foundations. I run because it is an unalloyed testament to me.

IV

I run to be part of something larger, to join others, to be like others, to be *a part of*. I wave to every runner I pass on the trail (and I am offended by those who don't or won't acknowledge our bond as runners and wave back). I read running magazines; I visit running websites; I linger and loiter in running stores long after I have made my purchases. I long for that odd, powerful camaraderie among total strangers that emerges near the start before races, for that mob mentality that erupts when we all feed off each other's growing desire to be moving through space.

I run because it is a deeply democratic endeavor and because my running family is wildly diverse. Anyone can run. There are no sociocultural barriers to success. Age, gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, political orientation--all irrelevant.

I run to deflate my ego. I run to be humbled by the harsh limits of my physicality--going out hard and feeling great and hitting the wall and dragging my sorry carcass over the finish line. I run to understand the consequences of arrogance. I am regularly humbled, too, by the old folks and women and little kids who breeze by me without even breathing hard. Truth be told, I am a mid-packer, and I like it. I am neither the best nor the worst. I am lost in the great middle among others who are just like me. I run to know humility, to be made right-sized, common, garden variety: not god, not slug, but human-sized.

V

I run to compete. Races are the goals, the markers, the currency, the icons: I spend months at a time mentally, physically, and emotionally preparing to for them. I am always looking to move up in the standings. I am always looking to pass one more person before the finish line.

I run to compete with myself even when there is no race in sight. I am always looking to increase my distance and decrease my time.

VI

I run to not compete, to avoid competition, to refuse the competitive impulse. I run alone, with no watch, over unmeasured distances.

VII

I run because running is one of those beautifully open-ended human endeavors. My running is like my guitar playing and my writing--I can always be better at it.

(Continued on page 11)

VIII

I run because it forces me to deal with uncertainty. The older I get, the more I realize how much of my life is based not on certainty, but uncertainty. Running helps me embrace that, accept that. Running continually requires me to push myself out of my comfort zones, to take risks, to experiment boldly, to go beyond the limits of my knowledge and experience.

IX

I run so that I might have discipline in my life. I don't mean corporal punishment here: the *disciples* followed a *discipline*, a chosen way of life, one that offered them both comforts and challenges, that both empowered them and defined clearly how they could no longer be in the world as well. Running, too, is a discipline, a way of life. I run to give my life order and direction, to follow willingly the dictates and strictures of a powerful authority. Running tells me how I will structure my days and weeks, what and when I should and should not eat and drink, when I should sleep and when I should wake, what I will wear, how I will style my hair, and so on. I know exactly what I will be doing next Saturday morning. I run because it offers me some certainties in an uncertain world.

X

I run so that I may move toward better physical health, toward lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, lower resting heart rate. I run so that I may move toward better mental health, toward less stress, toward clearer goals.

I run so that I may move toward better emotional health, toward happiness (even joy, bliss!), toward self-esteem.

I run so that I may move toward better spiritual health. Religion, they say, is what happens on the outside. Spirituality is what happens on the inside. Solitude is essential for my spirituality: my God is not the god of burning bushes; my God is very quiet, and I have to listen very hard. Running allows me to commune with--*be with*--my God. Running is respiration, perspiration, and *inspiration*. "Inspiration" literally means "a breathing into." As I run, I am breathing in God, being breathed into *by* my God. I run so that I may run into the arms of God.

XI

I run because running is dangerous, a constant flirtation with a loss of health, with injury, even death. At the cellular level, the extremes of my metabolism crank out enormous numbers of cancer-causing free-radicals. Some of the most physically fit people in the world have keeled over, stone dead, from massive coronaries brought on by easy runs. Dehydration will kill me; over- hydration will kill

me. The pounding of my feet on the ground threatens tendonitis, ligament damage, stress fractures, and arthritis with every step. A lifetime of running will eventually require the use of orthotic devices--inserts, insoles, braces, ligatures, compression bandages--just so that I can continue to put one shuffling foot in front of the other, to make one limping, halting step after another. I am always trying to avoid injury or injured or recovering from injury.

There are very few heroic battles left to us anymore, very few opportunities to test one's mettle and quest with monsters. Running fills that mythic need. Running is an extreme sport.

XII

I run in order to feel pain, know pain, walk through pain, function in spite of pain. Pain is edifying. Pain teaches us a great deal about ourselves and the paths we choose to walk through the world. This is not masochism: this is spiritual questing; this is growth.

XII

I run because I love the simplicity of it. It doesn't get any simpler than "put one foot in front of the other, breathe, repeat." In contrast, other sports seem to be nothing other than obscene accumulations of gear, great Gordian knots of rules and regulations. I run because it reminds me with every step that "simple" doesn't mean "easy." Keeping things simple is hard to do. "Simplify, simplify," Thoreau said. Running helps.

XIV

I run because I love the complexity of it. The clothes I wear are a direct result of the space race. The shoes I wear are marvels of engineering, and they make me into a cyborg: something both human and machine, a mechanically-enhanced organism. I take a complex combination of vitamins and supplements based on a knowledge of how my blood chemistry and metabolism work at the sub-atomic level. What I eat and when I eat and how often I eat have very little to do with simple hunger any more, but are based, instead, on intricate theories of how mitochondria work, how glycogen is stored and used, how insulin is deployed, how muscle fibers are repaired. I have a stopwatch that measures time to the hundredth of a second. I am thinking of buying both a GPS unit (which will link me directly to a satellite in stationary orbit hundreds of miles above the Earth) and a heart-rate monitor (another direct result of the space program, once cutting-edge medical technology). And when I start to consider the endless profusion of training methods, training schemes, and the arcane research that undergirds each (lactate thresholds, max VO₂, percentages of maximum heart rate,

(Continued from page 11)

and so on), my head reels.

Running is an insanely complex puzzle. Running is exquisite, extravagant problem-solving.

XV

I run because I write, and I write because I run. These behaviors live together, intersecting and merging at the heart of some crucial words and ideas in my life. Running and writing are *processes*. *Process*, at its root, means a motion between two points, a movement from here to there, from beginning to ending. Running and writing are *discourse*. *Discourse*, at its root, means a moving back and forth. Running and writing are *interpretation*. *Interpretation*, at its root, means a “going between” two distinct positions.

Running and writing are two fundamental forms of being, two basic ways I make sense of experience and inscribe myself upon the world, two essential means of existence.

XVI

I run so that I may learn to hold myself in, to hold myself back. I run so that I may learn to pace myself for the long haul. I run so that I may experience and practice *restraint*.

I run so that I may learn to let myself go, to hold nothing back. I run so that I may learn to go absolutely full out and having nothing left. I run so that I may experience and practice *exhaustion*, the joy of emptying myself.

XVII

I run in order to *start*. I run to overcome inertia, to combat entropy and stasis, to move.

I run so that I may *stop*. I run so that I may dwell, be still and value that stillness.

XVIII

I run to stay sober.

I run to get high.

XIX

I run to enact and understand continuity. I run to keep in contact, to keep connected with earlier versions of myself, with the boy who joined the track team in the spring of 7th grade at Wantagh Junior High School on the south shore of Long Island. I run to stay within my tradition. I run to experience the routine

and the familiar and the comforting, to do the same workouts, to run the same trails, to run the same races, over and over again.

I run to enact and understand discontinuity. I run to

alter who I am, to become something new. I run to become an adult, to appreciate the necessity and the wisdom of having new goals, flexible goals. The older I get, the more I realize that getting to a marathon starting line is a victory, in and of itself, that standing on that line injury-free is an amazing accomplishment, that taking one step over that line changes a DNR (“Did Not Run”) to a DNF (“Did Not Finish”) in the official results, that *enjoying* a race is a marvelous success, regardless of my time or place in the standings. This is not the runner--this is not the *person*--I used to be.

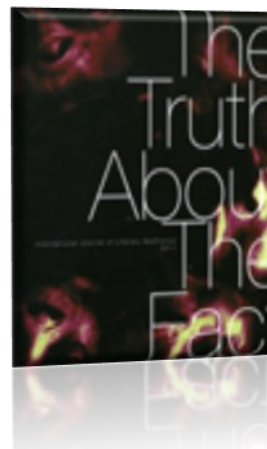
XX

I run so that I may focus, so that I may be a focus. I run to build up, to concentrate. I run so that I may grasp and tie together divergent strands of the wide universe. Within me I gather and focus and forge time, thought, desire, attention, and human will, I gather and focus and unite heavy atoms created by the cataclysmic explosions of ancient stars, invisible and ephemeral portions of our planet available through the atmosphere, the miracle of liquid water, heat energy, potential energy, mechanical energy. I run to be a crucible.

I run so that I may burn, so that I may dissolve. I run to break-down, to disperse, to unlock and unleash that which I have gathered and focused and forged and united. I run to be a furnace.

I run so that I may create something out of nothing and then let it return from whence it came. I run so that I may bind and unbind. I run so that I may make and unmake, be made and unmade. Again.

“On Running.” *The Truth About the Fact: An International Journal of Literary Nonfiction* 6.1 (2011): 106-116.



CITY COLLEGES of CHICAGO

Wilbur Wright

Education that Works