

## Prologue

I'm an ambitious person. When I see summer approaching, other than a little bit more sleep (which for me, is like 6 hours instead of 4), I envision an endless stretch of time to accomplish more goals and more things that enrich me, make me happy, and push me to learn, expand, and grow.

When I blew out the ACL in my left knee in late May, many of those ambitions faded and I began to formulate a new set of goals. Coming to aTi this summer, all I really wanted to do was heal, learn, and write. What eventually happened exceeded my goals. This is my scholarship report, but it's also the story of where I took my writing as an artist and where I found myself transported by the end of the seven-day program.

## Day 1 July 29

Of course, the first thing that Peter had us do was freewrite. Now, in English classes, freewriting is a difficult thing for most teachers to even grasp, let alone kids, but the thing that you learn as a writer, when you actually do it, is that it really does FREE you up to access the "real stuff" of writing, to say the unsayable.

Every year, I always meet a handful of students who either avoid freewrites in journals or simply just don't do them. What I've discovered is that some are just lazy or unmotivated, but more often than not, it's what we call writer's block, which according to Peter Murphy just means that "your standards are

**Murphy's Moments:**

**"Write like a guppy, not an elephant."**

too high". Lower your standards and you'll find the writing flowing.

***"Bringing it Back to the Classroom"***

This year, I will incorporate into the daily/weekly routine of the class, a built-in and regular time to freewrite. Five minutes is more than enough. Focus should be on "keep the pen to the paper" and just letting the writing flow. De-emphasize grading, and value more the willingness to RISK and create and imagine. The way we make room in Language Arts for independent reading is the way that we should approach developing writers.

So our first freewrite was about "Our Names". We introduced each other using excerpts from this freewrite. Mine was:

"I've been told that my name is very Filipino... It means 'robbed'. I think my father took that to heart- he was bereft of food and shelter, so he stole away something moments- to make noise, to smile, to be children. My siblings and I were all named 'R' after my father... Was it the gruff stability he wanted when he gave me his 'R' or the hollowness of being bereft at such a raw, purple age?"

After the introductory session, Peter sent us off to write. Our first prompt was simple yet maddening- typical Murphy. We had to write SEVERAL nature-based poems (again, writing like guppies). I came up with three, two of which are included here in their newest draft revisions. They are called "Happenstance" and "Benediction".

In late afternoon's buzzing yawn, I got  
lost amid my own native cypress trees  
only to find a nest of neat stones:  
honey round, oyster oval, boxy blacks  
bruised like olives. Someone had taken care  
to hoard this bit of quiet in the noise  
of the crowded forest. I wish to find

this person, give her a scrubbed gray slate and  
ask her to show me how to find home with  
only sun and pockets weighted with rock.

### Benediction

I breathe into a waxy eucalyptus and below  
into petunias, busy with pink and purple.  
It's a stone fountain with no water.  
Yet even here, I notice all the spilling:

green matter compacted like humus at the roots;  
torn ears of petals starting to blacken  
along the stone's lip; the dribble of someone's  
vanilla soft-serve, sprinkles falling like confetti.

I look up for the first time and wait for the clouds  
to spill over the roof of this courtyard's right-hand  
building, but something's holding them up/back.  
It's lunchtime now and there are others buzzing

around me, wings of their smart phones flutter  
in their pockets, and everyone's looking down,  
or jabbing at plastic, when really they ought  
to notice the sky or at least the early summer buds.

But sometimes, a wind or hymn stirs above,  
and they stop, heads upturned, and I watch them  
watching the clouds. I wonder again what's holding  
back the sky. I think it's all of us, breathing together.

Day 1 July 29 (continued)

During the afternoon session, we completed another freewrite called "An Encounter" and the second writing assignment of the day which was to interview a classmate and "tell their story" using the working title "Barrens".

**Murphy's Moments/Quotables:**

"No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader."

- Robert Frost

"No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader."

The interesting thing about today's class was that there was no feedback. It was all about generating ideas, and "surprising ourselves" in our drafts, always a requirement in

Peter Murphy's crazy prompts. To me though, the surprises came on the second day!

Day 2 July 30

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

In my Language Arts classroom, I need to focus on the peer feedback/conference aspect of the writing process as PIVOTAL. Imperative! Looking at other people's writing (better or worse) teaches you how to be a better writer yourself. Being forced to simply explain to a weaker writer, for example, why a particular technique is needed, improves the stronger writer. **It's win-win reciprocity.**

Right from the start, it was quiet. Freewriting. This time, the topic was "Break Fast". What I realized about

freewriting more than ever before (and I've been doing this kind of stuff for over 20 years) was how you can uncover hidden material from the recesses of your brain, how the simple turn of a cliché or a pun for a freewrite can unearth gems in seemingly common encounters, how a cliché can reveal a profundity about life.

**\*\*\*Insight Alert\*\*\***

Smaller poems are harder to craft. This is why poetry is so difficult, much more than prose. What we can learn from this hellish challenge, however, is the value of word choice- language.

**\*\*\*Insight Alert\*\*\***

What I realized throughout the second day was that everyone has their own stories, and even though everyone in the class had their own concerns, backgrounds, writers' voices, etc., I could learn something about myself from the stories of others.

After workshopping in the morning, Peter gave us our writing prompt for the day: write a long poem about loss which twists the abstraction in two or three different ways. Using the poems of Richard Jackson in Murphy's hallowed poetry pocket as inspiration, I actually wrote a poem titled "Two out of Three Ain't Bad/Losing It", which attempts to define this concept of loss. (The poem is included later on in this report to demonstrate the growth in the writing process through revision.)

**Quotables:**

"If I ever feel like I have writer's block, I lower my standards."

- Stafford

"But for him, it was an important failure."  
- Auden

I spent the rest of the day and night writing, revising, and hoping to not disappoint myself or my classmates, who were fast becoming "poetry buddies", especially Nicole W. who is an astounding discovery of a teacher and a friend- someone with impeccable, clever judgment who manages not to judge.

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

The value of reading (and writing) memoir is to see our own stories reflected in someone else's. Once you realize that everyone has their stories, and you listen to them, you comprehend that their stories are your stories. It's all the same HUMAN STORY, told over and over again. If we can understand that, maybe then, we can treat others with compassion and fairness. I will focus on this in the memoir and biography/autobiography units in our curriculum.

Day 3 July 31

It's Hump Day, but of course, there's nothing to get over or overcome at aTi. It's been pure bliss getting to write every day, without hindrance or obligation, except for the love of the craft.

The opening of the class, of course, saw us freewriting about "An Important Failure", and then giving feedback on yesterday's assignment. I received much positive support and admiration for my loss poem, but more importantly, the feedback I received allowed me to see the poem in a new way, to make it better, to make it a viable piece that I want to continue to work on, instead of a dead-wood assignment sitting on my hard drive. I've provided a series of drafts of this very long poem to show what I learned about revision and how each lesson guided the poem's improvement.

**Murphy's Moments:**

To revise means to "re-see" your writing.

Today's prompt challenged us to write about an intense personal conflict set in a place intimate to our knowledge. Of course, my mind immediately jumped to a poem I'd been working on for about two years, a personal letter poem about my former best friend and our falling-out, titled "Lovesong, Providence". I remember considering cheating a little bit. At this point in aTi, you start to get tired, and I thought, "Why not just present to the group the poem I've already written?" The problem with that plan, of course, is that if the poem were working, I'd be done with it already. So instead of revising, I used the parameters of Peter's prompt to come up with a whole different way of seeing the subject.

Thank God I didn't cheat because the result was amazing- a poem that I ended up revising and working on the entire week, a poem that interested my classmates enough that they wanted to give feedback. A poem that finally said, in an artful way, what I'd always wanted to say to my best friend. In the end, revision ended up liberating me.

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

## Revision Tips:

- 1) Get rid of the scaffolding- all those intro phrases, clauses, and statements that got you to where you needed to go.
- 2) Avoid abstractions.
- 3) Take out clichés.
- 4) Always go for present tense, active voice verbs; cut down the -ed and -ing.
- 5) Avoid redundancy, unless it's for rhythm or effect.
- 6) Take out anything self-referential, which won't help readers.

Day 4 August 1

Today we were originally scheduled to go on our field trip on the ferry, but alas, the skies did not cooperate with us. Putting off the trip until tomorrow, we hunkered down for another day of mad workshoping and more writing.

We began with a freewrite called "Clichés about Time". This is part of what I came up with:

"The commercials proclaim, 'Time is upon us.' Well, isn't it always? I remember a time when I was in a moment, surrounded by the totems of it- the journey of shadows along the back wall, the whisper of the waitress's brusque haircut slicing through the air when she passed. Cilantro leaves with the *tom kha gai*. Then more cilantro. Time pressing between each bite. Our moments wedged between swallow... Lynn is giggling inside her bubble tea. (She never laughs.) Lola sits and crawls toward an open, goofy smile, wide as Montana. We're all in it. And time was everywhere. Until it wasn't. When Lola died at 94, we were all surprised. Like Barbara Daniels said at the Dante Hall reading last night, it's always a surprise when someone's time stops."

I don't know exactly how I'm going to use that freewrite, but there's good fertile soil with which to grow something beautiful, I think.

**\*\*\*Sidebar Personal Insight\*\*\***

I am still glowing from last night's open reading at the Dante Hall Theater in A.C. So much positive feedback from local poets. Rina, you're not crazy. You can do this. Make something happen!

So much of what my peers presented today in workshop was brilliant. Bryon blew us away with this piece about his heart. Svea harkened back to her roots in upstate New York. Nicole wrote a bold piece which interwove Bible passages with the moment-to-moment experience of an abortion. Barbara took us back to Queens in the 1960's. In each piece, there was so much to admire, so much specificity. I feel fortunate, to be surrounded by skilled writers and compassionate, conscientious peers.

As always, my poetry friends helped me to make my poem into what it always wanted to be. Here is "Lovesong, Providence" in its first draft form, and then in its revised form after several drafts. I've highlighted the areas which were changed/removed.

## Lovesong, Providence

Dearest friend, you told it to me every time. Same story: *I worshipped her. She was so special. She was my moon goddess! How am I going to live without her?* And I listened. It's funny, the things we choose to orbit, the tides we bide our lives by. Our routines and rhythms, like this stone wall on Benevolent St. How I knew where my fingers fit into its grooves and pockets. How it was our place to talk. And buy desperate gestures of flowers after **(usually orchids)**. And always self-flagellation aside post-breakup **trauma** before some foreign film at the Avon and occasionally a veal dinner at Al Forno's. Sometimes, I got tired. Their names got gooey in my head: Maris, Meltem, Terin, Emma, Sarah, Lara, Rose, Caroline, Byshinte, Ying. And now, the new one Antoinette. This **letter** isn't about the wedding. **The one you e-mailed about** and scheduled on my birthday. It's not about how I lied and didn't go.

Here's what I should have said **all those years ago**:  
**Stop watching The Lives of Others, take off the blue hoodie and** walk around our city.  
Providence isn't so bad. I love you.  
**Call me when that orchid starts to open.**

## Lovesong, Providence

Dearest friend, you told it to me every time. Same story: *I worshipped her. She was so special. She was my moon goddess! How am I going to live without her?* And I listened. It's funny, the things we choose to orbit, the tides we bide our lives by. Our routines and rhythms, like this stone wall on Benevolent St. How I knew where my fingers fit into its grooves and pockets. How it was our place to talk. And then buy desperate gestures of flowers after, while wearing your depression-blue sweats and hoodie.

And always self-flagellation aside post-breakup before some foreign film at the Avon and occasionally a veal dinner at Al Forno's. Sometimes, I got tired. Their names got gooey in my head: Maris, Meltem, Terin, Emma, Sarah, Lara, Rose, Caroline, Byshinte, Ying. And now, the new one Antoinette. This isn't about the wedding you scheduled on my birthday. It's not about how I lied and didn't go.

Here's what I should have said:  
Take off the blue hoodie and walk around our city.  
I love you. Providence isn't so bad.

That night, Peter wanted us to write a protest poem which argues with itself and uses the word "but". I slaved away on a piece of *garbage-ola* for hours, only to find out it wasn't salvageable. Not everything is a gem!

Day 5 August 2

Finally, our Field Trip on the Cape May Ferry! I had never taken this ride before, so I was looking forward to it. What I was not looking forward to were the multiple prompts: two on the

boat and then another one at night at the Noyes Museum reception.

It was a unique experience, taking our class on the sea, reading poetry together in the spaces we could gather together. Most of the trip, however, was spent alone. I was surrounded-by-hundreds-of-people-on-a-ferry alone, but I mostly spent the time looking out over the water, experiencing the sun, watching others, and talking with an elderly lady named Ruth. The most astounding things to me were the multitudes of jellyfish skimming the surface of the water, and the variations of texture in light and in people.

**\*\*\*Insight Alert\*\*\***

Just watching people  
and listening to their  
stories and convo's  
can give you the best  
insight into what you  
didn't know you  
wanted to say.

In the end, I wrote mostly phrases and brainstorming-type entries which I felt I might be able to synthesize into something meaningful. One prompt was supposed to be addressed to America, but I wasn't really in the mood to rant in a vaguely discontented way, so I focused instead on the poem about desire using the five-sensory experience of the ocean on the ferry. What eventually happened was that I was able to learn something about the ocean- not my favorite habitat- and about myself and my own proclivities. (See the poem "Flood Light" for an elucidation of this very vague, board statement.)

**Quotables:**

Nastasia says there are 3 things you must do:

- 1) See the world.
- 2) Make it a more beautiful place.
- 3) Live by the sea.

## Flood Light

There is something about the sea that makes people want to be near it. On the Cape May Ferry, I watch them, mesmerized, everyone yearning, not for the Delaware destination ahead but for the jots of life swirling in the periphery. My friend has to point them out

for me to see. Spools of jellyfish with their bloated heads, like ghostly mushrooms haunting the froth that blooms from the bottom of the ferry. The water twinkling like a flash mob of metallic Friday night floodlights.

When I think of the sea, I think of salt. Small yet hard. Like salt crystals, or salt licks, salt marshes, salt shakers, salt in a wound- there is no give. Like sarcastic people who swell and storm in unyielding waves. I am afraid of the water but

I love sarcastic men. There's something about the way the ferry heaves and grinds into the ocean's gut that's soft and magic too. My friend's pointing out porpoises now. He's closed his eyes, dreaming of when jellyfish were smaller and hurt less.

Today seemed endless, and I don't think I actually finished working until I dropped into bed at 11:30 at night. Denise and I got lost on the way back from the Noyes reception. It was like something out of a Lynch film- driving up and down the same abandoned country road at night. Crazy! The museum art inspired me, but in the end, I wasn't able to focus on a poem because there were so many other prompts to think about. Sometimes, I

wish that Peter were just around the corner in my real life to drop prompts and ideas into my life.

**Murphy's Moments:**

What to do if you have Writer's Block:

- 1) "What Am I Afraid Of" - write down a list.
- 2) "What I Am Afraid to Write". Then burn it once you've written it down!

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

See "Murphy's Moments" listed above. (For advanced writers only.)

**Day 6 August 3 (Workshop and Feedback Day)**

This was our marathon day. A day of pure workshop and feedback sessions. I actually began the day by continuing to write in the morning. I was feeling the vibe and didn't want to be disturbed- not to eat, not to shower, not to talk to anyone.

**\*\*\*Insight Alert\*\*\***

Sometimes when you're "in the groove" or feeling the vibe, don't stop writing!

When I arrived at our classroom, however, it was Round Robin feedback. Like boxing rounds, we just kept sharing and workshoping until people started to drop (which they did).

I truly enjoyed seeing the growth in people's work, even though it had only been a week. Some people were really hitting it out of the park, but it was also a brilliant chance to hear

revisions. So many times, people will ask me, "Have you been writing a lot?" and honestly I don't know how to tell them the truth- most of what I do isn't generating more pieces. It's revision.

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

Revision is the real work of writing.

### Two out of Three Ain't Bad (Draft 1, the original, 62 lines)

I'm writing a poem about loss but it's really about the thing that births loss or at least lets it slither all over the planet you've loved and tended, which makes loss sound like a garden, but really the only fruit such a garden would engender might be frustrated figs or plaintive pears, maybe even a wishful watermelon.

Since loss implies lack, I hate when people define themselves by their losses- widows even after twenty years, traders who've tanked oceans in the market, LeBron James before he won two rings with the Miami Heat, all those people, without- because that would mean I am incomplete, a partial person, smudge instead of a full-blown stain. Who wants to be seen as NOT?

Maybe that's why my father never bought me glasses, even though the school nurse insisted in second grade, "You may want to look into corrective lenses for Rina." Well, my father never corrected himself on anything, and even though my young corneas were losing light by the second, Dad said it was not an option. So many friends I know

had miserable fathers. Fathers who left. Fathers who stayed but should have flown the coup. Fathers who were around but not. Fathers who drank and hit and screwed and used. Fathers who cut their kids off to spite their audacity to dream. Girls in Afghanistan are losing their noses and ears every day because someone decided

back in the days when our forebears grew gardens without tools, that a penis possessed so much more authority than a vagina, and this is again the first type of loss. And since my father never abandoned us or betrayed his marital contract, it's hard for me to talk about loss as either of those things but really they're about

surrender. People give up on religion, dual ovens, and old-fashioned courting, but mostly on themselves, and this forgetting of the deep and the tender is bitter fruit. And we swallow it with lattes every day. Teaching middle school for thirteen years almost makes me an expert on the art of betrayal. For instance, all my pupils will say that 7<sup>th</sup> grade was

“The Best Year Ever!” but after hours they’ll tweet you the truth- a list of BFF’s they’ve lost, the grades that failed them, the skank who told that lie about what didn’t actually happen at a Bar Mitzvah pool party. I know too what’s been lost- sleep, apostrophe use, (good grammar) innocence. The master teachers say, “Less is more,” but the truth is,

no one of any age wants less, except for maybe body mass and ex-wives. It’d also be swell to lose silly inhibitions, belly fat, knit sweaters from kooky aunts in Manitoba, anger that pulsates. But since all matter in the universe is conserved, I suppose these things can never really be lost. They just leave

and join other teams. It’s as if your ugly baggage woke up one day and said, “Sorry, but I’m gay and you’re not so I’m done.” Again, betrayal and abandonment. I suppose then, the third kind is best, and because loss is really about love and having less of it, and if God is love, I understand why church attendance has dropped in the past decade.

Most things are lost in the end- hair, teeth, continence, marbles- but I’d like to have kept my silver Sevilla ’94 bracelet, and also the fiancé a.k.a former love of my life who left me after drive-through Wendy’s and no explanation, but mostly, it’s the exuberance I miss. I’d lock that up.

Joy is simple. Exuberance takes work. Einstein opined, “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” but it matters when you’ve lost what counts. And I can count the number of men who’ve left, green leaves I couldn’t see before the age of twelve, and those glimpses of

unprocessed, virgin exuberance. Less just means less, and I can only abide two brands of loss in this lifetime. I don’t want to be a loser in middle school at fifty years old, unmarried, half-bald, and without a mortgage. I’d rather be unseen than seen as lack, so I’ll just swallow what I can

and make merry with my whole body the parts that have stayed that I can love, and maybe make a garden with someone who likes fruit.

## Losing It (formerly “Two out of Three Ain’t Bad”)

(Draft 2, with highlighted areas to remove abstractions, vagueness, and scaffolding)

**I’m writing a poem about loss** but it’s really about the thing that births loss or at least lets it slither all over the planet you’ve loved and tended, which makes loss sound like a garden, but really the only fruit such a garden would yield might be frustrated figs or plaintive pears, maybe just a watermelon.

It gets on my nerves when people define themselves by their losses- widows even after forty years, traders who’ve tanked oceans in the market, LeBron James before he won two rings with the Miami Heat, all those people, without- because that would mean I am incomplete, a partial person, **smudge instead of a full-blown stain.** Who wants to be seen as NOT?  
 (Why do they want to be seen as NOT?  
**Why do people only want to see the lack?)**

Maybe that’s why my father never bought me glasses, even though the school nurse insisted in second grade, “You may want to look into corrective lenses for Rina.” Well, my father never corrected himself on anything, and even though my young corneas were losing light by the second, Dad said it was not an option. So many friends I know

had miserable fathers. Fathers who left. Fathers who stayed but should have flown the coup. Fathers who were around but not. Fathers who drank and hit and screwed and used. Fathers who cut their kids off to spite their audacity to dream. Girls in Afghanistan are losing their noses and ears every day because someone decided

back in the days when our forebears grew gardens without tools, that a penis possessed so much more authority than a vagina, and this is again the first type of loss. And since my father never abandoned us or **betrayed his marital contract,** it’s hard for me to talk about loss as either of those things but really they’re about

surrender. People give up **religion, dual ovens, and old-fashioned courting,** but mostly on themselves, and this forgetting of the deep and the tender is bitter fruit. And we swallow it

with lattes every day. I'm a middle school teacher.  
I know all about betrayal. My 7<sup>th</sup> graders will say in June, it was

"The Best Year Ever!" but after hours they'll tweet you the truth-  
a list of BFF's they've lost, the grades that failed them, the "skank"  
who told that lie about what didn't actually happen at a Bar Mitzvah  
pool party. I know too what's been lost- sleep, apostrophe use,  
innocence. The master teachers say, "Less is more," but the truth is,

no one of any age wants less, except for maybe body mass  
and ex-wives. It'd also be swell to lose silly inhibitions,  
belly fat, knit sweaters from kooky aunts in Manitoba, anger  
that pulsates. But since all matter in the universe is conserved,  
I suppose these things can never really be lost. They just leave

and join other teams. **It's as if your ugly baggage woke up one day  
and said, "Sorry, but I'm gay and you're not so I'm done."** Again,  
betrayal and abandonment. I suppose then, the third kind is best, and  
because loss is really about love and having less of it, and if God is love,  
**I understand why church attendance has dropped in the past decade.**

Most things are lost in the end- hair, teeth, continence, marbles- but  
I'd like to have kept my silver Sevilla '94 bracelet,  
and also the fiancé **a.k.a former love of my life** who left  
after drive-through Wendy's and no explanation,  
but mostly, it's the exuberance I miss. I'd lock that up.

Joy is simple. Exuberance takes work. Einstein opined,  
"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything  
that can be counted counts." but it matters when you've lost what counts.  
And I can count the number of men who've left, green leaves  
I couldn't see before the age of twelve, and those glimpses of

**unprocessed** exuberance. Less just means less,  
and I can only abide two brands of loss in this lifetime.  
I don't want to be a loser in middle school at fifty years old,  
unmarried, half-bald, and without a mortgage. I'd rather  
be unseen than seen as lack, so I'll just swallow what I can

and make merry with my whole body the parts that have stayed  
that I can love, and maybe make a garden with someone who likes fruit.

## Losing It/Two out of Three Ain't Bad

(Draft 6 with redundancy taken out- now 54 lines!)

This is a poem about loss but it's really about the thing that births loss or at least lets it roam and choke all you've loved and tended, which makes loss sound like a garden, but really the only fruit such a garden would yield might be bitter figs or maybe just a melon.

It gets on my nerves when people define themselves by their losses- widows even after forty years, traders who've tanked oceans in the market, LeBron James before he won with the Miami Heat, all those people- without. Smudge instead of a full-blown stain. Why do people only see the lack?

Maybe that's why my father never bought me glasses, even though the school nurse insisted in second grade, "You may want to look into corrective lenses for Rina." Well, my father never corrected himself on anything, and even though my young corneas were missing light by the second, Dad said it was not an option. So many friends I know

had miserable fathers. Fathers who left. Fathers who were around but not. Fathers who drank and hit and screwed and used. Fathers who cut their kids off to spite their audacity. Girls in Afghanistan are missing their noses and ears every day because someone decided

back in the days when our forebears grew gardens without tools, that a penis possessed so much more authority than a vagina, and this is again the first type of loss. And since my father never abandoned or betrayed us, it's hard for me to talk about loss

as either of those things but really they're about surrender. People give up, but mostly on themselves, and this forgetting of the deep and the tender is bitter fruit. And we swallow it with lattes every day. I'm a middle school teacher. I know

all about betrayal. My 7<sup>th</sup> graders will say in June, it was "The Best Year Ever!" but after hours, they'll tweet you the truth- the BFF's who ignore them, the grades that failed them, the "skank/bitch/" who told that lie about the Bar Mitzvah pool party.

I know too what's been lost- sleep, apostrophe use, innocence. The master teachers say, "Less is more," but the truth is,

no one of any age wants less, except for maybe body mass  
and ex-wives. It'd also be swell to shed silly inhibitions,

belly fat, knit sweaters from kooky aunts in Manitoba,  
blind anger. But since all matter in the universe is conserved,  
I suppose these things can never really be lost. They just leave  
and join other teams. Again, betrayal and abandonment.

Then, there is the third kind, and since loss is really about love  
and having less of it, and if God is love, I understand why  
everyone feels lonely. Most things are go/get away in the end-  
hair, teeth, continence, marbles- but I'd like to have kept

my silver Sevilla '94 bracelet, and also the ex-fiancé  
who left after drive-through Wendy's and no explanation,  
but mostly, it's the exuberance I miss. I'd lock that up.  
Joy is simple. Exuberance takes work. Einstein opined,

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything  
that can be counted counts," but it matters when what counts leaves.  
And I can count the number of men who've left, green leaves  
I couldn't see before the age of twelve, and those glimpses of

unprocessed exuberance. Less just means less, and I can only abide  
two betrayals in this lifetime. I don't want to be a loser  
in middle school at fifty years old- unmarried, half-bald, without  
a mortgage. I don't want the lack, so I'll just swallow what I can

and make merry with my whole body the parts that have stayed  
that I can love, and maybe make a garden with someone who likes fruit.

I definitely think that I can use the multiple drafts (evidenced above) in my classroom to show my students how messy and imperfect the work of writing is. They all think that writing is just about the composing, not realizing that it's just the beginning. If they see that this is what real writers do, perhaps they will approach revision with more GUSTO and dedication.

### Day 7 August 4, Celebration and Reflection

This is the day when we perform for all aTi participants, so we should be focused, or at least nervous, but what are we doing in class? Bryon has brought the ripest peaches in the world and white corn so sweet, as if it was laced with sugar. What a jubilant, family atmosphere. It's amazing what happens in a writing class. We were talking about this at lunch, how the poets seem to have this rapport that the other artist groups do not. We share each other's stories and learn to trust each other with our most painful and intimate moments. We critique and support each other.

Honestly, we spent that morning talking about publishing, but really it was more of a celebration of each other's efforts. I was so proud of where everyone took their poems. And when we read, we read as a group. We succeeded as a group.

In schools, we talk so much about the final draft being the "publishable draft", but I hope that this year, I focus more on the idea of reading aloud one's writing as a form of "publication"- making one's poetry public. There is a certain amount of pride that a person feels in presenting in a public forum, something that s/he has painstakingly endeavored to craft. I want my students to feel that pride and to learn to work toward goals.

***"Bringing It back to the Classroom"***

- 1) Focus on the end result of writing.
- 2) Talk about the multiple purposes of writing.
- 3) Writing/Poetry is messy and imperfect!
- 4) Work towards a sharing/celebration of the writing process so that students are more invested in the end product.

In the end, I had a tremendously positive experience at aTi. I continued to heal, I learned a whole lot about the craft and about myself as a writer, and I wrote often and prolifically. This program clarified for me my direction in my career as a writer- that I need to build one to begin with- and it inspired me to get back to the classroom for another year.

As I drove back home after the presentations, all I really wanted to do was e-mail my new friends and get their feedback on some new ideas. I wanted to wake up early the next morning, maybe at 4:30, and feel the sun come up through my window blinds, fingers tapping along the laptop keys, heart soaring with the summer temperatures.