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Memory Created

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Graphic Design
University of South Carolina, May 2008

Master of Fine Arts in Design/Visual Communications
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Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts at
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in Design: Visual Communications.

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Praise the bridge that carried you over. George Colman

While this adventure was my own I could not have done it without all the selfless individuals in my life.

I would like to express thanks to my committee, Roy McKevey, Sandra Wheeler and Elizabeth Hodges for sharing their brilliant minds throughout this journey. I would like to thank all the faculty that provided inspiration and wisdom during each class throughout my time here. I am now armed with a plethora of knowledge because of your dedication and passion for my education.

Thank you to my classmates for being more than creative peers. I feel so lucky to have shared two years of my life with you. I hope you all keep your zeal and humor.

Thanks to my family. Mom, Dad, Dylan, Nick, Granny, and Pop, I could not have done this without your love. And for constant belief in me, before I ever took flight, I owe thanks to my future husband, Michael.

“All memory has to be reimagined. For we have in our memories micro-films that can only be read if they are lighted by the bright light of the imagination.”
Gaston Bachelard
Abstract
Memory is like afternoon light penetrating the windows of a fast moving car. The light coming through the trees creates images, reveals objects and faces, and introduces fluctuating sensations of warmth and coolness. Sometimes these images appear in logical sequences and at other times they are fleeting, surreal, and ambiguous.

While memories are often presented linearly as fact, in actuality our stories only grasp at the truth. They are fragmented, imagined, and rearranged. By examining the intersection of reality and imagination in memories we see retelling as an act of creativity.

Messy Nostalgic
an introduction, slowly remembered

With a pen hanging from the corner of my mouth and a mass of tangled hair on my head I sat at my dining room table in front of my book shelves. They were a cluttered, fuzzy mess. It seemed that everything I had ever come in contact with was stacked in archival heaps on the shelves and peaking out of drawers. Oh god, at twenty-three “I’m a hoarder.” What would my life be like in ten years? Would I be buried underneath all these moments I’d tried to preserve through photographs, papers, and writings?

I stared at the shelves and as I did, little moments emerged from each artifact. I remember losing focus, letting myself get carried away in all those mixed up moments. After a short time I saw the intersection of my design sensibility, respect for intuition, and storage habits physical and mental come together in one topic: memory.

I gathered all those things chronologically and I piled them up and soon I couldn’t really remember what came first and how or why they had shifted on the shelves. I sat down and decided I was going to pinpoint my creative project. But the shelves loomed over me, begging to be cleaned. Looking back at the shelves I scolded myself: “I’m intuitively messy...I’m also intuitively nostalgic.”

“I’m a messy nostalgic.”

I laid out all my past work that I felt was relevant on the dining room table. Professional work, student work, and personal work all shared the same surface. I started to notice the layers, the drawings of things on top of typography, the creation of new space resulting from multiple perspectives. Did the work have energy? Yes, the work had energy. Not in a negative or positive way and not in a messy way but in an intuitive way. The visual decisions in my work were purposeful but the more I thought about the process of creating each piece, the meaning came second, after I’d made a visual decision.

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"On a literal level it's an act of creation, we're reconstructing memories, everyone is constantly their own artist, we're constantly taking bits and pieces of experience, some things get sharpened others get leveled, when reality becomes infused with imagination what comes out of that construct feels like a recollection." This quote from National Public Radio's Radiolab propelled my thinking. I heard it in my car driving down Interstate 95. I pulled over at a Flying J gas station to write down the quote. Parked crooked, I added the following paragraph below the scribbled quote:

Memory is fragmented, layered, transitional and feels post-modern and deconstructed. It's clear at points, and at other points it's a vacant, vanished, white space. Memory is intuitive. There is fiction in the truth of a memory. When I remember things sometimes they are ambiguous and I let imagination fill in the blanks where I've forgotten. I take the clarity and the ambiguity and accept their collaboration as truth. Memories evolve in their written forms, their oral presentation, and their visual manifestations. Memories live at the intersection of reality and imagination, ambiguity and clarity.

I wanted to see if my creative processes could be strengthened by writing. I wanted to explore the nature of memory in both written and visual forms and to see how these two modes of representation might effect one another. I wanted to understand what was different and what was shared in these two activities that I enjoyed.

To move ahead I decided that written forms of memories could provide me with content that I could explore typographically as deconstructed language made up of sentences and sounds within a moment.
“I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.”

Joan Didion
A Pursuit of Memory

I discovered the content for my creative project from within myself. Sure, it is personal but it was also the most accessible material to work with and it seemed like a starting point. Initially, my interest in fragmented memory involved written language because I felt confident the result could be typographically translated and/or interpreted. I found graphic designers whose work felt like memory: David Carson, April Greiman, Cranbrook student work from the 90s. Their work, although different in many ways, emphasized an activity that seemed to fit the in and out, back and forth, clear and broken speech of memory.

I took an elective course in creative nonfiction where I was asked to write three essays. I was terrified each week when my essays were read, scrutinized, and edited by the entire class. I received a stack of essay copies filled with red pen marks, strike-throughs, and an abundance of comments on the writing. I found few smiley faces in the work and more grammatical corrections than I would have liked. The process of writing and re-writing and editing strengthened the essays. Suggestions for improvement in written language sometimes altered an event in the story and as a result, memories changed.
The writing course required three essays throughout the semester, two memoirs and one personal essay. There wasn't a specific subject assigned to each essay, just that the class approached writing about memory from those two formats.

With loose guidelines on the subject matter I approached each essay differently. It was important to me that they all be individual and that they each work toward a method of visualizing memory in a different way. My goal for the group of three essays was to see what my mind blocked out from different stages in my life. As I worked I tried to evaluate if childhood or coming of age memories seemed more clear. I tried to acknowledge various levels of sentimentality as I worked while also letting things come freely.

I tried to approach the writing in different ways: as rambling, as editing, as therapy, as creation and as an effort to preserve moments. I found writing to be difficult, and at times when I looked in the mirror, I'd point and yell, "impostor!" because I went with intuition rather than educated decisions with most of my writing.

I found great sources of inspiration in Joan Didion, Oscar Wilde, Vladimir Nabokov, David Foster Wallace, David Sedaris, Malcolm Gladwell and Jo Ann Beard lived on my night stand for over a semester. I would note their writing styles before I turned in each night, hoping that somewhere in my dreaming the voice of a better writer would emerge. I looked to the humor of Sedaris and the observant nature of Didion to give me new perspectives on memories that had become somewhat stale in my mind. These example helped me to form questions as I was drowning in my writing process.

Could a seriously devastating memory be portrayed in an accessible and light-hearted way? Did a given memory take on new meaning after other events intervened? Would anyone else find my memories interesting to read?

(Left) I dreamed about all the corrections I'd needed to make and soon there was a set of collages from the various essays swimming in my field of vision.
The imaginary dinner?  
The imaginary friend?

I was almost 21 when I became infatuated with lobsters. I changed all my passwords to LOBSTER 21 and bought a woven purse with sparkly lobsters attached to the front. I would tell people that I had a lobsters and wear it around town. I was young and naive and didn’t realize the consequences of my actions. When I went to college, I lived in a cramped, dirty apartment complex with six other girls. Our apartment complex was a dump and the smell of fish and garbage filled the air. The roof had holes and the walls were peeling.

My personal Lobsterfest turned out to be pivotal in the development of my personality. For my mid-OCTOBER birthday my grandparents invited me to dinner. They lived just a few floors from where I lived in college. It was all of 2100 miles away from their front door. I was nervous and excited to meet my grandparents. I arrived late and was greeted by a warm welcome. My grandparents were welcoming and kind. They gave me a tour of their apartment and introduced me to their neighbors. I was touched by their hospitality and felt at home.

My Lobsterfest was a turning point in my life. It was the moment that I realized the importance of family and the love that comes with it. I decided to make a change and move back home. I sold my Lobster purse and started over. It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it. I learned a valuable lesson that day and it shaped me into the person I am today.
Maria Fabrizio
Memoir one

The Imaginary Dinner

I was almost twenty-one when I became infatuated with lobsters. I changed all my passwords to LOBSTER 21 and bought a woven purse with sparkly lobsters attached to the front. In Graphic Design we had to redesign a menu and I chose Red Lobster. I memorized all the entrees and drew detailed drawings of their cockroach-like bodies.

My personal Lobsterfest turned out to be pivotal in the development of my personality. For my mid-October birthday my grandparents wanted to take me to dinner. They lived just a few towns over from where I went to college. It was all of twenty-five minutes from their front door to mine. I lived in a cheaply made apartment with 3 other girls. Our apartment complex with a dirty gym and a germ-infested pool was stuck between a railroad track and a rock quarry. The whistle from the train and the explosions from the quarry woke me from sleep on a nightly basis. The only thing I enjoyed about the apartment complex was that it was close to paved trail along the Saluda River. The 6-mile trail was one of the only beautiful things about Columbia, South Carolina. I used run there everyday.

I decided my grandparents could take me to Red Lobster for my birthday because it was close to the apartment complex and because my grandfather loved their cheddar.
“Collage was another new visual analogy that built on the reenvisioning of form begun in cubism which juxtaposed found images in dynamic relationships where chance could play a role in the perception of meaning.”

Philip B. Meggs, A History of Graphic Design
A Pursuit of Memory

The In-Between

My head nods and hits the car window over and over on the interstate. I’m almost asleep but not fully submerged into a dream because the rhythm of the car keeps bumping me awake. I live in-between.

This, more or less, has been my life since second grade.

When I was seven my dad moved out, two hours away from where my parents had bought their first house on Ramo Lane in Lexington, South Carolina. My father moved into a second story apartment in Spartanburg, South Carolina, which is further north and a little closer to Georgia. The carpet was yellow and there was a long menacing hallway in the apartment that all the rooms spouted from. When my parents were separated, every other Friday my father would pull up in his once driveway and take my two younger brothers and me up Interstate 20. On several occasions my mother drove us to Clinton, a little town halfway between Lexington and Spartanburg. We would meet my Dad at Wendy’s and in the vast, crackling, weed-infested parking lot we would transfer our little overnight bags and drive in the opposite direction of my Mother. Before their separation I’d never had a reason to travel far and never realized that I was prone to car sickness.

More than the car sickness I hated missing my friends’ birthday parties and weekends with my grandparents because I had to visit my father. I hated everything he cooked. He always made pasta, with the same type of red sauce, but he would call it by a new Italian sounding name. We had to eat tuna sandwiches and raisins for lunch. I didn’t like the weird bunk beds he bought for us to sleep in. They had ugly bedspreads that smelled like nail polish remover and when I’d pull the edge of the spread close to my chin at night I would start coughing. I’m sure that there was one smile, one ice cream cone and one happy memory, from that time in my life but they’ve all escaped me.

I’d curl up in the backseat and feel sick during the entire ride and even after I was out of the car the feeling lingered. I wore little magnet bracelets on my wrists to help with the nausea. It was especially bad in the afternoon. Every mile wielded me into a nausea. I’d pull the edge of the spread close to my chin at night I would start coughing. I’m sure that there was one smile, one ice cream cone and one happy memory, from that time in my life but they’ve all escaped me.

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I stood in my doorway, arms still crossed.

“Maria get your bag,” my mother said from behind my father, who now stood in front of me. I tightened my lips.

“I hate going to your house. I hate it!” I yelled. After a year of constant car sickness and frustration it just came out. What I said was one thing but my face must have said something. I looked at my father with absolute hatred. At the time I thought everything was his fault, but looking back I realize there is no one at fault for these things.

Without warning he fell to the floor, onto his knees and hugged me, sobbing. He said he loved me and wanted me to come. I had never seen my father cry. So I went. I felt as if my tiny tantrum had thrown the universe out of whack and the least I could do was to pack a bag and fasten in.

I stopped complaining about the music and sat up straight on the rides. I became more reserved and much less of a carefree child around my father for those years and trips. I still felt car sick but I started to find ways to distract myself. When the warm afternoon light would blink between the trees as we moved north or south I’d start to visualize memories. With my eyelids closed, things didn’t look dark. The world looked pinkish or red as the light would shift and splash my face I’d vividly remember images like an old cat or my younger brother eating sand. I just started to focus on random memories to find distraction. I’d let my mind throw me into a dreamlike state of remembering to help pass time between destinations...

It is December 1991, in Lexington, South Carolina. I’m in bed with my mom because my room was cold and my dad is away on business. In the dark I hear a

the music he loved. I only wanted to listen to country. My grandparents went square dancing and listened Country, so that’s what I liked. I found no value or pleasure in Tom Waits’ mutilated voice or Bob Dylan’s whining harmonica. They were the only music we listened to on those trips. I would pitch fits for my father to play something else and he would ignore me and tell me that one day I would understand the value of these talented musicians.

After a year of these back and forth trips I threw a tantrum. I told mom I wasn’t packing a bag and I wasn’t going to visit dad. I wanted to go to my neighbor’s Halloween party. I was tired of listening to Bob Dylan and feeling car sick and having to eat pasta. I crossed my arms. I watched from my bedroom window. My father pulled into the driveway, like always. My brother Dylan jumped in. My mother fastened my baby brother, Nick, into his car seat. I could hear my parents arguing already outside. “She doesn’t want to come. Why don’t you let her stay this weekend?” my mom pleaded. She was too tired to put up with my stubbornness.

“Nancy, she has to come. I don’t get to see her everyday like you do.”

My dad said this quickly as he brushed past my mother and into the house. I stood in my doorway, arms still crossed.

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It's a terrible sound. It sounds like someone is taking a piece of glass and slowly smashing it on it. It's loud. It's right beside my head. My mother and I sit up at the exact same moment and she rushes to turn on the light. Beside the bed is Dylan. He is chubby. His cheeks are full and he is finishing chewing on something. He smiles and holds up the top of a once red glass Christmas ornament. He ate a glass Christmas ornament off of the freshly decorated Christmas tree. I don’t remember if my mother called 9-1-1 or if he even went to the doctor but he was fine. He didn’t even have a cut in his mouth. He used to eat sand at the beach. He would take handfuls and open his mouth wide and then lick his fat fingers.

For two full years my brothers and I made the trip. Then my mother quit her job as a mail carrier and we moved to Florida. One morning before I went to school, the day before Christmas break she, stopped me before I walked out the door to the bus and just said “I quit my job. We’re moving to Florida.” There wasn’t enough time to be upset about the move. I knew it was only temporary. My mother rented out our house and in January I found myself sharing a bed with my mom in a tiny apartment. My mom was going to school to be a massage therapist, just for six months, and that meant I didn’t have to make the road trip for at least six whole months.

It wasn’t so bad. I liked Florida even though we were beyond poor. A single mother of three with no job going to school meant we had nothing new and barely any food. I have no clue where the money we lived off of came from. I remember eating Ramen. It didn’t matter because I knew we would return to our little house on Rama Lane when the Florida adventure was over. I dreaded the thought that I’d have to start making the road trip for at least six whole months. Each night when I’d get in my bed I would thank God that I didn’t have to make those trips back and forth. After just a year of my thankful praying, my parents announced we were moving to Spartanburg because my dad had been promoted there. I was skeptical of the reunion but relieved that I no longer had to make the trips. It wasn’t so bad. I liked Florida even though we were beyond poor. A single mother of three with no job going to school meant we had nothing new and barely any food. I have no clue where the money we lived off of came from. I remember eating Ramen. It didn’t matter because I knew we would return to our little house on Rama Lane when the Florida adventure was over. I dreaded the thought that I’d have to start making the road trip for at least six whole months.

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It is winter 1991 at my Gramparent's house in Chapin, South Carolina. My grandmother and I made Christmas sweatshirts this morning but now I’m bored. I am not allowed in the upstairs bathroom at my grandmother’s house. It’s very orange. Very 1970s. It smells like aftershave in Parton and I got bored. My Granny is doing laundry in the basement, three stories down. Dylan was slapping the coffee table over and over while we watch TV. I put one finger over my mouth and tell him to be quiet and we crawl up the two flights of the stairs to the orange bathroom. Now we are here, secretly. Dylan opens the door next to the shower. It’s a tiny door with wood paneling on the front. We look in and see a dark tunnel with a tiny light at the bottom and the sound of the dryer humming. It must lead to the basement. The tunnel is slightly slanted rather than just a giant hole. It almost looks like a scary slide. I don’t want to go down. Dylan sits on the edge of the frame.

“Do you want to slide?” He nods yes. With a gentle shove he slides down three stories into a pile of dirty blankets and sheets. My grandmother is standing at the bottom of the laundry shoot. I see her reach in to pull Dylan out and I begin to hear him cry. I’m going to be in trouble for a long, long time.

My dad came to visit us while we were in Florida. He flew down for the weekend. Twenty minutes after he left my mother told us they were getting back together. We were all going to return to our old house in a few months.

I was skeptical of the reunion but relieved that I no longer had to make the trips. I was skeptical because of the intensity with which they seemed to hate one another on Thursday and then they were in love on Saturday. As a fourth grader I was smart enough to see that three days isn’t long enough to heal two hearts and bring a Christmas card family back together. I aired my grievances but it did no good. They came together to rule the household and after a few months it was apparent nothing had changed and nothing ever would. They still live under the same roof now with the same problems that no one can really fix. This seems like a tragedy, and maybe it is, but something in them needs the other or else they wouldn’t keep coming back together.

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disgusting. I am sitting on the trampoline, in-between back flips. I picture all the ways to destroy the nests and save the tree. Alex Black lives next door and he is the official neighborhood bully. He shoos me off of my bike and calls me ugly all the time. He is coming across the yard with a lighter he had stolen from his father. With a sneer he climbs into the tree and starts burning the caterpillar nests. While I often think of how to rid the tree of the caterpillars I hate him for it but I watch all afternoon as he slides from branch to branch, like a serpent carefully burning their sleeping colonies.

After just two years in Spartanburg my dad's company closed the hazardous waste plant that he was in charge of. They offered him a job in Columbia and once again we returned to the same little town we'd been coming back to. My parents bought a house just three miles from the one we grew up in. And for three years, 8th, 9th and 10th grade I lived comfortably knowing that the car trips were over. There wouldn't be a reason for us to travel back and forth again. I reclined in the easiness of high school. I had settled back in with my closest friends from elementary school, like I'd never left all those times. Most importantly I discovered that all my special attention in art class had paid off. I found that I was a big fish in a little sea when it came to visual art. It was the only talent that ever came naturally to me. I painted Starry Night on my bedroom wall. When I was feeling strong teenage angst toward my parents or I was feeling in love with the guy next to me in french class I would spend hours working in my sketchbook to express my extreme moodiness.

In 9th grade I inherited an amazing 1980 Buick century with wood panelling on the dashboard so I could learn to drive. It seemed the years of nausea and lulling sleep of long drives were nothing but a unhappy memory filed away and the universe had finally decided to cut me some slack. And the times I'd let my mind throw me into a dreamlike state of remembering to help pass time between destinations seemed far away...

It is June 25th 1991, in Lexington, South Carolina. My mother is wearing a beautiful pale pink blouse. It has little bits of lace on it and her hair long and blonde. Sitting across from me on the couch she looks like a renaissance painting. It is her 30th birthday. Dad, Dylan and I have made her a chocolate cake. It looks pretty ugly. My father is standing on a chair in the kitchen replacing a light bulb. The room is quiet. There is tension. My mother clears her throat and motions for my father to come into the room. He sits down with the dead bulb in his hand and holds it in front of my mother's stomach. "Guys. You're going to have a little sister. I like the brother I have. I like our family. My mother can see my shaking brother or sister." I suddenly feel a wave of tears. I don't want another brother - or and holds it in front of my mother's stomach. "Guys. You're going to have a little

It is Spring 1996 in Gainesville, Florida. The dock under my bare legs is poking through untreated wood. My feet are dangling over the edge of the dock. I'm swinging them furiously and so is my friend Brittany. She looks so much older than I do. Her mom taught her to shave her legs last week. I'm so jealous. She's much taller and bigger. I look like such a shrimp sitting next to her. She lives in a really nice condo with her parents across the street from the really nasty apartment that my mom, brothers and I live in. She likes Alanis Morisette. We've been signing the lyrics to her new CD all day. I really don't know what most of it means but I think it is cool. The sun is setting and Brittany's mom ordered us a pizza. I'm so excited and a growling sound all at once.

"GET UP!!!" Brittany yells and jumps. I jump up onto my feet just as an eight foot alligator rushes from under the dock. We watch as it makes a beeline for a tiny ege that is sticking above the water about 30 feet away. It's mating season.

The art camp was sponsored by the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities. The camp was cool. It was the first summer that any boy had really noticed me in a good way. I will never forget coming upon a group of RA's just before curfew and one of them winking at me and saying the boys on his hall had rated me a 9. This was a miracle because I had been wearing overalls covered in paint, no make-up and a bandanna all week. I had not really had time to notice boys because I spent 12 hours a day painting and drawing. I was working on several paintings, one of them of giant yellow peppermints. I spent my nights listening to my roommate, a creative writer, tell me about her exotic life. She was just fifteen and she had already lost her
virginity to a French guy she met on a bridge in Charleston, South Carolina. She would read me poems about monks. I was mesmerized by her. I felt like I fit in so well for the first time with a group of people at this camp. Until we went on a field trip to the Governor's school.

It wasn’t far from Spartanburg, just 20 miles east in Greenville. We got a full tour of the school built like an Italian villa. The idea behind the school was to create a sort of breeding grounds for artists. It was difficult to get in and it was free. The campus was in the middle of a city park, near a waterfall in downtown Greenville. All the buildings were made of stone. The library had a huge round window that overlooked the most well tended part of the park. The cafeteria had a hot bar, salad bar, unlimited cereal, and best of all, a Pastry chef. There was a giant performance hall and 20 practice rooms for music students. There was a theatre for the drama students. The visual arts students had a large gallery, a dark room with a revolving door (like the bat cave), two paintings studios, a metals workshop, a ceramic studio with a kiln, a print making studio with three presses, an amazing graphic design lab with 15 Mac computers. There was even a supply closet at that was always unlocked where all the supplies you could dream of were there for your taking.

The dorm rooms were tiny but they each had a window. The guys and girls were on separate sides of the dorm and there was a common room for TV and games. There were free laundry facilities. It was college for 15 - 18 year olds. Most students, except for dancers, came as juniors in high school, but the dancers came in as freshmen so their bodies could be perfectly formed in by the way of the famous dance instructor they had hired.

At first glance this place seemed like the destination my personality had been searching for. I could be trained night and day and become an artist far beyond the one I was becoming at my high school in the country. My mouth watered at the free supplies. But I didn’t feel good about leaving my parents two years early. I didn’t feel good about leaving my close friends at home. I was torn between the idea of making great art and being forced to make art from sun up to sun down. It felt pretentious.

My biggest reservation was the idea of having to live in-between places again. If I did come to this school I’d have two sets of friends, two different beds and worst of all I’d have to make the trips again, at least once a month.

At the end of the camp my painting teacher took me aside and told me I should apply for the high school residential program. I had already decided I wasn’t going. I told her it seemed little like a cult of artists and that I wasn’t keen on leaving home early. She ignored me wrote me a referral and said to turn it in and use it if I changed my mind. I cried as soon as I exited the room because they told me my 3-D piece was absolutely terrible and I needed to learn to work better with materials. I left the room relieved because I really didn’t want to sit through two years of being told I was terrible. In March the acceptance package came in the mail. I pulled it from our mailbox and tossed it to my Dad while he was sitting on the couch watching TV. I was surprised given the way the interview went but I would later find out that they had a method of breaking you down and building you back up - the right way. My parents seemed pleased with the news that I got in. I restated that I would never go and that it was simply a test of my ability, nothing more. I couldn’t understand their reasoning for forcing me to go. Maybe it was the possibility of a free ride to college or the bragging rights, saying that their child went to a privileged school? It never seemed like either of my parents really cared to see what I was working on in art class before now. They didn’t understand anything I did. I just felt betrayed by them, again. They were pushing me from the nest early for reasons that they didn’t seem passionate about. I vehemently refused to go.

In June, they told me I had to fill out the acceptance packet or they would take their car away and ground me. They forced me to go. They even packed my things and put them in my mother’s van in August when I had to move in. In the front seat of my mother’s van I felt the nausea returning. I closed my eyes and once again let my head hit the window. I knew that for the next two years, at least once a month, I’d have to make the trip back and forth. We couldn’t have cars at Governor’s school so I couldn’t even drive myself back and forth. And on the rides I’d let my mind throw me into a dreamlike state of remembering to help pass time between destinations...

It is August 1994 in Lexington, South Carolina. My ultimate destiny in life is to be a Wildcat cheerleader. I am lucky I have found my calling at age 9. I love practicing kicks and running and yelling on the dusty, poorly tended county football field. My little brother is football player and I am the loudest, most proud cheerleader. I practice all the time in front of the mirror and my moves are SHARP. I’m always in the front because I’m small and if I’m good enough in a few years then I’ll make the real middle-school team. I never talk at school. But I yell on the field. We’re practicing...
for our half-time show during next Thursday's game. The sun is really hot and the red clay is staining my new white keds. Coach Anderson is mean but I guess she just has to be. She walks in front of us and sets down a boom box. “Today, girls, you'll learn a dance to ‘Cheeseburger in Paradise’ by Jimmy Buffett.”

The first day of my 3-4 class a short man with lots of hair, who looked like Jimmy Newton the cartoon character came into the room. His name was Mr. Gilliam. I was sitting in the back. He glared at us. He set a broken appliance in front of each of us. I got a blender. The wires and buttons were exploding from all parts. It looked like he had taken a hammer to it. He handed us each a piece of paper and a pencil.

“You will do blind contours of this appliance for the next three hours. If I catch you looking at your paper I will fail you for the day and you will sit in the hall until the rest of the class is finished.”

I looked at my blender. I didn’t take my eyes off the blender until I looked over at the kid next to me, who was staring at his paper. WRONG, I thought.

“Mr. Wood? What the HELL are you doing?” Mr. Gilliam had obviously seen him too.

“Hand your paper to Miss Fabrizio and go sit in the hall. Jesus Christ it’s only been 30 minutes. You’re pathetic.” Alex Wood handed me his sheet and ran into the hall. I held his paper, in shock.

“Tear it up.” Mr Gillam pointed at me. I tore up his paper and I dropped all the little pieces into a pile where he had been sitting. I had tears in my eyes for the rest of class period. No one else looked at their paper. I couldn’t wait to go home. I almost looked forwarding to the drive when I could let my mind throw me into a dreamlike state of remembering to help pass time between destinations...

It is October 2002, in Lexington, South Carolina. The boy is running from his car with a bloody nose. I can feel the bruises on my chest while I sit in the front seat of my Buick. His steaming car is at my car door. I can’t get out. I don’t have an air bag. I can’t get out. I can’t get out. It’s raining. A man is running over to help my brother out of the right side of the car. He crawls through the window.

“Maria! Unbuckle your seat belt and get out! Are you OK? Can you hear me?”

Dylan has escaped and he is yelling at me on the other side of the car. I unbuckle and crawl out. Our cars are in the middle of the intersection. I am embarrassed and scared and my chest hurts so bad. Oh my God. Is this my fault? The boy’s nose is bleeding. I look at the stranger in front of me.

“Is this my fault?” I start screaming at him in the rain.

“No. No. It doesn’t matter I called the police. You need to call your parents.” I can’t hear him yet he is horrifying. I almost killed another kid. I almost killed my brother. I just need to stand here for a minute and cry. I think Dylan is calling my parents because I can’t do anything but stand there and cry.

“Ma’am I need your information.” The officer waves in front of me as the tow truck takes my scrappy car away.

“It wasn’t your fault but we need your information for the accident report. He hit you. You were going straight through the light and he was making a left hand turn. It’s OK. We just need to get your information.”

I see now in the middle of the intersection a once beautiful goat I was making out of styrofoam. It’s head has been dislodged and looks nice but the body is in a million little styrofoam bits in the road. I’d been working on it for six weeks. It must have been thrown from the car in the accident. I was taking it home to put the finishing touches on it.

I adjusted to life at Governor’s school. I learned to avoid being yelled at by various faculty and by the end of the first year I felt like a few of the teachers had taken the role of my parents. As I suspected though, I did not adjust to the car trips or the spit-screen life. In Lexington, South Carolina I was quiet and I was the same as I’d ever been. But at Governor’s school I was the one who cracked jokes and spoke up. I couldn’t show my new self at home. I felt at home, in my skin, at Governor’s school, but I felt surrounded and loved in the space of my real home. There were things I couldn’t share with either world. I couldn’t tell my parents about the male sexual revolution that had happened at Governor’s school. It had come to light that having the boys and girls separated only made it easier for the male population to find they were interested in one another rather than us girls. I couldn’t tell my liberal friends, protesting the war at Governor’s school that I thought I might be a republican. My friends at home would never understand how much I loved Humanities Class each week where the entire school gathered in the auditorium to watch foreign films like Amelie. My friends at Governor’s school would never understand how I could be a follower of Jesus and an after hours nude figure model for the class. I’d live three weeks as one Maria and a weekend as another. I made my transition on the highway of my parents. As I suspected though, I did not adjust to the car trips or the spit-screen life. In Lexington, South Carolina I was quiet and I was the same as I’d ever been. But at Governor’s school I was the one who cracked jokes and spoke up.

It is Winter 2003 in Greenville, South Carolina. SNOW! I haven’t seen snow in so long I don’t even know what it is to do. There is a note on my door that says all classes are cancelled due to snow. We live on campus but I guess teachers can’t get here. ha! Perfect! I rush into Amelia and Carrie’s room. I turn on the lights and start throwing jackets at them. They are excited too. We all run out into the courtyard toward the dining hall. There is one lonely woman behind the counter. The Pastry Chef. She came in before the snow started so there are muffins sitting where they always are. I eat a giant Chocolate Chip one. Everything is white and so quiet. Most people are
not up yet. We eat our muffins and plan our day. We have so much work to do but since we don’t have class we have to spend time enjoying the snow. As we eat Mr. Franks, the openly gay, mid-forties and very entertaining English teacher, descends the stairwell reciting some poem about snow and sex. He sits down with us and eats a muffin. He said he walked from his apartment on Main street and he decided to just come in a grade. We’ve convinced him to get in our snow scheme. Since there is minimal adult supervision on campus and no one in the dining hall we take advantage of the lunch trays. We each grab one, including Mr. Franks, and we rush into the park. We slide down the dangerous icy hill for hours. Slowly the drama students, the other visual artists, musicians, creative writers and dancers arrive at our make-shift icy playground, all carrying lunch trays.

I got scholarships. I got a full ride to Virginia Commonwealth University, Ringling School of Art and Design and University of South Carolina. I wanted to go to VCU. My parents took me to visit after I was accepted. It was raining our entire visit. My parents were going through an especially bad spell in their marriage. I’m not sure why because I was never home, but there was a serious anger coming from my mother. My father got us a hotel room on the 16th floor of a pink hotel, a Crown Plaza or something. My mother had a mental breakdown when she opened the curtains and saw how high up we were. She’d never been afraid of heights until that day. They fought so much on that trip, it was like I was invisible. The only thing they agreed on was that the city was dirty and the campus was too spread out. By the end of the weekend I was so mentally exhausted by the emotional stress of the trip that I gave up on VCU. And on the ride I let my mind throw me into a dreamlike state of remembering to help pass time between destinations...

It is December, 2002 in Lexington, South Carolina. It smells like cloth seats and cheese Danish. The floor mats are leopard print and the entire car is this strange beige color, the outside and inside match. We’re doing the speed limit down highway 378. It’s 9:27pm and I’m twenty-seven minutes past my curfew and I’m 16. Sierra is driving. I can see the outline of her glasses as the lights of the cars going in the other direction shine through the windshields. Flash and past. It takes 14 minutes to get from her driveway to mine. I’m on the right side of the back seat with my face almost pressed against the cold glass. Daniel is pressed against me, just as I am pressed against the window. He just offered to ride with Sierra to take me home. I don’t know why I didn’t drive. He and I have been playing the high school game of longing and denial for several months. Sometimes he likes me, other times he won’t speak to me in the hallway. I am consistently dedicated to my feelings for him. Tonight is different.

He takes my hand in his and rubs his calloused thumb across my palm for 14 minutes. It is silent in the car except for “Motorcycle Drive by” by Third Eye Blind on the radio.

It wasn’t just their attitude that deterred me from going, it was also my boyfriend at the time. He told me I didn’t really love him if I went that far away for college. I liked the idea of VCU. I knew there would still be the back and forth of it but the interstate would be different and I’d be driving. I’d be in control. I was never in control. I just wanted control.

It’s been 16 years since I started traveling up and down the road between parents. It has been almost eight years since I traveled back and forth from Governor’s school to home. And it has been almost two years since I started driving up and down interstate 95 from Lexington, South Carolina to VCU. It’s taken me most of my life to figure out how to get control over all the outside things that put me in-between. I ended up at VCU to get my Masters in Fine Arts after learning to gain control in college. I’ve learned to take the time between destinations to analyze and learn from my past and to grow. I’m finally in control of the destinations and what to try and understand between them. After so many years of being in-between and so many lessons as two people I’ve finally learned to be the same person everywhere. I’ve also learned that you can only live in the present if you let yourself visit and understand your past.

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A Pursuit of Memory

For weeks my finger tips were covered in band-aids that stuck together. I was working on visualizing one of my essays by making collages from linoleum prints. The linoleum prints were reappropriated from a failed printmaking experiment in high school. When I began this project the prints had been living under my couch for almost six years, and, being a hoarder I just couldn’t throw them out.

The collages formed themselves, almost intuitively, as I cut along crude lines and around shapes of yellow, grey and black. I chose to re-appropriate the prints because their texture and color palette reflected the aesthetic of the interstate—the place where the essay takes place. As the collages grew to include typography, I decided to combine them into an accordion-fold book. I arrived at this format after spending many visits to the special collections section in the library looking for inspiration. I documented the way the books folded and noted the reasons for the form of various artists’ books that the librarian so graciously pulled out for me over and over. I decided the accordion fold nodded at the element of time and the option to flip back-and-forth from spread to spread.
After reading, studying and sometimes channeling April Greiman and David Carson I found myself intuitively breaking up the essay into typographic forms on top of the collages in an attempt to play with the sound of words, the flow of the essay, and the visual hierarchy.

(Right) 5” x 5” Digital collage with type
(Top left and right) Images of spreads with vignettes pulled from pockets
(Bottom) Full book on display in gallery
(Top) Book folded
(Right) Book from above
(Bottom left and right) Images of book unfolding
“The digital revolution and postmodernist intuitive thinking made way for designers like David Carson who created a chaotic vernacular which relies on overlapping and interrupted text.”

Timothy Samaura, Making and Breaking the Grid
A Pursuit of Memory

Kerwing

Sitting in this hard booth I don’t fully understand how I got here. I’m gripping my Sam Adams Summer Ale and replaying the two years in my mind. Thinking back on all the conversations and events trying to figure out how we arrived at this bar, at 4:00 in the afternoon, together. Across from me is a note pad. He placed it there beside his beer as he got up to go the bathroom. He didn’t say why he’d brought it. He seemed unsure of everything. I can see the handwriting on the note pad. The writing is sitting perfectly on the blue horizontal lines.

Interruptions of elegant surfaces; simple flip-up, white note pads. They were part of the landscape of the counter, the kitchen table, the top of the bedroom dresser. I’d find them stuck behind the dog food container or sometimes inside of a cabinet. There was always at least one note pad on the floor of his truck, with a dirty boot print stamped on the top page.

There was always one on his office desk. I’d glance in to see him as I walked to the copy machine. It was always the same picture. He would be leaning back, as far as the chair would go. His eyes were usually closed. If they were open they were surely avoiding mine. His feet, in heavy boots would be propped on the desk, his knees bent. There was usually a pen hanging from the corner of his mouth. I’d hear a muffled, tragically music coming from his computer speakers. A note pad would be haphazardly tossed on the desk, waiting for his thoughts.

He was most standoffish of all the employees who worked in the office. I was the part time receptionist, then I became the intern and later a Junior Graphic Designer and official dog sitter. He never looked at me when he came in from his lunch break. He was always in a hurry. He was tall and swift, attractive, even though I couldn’t admit that to myself and he looked to be about twenty-six but it was hard to tell. He was the only mysterious thing about him.) I parked my car outside of his little house at 7:00pm and started toward the door. When I glanced in the open window I saw a yellow lab bouncing up and down. His feet, in heavy boots would be propped on the desk, his knees bent. There was usually a pen hanging from the corner of his mouth. I’d hear a muffled, tragically music coming from his computer speakers. A note pad would be haphazardly tossed on the desk, waiting for his thoughts.

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It was the week before Easter when he came up to the reception desk. He sat down across from me on the couch and asked if I could dog sit for him. He had a yellow lab named Gertie. He was going to Daytona Beach with one of bosses. I nodded. He was very friendly and printed out directions to his house. He asked me to come over that night and meet the dog, see the house, whatever.

I was interested to see his house. (I couldn’t imagine a typical bachelor pad. I really knew nothing about him.) I parked my car outside of his little house at 7:00pm and started toward the door. When I glanced in the open window I saw a yellow lab bouncing up and down. I could hear her whimpering and see her ears flopping up above the window sill. I heard Norah Jones, at an alarming level, and I saw him in the middle of the living room, shirtless holding a glass of red wine. I looked at my watch. Did I come at the right time? Surely this guy isn’t always shirtless listening to Norah Jones every night. He took a minute to open the door. He had on a t-shirt when he did but the music was still blaring and he was still hanging his red wine.

Instantly, his dog tried to knock me to the floor and instantly I was annoyed. Who is this character and why is his dog insane? I was extremely shy and suddenly this situation was uncomfortable and embarrassing. He apologized for her and made her sit. He showed me her food and gentle leader and the back yard. He didn’t live in a bachelor pad. Each room was painted a nice taupe or burnt umber and the living room was a sage. There was a big leather arm chair in the corner and a painting of a beautiful woman with a sheet draped over her hanging above the couch. I was impressed. He was friendly, not too friendly, but he seemed so different at the office. I left feeling something I couldn’t place, perhaps looking back on it the feeling was just me slightly more than interested.

The next morning I went over to his house to let the dog out. She was romping in the back yard when I found myself uncontrollably snooping. I’m a very private person but there was something in me that didn’t care that I was violating my own rules. It was an impulse. I saw the first note pad on the counter next to the dog food container. I pulled it out and flipped to the first page. I don’t know what I was looking to find, but maybe just hoping for a clue to what was going on in his mind all those times he was leaning back in his chair.

What I found was more than visually arresting. He had the most beautiful handwriting I had ever seen. Everything about the way he wrote on the page was incredible. It was moving. It looked like something you’d find in an antique store, left over from long ago when people perfected their writing. Each character in every word sat just above the blue horizontal line running across the page.

You are confident in what you’re writing if it sits above the baseline or the blue line on the note pad. If handwriting rests on the baseline then you’re confused; you’re taking more time to work out the letters and words. Whatever he was saying - he knew what it was. It took me a few minutes to understand what the paper said because I wasn’t assembling words and digesting them, I was too captivated by the ascenders and descenders, like the tail of the ‘i’. He even hyphenated his words if they broke at the end of a line. He even had perfect rag along the right edge of his paragraphs. His leading was consistent even despite the fact that he was writing above the baseline. I immediately wanted to steal the note pad from the counter top and take it home. I wanted to keep it as a precious artifact from this mysterious person.

As a graphic designer my job is to take great care in the craft of typography. I need to understand the history and implications of typefaces. I need to understand the anatomy of a letterform. I need to know if the typeface is a slab serif or a just a serif, if it is old style or display, and make sure that every single letter is correctly spaced to its neighbor. It is laborious and tedious. My interest in Typography was fueled by my love of handwriting and letters because my mother used to be a mail carrier. I used to think about all the different things she was
delivering and all the different ways people write and tell. The personal nature of handwriting is beautiful in the same way typography is except there is less intention and more intuition.

I put the note pad back where it had been as the dog came charging through the back door to her food bowl. While she ate I walked over to the kitchen table. Under a stack of books from the library was another note pad. The stack of books were mostly novels. One was about artists and the women muses that had inspired them. I removed the note pad from the bottom of the pile and began to read it. It was just dialogue and notes. It seemed like the start of conversations between characters he was making up. Or on some pages there were just lists of things. It didn’t matter what any of it said. It was so beautiful.

For the next three days, each time I went to check on the dog I found a new note pad. I found one on this desk, one on the old timey radio by the front door, in the spare bedroom where the dog stayed and I found one on the floor next to his bed. His bed was enormous. It was so large that I concluded the movers must have assembled it in the room. I imagined him sitting in bed at night writing.

I never found anything that gave me a clue to who he was. All that I read seemed to be the beginnings of short stories or notes from work. At night when I left the dog in the dark house, pages of writing flashed before me until I fell asleep.

There was a long lull between the time I dog sat and when I came over for dinner. He was a little more laid back at the office after I dog sat. Sometimes he waved to me in passing or he would say hello when he came back from lunch. I became the intern that summer. I was diligent. I stayed late kerning letters on print ads. I came in early and did production work and I answered the phone on my lunch hour. I took the internship too seriously, perhaps.

At almost twenty-two you really don’t know a whole lot about yourself. I knew the foods I liked and what I thought I believed in. I knew what felt right and what felt wrong. I’d had several serious relationships and none of them had felt like this. I was so happy to be living in these walls with this once mysterious person. I was infatuated with his handwriting, his paintings on the walls, his laugh. I thought the world of him. But sometime in that second month I began to question myself.

There were silences between us. I couldn’t figure out if it was working together, the five year age difference or something else. When the silence came panic followed, for me. What’s wrong with me? Why aren’t we talking? Was that awkward? Slowly, I began to clam up and so did he. We still laughed and went out. We were still social companions. We still shared the bed with the dog. But something wasn’t right. I started questioning every move I made. I started questioning every conversation. At night, while brushing my teeth, sometimes I’d cry because I just couldn’t figure out what was wrong and in the morning I kept with the disguise of being a person I wasn’t. I didn’t know anything anymore, except I didn’t want to let him go.

While I couldn’t figure out why he was starting to be so closed off I tried to guess where my source of insecurity was coming from. I’d always been shy and largely disappointed in myself from a physical and intellectual standpoint. I’d have days of confidence but on the whole I preferred being unnoticed and somewhat of a wallflower. Perhaps the initial attention and excitement had helped me let go of those insecurities but after a while, when silence came, I blamed myself for not having something interesting or smart to say. The blame would live in a huge circle. I would hate myself for not being good enough, smart enough, pretty enough to keep his attention (so I thought), then something good would happen and slowly the silence would fall back and I’d blame myself harder this time.

He had a horrible temper. If a football game didn’t go the way he’d wanted he would pout, for days or some household object would suffer and be broken in the middle of the stress of the game. He never got angry with me but I could watch his face and see him internalizing our ever-distancing situation and then my circle of frustration would set in on me. We never talked about it. We never once brought up our issue, our division. This is what drove us apart.

On our first date I’d told him I was planning on going to graduate school the following fall. We knew that date would come and somehow we hung on all winter, all spring and all summer. I was terrified of going 400 miles away from him and his bed. Even when he went out of town I stayed in that bed yet I could feel the distance between us growing worse every day.
even though I couldn’t figure out why. I tried everything to smash us together that I could think of. I tried bringing him to meet my family. I tried being coy. I tried being angry and tried avoiding him. I tried cooking dinner and being matronly. Nothing worked. One night when he was gone, I lay awake in his bed running over scenarios that could be causing distance. I wondered if perhaps there could be a clue on the note pads. I snuck around the house and gathered them all. I looked for the name of someone else. I looked for sentence to confirm that we were failing but all I found, time and time again were confident pages of beautiful writing.

All summer before I moved away I pretended. I pretended that everything would be fine and that the invisible distance between us would last. The day I left in a u-haul filled with everything I owned he handed me a card. It was our one year anniversary. It was a handmade card with perfect handwriting on the front. In blue pen it read “One year, One Condition,” and on the inside it said “Go create a life you love.” We didn’t break up that day that I drove four hundred miles to my new life but I knew he’d let go. I was determined to fight for what I wanted despite the obvious disparity of the situation. I put that card in a cigar box with all the other things he’d written me, a birthday card, a Christmas card and a graduation card and the cigar box became a little reliquary to our relationship.

One card came in the mail, in mid-September. After nights of silence on the phone we’d finally talked about how things weren’t working. He sent me a card saying he was trying to figure himself out and he was thankful for my patience. It found its way to the cigar box. The night before I was going to drive home for my birthday weekend I got the call I knew was coming. The call when he choked up and admitted he just couldn’t do it anymore, the feelings had disappeared. They just weren’t there the way they should be. A part of me was angry but another part of me was just filled with despair. I was in a new city, alone, and now the voice and the somehow comforting silence on the phone was leaving me. The bed would never be mine. This relationship that I knew had been failing for a long time was finally falling out of my life. I’d have to let go of the man with the beautiful handwriting who had so shaken my world.

I carefully removed the pictures of us from the frames. I placed them in the cigar box. I couldn’t destroy them. I tucked the box in a drawer. I drove home, to his front door and we had the final conversation. I walked in and the house was spotless. It smelled like it always did. I walked into the kitchen, almost in tears. All the drawings and things I’d written, in my scribbled, terrible writing were gone from the fridge. Every trace of me - vanished. The room blurred, the house blurred into the painful conversation that I’d been avoiding for months. The only thing I could focus on as he took my hand and reassured me this was best thing was the note pad sitting in the window sill. He was sobbing and apologizing but saying it was right thing, that he was confident about the decision. I just focused across the room trying to read what the note pad said. As he walked me to the door, asking if I was ok, I at looked him and said I didn’t want to be friends. “This is the way it ends. If you’ve decided you don’t want me I get to be a ghost.”

Three weeks later mailed him a box with a note inside. In my best handwriting I wrote all the things I was thankful for about our relationship. I ended the letter with a strong, confident line that read “Thank you. I hope you have a beautiful life.” I moved on. Six weeks after we broke up I went on a date. I felt liberated and confident. I started to find myself in ways I hadn’t before because I had always been interested in impressing him. I learned everything without a hand to hold. When I started to doubt something - anything - I’d pull out the cigar box with the cards. I’d read them, read the confidence in the handwriting and I put them away, defiantly continuing on.

I changed completely in the following six months of our break up. I didn’t speak to him at all. He respected my request - that he vanish. He started to become just a past tense. I became the person should have been, perhaps not so much because I wasn’t with him but because I fully embraced a new journey, alone. I dated other people. I was confident. I was exactly the opposite of what I’d been the whole time we’d been together.

The e-mail came in March, when I’d come to my hometown for spring break. Sleepy and hung over from a night of conversation and wine with friends I’d woken up on my best friend’s couch. I’m always the first person awake and I needed to entertain myself. The computer was open beside me. I leaned over the couch, slid onto the floor and checked my account. When I saw his name my heart thundered in my chest. He lived one street over from where I was waking up. Perhaps he’d seen my car driving down the street or seen me out last night. Whatever sparked the e-mail, the e-mail sparked conversation, which sparked a freelance project together, which sparked late nights on the phone and long e-mails. Finally, one day I admitted to myself that while I was feeling the way I had before with this person, but it was different because I was different. I was confident. He seemed to be the one grasping to understand.

For the first time we’re looking at the other, with a kind of honesty and openness we didn’t have before. I don’t know what the note pad says but I’m guessing it’s for me. I’m guessing it’s full of explanation. Our roles seemed to have reversed because while he was in the bathroom I started writing on a napkin, confident permanence, sitting evenly above the lines.
It was time to work on my third essay for the Creative Nonfiction class. I put my pen down next to the page again and again. There have always been things that needed to get out of my mind and manifest into something. This part of my creative project was one of those manifestations. I wrote about the memory of a relationship. I found a metaphor in the memory to my everyday activities as a graphic designer and I felt there was an opportunity to create an analogy between the two. I wrote the essay framed with a paragraph in the present tense at the beginning and at the end. After I'd written the essay I decided to take the metaphor of the relationship as a typographic term one step further. I decided to approach this visualization from a purely typographic perspective.

My first experiment was to create "typographic frames" using the body copy from the *kerning* essay. To better understand how to approach the essay I studied the work of Wolfgang Weingart, April Greiman, the Dada movement, Dan Friedman and Willi Kunz. I wanted to challenge readers and make them commit to the reading. To help them, I used the device of a blue underline recalling the appearance of a conventional note pad. My goal was to change typographic color and explore the silence, grey areas and miscommunication that characterized the demise of the relationship.
They were interruptions of elegant surfaces. They were simple flip-up, white notepads. They were placed on the kitchen dresser. In the bedroom, the floor always jumped with dirt underfoot. The truck, always present, top page. The identity was the notepad.

The frames were created by taking a repeated section of the text from the essay and applying different typographic treatments. Rectangles were then cut out and arranged between the type.
HE WERE INTERRUPTIONS OF ELEGANT SURFACES; SIMPLE LANDSCAPE OF THE COUNTER, THE TOP OF THE BEDROOM DRESSER, THE TOP OF TIMES INSIDE OF A CABINET. AND THE DOG FOOD Container, AT LEAST ONE NOTEPAD ON WITH A DIRTY BOOT PRINT STAMPED ON IT, EVEN BEFORE I KNEW HIM WELL I PLACED HIS IDENTIFICATION ON THE TOP PAGE. EVEN BEFORE I KNEW HIM VERY WELL I PLACED HIS IDENTITY WAS THE NOTEPAD.
THEY WERE INTERRUPTIONS OF
ELEGANT SURFACES; SIMPLE FLIP-UP,
WHITE NOTEPADS. THEY WERE PART
OF THE LANDSCAPE OF THE COUNTER,
THE KITCHEN,
THE BEDROOM DRESSER. I’D FIND TH
EM STUCK TIMES INSIDE OF A CABINET. A
AS ALWAYS, AT LEAST ONE NOT
LOOR OF HIS TRUCK, WITH A DI
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FLIP-UP, WHILE THEY WERE
LANDSCAPE OF THE KITCHEN
THEM, THEIR
CREATE
I was terrified of going 400 miles away from him and his bed. Even when he went out of town I stayed in that bed. I could feel the distance between us growing worse every day even though I couldn’t figure out why. I tried...
Booth I don’t fully understand how I got here. I’m gripping my Sam Adams Summer Ale and replaying the two years in my mind. Thinking back on conversations and trying to figure out how we arrived at this bar, at 4:00 in the afternoon. I need to understand the history and implications of typefaces. As a graphic designer, my job is to take great care in the craft of typography. I need to understand the anatomy of a letterform. I need to know if the typeface is a slab serif or a just a serif, if it is old style or generated in a newer version. I have to make sure that everything is readable and legible.
“Post-modern designers place a form in a space because it feels right, rather than to fulfill a rational communicative need.”

Timothy Samura, Making and Breaking the Grid
I have a slightly addictive personality and I tend to go through phases. I was almost 21 when I became infatuated with lobsters. I loved the variation of color in their shells and the way little barnacles seemed to grow colonies on their backs. I imagined they communicated in little clicking sounds with their legs the way cicadas do with their wings. I changed all my passwords to LOBSTER 21 and bought a woven purse with sparkly lobsters attached to the front. My love for lobsters surfaced while working to redesign The Red Lobster menu for a graphic design project. I’d been too poor to enjoy the food from the menu so when my grandparents offered to take me to dinner for my twenty-first birthday I chose Red Lobster.

My grandparents lived just a few towns over from where I went to college. I lived in a cheaply made apartment with three other girls. Our apartment complex with a dirty gym and a germ infested pool was stuck between a railroad track and a rock quarry. The only thing I enjoyed about the apartment complex was that it was close to a paved running trail along the Saluda River. The six mile trail was one of the only beautiful things about Columbia, South Carolina. I used run there everyday for exercise and sanity.

Aside from my lobster obsession, the restaurant was close to my apartment and I knew my grandmother would enjoy the cheddar biscuits. I had an unnecessary guilt complex when it came to gifts and dinners from my grandparents. I’d had this complex all my life. When I was in elementary school I’d cry when they bought me a milkshake. I always felt guilty that they loved me so much and they were always doing things for me and I couldn’t do anything for them.

Guilt ran into other areas of my life besides the realm of Grandparents. I’d turned twenty-one the day before our dinner but I hadn’t enjoyed any alcoholic beverages. My roommates forced me to go to a gas station and buy a 40 oz of Budweiser at midnight but I never opened it. I was going through a phase when I thought everything was absolutely wrong. Drinking, smoking, sex, cursing, pretty much anything that was fun or inspired a little joy in your heart was potentially harmful. And Fun was equivalent to guilt. I was raised in a Christian household but after I started college become a little fanatical. Even when it came to body image I had this sense of guilt. If I didn’t work out or eat a huge piece of cake I felt guilty. My well-meaning roommates were always telling me I was skinny and I shouldn’t worry or be so obsessive about working out but I felt like I was doing something wrong if I didn’t cancel out an indulgence. I also had a tendency to apologize. My friends threw me a surprise party once and all the balloons had sad faces that said “I’m sorry” on them. That’s how frequent my needless apologies had become. At twenty-one I saw self conscious and guilty.

My grandmother let me ride in the front seat on the way to dinner. We chitchatted in the car on the way and when we arrived we asked for a table instead of a booth. My grandparents don’t enjoy sitting in booths, it’s too hard for them to scoot in and out. My grandparents sat across from me sharing a menu trying to find a meal that pleased the both of them. They always share food. I’m a fan of left overs and so I rarely split a meal.

I ordered the Tilapia and they ordered the Surf ’n Turf. I’d considered ordering the lobster before I arrived at the restaurant but once I saw them gracefully floating in the tank I knew I’d feel guilty if they ended up on my plate a few minutes later. They were also expensive. The conversation while waiting on food was normal grandparent dialogue about school, siblings, distant relatives and the change from sticky humidity to a nice fall weather. When our food arrived I gave a lusty glance toward their steak. I was happy with my healthy fish choice but I loved red meat. I never cooked it or bought it because it was fairly expensive, like the lobster.

“What do you cook at your apartment?” my grandfather asked trying to stab a vegetable.

“Oh, I eat Lean Cuisines and cereal. I don’t really have time to cook. Sometimes I make a little chicken on the George Foreman grill but that’s about it.”

My grandmother eyed me and said very frankly that I needed to eat more red meat.

“You need more iron in your diet. You’re a little pale and too skinny.”

“You haven’t become any sort of vegetarian have you?” We didn’t raise you that way. Helen, do you remember the year we raised a cow to eat?” My grandfather smiled.

Suddenly I’m five. I’m wearing a blue dress with white spots because in 1990 I was going through a phase when I only wear dresses. I will stop feeling this way about dresses shortly after my 6th birthday and refused to wear them again until I am twelve. I also have a mullet hair cut with my business bangs pushed back in a head band. I have this terrible haircut until I’m eight because my grandmother doesn’t like it when I have hair in my eyes. I’m on the screen porch at my grandmother’s house in Chapin, South Carolina. I’m at my grandparents for a Saturday visit. My mom is coming to get me later on so I can be home tomorrow for church. My round, curly haired little brother, Dylan, is being fussy. My grandparents are sitting on the porch with a football sized field surrounded by a log slat fence and then woods. I am not allowed to go into the woods for all the obvious reasons like poison ivy and snakes and becoming lost. I’ve been told many times to stay out of the field as well because of chiggers. Chiggers

My pink Big Wheel is calling my name in the driveway. The swing hanging from the large oak tree is swaying with a ghost sitter. I decide escaping the pollen box porch is worth the consequences. Big Wheel or swing? They’ll hear the plastic tires scarping across the drive way if I go to the Big Wheel. I decide on the swing. I crawl through the silent doggie door for Gus, the mutt, and I sprint across the yard. I settle in and realize I can’t touch the ground, therefore I cannot swing. I pout and slump. While I become angry at the lack of length in my legs ( this never changes as I grow up) I notice a break in the wooden fence to the far right of the yard. My grandfather’s own a significant amount of land at this house. They have a few scupen, vines, an open barn structure that is not red, large beautifully tended grassy yard, a football sized field surrounded by a log slot fence and then woods. I am not allowed to go into the woods for all the obvious reasons like poison ivy and snakes and becoming lost. I’ve been told many times to stay out of the field as well because of chiggers. Chiggers
are tiny red itchy bugs that burrow into your skin and migrate to sweaty places on your body. Nothing short of awesome.

I ignore the chigger, snake and lost warnings and sprint to the break in the fence. I squeeze through sideways. I sprint again to the woods. I believe I will go unnoticed if I run fast enough. Once I enter the shade of big pine trees and fallen logs I realize the wooded area isn’t very thick. It is mossy and damp and too quiet. I start to run for the field on the other side of the woods because suddenly I am imagining the dragon from sleeping beauty waking from behind a fallen log. Just before I break out of the woods I hear a low mooing. I know the sound of a moo because when you’re little, adults read you books about animal sounds and there is always a cow in one of those books. At first I don’t notice where the sounds is coming from but soon I see a large cow. This cow in the middle of a field seems strange to me. If this cow belongs to my grandparents then why have I never heard it moo before? Why haven’t they told me that they have a cow? Why haven’t I ever ridden on the back of a cow? Will this cow give me milk if I bring it a glass jar? Is the cow a girl or boy? Again, the mooing.

I conclude in this moment that the cow is an imaginary cow and that Jesus wanted me to have this cow as an imaginary friend. I’ve heard other children talk about their imaginary friend’s at day care. No one has ever said anything about an imaginary pet and so this cow must be a friend. Pets are only cats, dogs, hamsters and fish, I’d never known anyone with a pet cow. I AM SO LUCKY! I sprint to the cow but I keep a good three foot distance because it smells bad. “YOU ARE MY COW! I WILL NAME YOU SISSY!” I am yelling at the cow, slowly. This will help me communicate with it. Sissy does not respond. She continues to eat and swat flies with her tail. I didn’t know how to tell if the cow was a girl or boy at this age so I just decide it is a girl because it had long eyelashes. She is black and white, just like all the cows I’ve seen in books. She seems gentle despite her low mooing.

I circle Sissy twice and I pick some grass for her. I hold it out but she does not take it from my hand. I think she is probably full. I spend several minutes just looking at her and telling her I love her. I tell her that I’m going to make mud-pies with my fake kitchen in the garage later and I’ll bring her one to eat. No response. I never question why she doesn’t answer me. I just love her and know that I am chosen and lucky to have a real imaginary cow friend.

I know that I have to go back to the porch because someone will notice that I’m missing. I tell Sissy goodbye. I sprint all the way back to the porch. I climb through the doggie door and lie down on the Astroturf. It’s prickly on my bare legs and arms and the back of my neck. I’ve lost my headband in all my adventuring. I try to get the hair out of my eyes and regain a normal breathing pattern in case my grandmother comes back. I decide to always keep Sissy a secret. I don’t even tell my best friend across the street when I get back to my parents’ house. I believe that I will have to share the imaginary friend if I tell anyone. So I don’t. My grandmother comes out to the porch after twenty minutes or so and tells me to come in and have a snack. My grandmother, my brother and I each have a class of milk and a

I never returned to that field. My mother came to pick me up shortly after I got done with my snack. I thought about the cow often when I was at my grandparents’ house and sometimes when I drank a glass of milk because of the snack after meeting Sissy and because cows give milk. My grandfather’s moved from that house in 1997.

By that time cows were the last things on my mind. I’d moved on to more “adult” obsessions like the band Hanson. My decision to keep Sissy a secret was reinforced at a family Thanksgiving when my mother was making fun of my uncle for the imaginary friend he had when he was young. I can’t remember the name of his imaginary friend but it wasn’t a cow. I think it was a more normal friend, perhaps another little boy. I felt guilty that I had this secret, however harmless it may be. I felt guilty because it seemed having an imaginary friend was looked down upon but also because I knew secrets weren’t a good thing. When I had this conversation with my grandparents at Red Lobster it had been years since I thought of the cow.

The last time I thought of the cow was in 8th grade at an art camp. I’d gotten stuck in a photography class instead of welding and we had to go to the zoo to take photos. Everyone was so excited about the giraffes and the flowers at the Botanical gardens but I went to the farm area. I’d originally wanted photos of the llama but I found a beautiful cow instead. I used an entire role of film shooting her eye and her feet. There was a giant wooden painted cartoon of milk near her and I took a few shots of her next to it. I remember thinking to myself how much she was like my imaginary friend. One of the photos I took was exhibited in the show at the end of camp, the one of her eye. It’s hanging in my parents basement still today.

“Did you all ever tell me about the cow? When you were raising it?” I ask, in total shock that this memory or non-memory has been the opposite of what I thought for the past 16 years.

“I don’t think so. We didn’t want you to be attached to it when we had it slaughtered” my grandfather, the sweetest man alive looks sadly at his steak.

“It was kind of a silly idea. I got attached and it was hard to deal with. We thought it would save money.”

“I don’t think so. We didn’t want you to be attached to it when we had it slaughtered” my grandfather, the sweetest man alive looks sadly at his steak.

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“I saw her once and I thought she was imaginary because she was really far away from the house and no one ever told me about her. I’ve thought that I dreamed up this imaginary cow friend for the past 16 years.” I didn’t say this with anger. I just said it very matter-of-fact because I knew my grandparents had good intentions with the whole situation. They giggled at the scenario of me having an imaginary cow friend.

That night I laid down in my bed and started to consider how little I’d understood of reality for the past 16 years. What I thought was imaginary was not. Perhaps my perception of the world as whole hadn’t been correct? What other parts of reality had a dreamed up?
kept grasping to understand this backwards situation. I felt guilty for eating my memory and frustrated for not understanding the world.

Since that conversation, three years ago my perception of reality has changed into a more concrete understanding of the world.

After that night at dinner I began to evaluate the realities in my life and the guilt. I started asking myself questions like “Why feel guilty about things I can’t control? Why apologize for things I didn’t have a part in?” I started to look at all aspects of life differently, even fun.

My long-standing view that fun was wrong and everything had to be done the hard way even started to evaporated. I started listening when people told me. I shouldn’t worry so much about my body image because they could see what I really looked like and my perception was warped. There is a residue of guilt, I have little moments when I retreat into a mode of “I’m sorry”, but it’s significantly better now that my perception of reality as changed.

I’m a totally different person than I was before that conversation. It helped me realize that reality can’t just be your own. You must listen and observe and recognize that each person in your life contributes to your reality. I don’t have any anger toward my grandparents. I know that were just protecting me. I broke the barriers of the porch, the fence, the woods and found this hidden thing. I can’t be angry because they had good intentions and they still do.

I think of the cow memory more often, since metamorphosis. I think of it when I feel self-conscious or try to apologize. The cow memory floods me when I pour milk into a glass. The opaque white in glass, just like the jar I wanted to bring to the cow triggers this vivid movie in mind. I think about all the things the cow became sometimes and so when I open a leather bound book and smell the skin and run my fingers over the hyde, I remember. When I see astroturf at a put-put place I’m taken back to that porch. When I see an untreated log fence I remember the field. And when I drive down a strip of restaurants and shops, in any given town and see a Red Lobster I think of the cow. These things, the milk, the leather, the Astroturf, the fence and the Lobster act as visual triggers to recall the memory. When I’m faced with the objects I am sent back to that vivid reality and all its lessons.
Fragmentation breeds imagination. This subproblem in my creative project is from childhood. When I finished the first draft I was afraid that I might be sent for testing to make sure I hadn’t eaten lead paint as a child. The essay is about an imaginary cow that turns out to be real. The memory is greatly fractured in my mind, but the face of the cow, the posture and gesture of its body form a clear image. This memory was very much based on images and sounds. I tried to acknowledge the key elements in the story, the cow, a lobster, a fence and the sounds I heard, through a series of gesture studies, typography and use of white space.

The final form of the piece became a series of plates that accompanied a manuscript of the essay, created with the idea of post modernist design and intuition. I focused on only the most essential parts of the essay, visual and verbal, to bring an emphasized message to each plate. From memory, for part of the visual focus, I created a set of charcoal drawings of the cow. I created detailed line drawings of the lobster and used the technique of looped writing, strike-through editing and juxtaposition to work with the essay’s content.
3" x 4" Pen Lobster Drawing
Manuscript and Plates Packaged together
I was color in the imagined lift their weight with sparkly redesign the food first

92

93
My grandparents lived just a few towns over from the apartment complex. Our family was a bit of an oddity because my three sisters and I were all born within a year of each other. I always envied the ability to share a birthday with my sisters, but I found comfort in being the one to celebrate the new year's eve. Every year we would have a family gathering at our grandparents' house, and we would all enjoy a delicious meal together. It was a time to celebrate and reflect on the previous year while looking forward to the new one.
I don’t remember why I became infatuated with lobsters. I was about twenty-one when I changed all my passwords in KERMIT20 and bought a sewing machine with quilting lobsters stitched to the front. I never finished reworking them. I just decided I liked the evocative images of the sea and I wanted them in my life. I’ve always enjoyed Red Lobster, the evocative so perhaps that played into my interest. I remembered the memoirs and carefully illustrated new lobster drawings.
always felt guilty that they loved me so much and that I didn’t treat them better.

My grandparents lived just a few towns over from where I went to school. Reel Lobster, a popular seafood restaurant in the area, had a play area for children.

One summer, we went to Reel Lobster and bought a woman gift for her birthday. I choose Reel Lobster because it was a suitable choice for the occasion.

We had a great time at Reel Lobster and enjoyed the food. The interior was clean and the staff was friendly.
A Beginning

*an evaluation*

Looking at what I’ve done for my creative project is to accept the beginning of a direction in writing and design that I will continue to investigate. Through this process I have found new inspirations, precedents and influences that I hadn’t known. I’ve found that my creative process, specifically related to writing, designing, and memory is a cyclical process. The process feels like a sit n’ spin ride from childhood. The same image flashing as speed varies, the colors blur or stay precise, and the sound clips and echoes as the creative process spins.

As a future educator I plan to encourage students to write about what they are designing prior to, during and after designing. Writing nonfiction memories has been helpful in expanding my process of visual creation. I plan to investigate whether the creative process is enhanced by other genres of writing. I believe that expanding the creative process from sketching and designing to writing, sketching, rewriting, resketching and then designing will help the project become more thorough.

I can see the boxes, stacked in the corner, heaped with memories waiting for the next journey, heaped with memories. In the past two years I feel I’ve found a process to memory and a process as a designer that makes sense to the way I live my life as a whole.
While Reading

Annotated bibliography

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