

Carly Skinder

Writing 220

April 24, 2013

I Write To Revise

I can admit, *just in writing that is*, that I have what my sisters call the strong-will and occasional stubbornness of a complete asshole. Flashback to when I was five and I was the insistent sister who would *only* settle for the red color of our three matching t-shirts: red, blue, and pink. And I always demanded that I was Monopoly banker, not because I could quickly compute 25-minus-12 without consulting my fingers to count, but because I was that sly schemer who slipped some bills when I was broke and my sister took the lead. Now, I am just as persuasive as ever. I am a veteran at begging teachers to bump my grades. It's not a desperate plea for their help; it's a convincing plea.

I am hoping we can arrange a time to discuss this grade. My understanding of the course concepts and my hours of work are not reflected...

Although I recognize that an A- is an exceptional grade, I am not fully pleased. Throughout the semester I feel I have had a mastery of the material and I think this has shown with my two papers, which I have had the time to critically analyze. I received two A's on my papers and an A- on my midterm exam. After completing the final, I felt confident that I had completed A work. I am disappointed to see I have only an A-. I would like an opportunity to discuss where you think I fell short of an A...

I mean, what's the worst they will say, no? My mom always told me I was my own best advocate. I rarely settle for no's. In my defense I am the granddaughter of an always right, blunt as hell Bubby. But, as per my mom's recommendation, I work daily to master the art of balance, tempering my 'strong' (as she calls them) qualities in favor of those, which are subtler,

sweeter, less aggressive. I make an effort to think before I speak and before I write to be gentle and calm in my approach. I revise myself to become a better self, and because really, I am so flawed that “half my life [becomes] an act of revision”- John Irving.

I am a middle child—and not *just* a middle child, but I am a middle *sister* of *three girls*. I am not a loner nor am I an ignored child so the middle child syndrome says, but I am the voice that resonates most loudly in the Skinder household hallways—and the most outspoken at the dinner table.

As a child who showed early promise in argumentation whether convincing my parents to allow me to get my ears pierced or promising my parents that I really was sick and I couldn't make it to school, it is no surprise that I have been a lawyer in training since about six when my eyes met The People's Court judges on TV. My guilty pleasure as a toddler was watching Judge Judy bash and shun the often-disturbed people who stepped into her inferno. The infamous Judge Judy with her Brooklyn accent, straight face and blunt approach hooked my continued viewership.

Outgrowing Judge Judy and on to Law and Order SVU, I joined the high school debate team and became a fierce competitor. I am an ex debater—and I say ex for only logistical purposes now that I have upgraded to college. I still debate, in a more pleasant, more informal, and less confrontational way on the regular. At each Ivy League tournament, amongst hundreds of other eager, nose in the books, briefcase-carrying debaters, it is safe to say I definitely was *not* the smartest. But, lucky for me, I was always a great bullshitter. I sounded like I knew what I was talking about when I spoke about foreign relations and economy. And in my defense, I did have the basics down. But I will

tell you a secret *just in writing that is*, and only because I do not compete anymore: the key to a debate victory and even more precious, to a golden debate trophy is word-manipulation. As my opponents read aloud their case, I penned key words in my yellow legal pad, words that I could use against them. My skill that exceeded far and beyond the knowledge I could store away from my research was the power of my words and those of my opponents. Wordage is the art I mastered in my cross-x battles.

Of course, no great artist is a born natural nor do great artists *always* paint perfect pieces. Even though I often knew my arguments were a bunch of bullshit, I still argued them until their death during the judge's final verdict. As a debater and an artist, I of course received critique on my performance. Don't be 'too this' or 'too that.' Any great artist must revise or amend his piece if not his entire approach to improve. But to improve requires that I acknowledge flaw and revise and revision forces me to confront my stubbornness. I for one like to draw in permanent ink.

I didn't lose because of my debating; I lost because the judge was sexist!

...No Carly, you lost because your opponent out-debated you.

When I used to ask my parents to edit my writing for me, they hurried to my assistance. I on the other hand, rejected it. I wanted to hear praise, 'oh my baby is so smart' not 'its fine but you can do this this and this to make it better.' No mom, I thought. You must be misreading. You must not understand. My essay makes perfect sense. However, admittedly ironic, I revised my work to agree with my mom's critique. The truth is, while I initially wanted her stamp of approval, 'this is great' does not improve me, nor does it improve my writing. Revision does.

I know that dreaded red ink scribbled all over the words I spent so much time carefully crafting is constructive. I know that an A- on a paper is hardly a tragic grade. And I know that I can never expect perfection from myself because perfection is an unattainable ideal. I know that revision is the only way I can improve. I want to improve. Somehow though, it is that acceptance that I often struggle with. My strong-will guards me against admitting 'you are right and I am wrong.' My stubbornness is my ugly face that won't let me admit flaw and defeat. It is writing that permits inner-reflection, the kind of reflection that I am often too stubborn to admit aloud. This reflection is a form of revision that forces me to confront my flaws. My writing becomes that private space for me to crack—for my strength to crumble to that of vulnerability, softness and feeling. It welcomes an exposed me, a very blemished me. Rather than strategizing my next best move in my debate round, in writing I can look backwards. I can think, analyze, reconsider and revise. My relationship with my writing is honest, because *in writing that is*, I don't fear defeat. I welcome vulnerability.

I am, always have been and always will be that strong-willed girl and I probably will always be resistant to revision. That's just me. But that shortcoming will serve me poorly in life. It will complicate my relationships and stunt my personal growth. In life, the strongest voice doesn't always prevail. Though I will always be that strong-willed girl, I am not the ultimate arbitrator (though I would love to someday be a Judge Judy). I am too that soft girl, who cries at my own words when I write about family, who writes letters of apology to anyone who I might wrong, and who spends hours crafting the happiest birthday letters. I work in life to balance my personal qualities good and bad, revising the bad and emphasizing the good. My writing is my most intimate relationship that has acted

and will continue to act as a personal check where I acknowledge my imperfection and that of my writing and engage in a personal growth through revision.