

How Long Does It Take to Write a Sentence If the Sentence is Life?

Critt Jarvis/2018

Reunion time again! Thomas Jefferson Rebels, TJ68! Happy Fiftieth! Come tell us your stories, the mountains you've climbed!

Four sentences, four exclamation marks.

Food and drink provided! A fifth exclamation mark, one for each decade.

They send these recalls every ten years and each time I think to myself, No thanks, I prefer to keep my defects to myself.

Dallas in the 50's, Stephen J. Hay Elementary School. My school, by design, categorized us, putting certain kids in a Special Class. Nobody wanted to be in there, with them. Ms. Markley told us so, smirking, drawing a bead on her victim, "If you can't stop fidgeting, maybe we should put you in Special Class!" Followed by the cocking of her head, "You don't want to be one of them, do you? Hmmmmmm?"

And I wondered then, captive in that classroom, What if someone sees into my head and can't make meaning from what they see?

I wonder now, comfortable in the theatre of my mind, What does reunion look like? How might I bring such a story to life? I have an idea. Come inside my time machine,

Set the dial to Upstate New York, Camp Drum, 1970. Winter.

The snow started falling in November. By Thanksgiving the accumulation buried cars parked behind the barracks. Some would be hidden there until spring.

The winter garrison was small, the work day short. The dispensary where I worked only opened in the morning. I had a lot of time to read, to think, to be alone. Maybe too much.

Aloneness became isolation; I began to unravel. Fear of spinning out.

Fear, a low grade anxiety with a high cost. Inside my head, voluntary house arrest: handcuffed and shackled while others could be themselves.

Set the dial now to Berlin, 1983. Betrayal.

My mind has betrayed my body;
My body has betrayed my mind.

I have betrayed others,
Others have betrayed me.

I have betrayed caregivers;
Caregivers have betrayed me.

Accountability does not get a pass.
I live with my betrayals, all that each means.

Unrecognized mania, burning beyond all recognition. Invisible barbarians and me, fighting wars of escalation. For some it runs until death do us part. I got to that place in 1988.

I went to Vermont to die. Bought a rope, hiked a ski trail to a vacant warming hut, told God he had until morning to intervene. They (turns out God is both sexes) showed up on a Harley, spoke a few words to me. Although we made no deals, awake the next morning, I walked 40 miles to Burlington. There I began to unpack this story.

I used to bake bread. I could lose myself in a loaf, hide with the mysteries inside. For a brief moment I would be in heaven.

Now, to write a memoir is to find a lost memory and, maybe even, unveil those mysteries inside. Today, this moment—that's heaven.