

Helping to change the way we think, through therapy and writing: Psychology, Philosophy,
Journalism, and Creative Writing

A Graduation Contract for Zac Zilz

Johnston Center for Integrative Studies

University of Redlands

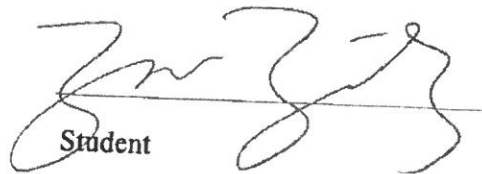
Graduation: Spring 2014

Advisor: James Krueger

Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'James Krueger', written over a horizontal line.

Student

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Zac Zilz', written over a horizontal line.

"You can't lock the bathroom door!" she yelled desperately, mistaken, as my eyes landed on the circular little golf-tee shaped lock next to the doorknob. Inside, I felt an evil and terrible malignant sense of triumph as I placed my finger on the lock next to the doorknob in the bathroom of my room of the rental house on the Big Island of Hawaii.

"Well there *is* a lock so if you could leave me the fuck alone that would be great" Sadness shrouded with anger drove me to pinch and prick my mother with such foul language and derision. Silence, as she quickly realized she had no energy for another word and that, regardless, I would sit in there locked up until she went to sleep if I had to. But really I had her fooled, it took only moments before my recollection of the past ten minutes sent me spiraling into insanity; The ringing in my ears trying to drown out my desperate and depressed thoughts. I opened the door and returned to my bed, the bright moon illuminating the trees and the landscape out of my window, and beyond that an ocean that forever keeps me mesmerized.

An entity that if, all the materialism and desire of this world was stripped, I could gaze at its infinite wonder day and night. Hearing its calming hush, a comforting murmur like the hum of a heater on a sleepy winter night, was far less cacophonous than hearing my sister call her and my own mother a cunt in the large and beautiful living room of the rental house.

Anger clouded my soul, but upon hearing those words come from my own sister's mouth, my rage was replaced by an inherent sympathy for my mother. I sprung up from my bed threw open my bedroom door for the first time and began to address my sister, "Zoe, as mad as I am at our mother right now, you should never call anyone such a terrible name, especially her." I had never before talked to my sister like that, that night possesses a number of first time occurrences.

My sister quick to retort screamed, "you know she deserves it, she is the only one who is acting this way. We all took our plates but she had to be a bitch about it."

And there it was, her shouts echoed in my mind, I had never stopped once in this terrible instance to step back and realize a dirty dish caused it all. After one of the most pleasant and tranquil family dinners of my life, out on the patio of the house over looking the vast Pacific ocean and the dark blue and purple waters of the Hawaii evening, our families entire

psychological make-up was collected and dumped out on the table like some Halloween candy-bag from hell.

As the dinner ended, out of disgust and rebellion, I refused to take my mother's plate upon her request. This triggered an explicitly entitled and nasty retort that quickly sent hot electric flame from mouth to ear, and after what seemed like seconds I was in that locked bathroom, ready to bust out once she left me alone, and ready to defend her when an obligation to do so was felt.

All families fight, right... I have always used that as a crutch, and when the word's "family therapy" escape loosely out of my mother's mouth in the middle of a shouting match my throat and heart burns with shame and embarrassment of our abnormalities. Therapy? How could I be so dysfunctional, do we really need help that bad? I always wondered, but never realized that needing help is not a sign of weakness, but of humanity. We are all here, on this Earth, meant to help one another conquer all sorts of obstacles. So, maybe, I should have thought, helping a family straighten out emotional problems does not embody shame and embarrassment, but rather requires commitment, respect, and love. It's not easy.

That night, in Hawaii, was different though, like a movie or some reality show, our screaming match turned incredibly ugly, arguments were abandoned and feelings were the target as we all aimed to attack each other.

I attempted to defend my mother from my sister's harsh words, but after Zoe had finished her retort, my mother with some unknown spiteful feeling in her heart warned me to, "stay out of it." I was flabbergasted; it was all the fuel the hidden evil inside me needed to take over. My body erupted as we all screamed, except my father, to my mother that was the problem. To my father the fight would tip over like a crashing carriage if he got involved. To my sister, everything was quickly crashing down around her. They had fought soon before about her change of plans pertaining to graduate school, I passively stayed out of it. To me, it was my mother, no one else, who had disrespected me more than anyone before and, filled with indignation, I furiously explained to her what she had done to me by belittling me and

disregarding my moment of clarity. A moment I thought would end all arguing; my mother would appreciate me standing up for her and my sister would recognize the error of her diction, instead I was further deterred from forgiving my mother. I had tried to help, instead she spat in my face and so the fight continued, me and my sister and my silent dad, against my poor cornered mom.

The angrier we got at each other, the more our individuals flaws and weaknesses began to surface. We had not been together as a whole family in a recognizable amount of time, with my sister and I in college in a different state, had we lost the ability to handle each other? Was the screw holding our harmony together finally coming loose? Shouts turned to tear drowned howls and yelps. My distinct memory of the dialogue and happenings of this night is fuzzy, but as my poor mother, devoid of all happy thought, uttered these words the section in my brain reserved for the worst memories lit up with great excitement: "Sometimes, I feel as if this family would be better off without me," she said and my heart sank. My mind that searched desperately for a destructive phrase had now filled with images of a life without her. As my argumentativeness turned to sympathy, Over and over again I begged her to understand that a thought like that could never exist in a mother's mind; maybe some rather terrible mothers who lack moral strength, but my mom had never given up on anything. Could that all have been a lie? My mother, the super hero, this immortal being capable of sadness only to an overcoming extent, actually was expressing to us a true weakness a true emotional insecurity. Not just any though, the worst one. An insecurity that painted horrible black and white images of my mother as a stranger walking down the street, apathetic towards my existence, apathetic towards the love and admiration I have felt for her all my life.

These thoughts chip away at my soul like an eroding wind. As I continued to desperately plea for her statement's negation, assuring my mother that this family would crumble without her intelligence and love, it clicked in my brain that if I were to approach this situation as an outside perspective, I could possibly convince my mother of her worth and help my family understand its internal problem. With the heat of the fight dying down, the soul of my family was being

experimented on, as though by a skilled exploratory surgeon. I calmed myself down, retreating from my previous argumentative stand point, and asked my mother why she felt this way, and consequently asked my sister and father how they could articulate ways in which she both helped and belonged. My sister was really fucking up the experiment for her tears and bitterness had not yet worn off, understandably so. I think it was mostly that I had recognized how, although my arguments might have given me the upper hand in a fight, I was originally to blame for the straw that fucked the camel. I had disregarded my mother as someone who deserves my respect and attention, through the episode with the dishes, and although she had responded rudely, I felt it was my duty to falsify her insecurities.

Adapting to my sister's incessant emotion I continued to synthesize and analyze things that were said, and tried my hardest to translate those attacks and anxieties into specific and simple things to work on in relationships in general. And after about two and a half hours of everything from the C word to a counseling session, I asked myself and the other three to come up with specific ways in which we could treat each member of the family with more compassion and sympathy. Tears drying on my face I finished my last statements and I saw, after what felt like years, my parents' eyes meet affably and I could see the happiness in their faces again as my mother muttered, "I am so proud of him," reflecting upon my incessant attempt to practice my conversationally therapeutic skills on my family for the first time.

Although I recognize this as a rather boastful or pretentious moment in time, the end of the summer after my freshmen year, this is when I realized what the most valuable, fulfilling and exciting path for my life pertains directly to this experience. Ever since it happened, I have wanted to document it in a story. It is easily my family's most dramatic and incredibly emotionally triumphant moment, a conversation I had never had with my family before; Words were spoken from my parent's mouth that I had never heard before. This piece of writing symbolizes the type of writing that I want to practice professionally, not necessarily the only genre I want to pursue, but a great example of the passion and voice I like to capture in my writing. Through telling it as a story I am able to look back on the argument with a *tabula rasa*

perspective and analyze its meanings concerning my family's emotional state. At this point I came to the conclusion that analyzing my family's argumentative tendencies together, through a psychologically therapeutic medium, was what we needed in order to get past this distressful experience. Furthermore, my past beliefs regarding therapy as a negative thing has faded, and I have experienced the power of words and conversation in a calm environment. My goal, using this experience as a catalyst for my aspirations, is to reach out to families, people struggling from mental ailments, as well any person in need of a second perspective in life. As a journalist, I aim to reach out to those like me, who thought therapy was for the weak and helpless, as opposed to a normal way to cope with the troubles of everyday. Through my writing, I aim to lift a saddened person's spirits therapeutically as well as change their perspective on life philosophically.

Now, my experience in Hawaii had to do with human behavior and how families should treat each other. Everything I am going on about here pertains to what I want to emphasize in. Strictly, I would say, my emphasis is Psychology, Creative Writing, Philosophy, and Journalism. How my precious sentiments translate into those four emphases epitomizes interests I have had for many years. I have struggled to conclude upon a specific occupation that I most desire all my life, but I have always related to people well, and have enjoyed conversing with and helping my peers since I was very young. As a teenager I developed a behaviorally analytic personality that has developed into a strong interest in the study of the mind and personality. Essentially, as a Johnston student I would practice writing on certain different subjects and studying psychology and therapy, in an attempt to become a therapist who develops his patients lives into literary stories of fiction and non-fiction as a professional writer. Therapy being a very private and personal occupation, obviously I would not take advantage of my patient's privacy, but the intrigue that the human mind has to offer creative writing is infinite. I would use my experiences of my life and the lives of the people I work with to write in the perspective of a culture-critic type of writer. My passion for writing and helping people is equal, so I am simply looking for a way to artfully combine the two professions in a way that synthesizes my observations through a worldly philosophical perspective. Once again, I am not trying to take advantage of my patients

to support a writing career, I believe, though, that integrating oneself into other peoples' lives on a daily basis is a great atmosphere for someone who wants to comment on humankind through writing. This semester I am taking a class with Kevin O'neill in which we examine the philosophical backgrounds of Johnstonian-type thinking, regarding the teachings of Condillac, Descartes, and John Locke. However, O'neill's hands on teaching class that stretches and strains you into thinking philosophically about our society's educational system and society as a whole. The way he challenges the normal way of thinking and observing the world flawlessly epitomizes the message I want to put out in my writing.

This is why Johnston is so important to me, because as someone who would counsel and heal through psychological methods I would also want to shed a philosophical and literary light onto that medium, and I can incorporate all of these subjects into really the only thing I can see myself loving and passionately exploring. For in philosophy, we are always experiencing mental exercises, and heeding sentiments of geniuses like Plato, Descartes, and Freud can help people who feel their world, their existence is flawed. Admittedly this has been more of an interest than a passion, but the process of internally transferring has further fueled my desires. As a transfer student I was encouraged to switch advisors, I chose my freshman year Medical Ethics professor of Philosophy James Krueger. Thinking that philosophy, literature, and medical practices would be an excellent thing to discuss with him, I met with him not long ago and upon discussing exactly what I previously explained he went on to name a number of authors who had documented stories of their mental patients and performed behavioral studies on psychological patients. My face lit up with the awareness that what I had finally fathomed as something meaningful could be achieved.

Another rather unexplained aspect of my emphasis is Journalism. What I want as a Journalist is to go explore and study the world through a psychological and philosophical lens, gathering information and stories of different people with amazing lives along the way. I want to analyze cultures and compare them to the rest of the world, and synthesize the way people act philosophically while, as a journalist, being a part of some revolutionary new movement of self-

awareness. That is why I strive to be a journalist, mostly because I am a whore for large scale attention and have always been, but also because I believe through the things I learn throughout my experiences in life as well as specifically Johnston I will have a valuable message that the world will strive to understand and will be a better place as a result of my words.

That being said, I believe I have a very important role to play in the Johnston community directly relating to my emphasis. I find the social structure of Johnston as well as the people within it to be fascinating. I have recently bought a video camera that has recorded a lot of Bekins and Holt activity and aim to use it in a journalistic way to document the amazing parts of this school. Also, I am a DJ and guitar player, and my passion is music. I plan to DJ many events within Johnston and beyond; interestingly enough this also relates to my aspirations for studying abroad. My senior year I traveled to Vietnam, and there I noticed an extremely lively electronic dance music scene there and it excited me to a great deal. On the other side of the world, Jamaica has an extremely lively dance culture defined as "dancehall:" A genre of music that mixes house music, reggae, R&B, and happens to be one of my favorite genres. On top of that, the poverty and oppression of Jamaica, in my opinion, is a valuable atmosphere for a writer and philosopher. Part of my plan is to travel with my close friend Hanna Bratton, who I have already incorporated into part of my classes next semester, who is majoring in Hip-Hop culture. We would travel together as a team of writers and observers journaling and videotaping all we can. Specifically, a potential abroad program would be to teach children various subjects while studying or other similar ideas. Abroad I would take Philosophy Practicum, Non-Fiction 3, and Cross-Culture Psychology, and really incorporate the education into the abroad experience with aspirations to construct a piece of writing that directly resembles how I would want to write and study the world later in life. Regarding my future targets, the breadth of my courses gives way for even further opportunities. My desired job could potentially require a doctorate, and having experience in Biology would really help that plan come to fruition. And my passion of music and art fits in well with the culture I embody, and an artistic perspective complements that of a writer and philosopher perfectly.

Chronological Course Listings

Fall 2011

FYS-100-10 Incredible India (4)
GERM-101-01 1st Year German (4)
PHIL-255-01 Medical Ethics (4)
PSYC-100-05 Intro. to Psychology (4)

Spring 2011

CRWR-107 01 Fiction Workshop 1 (4)
GERM-102-02 First Year German (4)
MUS-100-03 Experiencing Music (4)
ARTH-103-01 Intro. to Modern Art (4)

May 2011

JNST-000A-01 Ovid's Metamorphoses (3)

Fall 2012

PHIL-340-01 Philosophy of Mind (4)
CRWR-105-01 Poetry Workshop I (4)
JNST-000L-01 Deaf, Wild, Dumb, and Democratic (4)
CRWR-310-01 Sem: The Art of the Journal (4)

Spring 2012

CRWR-104-01 Non-Fiction Workshop I (4)
PSYC-252-01 Culture & Behavior (4)
PHIL-350-01 Symbolic Logic (4)
MUAP-104-02 Jazz Piano (1)
JNST-000E-01 Interdisciplinary Thinking/Writing (4)
IND: Hip-Hop in Los Angeles; Journalism Opportunity (1)

May 2012

PHIL-160-01 Philosophy and Film (3)

Fall 2013

CRWR-204-01 Non-Fiction Workshop II (4)
MUAP-304-02 Jazz Piano (1)
BIOL-133-01 The Principles of Biology (4)
PSYC-350-01 Evolutionary Psychology (4)
JNST-0000 Writing/Film Seminar (4)

Spring 2013

Abroad: Kingston, Jamaica
PSYC-435-01 Cross-Cultural Psychology (4)
CRWR-304-01 Non-Fiction Workshop III (4)
PHIL-461-01 Philosophy Practicum (2)
ENGL-221-01 Shakespeare to 1600 (4)

May 2013

JNST-0000-? Writing Seminar (3)

Fall 2014

BIOL-326-01 Neuroscience (4)

ENGL-370-01 Journalism (4)
MUAP-331-01 Applied Jazz Improvisation (1)
PSYC-440-01 Counseling (4)
JNST-0000 Artistic Seminar (4)

Spring 2014

PSYC-473-01 Senior Seminar (2)
PSYC-487-01 Senior Field Placement (2)
BIOL-Research Topics in Biology (2)
CRWR-441-01 Senior Portfolio (4)
JNST-0000 Artistic Seminar (4)

May 2014

JNST-0000 Philosophy Seminar (3)

Courses By Discipline

Depth

Psychology

PSYC-100-05 Intro. to Psychology (4)
PSYC-252-01 Culture & Behavior (4)
PSYC-350-01 Evolutionary Psychology
PSYC-435-01 Cross-Cultural Psychology (4)
PSYC-440-01 Counseling (4)
PSYC-473-01 Senior Seminar (2)
PSYC-487-01 Senior Field Placement (2)

Philosophy

PHIL-255-01 Medical Ethics (4)
PHIL-340-01 Philosophy of Mind (4)
JNST-000L-01 Deaf, Wild, Dumb, and Democratic (4)
PHIL-350-01 Symbolic Logic (4)
PHIL-461-01 Philosophy Practicum (2)

Creative Writing/Journalism

CRWR-107 01 Fiction Workshop 1 (4)
CRWR-105-01 Poetry Workshop I (4)
CRWR-104-01 Non-Fiction Workshop I (4)
CRWR-204-01 Non-Fiction Workshop II (4)
CRWR-304-01 Non-Fiction Workshop III (4)
ENGL-370-01 Journalism (4)
CRWR-441-01 Senior Portfolio (4)
JNST-000E-01 Interdisciplinary Thinking/Writing (4)
JNST-0000 Writing/Film Seminar (4)
JNST-0000-? Writing Seminar (3)

Breadth

Biology

BIOL-133-01 The Principles of Biology (4)
BIOL-326-01 Neuroscience (4)

BIOL-Research Topics in Biology (2)

English

JNST-000A-01 Ovid's Metamorphoses (3)

ENGL-221-01 Shakespeare to 1600 (4)

German

GERM-101-01 1st Year German (4)

GERM-102-02 First Year German (4)

Art/Music & History

ARTH-103-01 Intro. to Modern Art (4)

JNST-0000 Artistic Seminar (4)

MUS-100-03 Experiencing Music (4)

MUAP-104-02 Jazz Piano (1)

MUAP-304-02 Jazz Piano (1)

MUAP-331-01 Applied Jazz Improvisation (1)

JNST-0000 Artistic Seminar (4)

JNST-0000 Artistic Seminar (4)