

Bob Anderson  
Honor's Thesis Project--  
Artist's Statement

My Writing Experience:

My very first memory of writing is of writing my name in the first grade. My parents had already taught me my letters and how to write them, so I was confident of my abilities. "Bobby," I wrote. It was perfect; I was sure of it. Every letter was in perfect order and written with the grace and form only a five-year old artisan can accomplish. I was immensely proud. I could hardly wait to show off my masterpiece to the teacher. Upon seeing it, however, her eyebrows formed a viscous "v" upon her visage. "That's not your name," the dictator scowled. "Your name is Robert."

I swore to her that my name was Bobby, and explained that she must be mistaken. I was Bobby. I had never heard the name "Robert" before in all my life. "Write your REAL name," she demanded. I pled with her, please, please let me be Bobby, but she would have none of it. I was forced, teary eyed, to write my name as I had never heard it before; defiant to the last that she was sorely mistaken and that my Dad would have a word or two with her, I tell you what.

This was my first and most memorable experience of writing. It may not seem very important, but it had profound implications for a large portion of my scholastic career. I separated my personal writing from assigned writing, and assigned writing was always written for the teacher—with his/her personal expectations set firmly in the forefront of my mind. "Robert" was consistently the name I placed on all homework assignments, even though I preferred that my teachers call me Bob.

This may not seem like a very positive initial writing experience, but it was surprisingly beneficial. When I first began having teachers tell me that I could, nay, *should* write the way I wanted to, (which was around middle school, as best as I can recall) the door for creative expression swung wide. I loved to express myself with my own words, even more so since my first grade teacher literally wouldn't allow me to express the concept of my own self. Perhaps I have exaggerated the repercussions of my first writing experience a little, but only so I could show how the experience felt to my first-grade self. Though I probably would have ended up an English major anyway, my first grade teacher did at least give me a way to separate my creative writings from other assignments: I always signed my name Bob at the top of creative works. "Robert" was reserved for regular homework.

My scholastic experiences with writing waned during most of my regular K-12 education. I wrote when a writing project was assigned, and typically wrote well. School was easy for me, so writing well was something I expected out of myself--it was nothing different from any other subject. I took pleasure in writing, but officially disliked it because writing was not the cool thing to do.

It wasn't until my last year or two of high school that I wrote anything at all that wasn't required for an assignment. Writing outside of school assignments seemed to be like working for free. Therefore, I did not own a diary or journal or a poetry notebook of any sort. Then one day I wrote a poem; and then another and another. I wrote for myself and for the pleasure of writing but I did not, however, associate it with something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It was more of a hobby I picked up, like doodling. I

guess what I'm getting at is that I didn't have the slightest clue until college that I might want to major in English.

I have always known I wanted to be a teacher. Part of the reason is because of my academic talents. Since I always finished assignments before my peers, and was certain of my abilities, I often helped my friends and younger siblings with their homework. I never did their homework for them, but tried to teach them so that they could do it on their own. I really enjoyed being able to help them out like that.

Another reason I had always wanted to teach was from a familial perspective. Many members of my immediate family (my mom, dad, and two aunts) were teachers, and I saw what their lives were like first hand. I knew from my observation of them that I could be happy being a teacher as well. But unlike my family members, who are all elementary teachers, I knew I wanted to teach high school (and eventually, maybe even college). I had always preferred academic challenges and I feared the simplicity of elementary subject matter would bore me.

I always expected that I would end up teaching math. Math and science came to me just as easily as English, if not easier. Thus, everybody (including me) seemed to expect that I'd make use of those skills. I entered college as a math education major, and I enjoyed my math classes—I still do. But during my sophomore year, I began having doubts about teaching math. I enjoyed learning math, and enjoyed helping my peers with their math problems, but I was quickly realizing the static nature of mathematics. Math seemed too concrete for me. English was fluid in comparison: two essay-type assignments would never produce exactly the same results. I did not think I wanted to

teach math because I feared the repetition would bore me. I was afraid that each algebra class I taught from year to year would be far too similar for my tastes.

While I was having these doubts about being a math education major, something else happened simultaneously: I began missing my English classes. My sophomore year was the first year in my academic history without an English class somewhere in my schedule, and I missed taking those classes. The revelation kind of surprised me. I had always thought of English classes as something I could live without. I knew that I enjoyed them, I just didn't realize how much. So I switched my major to English education and have been happy with it ever since.

Funnily enough, after a year without math classes, I began to miss math as well. So, I made the only logical conclusion: major in both. Unfortunately, I cannot be a student for the rest of my life and I have not the time to finish my math major, so I will have to settle with a minor in math—for now, at least. I have told you my experiences in school and what experiences have led me to where I am at now. Now I will tell you about the project I have chosen to do for my honors thesis:

#### The Story:

Though I only wrote required school assignments until high school, I had a very active reading life throughout school. I always had a book on me. Sometimes teachers even had to ask me to put a book away because I should have, in their opinion, been doing something more “productive.” I loved reading then, and I love reading now.

I read just about every genre there was, and found my favorites to be science fiction, fantasy, and suspense novels. I have chosen to write a science fiction story for

my honors project. My reasons are simple: I love reading science fiction, so I want to attempt writing in the same genre. I've written plenty of poetry, and a few short stories, but I've never attempted to write a science fiction story and I feel the experience could be quite helpful for my future writing.

I chose to write a short story or novella of length around thirty to sixty typed pages. I played around with a few ideas before finally settling down on The Resistance. The basic plot is one of first contact with an alien species, the Sha'har. The contact went bad, and there was a war—a war that we ultimately lost due to the superior numbers of the Sha'har. The Sha'har, not understanding the basic elements of human emotion and interconnection, separated all known relations among humans in order to prevent an organized resistance. This process was known as the Relocation. It was a very emotionally painful time for Earth, as families were torn apart and people were regrouped to distant cities with total strangers. The Sha'har's next plan of action was to incorporate the humans into their own society, though perhaps as a lower species. Many Sha'har, after all, never wanted a war in the first place. This is where the story begins, after the Relocation and very near the beginning of coexistence.

The plot of The Resistance really evolved as I wrote it, but there were a few core elements that I wanted to be sure from the start to write about. One such element was the absolute dependence of the Sha'har citizens upon the Sha'har elders, the leaders of their society. Their blind acceptance of the elders' word is what led to the war, and the whole situation is representative of the dark possibilities of a government without an independent check and balance system, such as the media, which can freely investigate government and report to the populace.

I wanted to be sure to emphasize that the aliens were not intellectually superior, technologically advanced, or inherently violent beings. Instead, I wanted the Sha'har to be very similar to humans. Well, similar to us mentally at least, if not physically. I wanted to do this because I did not want the story to have an “us vs. them” mentality. Our society already has too many negative connotations about possible alien encounters—especially from a technologically advanced species. In fact, I felt somewhat guilty in including a war between the species at all, because I’ve always envisioned any possible first contact to be peaceful. But, war is a possible scenario if we ever do contact another species, so I rationalized its necessary inclusion.

There were also a few minor points of the plot that sort of arose after I began writing. The resistance’s development of the virus that effectively infects and kills the Sha'har species was one of these. I wanted to use the virus to show the detrimental effects of biological weapons. I am of the opinion that even the development of such weapons borders on bioterrorism, regardless of its intention. This bioterrorist element of the plot was conceived long before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack, but the attack lends new urgency to the concept. If biological weapons were ever used, the results could be catastrophic.

I also included a short history of the detrimental results of poor environmental maintenance (New York city was overtaken by the rising Atlantic Ocean) and the benefits of a world government—which I fear will probably never happen, but is nevertheless intriguing to contemplate. These are a few of the warnings and insights of the story upon real life, yet the purpose of the story is not to be a satire or symbolic parable. In essence, I wrote The Resistance for the pleasure of reading a story. The

inclusion of political, environmental, and moral elements to the plot is not the main message, but a complimentary one. The story really speaks for itself, so I will move on to the topic of why I write.

#### Why I Write:

The most difficult part of the writing process for me seems to be turning on the computer (or opening my notebook if I plan on writing longhand). The hardest part of writing is simply to start. Why is this so difficult for me? I enjoy writing, so why is it I always seem to find something else to do when what I really want or need to do is to sit down and write? Perhaps, it is a deep down fear of being a failure.

That's a big sentence for me: Fear of being a failure. Fear. A quality of myself I do not like to examine. I pride myself in fearing little. I'm not afraid of heights, hoodlums, or hard work. Bodily injury concerns me, but I don't fear it; there is a strong distinction between concern and fear. No, I don't fear very much, but I do fear being a poor writer. I have high self-esteem (sometimes too high) and I don't consider myself to be a poor writer. But I still fear that I may be wrong. I wonder what would happen if I received poor or negative comments about a work that I had poured my self, my soul, my essence into. I write too closely to myself, if that makes any sense. Even though I know it is not true, there is a little part of me that whispers, "They judge you when they judge your writing." That same voice wants me to distance myself from my writing, but I refuse to do so. I fear (there's that word, again) that, though I could take criticism better if I distanced myself, the quality of my writing would decline from such an action.

The preceding paragraph may make it sound as if I am afraid of, or dislike, criticism. I would like to take a moment here to make myself clear. I like criticism; I really do. I appreciate the person who cares enough about my writing to tell me how to improve. It is not criticism I fear, but failure: writing so badly that the whole piece is disliked, worthless of even criticism, beyond saving. I can take all the negative criticism in the world, as long as its purpose is to improve a work worth putting the effort into.

Failure. What defines failure? Is a failure something that can only happen when a judgment is proclaimed? Can a single person justly tell another he has failed? Or does it take a jury, a consensus of condemnation? If so, must the condemnation be unanimous? Can a single person proclaim failure? What if the condemner, the judge, and the prosecutioner, are all...the author?

Sometimes I ask more questions than I answer. Sometimes I like it that way. Sometimes, an author cannot answer the questions he/she asks...it is a question for the reader. But this is a paper about me. It is rare that I take such compositional journeys. A paper about me, not about a concept, question, or position. A paper about me. It feels kind of nice, you know? Well, to finish this little section, I think only I can fail myself. I am my own judge. But this judge lends a careful ear to others, lest I be self-proclaiming.

Why do I write? With such high potential costs, why write at all? Determining this is a harder task than I imagined. Why do I write...think about it for a while: if you write, why do you do it? For the money? I doubt it, and if it were true, I'd pity you. Money is no reason to write (Though I'm sure it would be a nice little perk). Why does anybody write? To feel immortal? For remembrance? Again, I would pity such a



person. Wouldn't such a reason lead to empty, meaningless writing...even if it were a great piece of art...would it mean much to the author?

So why do we write? How about this: for the same reasons we call our friends and go out on a Friday night, the same reasons we hold a door or an elevator open for a stranger, the reasons we go to church, laugh with each other, eat, breath, cry. As with all of these things, it is very difficult to explain away why we do them with mere reasons. But deep down inside, we all know it is beneficial—beneficial to ourselves, and to society in general. It is a good thing, this process we call writing. Deep down inside of me, inside of all of us I'd like to believe, I (we) write because it is fulfilling in a multitude of ways.