

The Making of Project II

So for project 2 I wrote a short story that was searching for understanding and meaning regarding death and the afterlife. To do this I created two characters that had cancer and were approaching death. As I wrote the story I think themes of friendship, spirituality, and hope came out.

When I started the project I was in a completely different mind-set. I was originally going to write a few short stories in the style of David Eagleman's *Sum*. However, as I continued to ruminate on the project, I started leaning away from these shorter stories, and a longer, more cohesive story started to develop. Then I met with my teacher to talk about the project, and I fully decided to write the longer story.

From that point forward, I started thinking about my characters and the events in my story. I have some images of brainstorming and pre-writing that I will include later, but I started writing things down that I wanted to try. Most of my planning for the story was all in my head though. I had some vague ideas about what I wanted to do, and how, but these ideas were really just a framework. Because I kept more to my mind than to paper, I think that I might have lost some meaning and cohesiveness for my characters. I may have forgotten some things over the course of the project that I wanted to include.

I truly discovered some new things about the writing process though. It is akin to something that Stephen King says in *On Writing*; that a story writes itself, so you shouldn't focus too much on plot, and instead just commit to writing. It made sense when I read that during the summer, but I really saw it come true during this project. During the entirety of the project I was thinking about plot and what my characters would do. I wanted to have a guide to walk through as I wrote the story. To some extent this was helpful. I noticed that

having that plotline helped to move the story forward when I wanted to, but sometimes I felt a little boxed in. So I was happy when I came to new sections in the story that I didn't map completely. In these sections I just thought, *what would this character do here?* Or *what would be a good way for this event to happen?* During these moments I really got to explore different moments and events and feelings between my characters, and hopefully I ended up with the ones that feel most real. My favorite section like this came right at the end. I knew that I wanted 'The Afterlife' section to be about Beth after Frank and Ed died, but I didn't know how I was going to do it. When I got to that point I decided that maybe a eulogy type speech would be appropriate after the second funeral. At that point she could talk about both characters reasonably, and they would both be dead. Also, it kept the focus on death and the afterlife. At the same time, I could have done something different, and ended with the focus squarely on Beth. In connection with this, I also discovered that I liked my cancer patients more than Beth. That is why I decided to end with the lens on them as opposed to Beth.

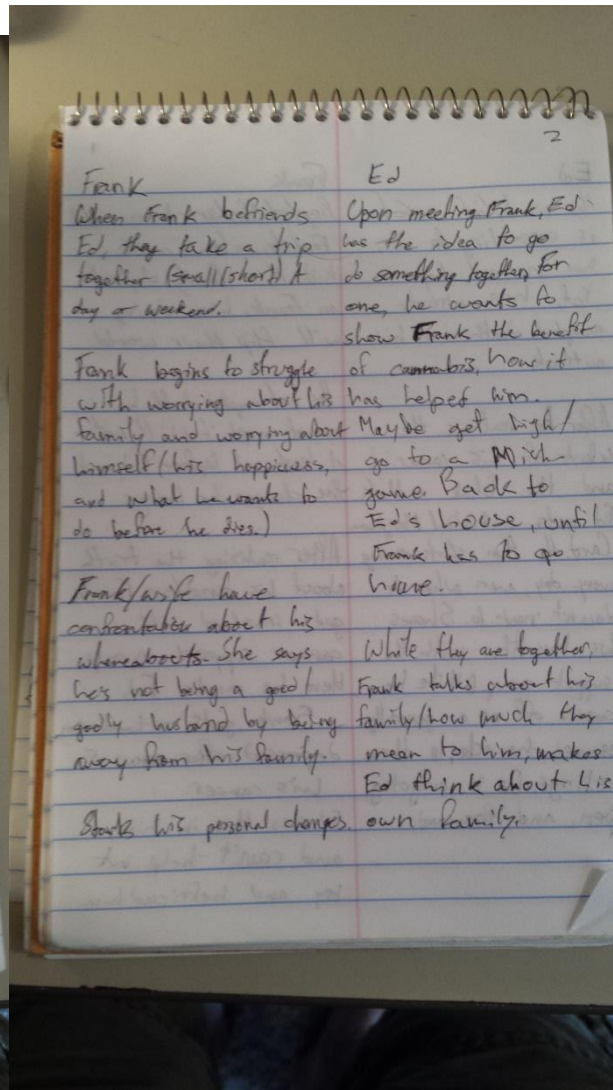
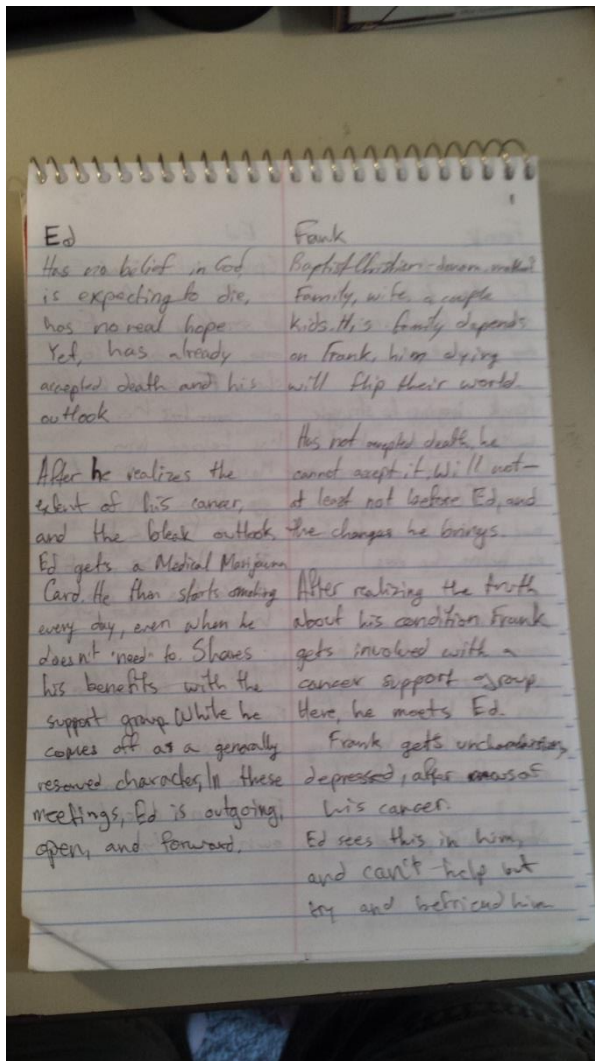
As I have stated previously in this class, the hardest part about writing (to me at least) is sitting down and doing it. This is probably more due to other things going on in my life than anything else, but it is what it is. So my biggest obstacle in this piece was to sit down and write it. This was an obstacle even more because of the fact that I have never written anything even close to this long. My longest piece of writing until now was probably about half the size of project 2, maybe a little more. At the end of the project though, I felt awesome for actually hitting my mark of 20-25 pages.

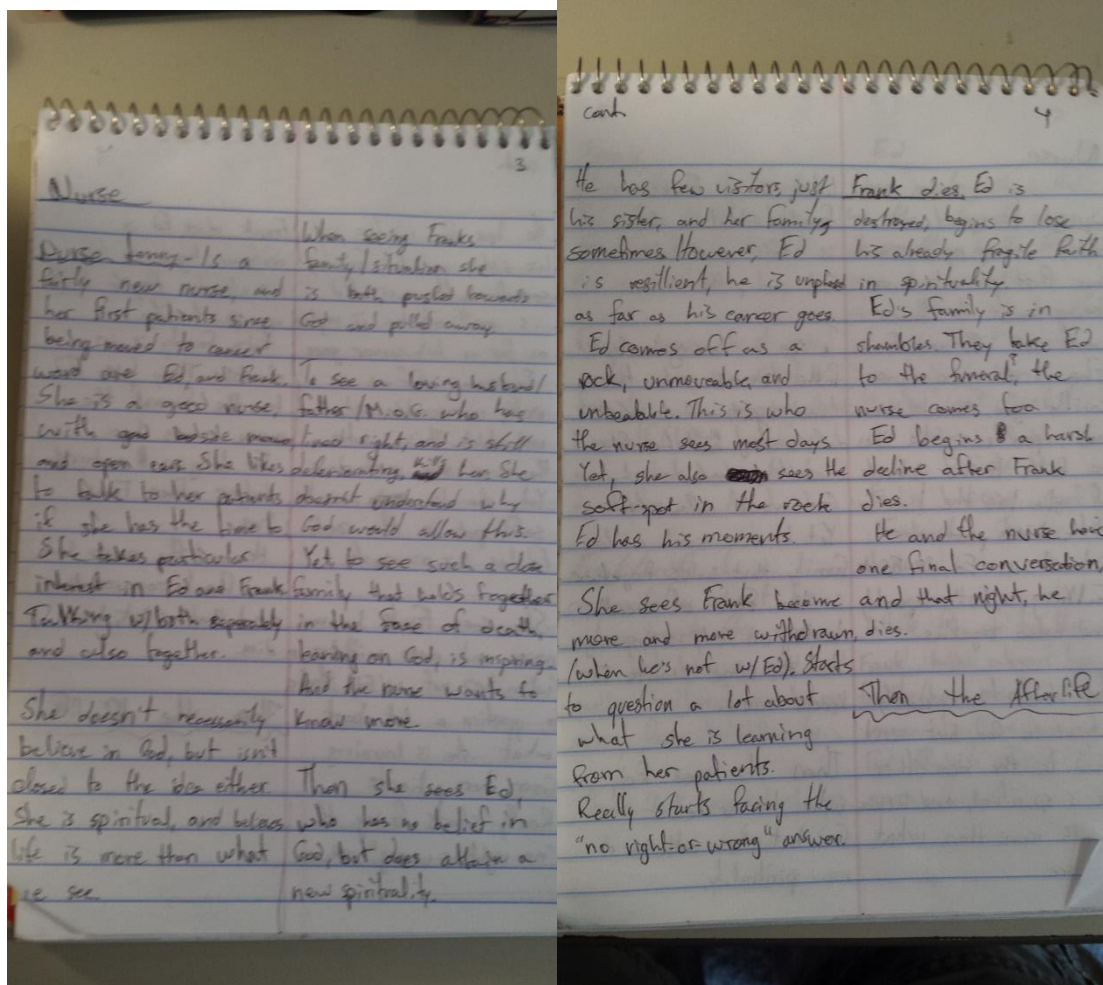
My expectations at the onset of this project were much different than they were by the end. I thought I was going to be doing a completely different project, and so as that changed, my expectations grew into a much larger project and product. Next time, I think I

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will just commit to a more regular schedule of writing. This time I did so much thinking that my writing was done mostly in bulk sections. Next time I think I will set a schedule and by keeping that schedule, I will have more effective revision and writing, because my mind won't be wandering between sections. As I said earlier though, my big epiphany and favorite learning point from this project is that a story truly can write itself, as long as I start writing it.

Below are pictures/other documents from my work on project 2





- Ideas for project 2

Characters seemingly separate, but very intertwined

(This could be a lot bigger than project 2, so make sure project 2 is appropriate)

I'm thinking terminal cancer patients, they go through chemo together, and eventually smoke weed together. One is a Baptist Christian, the other is an atheist. The two become

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unlikely friends after several arguments about religion. They tell each other stories of their lives and why they believe what they believe.

There is also the nurse who quietly gets to observe these two interact, and transform from strangers to friends. She will be kind of the neutral bystander, who doesn't know what to think. But in the end she will have the most profound experience of all.

I would also like to add in other characters from each patient's family. Somehow these two families are very intertwined, it's a small world after all. However, for the purpose of project 2, all of the abstraction/detail may be unnecessary-but capstone?

How many stories?

First story introduces the three main characters, and their situations.

At least two afterlife stories-one from the atheist, one from the Christian. Potential third with both of them (after they die).----Orrrrr, maybe after life without them-nurse?

At least 2 stories about the past, one from each patient.

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The Afterlife Proposal

The original source material for my project is a piece titled *Walking the Earth*. I wrote it my sophomore year in my English 223 class. For this piece I was supposed to create my own version of the afterlife. The original piece is a little over 500 words, so fairly short. In that piece I propose that the soul is released from the body upon death, and set free to roam the earth and see any and everything that it desires. When the soul has seen enough of earth they can either go to heaven to live in luxury with everything they want, or they can be reborn into a new life at the cost of every memory they have ever known.

I have had a renewed fascination with old-age/death/life-after-death in recent months. So I guess I am curious to figure out what I think about it through writing. I do have some questions though (here comes a list). How many stories should I write? Should the stories be connected in some way? Should they all be pure fiction, or carry along some commonly held beliefs as well? To carry on from the last question, would it be better to have different points of view based on different people (Christian, atheist, etc.) or to just

think of interesting things that could happen (more along the lines of *sum*). I think I will need to do research on different belief systems and how they relate to the afterlife. I might also want to look into how short stories are released over time. Similarly, I need to look into the way short stories typically published or released in present times; this will affect my audience a lot.

The new project is building outward from the first piece. My initial thoughts were to release some short stories surrounding the topic of death and the afterlife over my blog. My hope is that the stories will have enough of a connection that they stand taller as a whole than any single piece could on its own. Is this a true re-purposing though? I think it is, seeing as the original piece was a one-off school assignment. However, if you think I can/should do more, please let me know. Right now I'm between the idea of writing several different afterlife pieces in the vein of *Sum* by David Eagleman, or writing several pieces about the process of life to old-age to death to the afterlife. The latter option could help me stay focused in the lives of the same characters, allowing their afterlife to be carefully constructed based on the information that comes out in the previous stories.

My audience is really anyone who is interested in the topic of death and the afterlife (can include old-age leading up to death as well). I can't officially be more specific yet though. The audience could be bloggers or people who read online. It could also be the readers of a magazine or newspaper though. Figuring out which magazine or paper is the hard part though, and that is where I could get specific. I need help with that!

I would publish this piece in several places. I would like to release it on my blog in several parts. I would like to do this because it would bring freshness back to my blog, but also showcase my writing skills as well. I would publish it in the Ann Arbor News (fictional at this point) or maybe the Michigan Daily, one story at a time. This could also work well in a magazine, some literary magazine? I would publish it in these places because they work well for the format of a series. If it is a blog, the stories can come out in successive posts. If it were a magazine or newspaper it would be in successive editions or weeks respectively. I also like these outlets because people, who read magazines, newspapers, and blogs, would be more likely to read a story or series of stories, just for the fact that it is in their view.

The genre conventions are that of short fiction and/or creative non-fiction. Conventions could be even further described by blogging or newspaper/magazine article or story. I think the conventions of fiction and creative non-fiction suit my subject well. There is so much mystery and theory about death, yet nobody living knows for sure what happens. For this part, conventions of fiction will work well. The creative non-fiction aspect of it can be applied to the time before death and death itself to show what we do know about this subject. Blending fiction and non-fiction will be a challenge to do appropriately, but I think it makes for an interesting combination. The style of writing lines-up very well with the solid concrete knowledge that we have regarding old-age and death, and the enigma that comes with the afterlife.

As I said earlier, I have recently had many thoughts about what happens after death and the end of life in general. I like this project because I think it will allow me to explore these thoughts and feelings much further than simply thinking about them like I have been. I'm also particularly interested in developing my fiction skills, and story weaving. I think taking on the challenge to write several compelling stories, and to connect them all in a meaningful way, will allow me to take a big step forward as a writer; this is what compels me.