

Romanticism. My whole life I have loved everything in the Romantic Era although I didn't even know what it stood for or why I loved its products so much. Some of my favorite artists from Goya to Turner are classified under Romanticism. Some of my favorite books, from *Les Miserables* to *Jane Eyre* are also found here. More favorites include Edvard Grieg, Emily Dickinson, William Wordsworth—so many I could name. This year I learned the complexities of the Romantic Period and the reasons why I have loved all these works for so long. Emphasis for this period is personal feeling; the artists focused on exposing their deepest fears and their deepest desires. They were willing and ready to open their souls to the world, willing to let the world think and do with the works as they chose. The Romantic Era was not about making the reader or viewer happy, working to make money and please who ever was paying. The geniuses of this period wrote, painted, built, dreamed only for themselves and if others found joy as well, it made their trouble all the more worthwhile. Filled with dreamers, lovers, visionaries, they changed the attitude of society toward basic everyday life, from politics to poetry. A key to creativity is the ability to express feelings, so personal and sacred to the self, thereby inspiring others to improve their own lives. For this reason alone Romanticism is a hot spot of creativity in our past. It was a time of excitement and change, of forward movement and expression, a time to focus on self and enjoy the beauty of nature. From this period creativity oozes and still influences today's world.

I love Ralph Waldo Emerson, a shining example of Romantic literature, because of his ability to communicate, through poetry, essays, and his personal journal, his emotions directly to me, the reader. Many times I have read from his works just shocked because this man- who lived decades and decades before my time- had exactly the same

thoughts and feelings as I, a young 19 year old girl. For this creativity project, so many ideas and suggestions from others pounded at my thoughts, screaming pick me, pick me! I then ran across a quote from Emerson. He reminded himself to continue to trust his instincts. His project was to look at every object in its relation to himself, thinking to himself, "What discoveries or stimulating thoughts have I to impart?" (Porte, Joel. Emerson in His Journals. Harvard University Press, 1982. Pg. 90) I realized that none of the ideas I had accumulated would be *me*, thus would not accurately express the ideas and thoughts *I* have experienced from taking this class. Mfg. 202 did indeed teach me how to be creative, simply by absorbing everything in, letting it mesh together, and then allowing me to make everything personal and applicable to *my* past, present, and future.

The following pages contain words. When added together they form sentences, phrases, and paragraphs, the final product forming a story. It is a story of my thoughts, my ideas, and my creativity. I wrote it for my own benefit, a way to analyze where I am headed in life and how my forgettable and ordinary life will fit into the grand scheme of things. Enjoy.

forgettable and ordinary

A story by
Rebecca Stiles

Read, think, and let your mind wander.

Sometimes I have so much to say, to think, to write that I make myself dizzy with my thoughts as they swim around my brain, bumping against the walls and sending echoes in every direction. Sometimes, no always, I run for a pen and paper as my thoughts continue, trying to catch them as they race about and put them down where they can become alive, a part of the world. But when that pen reaches my hand, nothing. Silence. So then sometimes I try to voice my random insights, but worse luck, I end up saying nothing but jumble and everyone looks at me strangely. So I just sit and think as the world passes me by-- I don't think my thoughts are destined to join the ranks of the great minds, that is fine by me I suppose. But deep down I know I have something I need to get out. There is something in me I can't describe, I can't name, but it's there. Who am I and why am I now finally writing my thoughts, awkward as it may seem? Predictability now states that I'll tell my life story, so here goes...

I was born in an easy time. The biggest crisis was running out of milk for breakfast or having to share the last cookie with my sister. Born in a world where things were too easy, making everyone soft and squishy and too egocentric. I went to school, as everyone else, learned some things (but forgot most), made friends, made enemies, grew a couple of feet, just another face forgettable and ordinary.

I love jazz, the saxophone undertones soothing and whispering, making me forget all, making the wrinkle line disappear from my forehead, making me dream of dancing with someone strong and right and sweet and imaginary. Jazz, even the word makes me sigh.

But I guess life isn't made to be easy, just walking left

right

left

right.

When things run smooth for too long, something horrible is always ready to leap from the corner of shadows, tired of hiding. Such a small thing for me, I woke up. I was seventeen, the age for me to move on in life. College. Time for change and I was so ready to move. The summer before I left, I just voiced aloud how ready I was to jump across the globe and get away from the ridiculousness of my youth, my family. I was leaving everyone behind, and I never once admitted to myself how the fear swelled up inside me, how sometimes I just stayed up all night trying to soak in the light of the moon as it fell across my backyard, through my window, across my bed. I was never alone there. At night I had the moon. During the day I had the woods, which surrounded me wherever I looked. Never alone, a feeling I miss, just knowing that the world around me knew who I was and sent me love notes in tiny details. A sweet breeze, a breathtaking view, greenness on four sides.

Ralph Waldo Emerson. Right now I sit with a copy of his journal on my lap. I had to read his essays in school, but I don't know if quickly moving your eyes across the black

and white pages actually counts as reading. I read his essays and made an A on the test. So then I bragged about Emerson, how I understood his thinking patterns, how eagerly I boasted of our dear friendship, the friendship I treasured because I made an A on the test. Now I just laugh, as I sit with this book on my lap. Every statement now just leaves me with a question mark hanging over my head. ? My favorite quote, “We are very near to greatness: one step and we are safe: can we not take the leap?” Someday we’ll sit and chat and drink a cup of tea. I wonder if Emerson likes jazz.

So that day came and I boarded the plane, not looking behind me as I left. I had big plans to become the person I always dreamed of being: social, beautiful, all around perfect. At first I was so, trying to pretend I was interested in everyone and everything, until I realized no one really cared. I was just a goof, silly and immature, doing the least amount of work to still stay alive and wasting all my time enjoying my new found independence. Such a waste, yet irreplaceable. I loved the new found me-ness so much I decided I’d never go home again; my life had moved on and there was no place left for me amongst my green hills and orange rivers. I had already made one big change in my life and that was enough. But one change is never enough, change just adds and grows and continues forever. I was trying not to notice the world moving on around me, I just wanted to stay where I was, not thinking, not moving ahead, just breathing and nothing more. Sometimes though I would forget to breath.

Aah!

How do you write a scream and make it poetry?

Grrrrr

Aahhh

Blah

Maybe some things are better off heard.

I wish I could say something dramatically came and hit me in the back of the head, changing my life in a second. Sometimes it’s the little things that make the most difference. Little things that add up and form a whole. Little things that at first are easy to ignore, but when they start to build up, that’s when it is time to worry. I finally took the time to look around me and to realize that the world in which I was ignoring was moving, changing, and I was drifting backward, bound to be one of those who once had so much potential but somehow the pace of their life changed and instead of doing something great just ended up working as a janitor cleaning floors and pitied by all. What can be more pitied then failed dreams? I looked at myself and wondered who I was becoming. I was at the fork in the road and I now had to choose which way I would follow despite my reluctancy. So many choices, which is the way: money, fame, family, God, hermit, death, etc. etc. etc. One thing I decided, though, was that I would not end up in a life like everyone else, obsessed with the tedious, working long hours, living to impress with the nicest house, car, goods (but wouldn’t it be nice to have the BEST!),

enjoying Monday night football and the latest James Bond flick. Is there happiness in a life like that, so focused on yourself that every boring thing that you do seems important? But when all the world seems to be marching in the same direction to the same monotonous drum cadence, it is hard to take a chance and just run.

If I had the means right now at this very second I would jump in the fastest plane and fly to Italy. Once there I would run inside this place called the Sistine Chapel, I'm sure you've heard of it. I would run in and just sit on the floor looking up with my mouth open in wonder listening to the surrounding noise. I'd pretend to travel back in time and just watch this Michelangelo guy paint lying on his back. Maybe he'd give me a try at being an artist and then I could say, "See Adam's finger? I painted that fingernail, I'm sure it's the best you've ever seen." And then I would laugh like a mad man and go back to staring up and drooling.

Two paths diverged in the woods, and I, I took the one *most* traveled by. I didn't want to be another face in the crowd, but even the hardest thing is the easiest when others are there to drag you along. I finished school, studying long hours to pass the tests, writing long, complicated papers, sitting through hours and hours of lectures and test reviews. I graduated and got a wonderful job, so wonderful due to its high paying salary and the prestige that went along with it. I had a zippy car, fully equipped and leather seats. I had a top of the line apartment decorated by a top of the line designer who thought I would feel most at home if everything was decorated in the color yellow. Everywhere I went, heads turned and whispers started: do you know who that is? Respect is what I received from the world. But when I caught the flu no one made me soup. There was no one to hear me yawn away my boredom. When it was my birthday not one soul made me a construction paper card. When I died, I was too respected that no one even attended my funeral. Oh, but the coffin was remarkable. Cost the last of my fortune, and such a lovely color of yellow.

Is it possible to hear someone laugh and still let a frown stay on your face? The most beautiful laughter I have ever heard belonged to someone who couldn't even hear it. She was in one of my classes and always had a handy dandy signer to translate everything that went on. When something funny was said, the room would roar with laughter. And then when all was quiet again, the signer would finally finish translating the joke, and she, the deaf girl, would laugh. Such a beautiful sound, that sweet laughter, a solo song that would always bring tears to my eyes and fill me with gratitude.

I wasn't struck by lightning like Martin Luther when I decided I would devote my life to the service of God. A moment of truth and I knew I had only one purpose in life, to be an example, basking in the glory of the creator. Read scriptures, go to church pray. Read scriptures, go to church, pray. Pray, read scriptures, go to church. I was so righteous. I never touched a drop of liquor. I never- no not once- let my thoughts get carried away

and think of naughty things. If anyone passed by me shoeless, coatless, or hungry, I always gave of my substance. I'm sure all who saw me were awed by the halo that one day appeared around my head. I just woke up one morning and there it was, so bright and shiny, attracting rays of light and lighting up my innocent features. I'm still waiting for the telegraph proclaiming my sainthood. It's coming soon... I can feel it.

One Christmas I learned the meaning of that famous quote by Charles Dickens, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times." I spent Christmas Day, after opening a huge pile of presents already knowing what they contained, with my family at the hospital. My grandma, pale and white and ghostly, lay dying, or so everyone thought. She looked miserable enough, maybe just because everyone kept crying and giving her worried looks. Then she said, in one of her waking moments, that this Christmas was wonderful, because we were all together. Best of times being together, worst of times because we realized it wouldn't always be that way. Lying there in pain and being together made all the suffering worth while. My grandma had spent three weeks walking around on a broken leg and didn't even realize it was broken. She is still alive by the way.

The first time I saw him, perfection came to my mind. I actually just saw him from the back of the head, but there was just something about him that knocked the breath out of me. I just sat there, staring at his cowlick sticking up and planned our future. We actually didn't talk to each other until months later, just a small conversation, yet like the first time I saw him, perfect in every way. I never thought I'd be the one to get all lovey-dovey and girly, but it just happened, actions just coming together, nothing amiss. Married, mom, housewife, making dinner for a lively bunch crowded in a lived-in house, cleaning every second of everyday, wearing baggy sweatshirts and ponytails, driving to soccer games and piano lessons, braiding hair, tying shoes, washing behind ears, giving advice, dealing with monsters under the bed and kids who eat too much Halloween candy. One day I looked in the mirror and this stranger with gray in the corners of her hair and small wrinkles around her eyes and lips sighed back at me. Somehow she seemed happy, oh so happy in a life of pleasing husband, pleasing children, pleasing all. Yet, nothing but fear entered my being, for I did not know this person! I was still just a young girl age seventeen, not this woman who looked back at me with the same eyes attached to a different face. A young child came and pulled at my sleeve asking me something. I wanted to run away horrified from this kid with tangled hair and a slimy nose, run and let the years fall off me, faster and faster, getting dizzy, younger, freer. But instead I picked up the child, wiped its nose, brushed its hair, and went to do the dishes.

When I was in elementary school, I was the weird one who was always doing something unnatural. One time everyone gave himself or herself a nickname, like Red for having red hair, Silly for always telling jokes. Me? The nickname I picked out was Beautiful. I am Beautiful. The other kids just laughed, and I just smiled back at them feeling sorry for their small brains. Another time we had to color a picture with trees. I was sick of using green, so all of my trees were blue and purple. Afterwards the teacher hung all

was doomed to happen in my simple existence. Divorce. Death. Divorce again. Unhappiness with life. Murder. Fleas. Bad luck. The kind of stuff everyone looks forward to happening to the people they hate. You might have guessed by now that I am still sitting at the fork in the road, undecided on which path I will actually take. When I look into my future, I see so many possibilities like the ones I wrote. Onward ever onward, that is the way of life. Maybe we will be lucky and we'll choose the road paved in gold. Maybe we will be not so lucky and we'll cautiously dodge arrows and deep trenches. But I think the hardest part of all is looking ahead and seeing the unknown stretch before my eyes, unable to look back yet unwilling to take that first step. Deep down something leads me on the path of life, guiding me home, guiding me through the tough decisions. Somehow I know I'll do what is best. Alexander Pope said, "whatever is, is right." Maybe it is right just because we don't know any other way. Maybe I just shouldn't think so much, questioning and doubting everything, but just accept with open arms. But right now I'm content enough to just sit in the crossroads, smelling the daisies and looking for love notes. Where's the switch? My brain runs empty, too much to think sometimes. It's just nice to turn it off and let peace echo off the sides. So much to wonder. Dreaming is endless. Thoughts visit. And life is good.