MALS Quarterly

Winter 2010
CREATIVE WRITING

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MALS Quarterly Mission Statement

The Dartmouth MALS Quarterly is the journal for the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. The publication is broad in scope, and accepts submissions of any scholarly or creative work from current MALS students and all MALS alumni. It is a priority that all work is accessible to a full disciplinary range of MALS community members.

Our primary goal is to publish the best current work being done in MALS from the four tracks: Globalization, Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, and General Studies. Through publishing this work, we intend to initiate and encourage scholarly dialogue within the MALS community.

Submissions may be sent to: MALS.Quarterly@dartmouth.edu

Cover Photograph: DEWAYNE HAYES
Editor’s Note:

Dear Readers:

Winter term has certainly lived up to its name this year. I hope you have enjoyed the abundant snow of a classic New England winter. There was a definite trend in the submissions this term that seem to suggest MALS students used their extra hours of dark and cold to cultivate their creativity. We received a record number of poems! Please enjoy the series of poems we selected in what has become our Poetry Issue (beginning on page 10).

To represent the more academic side of the MALS community Kemi Adedokun took us back, a year after the tragic earthquake, to Haiti (page 4). Her in depth look at the image of Haitians and its historical context is fascinating as she explains it through the frame of the Miss Haiti pageant.

To end our winter issue we have two essays from two talented Creative Writing students, Anida Pobric and Laura Burgess. Anida’s cunning sense of comedic timing shines through her piece that outlines the development of her love of football (page 22). And Laura’s narrative talent takes the reader through the story behind a specific address (page 24).

As always I will leave you with a plea for submissions. It is such a pleasure to share the amazing works of MALS students with the community and the editors and I look forward to sharing your latest work next term. Please take the time in Spring to submit a piece you are particularly proud of to the editors at the Quarterly.

Thank you for reading the MALS Quarterly!

Stephanie Reighart
Editor-In-Chief
CONTRIBUTORS

KEMI ADEDOKUN:
Kemi is a graduate of Oakwood University and is a first-year MALS student. In her free time she enjoys playing the violin, reading her favorite blogs, traveling, and writing occasionally. Her academic interests are human rights, international law, and women’s studies. She hopes to combine all these interests in law school.

LAURA BURGESS:
I am excited to be back in my home state of New Hampshire after a twelve-year hiatus in the mid-Atlantic where I pursued my education and the beginnings of my career. I attended Emma Willard School in Troy, NY and St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. I spent three years on the faculty at Mercersburg Academy in PA. As you read my piece, which was written for Tom Power’s nonfiction class on the topic of a place of importance, you’ll get a sense of the significance of this for me. I am extraordinarily grateful for the many learning opportunities afforded by my education and my career, and that all of it has led me here. I have been enjoying taking advantage of the squash courts and the hills and trails for nordic skiing around the Upper Valley. I am always on the hunt for a squash partner who doesn’t mind playing with a beginner, albeit a tenacious one.

ANIDA POBRIC:
Anida Pobric is feeling lucky. She asks Google, how does one write a bio about herself when she hates writing bios? A voice responds: Write about someone else. Or, tell ‘em you like to vacuum, you hope to replace Andrea Kramer, you want to meet Drew Brees, fit the shoes of Walt Whitman. Tell ‘em you’ve got a big poster with your face on it promoting a good cause. You’ve given one to all your aunts and uncles. Tell ‘em you want a bio full of titles in italics. Titles, Titles, Titles. Tell ‘em you want to write books about all the things you know and you want to know everything. Tell em you believe that possibility is the best gift of all. Anida responds, Oh, you’re cheesy! We’re in graduate school, these kids are hardened by serious life experience and New Hampshire’s bitter cold. Google says, Fine. Include a fact: you were born in Sarajevo. You grew up on the half-mean streets of New York City. Tell ‘em you’re studying globalization and creative writing. Include that you’ve graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. Say something like you hope to spread your heart but never ever lose your mind. Then, just go back to Titles.
Haiti has been in the news in recent years for many reasons, from Wyclef Jean’s bid for the presidency, to the country’s participation in the recent Miss Universe Pageant. These events, however, were overshadowed by the earthquake that took place in January 2010. The economic, social, and political implications that this disaster carried are far reaching and touch every facet of Haitian society. While Haiti has always been a country that has struggled with oppression from its neighbor, the Dominican Republic, and a steady rash of natural disasters, the rich complex and often disturbing history of its people add an element that is even more layered. Through this, the diversity and ethnic identities of the Haitian people is just as complex and plays a huge role in how they view

There She Is:

How Sarodj Bertin (Miss Haiti Universe 2010) has Emerged as a Symbol of The Disenfranchisement of the Haitian Community Through Representation of a Minority Group

Kemi Adedokun
themselves and how others view them. The selection of the Miss Universe representative for the 2010 pageant highlighted these divides.

Last year Haiti decided to participate in the Miss Universe 2010 pageant. While the country had not participated since 1989, with the aftershock of the recent earthquake still reverberating in the minds of the world, this was seen as a step of courage. In an interview with Yahoo.fr, Miss Haiti Universe 2010, said, “This is the best time to climb the world behind suffering and poverty, we also have nice things like beauty”(1). In an effort to force the world to see beyond the devastation of the earthquake, Haiti chose to allow a beautiful woman to distract them from the suffering that is still rampant. Miss Haiti is a symbolic sacrificial lamb for both national pride and the courage to face challenges that lie for decades ahead. In an article entitled “Q&A: Miss Haiti in Miss Universe pageant to help her devastated country”, she is painted as a national symbol of strength and sign of Haitian ingenuity. An advertisement for the competition read as follows:

Amidst the catastrophe brought by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that devastated the country in January this year, beauty still remains in Haiti. With Sarodj Bertin representing the Haitians, a promising comeback is anticipated. Will this mean a victory for the Haitians? See for yourself and Watch Miss Universe 2010 Online (2).

When asked how she thinks her participation in the contest would help her country she replied, “There are many people who want to help but don’t know how and sometimes they need a voice to tell them what the necessities of the people. I want the people, through me, to be who says what their necessities are”(3). But in reality what voice is this young woman giving the people of Haiti? Both her controversial appearance and background speak volumes to the undertones of the complex Haitian culture.

Born in Haiti in 1986 Sarodj Bertin was born to the privileged upper class of the educated elite. Her childhood home was described as being a stone home on a hilltop overlooking the streets of Port-au-Prince. She, along with her siblings and father, left Haiti in 1995 after her mother’s assassination, and sought political asylum in the Dominican Republic. Despite her troubled childhood she went onto study law in the Dominican Republic and is fluent in four languages (French, Creole, Spanish, and English).

Her mother, Mireille Durocher Bertin, was a lawyer in Haiti and deeply involved in Haitian politics. She was opposed to the middle class leader to the party that protested the leadership of President Aristide. After announcing the creation of a political party that would compete with that of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the upcoming elections she was gunned down in broad daylight on a busy street (4). The former political associations of Miss Haiti’s mother are yet another layer to the skepticism that many Haitians regard her with. Her mother was seen as one who fought for justice by some, and by others as a deeply corrupt leader of an underground political group.

Another element is that Miss Bertin does not physically resemble the “typical” Haitian. She is of mixed heritage unlike the majority of other Haitians. Primarily because of this, the reaction of many Haitians to her win was one of outrage. While Miss Bertin expressed many times her desire to represent her people; “her people” did not feel that she accurately represented them. On the site of one Haitian blogger in an post entitled “Dark Controversy Surrounds Miss Haiti 2010 Sarodj Bertin: Uncovering the Ugly Truth about the Assassination of Mireille Durocher Bertin”, the reasons why the Haitian community regards Miss Bertin with such suspicion are outlined as follows:

There is fierce debate in the Haitian diaspora about Miss Bertin’s selection as Miss Haiti. The controversy centers around her long-time residency in the Dominican Republic (15 years), her light complexion, her “Dominicanized” persona and most disturbingly, the execution style assassination of her mother Mireille Durocher Bertin in 1995. Given the divide, it remains to be seen whether Miss Haiti will “give hope to a devastated country”(4).

This clearly displays that most Haitians do not feel that they are being accurately represented by this young woman. While the claims of these people may seem insensitive or even a bit racist, their statements and feelings are rooted in the identity that the majority of them proudly claim. In essence Bertin has unwittingly become a symbol of disenfranchisement for the Haitian people, who are so desperately trying to claim a uniform national identity. This identity is very much rooted in physical appearance as it is in political affiliations.

In another website/blog called mediatakeout.com. The post reads: CHECK THE NEW Miss Haiti 2010 . . . SHE’S A BEAUTIFUL GIRL . . . BUT IT JUST SEEMS ODD FOR A WOMAN SO LIGHT TO BE THE SYMBOL OF BEAUTY FOR HAITI!! (DO YOU AGREE)?
testants, along with Miss Bertin at the competition. While looking at the pictures it is almost as if you can hear the childhood song “One of These Things is Not Like the Other” ringing in your head. It is clear that Sarodj Bertin is physically different from the other contestants in almost every single way. From her hair texture to her body shape there is a distinct difference between her and the other women.

The current Miss Haiti challenges national identity on almost all levels: physical, political, and geographical. With the reality of the earthquake still very much present these facts are only given further veracity. Virtually the only source (both historically and presently) of empowerment left for the Haitian people is their ethnic identity, which is the foundation of their national identity. By choosing a representative that physically represents a minority ethnic group, a type of disenfranchisement is reached. This fact for the Haitian people as a whole serves as a force of further fragmentation. Essentially the symbol of the oppressor is now a representation/representative of the oppressed. This is especially poignant given the historical significance of race in Haiti.

Race in Haiti is an entity that holds particular cultural importance. The fact that the country was the only nation in the world to form from a successful slave rebellion is one that shows the deeply rooted hatred of the white oppressor and those that hold physical characteristics that can be identified with the oppressor. By the time of the French Revolution the population of slaves in Haiti was somewhere between 500,000 and 700,000. Most were slaves imported from Africa, predominantly from the west central African region of Dahoumey. The hard labor of the plantations along with the epidemics endemic to the tropics kept the mortality rate high necessitating continuing importation of slaves from Africa.

The century of domination of white slave holders over the African women produced a subpopulation of mulattoes. The mulattoes being offspring of the white elite were given special privileges that led to mulattoes accumulating land and some wealth. The mulattoes definitely were below the white elite in social status but they were definitely above the pure African slaves.

During the 18th century, communities of escaped slaves developed in the mountain wildernesses. These people were called maroons from the Spanish word cimaron for wild. These maroon communities carried out wars against the slave plantations. One war in 1751-1757 resulted in the deaths of 6000. The French were able to put down these rebellions and skirmishes between the royalists and the republicans (ibid).

Racial distinctions soon moved beyond just white, mulatto, black. The amount of white blood that a mulatto person possessed soon became even more important than the distinction being mulatto itself. In 18th century French colonial Haiti, there were nine categories of African and European mixture that were defined based on the assumption that people have 128 parts of inheritance:

- **Blanc 100% European** (128 parts European ancestry)
- **Négre 100% African** (128 parts African ancestry)
- **Mulâtre 64 parts European and 64 parts African**
- **Sacatra 8 to 32 parts European**
- **Griffe 24 to 39 parts European**
- **Marabou 40 to 48 parts European**
- **Quateron 71 to 100 parts European**
- **Métif 101 to 112 parts European**
- **Mamelouc 113 to 120 parts European**
- **Quateronné 121 to 124 parts European**
- **Sang-mêlé 125 to 127 parts European**

These “racial” terms are still important to many people...
in Haiti, especially members of the largely mixed ancestry upper class. Similar kinds of distinctions are found in the neighboring Dominican Republic today (6). The fact that these people would take time to meticulously categorize their racial identity speaks beyond its significance to its role in national identity.

Identity is a curious notion. Suggesting a kind of unity within ourselves, it nonetheless reveals difference at the very core of our being. Reflecting further on that initially odd observation, we can [allow people to] realize that coming to know [themselves] involves not so much discovery as creativity, and that [they] do not undertake the quest alone. That human being[s] need to and can ask “Who am I?” is related to the reasons [that are needed] to be educated;[these entities] need to and can develop moral consciences;[they also] can and do flourish in democracy. These human projects are differentiated, but they need not be divided, in opposition, or sequentially. On the contrary: given the chance to be in communication with each other, these projects can serve and significantly enhance each other (7).

The words of Minnich are both instructive and meaningful. However, they are not completely true when taken in account with the way in which ethnic identity was formed in Haiti. The moral implications that the identity of the mulattos held were virtually nonexistent is evident in the way in which they used hypocrisy and their dual racial identities to their advantage. With the subsequent rebellion the Haitian people liberated themselves physically, but not in the case of identity. As Freire cogitates in Pedagogy of the Oppressed: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor, this contribution is impossible (8).

This thought is what embodies the roots of the formation of the Haitian ethnic identity, and is why the reverse superiority of the people with a greater percentage of African ancestry became the dominant force behind national identity. The rejection of the “duality” that the mulattos carried was the strengthening force that allowed the Haitians to eventually gain complete independence from France.

The fact that the ethnic identity of Haitians relates directly to their national identity is another reason why ethnicity displays such primacy. In the aftermath of the earthquake, Haitians lost so much. While their material possessions were permanently destroyed their identity was not. Even now over a year after the disaster, identity still serves as a constant in their very uncertain lives. The political and even the economic future of the country are beyond the imaginings of even the most brilliant political theorists. The need for a national representative to clearly articulate the needs of the Haitian people to the world is well founded. The representative was not found, however, in Miss Haiti Universe 2010.

Ethnic identity is the lenses through which [people] interpret and interact with the world on both local and global levels (8). If the representative is not a representation of the majority ethnic group characteristics then a disservice is done to the people who need visibility on the stage of their choice. Both the historical significance of race to the Haitian people and the struggles that they have endured, are indelible marks etched in the minds of them all. •
Works Cited


April Snow

LI JUAN WEI

This is a season,
April snowflakes whitened the limbs of trees overnight,
Storms brought heavy rain and flooded the East Coast,
Tornados came from nowhere, sweeping over the South,
Oil spill keeps growing and will be washed ashore,
Political debates never stopped,
and nothing is changed.

This is a season,
I began writing poems
to create an idyllic world
where my troubled soul can rest undisturbed.
LITTLE COTTONWOOD CANYON

PHOTO ESSAY BY WESLEY R. WHITAKER
After graduating from college, I went skiing. The morning after I received my diploma, I loaded my gear into my housemate’s Subaru, and the two of us drove west. Six days later, we arrived in Government Camp, a town of 157 year-round residents that is located on the outskirts of Oregon’s Mount Hood National Forest. A few days later, JP and I were hired as short-order breakfast cooks, and the two of us spent the rest of the summer making omelets in the morning and skiing on the glaciers in the afternoon.

Though the snowfields hold snow year round, the ski resort closes for maintenance every September. By the end of August, JP and I had grown tired of our shared studio apartment, and decided that it was once again time to pack his Subaru. We drove south, down along the Oregon Coast, connected onto I 80 East, and arrived at Utah’s Wasatch Front a few days later. The median age in Little Cottonwood Canyon is 28. At 370 residents, the town of Alta is slightly larger than Government Camp, and is a popular destination for recent college graduates, high school dropouts, and professionals on hiatus from the
cooperate world. As Trainer, the owner of the Gold Miner’s Daughter bar, robotically said to each of his patrons, “Welcome to Alta, Utah: a town with zero registered sex offenders, a negligible crime rate, great pizza, clean air and water, and the most powder turns per capita in the country!”

The base of Collins, the main ski lift at Alta, is 8,530 feet above sea level. This means that for five months, JP and I worked, ate, and slept at around 8,490. While in the canyon, I consumed very little alcohol, smoked rarely, and ate three home-cooked meals every day.

I got to know everyone who worked in Little Cottonwood after a few weeks. About once a month, the town would sponsor a “mixer” at Our Lady of the Snow, an avalanche-proof function hall that served not only as a non-denominational church, but also as a classroom and a local theater. One night, I had a few too many drinks at one of these mixers, and found myself sitting outside the church with the spins—there is something oddly disheartening about merry-making in a place of worship.

At times, I felt isolated in the canyon. Though Alta is only an hour away from Salt Lake City, it is difficult to access. The umbilical cord that connects the Wasatch Range to society, Utah State Road 210, is prone to avalanches. During the winter months, it is illegal to travel on the road without either four-wheel drive or tire chains. During heavy snowstorms, the road closes, sometimes for days on end, and the US Forest Service stabilizes the slide paths with controlled blasts. When this happens, the residents of Alta enter into a police-enforced lockdown called “interlodge.” If the avalanche conditions are bad enough, canyon residents are required to stay inside state-approved buildings for the duration of the storm. Last winter, I was trapped inside the Gold Miner’s Daughter lodge for over twenty-four hours during an interlodge.

Hundreds of Rocky Mountain Goats live in Little Cottonwood Canyon during the summer. When JP and I first arrived in Utah, several straggling goats still inhabited the canyon. However, as the winter progressed, they all migrated to lower altitudes. Come March, when the days grew longer and the snow began to melt, the goats slowly worked their way back up the canyon. When I left Utah at the end of April, I could see goats scrambling across the canyon walls from the chairlift.
Inclined to write a beggar’s sight:
One needing pleads on his stool,
Soberly placing an eager fight,
Though historically a drunken fool.

Stories flow with strong merlot,
And with tragedy they linger.
Hard to hold the story told,
Expressing uncertainty with a finger:

Forced to tell a mighty tale,
One conquering, claiming all;
Stumbled, fumbled, costly, frail
All conquered now seems small.

Mountains climbed and oceans crossed,
Years, a lifetime spent.
Each step not finding, but more lost,
From dark to darker the journey went.

Visions full of pure, brisk air,
Her soft skin, and battles won;
Left gasping where I wouldn’t dare,
To love or shove anyone.

Sailing seas on a blazing breeze,
Sends sailors swiftly home.
Stuck adrift a blaring tease,
For it’s homeless that I roam.

Time is bled finding her.
She mustn’t be afar.
Now it’s learned that she’d prefer,
My time resume to mar.

Her soul I’d humbly nestle,
By the heat of our destin’d fire.
Her soul I’d proudly wrestle,
With chills of a rushed desire.

All tucked away in peaceful bliss;
Is within the reach of me.
The battle’d end with a lovers kiss,
If I’d but reach fervently.

The soldier’s errand would decease,
His comrades: declared victors;
If I could but sustain the peace,
Not drawn to internal wars.

Statues set of deeds well done,
Flourish in the streets we sow.
Sincerely the deeds were but one,
It was but a promise that we owe.

Homebound- now that we’ve found,
A destination in the view:
An end sought, yet far more ground,
Now that the view is new.

Battling dreams with flesh alone,
Amidst our choppy sea,
Anchors only in the deep unknown,
Fighting and loving reluctantly.
With you

ANIDA POBRIC

I wake. Look at your face, touch
sweat, kiss you tasting
my lifetime. It is not enough
to love like that
to have you
in so many ways
I am grateful.
Toy Soldiers

JOHNATHAN RECOR

Two forces meet on a stony ridge.
Green leader yells: Enemy at the bridge!
Tan troops react and shots are fired.
~ All hail to the angel never tired ~

Fear not. Said the winged feather spread.
The dying soldier lifts slowly his head.
Who are you? Cried Sergeant Major Ned.
A fallen angel among the fallen dead.

Be gone angel for you are surely mistaken.
See my life! And hear my heart unshaken!
Listen now for I shall not be taken…
I am Sergeant Ned…and I am not de--
WAR IN SARAJEVO

ANIDA POBRIC

Escaping the womb
to return to the same darkness.
(There is no tunnel analogy.)

My parents sit in the kitchen
sip on stale coffee that smells like war.
I hear them talk of walking to the store, and the plan to walk separately…
(what follows are things I cannot say
but know.) No way to escape
but to listen to the privilege of silence on sunny days
when I remember what it was like.
My Friend, the Pen

JOE SHAFER

My friend, my end, the pen.
Pretty how you dance tonight.
Do you waltz so with all the men,
And are you handled just as light?
Tell me softly, but do not stop,
How do you speak so well?

With fancy gesture, the lines you hop,
Unveiling souls, and rightly spell.

Oh your magic, my swifting mate,
I hide, but none from you;
Often dancing, singing late,
Yet known by very few.

Always honest, always dear,
From beginning, and soon the end;
Ironically, with pain, sincere,
And luckily a pen, my friend.
Pitch is the black that scurries back,
To the house on the old lagoon.
It crawls up mist, with me on its list,
And its pitch, oh, wouldn’t leave too soon.

It walks its way, with me as its prey,
In the most unnoticeable act.
Though somehow its chance, my heart does romance,
And its presence has brought me this fact.

I sit in my chair and how do I stare,
At the wall, with scenes in my mind.
Of the beautiest thing, what a joy it doth bring,
With beauties of similar kind.

Here I do sit, and unknowingly knit,
The pitch and the mist that will knock.
For in all my good gleam, I created the seam,
Of a pain that keeps like a rock.

And in nursing my smile, I forget all the while,
That a misty, foggy black lay,
Outside my warm keep, its quieted feet,
Refuses the longing delay.

I hear its soft knock, why I’d turn the thick lock,
To let in an unexpected foe now,
Is always the mystery, that fills my odd history,
And leaves a morning filled with a “how”?

And so as it goes, as the listener knows,
The dark does fill a well lighted home.
And I’m blinded to see, that my heart is in plea,
For immediately my heart is alone.

The rest of the night, I walk very light,
For my burden is hesitant to show.
For in the dark, I commit to the lark,
Which carries me to sin that I know.

For in our kind minds, a tragedy unwinds,
To the best of the worldly beasts:
That we wish to decay, all that we pray,
Before the grandest or loneliest feasts.
Football Rant from a Once Rookie Fan

Anida Pobric

My interest in football was sparked by the hype of the sport. Most men in my life enjoy watching the games and I wanted to understand the big deal. I wasn’t serious about it. I had gone twenty some odd years with various preconceptions and no interest at all, and I had turned out perfectly fine. In any case, I asked my friend Ben to take me to a game and he did. I sat at old Giants Stadium and watched the Oakland Raiders get their something handed to them. The crowd around me high fived each other every time something “good” happened. There was a humorous Oakland fan sitting next to me. I didn’t know why he was all right with all of those harsh words directed at him, or why he laughed it off every time the Raiders “missed an opportunity.” My first impression was that:

One: Football fans are not nice people.

There was a fan who wouldn’t take off his hat during the Star Spangled Banner. He was verbally abused during the entire game. I thought, “What if he had terrible scars on his head?” He stood up. He put his hand over his heart. He showed respect.

Two: Football brings out the aggressor in us. The American aggressor!

As half time rolled around, I understood why the Raiders fan had such a great sense of humor. It was the only way he could get by and love his team. At this point the score was double digits-0, Giants, and it honestly looked like the referees would bend the rules and the Oakland score would sink into the negatives. Every time the Giants scored a touchdown, the Giants fans yelled “YumYumYum” and then laughed, continue to drink beer and eat nachos.

Three: It’s perfectly acceptable to be a complete asshole to the fans rooting for the other team.

In short, I was repulsed.

I didn’t know when to get up to cheer. I didn’t want to hurt the Raiders fan’s feelings. I didn’t know what team I should like. My sneakers were stuck to the sticky floor. I had a difficult time following where the ball went. Behind me, there was a little boy, of about five, asking his father the rules of the game. I mostly listened to their conversation and stared at the field before me.

Ben explained everything that happened play by play. I absorbed about ten percent of what he was saying. When you throw in words like “down,” “challenge,” “holding” “off-side,” “field goal,” I honestly could only think of Kama Sutra.

Most football fans are kids who grow up brainwashed by their parents to like a certain team. They go to football games before they can appropriately walk. So, I imagine that when they grow up, they must feel that this knowledge is inherent or innate or at least, effortless. This was not the case with me. I spent my life with my head in my books. My Bosnian parents weren’t football fans and my father still argues that the word football should only be applied to soccer.

I knew that I would have to do some reading on all of this before I committed myself to being a fan of the sport. Yet, something told me early on that I would learn to love it.

PICTURE THIS: There are thousands of people on the bleachers. Each one likes a certain set of teams, a certain set of players. A lot of them play fantasy football. (I hear that “nothing in this world compares to fantasy football.”) Luckily, my first impression of football bears this kind of energy.

I went home that night and asked Ben what I could do to become a fan. He said, watch the games on Sundays and watch Sports Center whenever you can. So, I watched the
games every Sunday and followed Sports Center.

I asked my friend Justin what else I should be doing. He said, read Sports Illustrated, start with Don Banks’ ratings and predictions each week. So, Don and I became very good friends, very soon.

I asked my pal Robbie what he thought and he advised me to learn some of the rules. He said there’s a lot of vocabulary in this game. So, I welcomed Wikipedia and other rule books into my life.

I decided it was best to learn a little about key players. I read up on some juicy drama. Criminals, cheaters, and top scholars all have a place in the National Football League. When I got somewhat acquainted with different Quarterbacks, I was more drawn to the games. Hello, it doesn’t take a wizard to make a judgment about Tom Brady’s physique or desire, terribly, Troy Polamalu’s hair. [Head and Shoulders, you found a place in my bathtub!]

Watching the games and getting educated about football, I could finally pinpoint why I enjoyed it. Football is fast. It’s not like life. There’s no waiting around for things to happen. Things are always happening. There are challenges. There are fights on the field. The offensive players are fast. The defensive players are angry. There is soft blood and hard blood and a lot of sweat.

I was impressed by how fit the large players were. I forgot they were wearing tights! I appreciated their uniforms and understood them as being completely practical (Before this, I thought they looked like aggressive ballerinas). I liked their shoulder pads. I liked their tattoos. I liked their strong arms, especially the way the arm muscles bend and elongate when the ball is being passed, or a tackle is happening.

In what other game could you see so much struggle, endure so much physical pain, run over incredibly large men just to score a touchdown? In what other game could you see the stiff arm so successfully carried out that it throws a man down? Such resilience, I always thought.

Aside from the sheer thrill of strategic aggression, some of my favorite moments were when opposing teams’ players kind of hug each other. Sometimes arm around neck, sometimes pat on the shoulder or back. Like in good melodies, there is a sweet balance of tension and release. The plays are quick. Nothing is dragged out. You get hurt, so, you get hurt. You leave the field. Your team supports you.

My senses are married to the game: the way the helmets click and clap against each other; the way the whistle controls the game; the sound of the referee’s voice, like an old Hollywood actor. He deserves a cigar while announcing judgments; the way the Quarterback licks his fingers as he explains the inaudible plays to his team.

Football fulfills a blood lusty desire. Thankfully, these are things I can’t express on my own. Tackling my academic opponents or stiff-arming a mean friend just doesn’t translate. It didn’t take long for me to come to terms that the sweet girl on the bleachers at the Giants game disappeared somewhere.

Football is fair. Almost always, there is a well-deserved victory. Even if my team doesn’t win, that’s all right. The other team probably deserved it more-- played better, played harder. Tough love.

Football is bloody. Concussions and broken bones are frequent occurrence in the NFL. Injuries are a strategy of the game. What is a disadvantage to one team is an advantage to the other. This is shamelessly characterized on the field. What is embarrassing for one team is victorious for the other. This is how the NFL teams compliment each other. One is always better, always stronger. Darwin smiles all the way to the playoffs until the weak have slowly and painfully been weaned out and the strong survive, get rewarded with a bye and home field advantage.

NFL Football players are celebrities. Sure, their paycheck is celebratory, but so is their persona. Football fans follow what happens on and off the field. I finally realize why the Quarterback is the most popular and sought after kid in high school, even if that is just on sitcoms or movies. He is (arguably) the most skillful, strategic player on the team. He is constantly protected by his teammates. He has the power to make trick plays and he has less chance of getting injured. He’s quick and cool under pressure. He and the ball have the most special relationship of all.

Football is complicated. One cannot be a dumb-wit and believe that he/she could understand the game. People talk about how it is a game of yards, and “literally inches” but that isn’t its most impressive quality. Football is about player behavior, team history, morale, psychological and physical intimidation. It is about incredible accuracy and precision. For the receivers, it is about being in the right place at the right time. It is about how to outwit the other team’s defense. It’s about being unpredictable but remaining consistent. It’s about constant observation. The fans. The players. We are one when it comes to observing.

Football is eclectic. It’s full of drama. It’s a performance. It’s art. It’s math. It’s entertainment. I love it for all of these reasons. When I watch a good game of football, I feel the blood rush to my fingertips, to my forehead. It’s hard to stay away. I am devoted. Now, all I need is to figure out what to do on Thursdays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, in the other seven months of the year.
I lived for three years in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, a town of several thousand residents with one main street. It lies just a few miles north of the Mason-Dixon line. A private high school located in this small town (which miraculously enrolled students from 30 states and 33 nations) offered me a job with a good salary, a place to live and a 401K and so, although I had seen the school and the town but once, I took it. I moved there from New Hampshire in July of 2007. When the moving truck was gone and my parents were satisfied that I could cope with the last of the boxes, I was alone.

The school had assigned me to an apartment on the top two floors of a house on South Park Avenue, which ran along the edge of town towards the farmlands. It sounds bucolic, but these were dairy farms and smell of manure was nauseating. Number 204 was sea foam green, a two-story structure with vinyl siding that had been haphazardly chopped into two apartments. The rooms were all painted or papered in different colors, and it wasn’t clear which room was supposed to be which. The kitchen appliances were old and there was no room for a table. I turned the semi-insulated attic into
my bedroom because it was painted bright sky blue, and my bedroom furniture came the closest to matching that color of any furniture that I owned.

The most redeeming feature of the house was a screened-in porch off the kitchen, where I placed a rocking chair and a small glass table. The rocking chair was painted green, with wicker seating that my mom had done herself when she and my father lived in their first apartment. There was a view out over the fields belonging to a neighboring farm and the low, shadowy spine of the Tuscarora Mountains beyond.

My parents left to drive back to New Hampshire early in the morning on the 4th of July, 2007. I don’t remember what they said when they left or what I did with myself that morning. I do remember that they called me from a McDonald’s in Scranton around 2 p.m. My mother had permitted the stop in order to acquire a traditional 4th of July burger. Ordinarily, my dad would have been grilling on the deck at our home. My mother would have been making fresh whipped cream and blueberry sauce for sundaes with strawberry ice cream. I might have been pretending to help with the grilling, waiting for the high-sign to eyeball Tanqueray into glasses and slice up a few limes.

But when I took their call, I was standing in the Mercersburg supermarket, which smelled like rotting produce and where the floors hadn’t seen a mop since the elder George Bush’s administration. Specifically, I was surveying the options in the pasta aisle such as Kraft Mac and Cheese and Hamburger Helper. The boxes looked as though they had been run over by a truck. There were no whole wheat options or any organic sauces, only a brand I had never heard of that looked more like catsup speckled with flakes of oregano. As I stood in the checkout line, I found myself looking intently at celebrity gossip magazines instead of thinking about what I would rather be doing and how very far away from home I was.

That summer, I would fix a Tanqueray and tonic with two limes and sit in the green rocking chair in the evenings. It was a way of turning loneliness into a kind of solitude. On the porch, I felt as though I had my back to everything around me, the strange apartment and the slow, unfamiliar town. I could imagine that the hills on the horizon were New Hampshire instead. I would rock and sip and wonder to myself, “How come, in the course of my extraordinarily fine education, I never learned anything that prepared me to deal with life on my own, with new brand new challenges every day and no one to ask for help?” I am an only child, I went away to school when I was fourteen and spent a good amount of time alone when I was there, and I never felt a need to do what everyone else was doing when I was in college. So why, all of a sudden, was I uncomfortable with my own company and my own thoughts? With the Tanqueray to unlock my brain, I rationed it was because if I had wanted company or comfort, a good friend or family member who knows you and loves you anyway, I would have had to drive ten hours. It was the realization that they weren’t there that made the difference. Having always been relatively comfortable on my own, I had never anticipated this problem.

School came into session in the fall and the rest of the faculty returned from their vacations. I made friends and did well in my job. I learned to keep busy and to find things around me that made me happy as opposed to daydreaming about what I couldn’t have, a ski area with a 2,500 foot vertical drop or a co-op of fresh produce. Unfortunately, with the onset of the cooler weather, mice found their way in from the peaceful fields. I am not a squeamish girl and I fancy myself as fairly independent but quite frankly I cannot stand those little bastards. A friend’s husband set traps and he came to empty them for me upon request. Thankfully, the school realized that this was deeply unsuitable as a strategy for retaining energetic young faculty and they moved me out of 204 South Park that summer.

I found myself in a gracious, stately brick home at 123 East Seminary Street that had been built in the early 1900’s for the wife of a former headmaster. There were 12-foot ceilings, 9-foot windows, an eat-in kitchen, a built-in glass display cabinet, a fireplace, an herb garden, three bedrooms and two bathrooms all for me. There was also a small, open porch on the back of the house but it wasn’t the same. There was no room for my rocker and no view of the fields and hills.