

What it feels like when I have a migraine.

By Allison Winningstad

The actual headache, when it comes, brings with it chills, sweating, nausea, a debility that seems to stretch the very limits of endurance. That no one dies of migraine seems, to someone deep into an attack, an ambiguous blessing.

- Joan Didion, from "In Bed"

When I have a migraine, I, as a person, shrink inside my own body. My exterior stays the same size, but my shrunken inner being, my spirit, rattles inside my skin, against a layer of black space that is both empty and solid-- solid in that when my self bumps against my inner walls I feel pain in a way I only do when my shrunken self is hanging from a rusted metallic spike that travels from the back of my skull through my right eyeball. I am at the mercy of this spike, which is both a metaphor for my pain, and is as real as anything I can touch.

This sense of being a smaller self inside my body affects my ability to walk, see, hear, speak and think. I have a delay-- my footing feels a little precarious, and I move slowly, partly for an assurance of the ground and partly to avoid goring myself deeper and further onto the spike in my head. The rough edges of the spike in my head slowly grinds away at my self: much like a pin shoved through paper can work itself back and forth to enlarge the hole. Moving too much too quickly makes the hole bigger, and movement hurts more. My entire being hangs from this spike, concentrating the pain, my own physicality working against me.

When I speak I do so quietly, so the reverberations of my voice off the inner walls of my body don't grow and thicken and and rattle my brain anymore. My voice, while under the influence of migraine, is a physical thing. Listening is harder too, for sound has to travel farther than usual and cross the void from my ears to my shrunken, shaking self inside and then be read and interpreted by my pain-addled brain.

The darkness from just inside my lids is not enough to shade the harshness of the outer light. I can hear light, and feel voices, some of which are like muted or blunt punches, some of which are like needles.

I feel a paradox between being small and pained and vulnerable inside my body and the heightened sensitivity of my skin, which often itches or feels touch and temperature longer than usual. My skin feels more distanced from my sensory system, but since all external sensory input feels more intense and prolonged, my brain thinks it's misinterpreting the information, and sends signals that sensation or temperature are stronger than they are. I am distracted by the contact I have with the world, while trying to accommodate the spike in my eye.

Juggling these sensations, these flaming knives, takes a lot of energy. When I have a migraine I try to sleep. Sometimes I can get my mind still enough, and relax my defenses enough that this is possible. Usually, I exhaust myself by tossing and turning in slow motion. Each contact point of my head on the pillow bruises like it's been slowly hit with a baseball bat repeatedly. I turn every few minutes to alleviate pressure on this bruising. Sometimes the ache spreads to my back and I can't lie on one side or the other for very long.

As time moves on, I do find my way to sleep. Or I sleep too much, and awaken with the same pain, but have to take up a book or a DVD, turning the screen down low, just to have something to focus on besides the pain, to pass the time. This distraction works for awhile. Eventually, the pain fades, the spike withdraws, my inner self extends from its shriveled state to realign with my skin. Sometimes the dull throbbing lasts a few days, and I sleep a lot, trying to save and build strength. After a few days, I can shed the sunglasses, move a little faster. My body and mind find harmony again.

The Full Moon

(Given that our blood is just like the Atlantic)

By Allison Winningstad

I've never noticed the moon cycles before, as much as I have in the past year. In college I hung a moon poster on the wall, complete with dates and its every stage of wax and wane, and would occasionally go out and howl at full moons with my friends, searching for some primitive feeling.

Teaching, however, has changed my view. When there's a full moon, the students act up. None of them notice the moon and its cycle, but I am reminded of how much of our bodies is made of water, and how the weight of the moon pulling on tides must have its grip on our bodies and minds, pulling things off-kilter, because in the last few days we've dealt with break-ups, blow-ups and students skipping school.

I don't remember the world stopping every time I had a problem in high school. I do remember the violent flux of emotions that comes with being a teenager, but I also remember the effort I would make to keep my life in order, to keep my schoolwork in line, to not embarrass myself because of my feelings. I had outlets, like journaling and reading. I never felt like my problems had to be the central focus of everyone.

Maybe I'm generalizing what I think my students think or feel. My perception is sixteen years removed from theirs. But I think about the impressions they give off, and how they perceive me. If the moon warps and enhances our emotions, reactions and endeavors, do we ride the tide of chaos, or is it our public responsibility to keep things in check? How can I help them balance their valid emotional state, with a sense of respect for their surrounding community?

I want them to harness the tides, instead of being thrown by them.

"3rd Planet"

- Modest Mouse

It occurred to me that the animals are swimming
Around in the water in the oceans in our bodies and
Another had been found
another ocean on the planet
Given that our blood is just like the atlantic.

And how.

The universe is shaped exactly like the earth if you go
Straight long enough you'll end up where you were.



Jon Stewart vs. Bill O'Reilly, on Common's performance at the White House Poetry Slam

O'Reilly invited Stewart on his show to discuss their differing opinions on the rap artist Common's invitation to and performance at the White House for Michelle Obama's poetry slam. I feel like Stewart adroitly refuted O'Reilly's anger at Common's presence at the White House. I understand why O'Reilly is concerned about the image a person with a "questionable" resume could bring to our nation's highest office, but he takes it too far, and his argument didn't hold up. I think we need to get away from the idea that everyone has to have a spotless, controversy-free past, even if they are invited to the White House. They can open dialogue, if we choose to not automatically argue. No one has a spotless past or resume, but we need to look at what they've accomplished, how they've changed, and what they stand for now. We need to believe in the best.

The How and Why: from events to meaning

By Allison Winningstad

Margaret Atwood wrote a short story called “Happy Endings” in which she briefly chronicles a sketch of a love story between John and Mary, from the beginning where “John and Mary meet,” through various permutations of where the story can go, to the only ending possible, “*John and Mary die.*”

The brilliance in this brief story lies in its simplicity. With every sketch of possibility, the reader fills in all detail from memory or experience. She gives us “a what and a what and a what,” and at the end, asks for the “How and Why.”

My students days are filled with whats. They tell me events, who did what, who broke up with whom, how crazy something is, or how amazing; they have these huge emotions and reactions to the whats in their lives, then either wallow and dwell or obsess for days, or they quickly move on to the next thing.

I’m not discounting the events in my students’ lives at all; without them there would be little to talk about besides the possibility of things happening at all. They have interesting, wonderful, and often tragic lives. But I often can’t get them to look at the

purpose or the meaning of the events that have transpired.

I think we anchor ourselves to what happens to us and around us. When we narrate our day to our friends or partners, we always start with the events that happened. If we are close to someone, or trust them enough to share, we tell them what it means to us, or how we feel, or how we are affected by the events of our day.

With my students, most won’t tell me until I ask. A few trust me now, and will come into my classroom to tell me about their lives and what they think or feel about it. That’s a start. Some are grateful I care, and soak up questions and conversation.

As often as possible, I try to get at their inner lives, since that is where their perspective lies.

We are two weeks from the end of the school year, and many are in a mad race to get things done. I find myself explaining the how and why of their choices and our assignments. Of course a significant factor of any assignment is a skill or type of knowledge I want them to practice using, and could often be done with a variety of readings or topics to write about.

A student, Caleb, asked me why we had to read a certain story and write a response to it in which he discussed metaphors. He told me the story “sucked,” and that he had no need for it

**“Listen to your broccoli,
and your broccoli will tell
you how to eat it.”**

--Mel Brooks

in the real world. I told him in the long run I didn’t care if he forgot this story, or never read it, or hated it, as long as he understood metaphor. “You can think the story is as stupid as you want, but tell me what a metaphor is, understand it and be able to use one, and we are good.”

So he sat down with me and we read part of the story and talked about metaphors. Caleb understood it. I even told him I’d let him off the hook for the written reflection if he came up with a metaphor every day and shared it with me.

When he came in to my classroom and said, “My mind is a prison when it should be a dancehall,” I knew he got it.



String Theory

Put a few pieces of string in a box. The longer the strings, the more likely they are to get tangled, and the more tangled they will become. Science proves this.

Swiss Cheese Universe

The other day I re-listened to an episode of Radiolab called “The (Multi) Universe(s).” The guest science expert explained his theory that there are an infinite number of universes in space, but we’ll probably never know another one because of how far apart they are. His theory uses swiss cheese as a metaphor for space, and it’s the only metaphor

that has made me able to wrap my head around the vastness of space and universes.. Space is expanding, he argues, and if you think of space as being the cheese, with the holes being each universe, then as the cheese is expanding, the holes, or universes, are moving farther apart.

This metaphor makes sense to me.

Waterfront Park, Saturday morning

By Allison Winningstad

Around 8:30 on Saturday morning, I pull on my running shorts and tank, pull my hair back into pigtails, slip on my Luna Sandals, and head out the door. Mike is on the road back from Pendleton where he spent the night in a dingy motel, too tired to complete the drive from Enterprise on the far side of the state. I have time to run before he gets home, and we go to the Farmers Market.

A few years ago when I trained for my first marathon, I ran on Saturdays with a group of people, most of whom were also preparing for their first big race. Now I like the time alone.

Today I even forgot my iPod, and while I ran I focused on the movements of my body: I paid attention to the swing of my arms, careful to not waste energy swinging them too much; I felt the rotation of my knees and hips, and checked for anything out of balance in my body; I listened to the sound of my feet hitting the ground-- you want to be light and easy, not slapping the ground hard. Over and over, I did a head to toe account of how my body worked during the run.

I passed some runners, and some passed me. I saw many go in the other direction. I'd heard part of the east side was closed, due to the rain-swollen Willamette, so I continued down toward south waterfront.

Several people glanced at my sandals; I gave up on running shoes last year after an IT-band injury

"...there was some kind of connection between the capacity to love and the capacity to love RUNNING. The engineering was certainly the same: both depended on loosening your grip on your own desires, putting aside what you wanted and appreciating what you've got, being patient and forgiving and undemanding... maybe we shouldn't be surprised that getting better at one could make you better at the other."

Christopher McDougall

and reading Christopher McDougall's book *Born to Run*. My feet feel stronger every week, and I had never before thought about how great the air feels on my toes.

I like to look at the faces of runners. Some look intently focused and might glance at you when they feel eyes on them. Some are chatty and happy, moving at a comfortable pace. Some ramrod straight skinny dudes run with an air of authority and furrowed brows. It's always the dudes. Women will run with extreme concentration and speed, but won't wrinkle their foreheads.

I stopped at the restroom at the base of the Hawthorne Bridge, which I am loathe to do, but the coffee after four miles meant I really had to pee and wouldn't make it the last mile.

A man about my age--kind of grungy looking, stringy hair, was waiting to use it too, and after an older woman exited and joined her husband, the man motioned to the restroom and said, "Ladies first. You're a mover and a shaker, and I got all day."

Park Life

This park changes all year-round: the two weeks of cherry blossoms; the full and naked trees; runners, bikers, walkers, all in various layers; the play and fun and trash and hype of people; the shouts from the beer garden at Oregon Brewers Festival; the lawn constantly being regrown after a festival; the wait for bridges to lift or lower; dogs, soda cans, cigarettes, people, bikes, rain, water...

