

What made you decide to pursue publication?

It's a funny story! I first found out about *Deliberations* somewhat randomly and somewhat illicitly.

I think it was some time around the start of my first-year spring semester that I embarked on one of my nightly escapades into the unexplored corridors of East Campus. So much of my fall semester was spent in my Gilbert-Addoms hermitage or within the dungeons of Lilly Library that I was determined to discover new places for studying, idling, and semi-frequent sleeping.

The sign said "Bivins Building" in a stately way. Tonight, I had prowled to the edge of East Campus, and saw a wide architecture I initially thought was a secret dormitory, like where the ghosts of past Duke alumni lived or something supernatural. I scampered to one of the front doors, expecting disappointment, but to my surprise and good fortune, it was unlocked!

Upon entering Bivins, there were no poltergeists to be seen. If anything, I was the phantom—I had stumbled into the empty offices of the Thompson Writing Program. Of course, at night, there was no one to greet me, besides the animated visage of the "Yelling Scholar"—the front cover of *Deliberations*. The writing studio had left a few copies of the journal out for perusal, and I eagerly grabbed last year's edition.

By the time I snuck out of Bivins (Apologies if I stirred any trouble!), I had read the entire journal, and it would stick in my mind for the next three months, until it was my own turn to submit a Writing 101 essay for potential publication, in the hopes that it too could find itself in the hands of a student on a lonely night.

Can you describe how you came to develop this writing project?

When Professor Spencer first assigned our Writing 101 class a personal essay, I confess to have felt blasé about the assignment. The personal essay was something I was deeply intimate with, having appeared consistently throughout my writing career, as English class projects, college application supplements, and now as my first real Writing 101 undertaking. But after writing so many personal essays across the years, the reservoir of anecdotes, witticisms, and poignant memories I would often siphon from felt empty. *What will I write about?* I pondered. Professor Spencer was helpful. He reminded us to avoid the sensational—the "conquering my fear of heights by jumping off a cliff" type of story. Great personal essays didn't need scandals or tense climaxes to be successful. Reading [*Crying in H-Mart*](#) by Michelle Zauner in class convinced me that much was true.

And so I decided to look at my life plainly, thinking familiarity would cultivate introspection. I began by sifting through my daily routine. What did I like about it? What did I hate? My meddlesome habit of doing schoolwork, which eventually became the linchpin of my essay, seemed to answer the latter question expertly. There was a thread I could further pursue, as I more or less decided to write a personal essay about why I hated writing personal essays

(among other things). If my essay flopped, at least I could say it was an experiment on meta-writing.

Describe the writing and research process that went into this article—what stands out for you about that process?

My writing habits are conventionally terrible. I love adverbs. I overcomplicate. I can't resist being loquacious. And if you dare give me the option of writing about anything, I tend to produce even more nonsense than usual. Writing this personal essay was hence a delicate task, a ballet instead of a waltz. I had to stay nimble on my feet, and deliberate too, or else the weight of my typical verbosity would threaten to squash any real substance I was trying to produce.

Accordingly, you'll notice my essay (if you know me) is comparatively short. I tried plumbing solid ideas to their natural conclusion, rather than reanimate them for a few more sentences or paragraphs. My essay is also firm, in the sense that main devices don't wander off too far. I wrote about one homework night during high school and molded the rest of my essay around that motif.

I think choosing to structuralize my essay this way gave it prosaic integrity, but I still faced the challenge of organizing my own thoughts. My bibliography is sparse, containing just one source (a poem by Robert Frost). Research for me was more about interrogating my past experiences, how I intuitively felt about them, and how I felt about them now. It consisted of liquidating my own native philosophy about productivity and conveying that to the reader. And though the final product is a nuanced snapshot of how I, perhaps as an unreliable narrator, think about things, it's possible to still present it in a way that is both compelling and logical.

What were the most challenging and/or your favorite aspects of the publishing process?

When I was learning to write in grade school, my mom, ever maternally shrewd, would proofread my papers. I usually sat beside her, fidgeting and wondering why my beautiful canvas of black ink was now spoiled by intense pencil marks and scribbles. English was not my mom's first language, yet she was a skilled grammarist, and knew a thing or two about proper syntax too. My mom was the first person to teach me to embrace the editing process, and I'm a better writer now because of it.

I'm also a better writer thanks to the staff of *Deliberations*. They were more patient with me than I'm with myself. The student editors who reviewed my submission were quick to notice the idiosyncrasies abundant in my article, helping me simplify esoteric language and awkward passages. Sheryl graced my essay with her expertise and assisted with the effort to reduce the pedanticism towards the end of my piece in lieu of more personal statements. She also helped me integrate Robert Frost's into my conclusion. Throughout the publishing process, I had struggled with introducing my interpretation of *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* in a way that was symmetric with the rest of the essay. The feedback I received was crucial towards this denouement, and subsequently my final product.

What do you hope the article does/how do you hope the article impacts readers?

As the first article to appear in a writing journal called *Deliberations*, I do hope my pieces coaxes some meaningful thought or discussion out of readers! At the very least, I hope readers can relate to the familiar doldrums of procrastination and find inspiration to treat their productivity differently: that there's nothing wrong delaying one's work sometimes. It can even be beneficial. At the same time, I hope readers understand that starting somewhere—anywhere—is our catalyst for *being*. As I look to stars from our little corner in Durham, on a rock spinning through the expansive corridors of space, I've realized what makes our seemingly subatomic lives so worthwhile and precious, is that we decide what matters. We create our own purpose.

So start your Spanish homework. Or not! You get to decide from whereupon a universe of possibility, what to begin.

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