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Autoethnography

### Nicole's Creed

Determining why you believe what you believe seems an easy enough task - at first. My immediate thought when I think about what I believe is tied to faith, since I was raised in the Catholic church, was baptized as a child, and have remained Catholic into my adult life. But I think it is easy to forget that our entire lives are built on belief. I believe that, when I get into my car to drive, it will work and not kill me. I believe (perhaps naively) that other drivers won't kill me, either. I believe that tofu is delicious, although my partner would vehemently disagree with me. I believe that up is up, and down is down, and I guess that's just because someone told me it was so. I'm struck by the contrast between knowing and believing, since the two ideas seem fairly tightly wound together. For example, I know that a particular shirt my partner loves is a greyish greenish blue. He is colorblind, however, and believes that it is purely grey. I say that I *know* and he *believes* because I see color at least closer to what is collectively agreed upon as color. But I digress.

Since my idea of belief is so closely tied with faith, I think that vein of thinking merits consideration. College is actually the first time in my life I have not gone to a private, nonsecular school. My preschool was Lutheran and both my K-8 and high school were Catholic (and yes, this is the first time in my life that I don't have a uniform). Now, if I want to take a theology class, I have to go out of my way to find time for it in my schedule, and there are no school masses that everyone attends together. Instead of being woken up for the early mass that my family has attended my whole life, I have to take myself to church if I want to go. This means I

don't necessarily go to church anymore, but it's not because I don't believe anymore; it just means I'm not very good at getting up early on Sundays.

With all of this background in the church, I've not really had much of a questioning phase where I wondered if God exists. It has always sort of been a given, which is something that I've never really given much thought to. I guess the time in my life where my belief was the weakest would be in high school, when a lot of my friends were less than reverent and (I mean this in the best way) pretty gay. Always at odds with the theology professors, these girls played bingo in church with boards based on phrases they assumed the priest would say. It was almost relieving when I made it into my school's chamber choir and got to sing during mass instead of sitting with the rest of the easily sidetracked congregation.

Coming to college made it a lot easier to embrace my faith, because I was starting a new life and was glad to turn to old and familiar things that reminded me of home. This seems a bit tangential at this point, but I guess what I'm getting at is that this is a huge part of my life and why? Because my parents raised me in it. I think so many beliefs people hold are there because their parents believe in them and teach them to their children. I don't have any tangible proof to say that God exists. My biggest foundations for this belief are my fear of the nothingness that death could potentially be, and the feeling I get when I hear something really cool in music - like a perfectly executed choral chord - or when I see something incredibly beautiful out in nature. Not exactly unshakeable proof, is it?

Outside of faith, I struggle to come up with other beliefs I hold. What are my core beliefs? Horrifically enough, I haven't given this a lot of thought. I guess I believe in love, which stems from closeness with my parents, a lot of loneliness, and that I am in a stable relationship

going on three years. I am lucky in that my parents are together, although sometimes I wonder if that's what is best for them. As the youngest child and the closest to both of them, I hear a lot about their relationship from both sides - and it's not exactly reassuring. But for better or worse, they're still together, and that tells me something about (if nothing else) commitment. I guess that means that half of what I believe "love" is, is commitment in and of itself. I don't think people are perfect, but I think that if you can find the level of imperfections that you can live with, you're halfway there. Connected to both Catholicism and love, I believe wholeheartedly in marriage. I've noticed that more traditional ideas of marriage and relationships can tend to be seen as old fashioned, and that more and more people are less interested in marriage as conventional. I'm not exactly sure why I believe so strongly in marriage, but I think it has something to do with my being raised seeing it as a sacrament - which means we're right back to religion.

The only other unshakeable, holy place I hold beliefs is, oddly enough, in the grammar system of the English language. Somehow, through years of instruction, practice, and focused interest, I believe wholeheartedly in my own mastery of punctuation and word choice, of style through formatting, of context and syntax. I'm not sure what this says about me, though I've been dubbed "the Gordon Ramsey of editing" by a dear friend who allowed me to rip one of her essays apart. Call me Dr. Frankenstein, but I could cut up and stitch back together the worst piece of writing you've ever seen and you'd have a good time reading it. Maybe this is why I was so adamantly against the slander that Jim Fingal was receiving in class. Perhaps I sensed a kindred, unyielding spirit just trying to do his job. I understand that fact-checking and editing are not the

same, but I feel that fact checking falls under the broad umbrella of editing and goes hand in hand with proofreading and reconstructing (which are more my speed).

So strong is this belief in my proficiency, and in the rules themselves, that one semester I made my very own crusade. A criminology professor, sick and tired of the over- and misuse of semicolons in the class's largest assignment, a semester-long group case study/research project/essay, forbade the further use of *my coveted semicolon*. Aghast, I crafted my defense, a beautifully worded email on my horror at her ruling, requesting leniency for my very special case. She acquiesced, the paper was saved, and not a single semicolon was out of place (though my group mates did try to ruin this for me). And, you may have noticed, I only used one semicolon in this entire paper, and it was used JUST RIGHT.

Where does this belief stem from? I can only assume it is because of the years of success I've had in writing, starting from a young age and cultivated until now. Never is there a major grievance against how I have punctuated and situated my pieces of writing. Occasionally my words get away from me and I try to do too much with them, but most critiques of my craft have less to do with structure and function and more to do with content, which is an area where I can and will allow comments. This may make me a stubborn bitch about some aspects of my writing, but I'll take that. In this belief, I create my own proof.

I'm not sure what this all says about me, or where I'm left in the sense of belief. I guess the big takeaways are that my partner's shirt is *greenish blueish grey*, *goddamn it*, I believe in God despite my stint in private school, and I play god with a paper to edit. Not a very good Catholic, now am I? And yet somehow, I believe that if I play my cards right, I may still end up in heaven.

Oh, and Jim Fingal was right, and justified, and to hell with stubborn authors (unless they're me).