

HOW ONE PERSON BECAME THIS PERSON A Mostly Complete Chronology and Oral History of WU-Slam and One of Its Member



The Complete History of Mikel 'Puzzle Piece' Snyder and Edison Theatre.

*“You were never a bystander in WU-SLam.
Not being a bystander was kind of your defining
feature.
You could do worse.”*
-Lauren Banka

PREFACE OR DISCLAIMER

I actually hate disclaiming pieces.

But actually, this book needs some explanation. This book came into existence after one faithful October night where I was asked to show some of my old work and the progression of who I was as a freshman and who I am now. This book came into existence because I spend a lot of time telling an overtly intricate story about chance, hard work, and a loving community. This book came into existence largely because I was bored and needed something to productively put my energy towards.

This book's title came from trying to explain this book. And the title does a great job of explaining it. This book is a mini archive. A collection of poems, anecdotes, and other insights into WU-SLam, Washington University's Premiere Spoken Word Poetry Group, from the perspective of a very odd character in its history. And the word odd does not begin to cover all the insanity that resulted from the series of premeditated accidents that occurred.

The book covers four years of information and poetry. Due to shoddy book keeping practices early on and the tendency to make on the fly edits, the text in the book represent only what was brought to the stage, not necessarily the actual product. However, this is as about a complete archive on all the poems that a single person competed with on a Washington University stage as you can get. If I really wanted, I probably could find all the pieces I've ever done on a WashU stage or all the pieces I've competed with, but this intersection seems nice. And this book is already threatening to be hella long. But here we go

BOOK 0: IN THE BEGINNING

It is hard to imagine a Washington University in St. Louis with a WU-SLam. Even just thinking about it raises questions and concerns and makes you wonder how we could have ever made it without it.

I speak of this story as the last of the old guard, one of the last to commune with the old gods. And when I speak of the old gods and old guard, I do not mean to venerate them. They were human. Oh, you can be damn well sure that they were human. But with this group there is a mythology about it and given everything, this group deserves the mythology.

WU-SLam has always been a ragtag bunch of misfits. The founders of the group were a business major, a theater major, and someone in the Interdisciplinary Program for Humanities. They were joined by a painter, a printmaker, a communication designer, an art history major, a pre-med, and another theater folk.

Being a ragtag bunch of misfits, we have also been appropriately tuned to certain issues, particularly the concept of diversity.

And as with every story, there is so much to tell and so much to do, so let us start with the simplest things and work our way backwards, let us talk about all of the strange and wonderful things that have happened and while.

And please excuse my ramblings.

I swear it'll all make sense

BOOK 1: THE ARCITECHTURE

The Lineage Spelled Out

Progenitor

(A Brief Word About The Context This Was Written In)

Before we can talk about WU-SLam, it is crucial we talk about what came before. That slam poetry was a trick to get people to listen to our poetry. That Marc Smith (so what?) founded this craft with arbitrary time limits and a hope that it grow and in Chicago 1987, little more than a quarter-century ago, the first poetry slam scene was founded.

This is a relatively new art form. It is important to understand this.

WU-SLam has taken inheritance from many places: Chicago, Providence, New York, St. Louis, Ann Arbor, and dozens more cities we learn to call friends.

It is important to understand this.

WU-SLam has just recently entered its fifth year of existence. We have existed a very short time in the history of the school, and have only be apart of the last fifth of poetry slam.

But with that almost-infancy comes an overwhelming amount of histories, of lessons learned, of inside jokes, of hopes, of aspirations, of idols, of hopes for a future.

Half a decade: we have already left a mark.

And this part is just context.



Prototypes (First Year)

There was a time when there was no performance poetry on campus. Our founding members of WU-SLAM consists of three poets who wished to bring poetry. Our founding members: Chris Kammerer, Aaron Samuels, Eric Rosenbaum came from different backgrounds and different styles of writing but had a simple vision and a simple hope: 4 monthly slams where the top two advance to a Grand Slam, whose winners who go onto represent the school at CUPSI.

During this time, the first every monthly slams were held. They culminated in the first ever Grand Slam, which the first major even to christen the DUC. To this day, the DUC still loves us and BD security is still skeptical that we will not fill the place up every time we host anything then.

The team went to CUPSI, and while they did not progress that far, they received the "Best of the Rest" award. The seeds of WU-SLAM were in place.

Founded by
Aaron Samuels, Chris Kammerer, and Eric
Rosenbaum

Joined by
Leah Nixon, Lucy Gellman, Lauren Banka, Kim
Frisch, Allison Reed, Dani Schuer, Celso White

Joined By
Naia Ferguson
Gerald Jackson

The 2009 CUPSI Team

Aaron Samuels, Chris Kammerer, Gerald Jackson,
Naia Ferguson
Wildcard/Alternate: Celso White
Coach: Eric Rosenbaum
Notable Accomplishments: Best of the Rest

Proof (Second Year)

This year of WU-Slam was a time for practices to be cementing and grow ever so slightly. The original group of eight became a group roughly the size of thirteen. Still reeling over the success of last year, WU-SLam entertained great popularity and publicity. The founding members had hopes for expansion and started building upwards.

Once again, the monthly slams were a success and led into a grand slam that continued a proud of tradition of packing out the venue.

With the team assembled, they ventured up north and fought valiantly. They managed to lose out in the semi finals by a small margin, but brought home experience pride and a burning passion to do better.

ENTERING CLASS, Fall 2009

Adam Segal

Ben Rahming

Brian White

Leah Bersanti

ENTERING CLASS, SPRING 2010

Fiona Sloan

The 2010 CUPSI TEAM

Aaron Samuels, Lauren Banka, Fiona Sloan, Lucy Gellman

Wildcard: Gerald Jackson

Coach: Brian White

Notable Accomplishments: Semi Finals

Progress (Third Year)

If there was a point in our histories where we could point and say defining year, this year would be it. Of course, when it comes to this group, every year is a defining in some way. But within this year, standards were set and what had spoken of had now been codified. The group had grown its ranks to 20.

Monthly slams were more packed than every before and this year brought two important changes to the WU-Slam

- The Introduction of Edison Theater and the 626 filled seats and over 1000 viewing online.
- The creation of the Spring Show, an avenue for non CUPSI team members to work on a collaborative project

With the all too appropriate Genesis Show in the works, the CUPSI team went harder than ever before resulting in taking second place. Morale had never been higher.

The summer came and went and alas so did the seniors.

In the background, the group started making roots in the adult scene, becoming a Poetry Slam Inc certified venue and sending a representative to WOWPS as well as NPS (where, as luck would have it they reached semi-final stage) and the first ever Pre-Orientation program.

ENTERING CLASS, FALL 2010
Mikkel Snyder, Gabriel Cralley
Patrick Hollinger (Freeman Word)
Tabia Yapp, Josh Aiken
Laura Beckman, Kawana Tharps
ENTERING CLASS, SPRING 2011
Ian Suiter

2011 WoWPS Rep: Lauren Banka

The 2011 CUPSI TEAM

Aaron Samuels, Naia Ferguson, Tabia Yapp, Josh Aiken

Wildcard: Gerald Jackson

Coach: Brian White

Notable Accomplishments: 2nd Place, Best Performance

The 2011 NPS TEAM

Members: Aaron Samuels, Lauren Banka

Kim Frisch, Patrick Hollinger

Guest Poet: Fiona Chamness

Notable Accomplishments: Semi Finals

The Third Executive Board

P: Lauren Banka

VP: Gerald Jackson

Admin: Leah Nixon

Human Resources: Adam Segal

Outreach: Lucy Gellman/Ben Rahming

Publicity: Kim Frisch

Special Programming: Aaron Samuels

Treasurer: Brian White

Power (Fourth Year)

The first year with the Old Guards, without the majority of its founders. The infrastructure had stayed and the inheritors to the group set to work.

This year proved that the passion that had sparked the revolution had turned up into straight conflagration. There was never a week without a gig, never a month without a slam, and once again we packed out Edison in a matter of minutes.

Another year at CUPSI. another Spring Show, another founding member leaving our ranks, but the group stayed stronger than ever and knew what it wanted to do.

ENTERING CLASS, FALL 2011

Sam Lai
Meredith Irvin
Bryan Baird
Jacqui Germain
Elliott Scheer
Tayler Geiger
Ricker Bailey
Cecilia Appleberry

ENTERING CLASS, SPRING 2012

Ben Tolkin
Maxine Wright
Rose McCarty
Greg DeRenzis

The Fourth Executive Board

P: Adam Segal

VP: Brian White/{Vacant}

Admin: Mikkel Snyder

Human Resources: Josh Aiken

Outreach: Kim Frisch/{Vacant}

Publicity: Gabriel Cralley

Special Programming: Tabia Yapp

Treasurer: Ian Suiter

2011 IWPS Rep: Aaron Samuels

2012 WoWPs Delegate: Meredith Irvin

The 2012 CUPSI TEAM

Patrick Hollinger, Lauren Banka, Jacqui Germain,

Bryan Baird

Wild Card: Sam Lai

Co-Coaches: Josh Aiken, Tabia Yapp

Guest Coach: Danez Smith

Notable Accomplishment: Group Piece Final

Showcase

The 2012 NPS TEAM

Coach: Patrick Hollinger

Meredith Irvin, Sam Lai, Adam Segal, Tayler

Geiger

Notable Accomplishments: Tayler Geiger on Finals'

Showcase

Pertinence (Fifth Year)

So here we are. The present day.

ENTERING CLASS, FALL 2012

Emily Alves

Karisa Tavassoli

Susan Lee

Erin Amato

Amie Smartt-Nelli

Caroline Grossman

Sarah Roth

ENTERING CLASS, SPRING 2013

Corban Swain

The Fifth Reign

Co-Presidents: Josh Aiken and Tabia Yapp

Admin: Elliott Scheer

Human Resources: Jacqui Germain

Outreach: Sam Lai

Publicity: Ricker Bailey

Special Programming: Tayler Geiger/{Vacant}

Treasurer: Adam Segal

*An Overview of the List of Teams and Poets Sent to
National Level Competition For Sake of Posterity,
Potential Resources, and Personal Sanity*

2012 IWPS Delegation: Lauren Banka (Rep),
Mikkel Snyder and Elliott Scheer (Storm Poets)

2013 WOWPS Rep: Jacqui Germain

The 2013 CUPSI Team

Corban Swain, Adam Segal, Mikkel Snyder,
Gabriel Cralley

Wildcard: Jacqui Germain

Coach: Elliott Scheer

Guest Coach: Tatyana Brown

Notable Accomplishment: A Legacy

BOOK 2: THE JOURNEY

As with any mythology, there are dozens of stories all interwoven together. This book deals with my own strange journey with the group. This was an odd ball adventure that was a product of a series of exceedingly strange circumstances.

Fall 2009

Year: Freshman

Major: Biomedical Engineering

Status: General Body Member

Here are the important things you need to know about my life before Washington University and the first two weeks there. I applied early decision. I applied because I fell in love with the biomedical engineering department. I was excited to go. I originally wanted to be part of the literary magazine, a drama production, and an a capella group. This changed quickly

All of this was quickly derailed when I couldn't find how out how to become a part of the editing board of the lit mag, and did not do too well on my auditions for the production or a capella group.

However, by random happenstance, I heard about this group that held weekly writing workshops. This would have been inconsequential if it weren't for the fact that the first two weeks of a biomedical engineer's schedule were utter hell and I really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really needed to write.

Seconds Inkings of Fall 2009 (I had missed the first one because of an audition) and with the prompt at hand and a very loud computer, I began to type.

And thus began the start of a very long journey that this book attempts to chronicle in as much completeness as is humanly possible. Slam signs up were the following week, and I said why the hell not. Almost didn't get to Slam, but as luck would have it, I got a taste of the game.

SEPTEMBER

ROUND 1

Storyteller

I know my words are brave enough, I'm just not
sure my voice is

I know my thoughts are strong enough, I'm just not
sure my hands are

I know my soul is fast enough, I'm just not sure my
heart is

And I have the ends, just not the means

And I lack skill, but I do not lack dreams

And I am lucky enough to know what I seek

But what's the point of having a story if no one can
hear it

But what's the point of having hope, if you can't
hold on

But what's the point of living, if you're just barely

I have my tales to tell

I have my fantasies to fulfill

I have my life to lead

Yet, this life is only one of a thousand

Yet, this one is flawed

This one is not under my total influence

As opposed to script, malleable to my every whim
Allowance in aptitude
Compensating for actuality

For to write is to imprint a piece of your soul to
paper
Immortalizing a fleeting chemical reaction
Giving evidence to what once existed

And every tale is a mystery
Even if you know what happens
Because you may not know how

When fragments replace numbers
Sentencing relocating symbolic letters
A line of text for every equation memorized

It's a balance of languages
Of the regional spoken
Of the universal law

The conventions of science
Coupled with the outlaws of semantics
Create something far more interesting

[[[And originality comes and goes
Like the tide ebbs and flows
Like the moon waxes and wanes

Sometimes they infinitely cliché
Other times they're paving the way

The path to a nook of the mind

Buried away because it wasn't needed
Hidden underneath years of experience
Uncovered by a spark of imagination

An inferno of thought burning faster than ever
Blitzing through the network of neurons in a
heartbeat
Finishing with only a single stroke

Rinse
And
Repeat]]]]

Given enough time, caffeine, and compulsion
I would tell you every story floating around
Bouncing down from my brain stem to my digit

To the point where fiction couldn't be as unreal as
fact
Where even the chimerical visions I've built up in
my head could no longer compare to reality
Where even the most mundane aspect could white
wash the most vivid

And it's when you stop trying to surpass the
veracity of life
And start trying to compliment it
When you reach the zenith of stories

These are strange times to reaffirm one's conviction

In the beginning, before the end has even began
calling
And in truth, all the things I want converge to one
word

So I have become an engineer of realities
A weaver of myth
A creator of lore

Because I realize my words don't need a voice to be
heard
Because my thoughts don't need a hand to be
written
Because my soul doesn't need a heart to thrive

Because my life is what it is and that is all it should
ever be and I am, and will forever be
A storyteller
And a damn good one at that

ROUND 2

Worthless

I could never been held responsible for anything I
say during this hour
Whether it is the unnoticed pass at a girl I've had a
crush on (For how long now?)
Or a caustic comment directed at her current
infatuation (I might as well give up)

Influenced by caffeine and hormones
(And God knows what else)
Inspirations comes at the darkest of hours
(When I least want it, least need it, and never able
to write it down)

It was in a quite respite, that the pen became an
extension of my body, and ink living blood.
I am what I am: a contradiction, order found within
chaos.
An endlessly echoing question trying to resolve
myself

What do I want?
What do I need?

Damn it, I think love her
(Her being more than one person)
Wait, do I?
(I'm fairly certain)
Wait, who?
(I'm still working on that)
Wait, why?
(This is one too many inquiries right now)
Wait, when did even this happen?
(That one I know)

It's all incoherent, nonlinear and all I'm doing is
babbling nonsense

Who am I?
(Because I never know)
What am I?
(A fucking great existentialist apparently)

Of course I have feelings
For her (she probably doesn't)
And her (she's probably taken)

And her (she probably can't)

They would come to like me as they came to know
me

(As well as you can get to know someone like me)

But they would hate me for what I do (read
everything),

They would hate me for what I am (read nothing)

For who I am: a creep, a bastard who doesn't
deserve or need the time of day.

It's not like she cares now.

She

(Being more than one person) belongs to someone
else.

And even if they weren't there, I still wouldn't be
good enough.

No, there are a thousand lined up and it would be a
miracle for me to get any other place than last

And they'll keep me around 'cause I do have my
uses

But spare that, I'm nothing special

(Because time spent with me is time wasted, time
lost, or time better spent).

I just want a chance to prove behind this false
façade there is a real person.

That behind the weird, awkward, abrasive kid is a
sweetheart to nice for his own good

And too shy to prove otherwise

Who wants nothing more but the chance to show

He's worth more than a ride home, someone to talk
to, and a spare thought

To no longer be second to everyone, everything,
every time
Because he's not really that important

And you bet your ass, he want to take a swing at
every guy who makes a pass at her
To try and make things right
Except he isn't in a story, and even if he was, he
wouldn't be the hero.

Because he falls in love way too easily and he has
fallen a thousand times
And he'll fall more, harder each and every time.
And all he ask is that if it will stop stinging, stop
burning, stop killing him on the inside

As he guts his soul one more time, he wonders
Did he pick his poison or did they pick it for him?
Worthless or worthy, he has reached the edge of
oblivion.
He thinks there can't be that much left for him to
lose...

He can't be worthless.

He (read *I*, read *me*, read not some
hypothetical, but the flesh and blood incarnate
standing right before you, an audience that could
never truly understand the issue at hand)

He has to be worth something more to someone
I have to be worth something more to someone
Even if it's probably not her

(Her being more than one person)
(Except by more than one person, I just mean one)
(And by one, I just mean you)

~

The first piece was a remnant from high school that I had wanted to spit at some talent show for freshman that never really panned out. The second piece came from Inklings, probably. I'm almost positive I ended up getting last place in the slam. It was inconsequential in the long run of things. It did get me a taste of the game, and Ursa's was a good introductory venue for me. It was also an exceedingly important venue for me.

Now, certain things did become obvious because of this slam. Like the fact that my speech impediment was going to be a hindrance. Like the fact that being alone with that microphone stand with no one to save you is utterly terrifying. Like the fact that I need to bring better shit to the table.

The other thing of note that happened between that slam and the next were that P-Crew auditions happened. I had the flu at the time. This was unfortunate. They said I might be able to reschedule the audition, but there was no follow up and when I looked at the pieces I had in front of me, I felt like it was probably best I didn't press it.

And admittedly, it was probably for the best when I discovered that non P-Crew members got preference for repeat slamming.

OCTOBER

ROUND 1

E N G

TICK *TOCK*

This is the sound a pendulum makes
This is the sound the clock made
When the barkeep at my favorite haunt reluctantly
asked me to leave
'cause the English Majors
Who want to get wasted
Before they write
& the engineers who
Want to get wasted
After 8 hours of work
Don't like how I'm
Straddling space
And it wasn't that big of a deal
And it wasn't supposed to be
So I got up and
Begun to leave
But as I reached for my coat
I glanced around & decided
To make one final inquest
To attest something
Key
"Hey folks?
If you want to understand me
You have to understand that

I have a thing for clocks and pretty girls
I prefer integration to derivation
& if you don't appreciate calculus innuendo
What the hell is wrong with you?
But I'd know you would like
a mixed metaphor or two
That'd make even Freud proud
But it won't be a slip
So much as a flick of the wrist
'cause I have some sleight
I've been trying to fit in
But I'm not an elite
I'm just good at what I do
Misdirection on a mind wrecking proportion
Cause I have certain motion
When I'm spitting out words
Doubling down on the diverging
Of the letters I've written in the sand, man
E N G
Enigmatic and energetic
Are English and Engineering
No section between the two
Except the ones I make
Erasing the lines between
What is and what could be
Between science and science fiction
Cause I wanna build the Tower of Babel
Out of carbon chains and linguistics arrays
I wanna write to reason
I want to make a problem to solve a problem
I'm not sorry for disrupting your way.
You need to be for disrupting mine.
*Tick... * *Tock... *

ROUND 2

Disarray is my natural state

Linear logic pales in a chaotic realm
Which is why I see no reason to set A equal to B
Because it obvious to me
That A is already equivalent to Z
For the end is already beginning
Because the beginning hasn't ended
And it's everything in between the alpha and omega
That truly matters the most
For you can't coast on the high expectations
In a world unversed in meteorology,
The study of whether or not the nimbus can actually
touch the sky
Because keeping your head in the clouds is one
thing,
But getting your feet off the ground
Is another step to take on a winding road that we
call life
With one too many left turns
And never enough right ones
Because the wrong ones are infinitely more
interesting to take
On the will of a whim or the whim of a will
You throw caution to the wind like you would a pair
of dice
In a game with rules you made up
But an editor with a cruel sense of humor
Ripped it to shreds via audience participation
Yes we can change the world, if they would let us
change our minds
Control is an unnatural state of mine

And not something I'd prefer
Especially if the alternatives are chimerical notions
of
Delusions of grandeur
Not of the egotistical sort
But of the awe of the illusion of scale
That something we perceive to be big
The sun, the moon, the sea, the earth
Is a relative speck
In a relative vacuum
That may not be the only one
A statistical anomaly
A blip, a blooper
Or a decidedly determined choice
Of a determinedly decided particle
That's how it is
That's how it should be
Word plays with thoughts
Quid pro Quo
Tit for Tat
Nothing's lost in translation
Only in understanding
But that's just part of the fun
Of being a slightly irrational being
Because rationality doesn't always work
Disarray is my natural state

~

October was held in the Gargoyle, one of the coolest venues on campus. Had an undeniable underground, grunge type feel that made a really cool place to slam. The feature was Jared Paul who was an exceedingly intimidating poet. Much later on in life I would see him again in Chicago and

realize I was taller than him. Guy could thrash me in a fight and destroy me in a slam, but, spoilers, I would eventually earn my salt and my bones.

This set differed drastically from the September set largely in that it was almost certainly influenced by rap and hip hop, which up felt like the most natural way to do a slam poem. I actually did pretty good the second time. Got 5th place. Closest I got to getting the third round. Out of six people, but nonetheless, I knew had to keep trying.

And they kept letting me.

NOVEMBER

ROUND 1

This is a poem about sobriety
But not the type that society
Will talk to me
Honestly about
'Cause it is not the definition you're going to hear
on the streets
Or the one you're going read
If you go to the book of the meek
It those who practice spoken word
Who will truly understand the terms
The gravity of severity
Stories about politics and turning tricks
But I'm not an activist
Nor a pacifist
So much as I am a lyricist
A specialized word smith
A master in etymology

Brokering in thoughts so that you may see
It's already hard enough to be
I want to spit out truths that are universal to me
And I am sick and tired of having to
Take myself so seriously
What do you want from me
My soul has already spilled out
My blood is on the streets
Here is my beating heart
Just don't take what's left of my mind
I'm not a preacher of any kind
No revolutionary dead set
On redemption
This generation doesn't need another soldier
It needs a medic
In a war fought with words and emotion
I come bearing only
The tools for the cures I know best
Relaxation, not self deprivation
No medication, only vacation
A break from reality
So that all may see
The oceans, and not the seas
That the embrace of
Waters may wash us clean
Let us glean
From nature's primal fury
That even leviathans
Need fishes to survive and thrive
Thus society must understand
That our somber days
Must be met by playful nights

ROUND 2

In Romance

Nothing is heard
There is no exchanging of words
Only a sequence of verbs
Actions transmuted from thought
That need no description
So then why do I
Continually try
To appropriate
The dialogues of love and hate
Lyrics with loneliness
Dissonance with Disdain
Life is not a musical
There must be something wrong with my brain
If I'm still relying on the same
Notions that poems
Carry the same weight as roses
That serenades are serendipitous enough
To replace a simple hug
The transition from being nervous
To having the nerve
Is something that my body can't seem to do
When I just want to prove that
I think, I know, I'm sure, I have
Fallen for you
And all I have to do is act
For things to change
But in which way
Does destiny sway
In or out of my favor
Should I spend
What little grace I garnered
With the fickle mistress of fate
Who would deny me of you

Just as easily as she could grant my wish
Yet, am I enamored with you or your prospects
Your scintillating smile
Your endearing eyes
Your gentle touch
Am I any better
Than the sleaze balls who don't respect boundaries
Than the smooth talkers who bend nerves and break
hearts
I think, I know, I am, I sure
My words will endure
Far longer than their verbs
Because my words are the purest translation
Of my heart has
And what I'm willing to give to you

~

Oh good lord, these pieces. This was probably the worst slam out of the four I got to do as a freshman. That probably could be put up for debate, but good lord was this performance bad. I dropped the paper in the middle of my first poem and tried to do the rest off of paper only to have to reach back down and get the paper back. I got called out by the host for it. Roger Bonair-Agard is a dope ass poet. Also intimidating as fuck.

Let's ignore the fact that I desperately trying to find a style that fit and was still jumping around all over the place.

DECEMBER
ROUND 1

This is Part 1 of 'A Betting Man'

I do not make mistakes
I make choices
Resulting in a chorus
Of thousand resounding voices
It is not noise that echoes through a heart,
Empty ones have horrible acoustics
So I filled mine with passion and
Hopes of what will come instead
Of regret over things not done
I listen to a call of old to find
The static signal of serenity
Takes me place to place
Floating on a dream
Hanging on a thread
Woven from the best of intentions
A thin wire guiding the road to hell
Outlining the staircase to heaven
I have learned from myth to never look back
From my climb
So I cast my eyes to the sky and
Take one step at a time
On an endless expanse
That must be conquered
I do the best I can with I got
It's not always enough
But, I do not make mistakes
I make decisions
That have given me wisdom
Over the years that

They have been made
And I would not take any
Of them back
For they would remove me
From this path
That I have made
Lush with possibility
Cause trailblazer can't burn
My roads down
I met a gypsy along my way
Greedy and beady eye
Called herself Karma
And caught my gaze
Took a deck of tarot out
And motioned to play
So let me reiterate
This is and was my fate
I'm going to lose either way
But it will be one hell of a game
I say

ROUND 2

This is Part 2 of 'A Betting Man'

I was dealt a hand of destiny
Cards in the form of hopes and dreams
'Cause I knew how the game changed
When words were spoken
And people were broken
So she handed me a token
And told me to "Play the slots of life
The best I can"
I'm not a betting man
Still, I took a chance for you

Even though, Lady Luck was
Not with me that night
I didn't need Fate to guide my hand
I don't always make the correct call
But, my heart was in the right place
Facing Karma down
While the sun hid behind the peak
Red light shining from the heavens
To signify the blood I'd shed
A thin paper cut on my thumb
From glancing at my cards
Opposite of a woman
With many one too many names
She called herself Destiny
Happenstance and Finality
Told me I had the free will
To continue on her route
So I smiled politely and said
"No fucking way"
Flipped the cards and went all in
In a risk that had to be taken
Because actually
We were betting in a different currency
And I was dead bent on winning
The secrets to your love
She saw that she had won
But still gave me a constellation prize
My future for a willing surrender
A chance to see what lay ahead
Where I am supposed to be
So what I was supposed to do
It was a gamble, but one I'd take again
Unlike prisoners to hubris,

I happily folded and lost the easy way to you
Cause' it'd make you happy
Though, I don't think you were
Mine to bet in the first place
I knew I was going down
But I had to try at least

So here's the interesting thing about themed sets
and continuing pieces: they only really work when
the them is relatable, clearly defined, and you're
phenomenal at your craft. None of these things were
true for the three part sequence of a betting man.
But such is life and I left knowing I wanted to do
better.

Spring 2010

Year: Freshman

Major: Not Biomedical Engineering

Status: Heavily Involved General Body Member

Going into the next semester, I started
indoctrinating myself into the group. I began
bringing friends to Inklings. I began showing up to
everything barring P-Crew meetings because I was
never invited to one, but I saw CUPSI pieces when I
could and I tried my best to make myself useful.

This lead to things like becoming the score keeper
for the Grand Slam as well as managing the
livestream. Interesting notes: had never used a
spreadsheet before. Had never done live stream
before. I had a camera, a very poor cable set up

made with old food cartons and managed to record the damn thing.

This is the only lesson you have to learn: you can't be afraid to fail.

Summer 2010

Year: Rising Sophomore

Major: Undecided

Status: Writing

This was the summer I spent as a pen pal, part time student, and part time cashier at McDonald's. Lots of good came out of that summer, but more importantly, it was the first I took stock of what I wanted and why I wanted it.

Fall 2010

Year: Sophomore

Major: Systems Engineering

Minor: Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: P-Crew Member

At the start of the semester, I did a lot of shenanigans very quickly. In my academic work, I went about a rapid fire approach of getting majors and minors declared to help guide the choices I made it school. My Fiction II course was with the night school and interfered with Inklings, thus causing me to be late every time. However, this was actually a great thing that happened because I allowed myself to improvise and think quick on my feet and learned to just say the words than just say

them. I swear this stuff makes sense if you think about it.

Anyhow, when they announced slam signs up I was first on that list. And when they told me about this magical place called Dungeon... well, I wasn't about to say to no to getting help with my work. This is where I learned to adjust the microphone and hold a piece of paper correctly. Yay for fundamental skills.

SEPTEMBER
ROUND 1

Upon being asked

What I want to do with the rest of my life

When you were six
People would ask you, what do you want to do
when you grow up?
I bet you would respond honestly
I wanna be an astronaut
I wanna be a fire fighter
I wanna be a dancer
I bet you would respond innocently
I wanna be a princess
I wanna be a ninja
I wanna be president by the time I'm ten
And I bet you would respond illogically
I wanna be a dinosaur
I wanna be an alien
I wanna be everything
As time went on though,
We all learned realism
To some degree

And there was that critical moment
When we actually had to decide
What we wanted to do
And as we began factoring in
Distance, cost, and prestige
Into where we would
Spend the next four years
Picking a place where we would learn
The things we thought we wanted to learn
It meant more then
Than it did now
I'm nineteen
In the college of my choice
Studying facts and figures
Words and symbols
And when somebody asks me what I want to do
with the rest of my life

I can't respond innocently
So I respond honestly,
And a bit illogically instead
I wanna be a broker of thought
I wanna be a dealer of dreams
I wanna be a merchant of moments
I wanna be an architect of realities
I wanna be a romantic at heart
I wanna be a badass like in every film noir
I wanna be an enlisted
mad scientist for the US of A
And as these thoughts fly through my head
As I am dizzied by possibility
I look these people straight in the eye
And I tell them

I gonna be an engineer, ma'am
I gonna be a writer, sir
I wanna be something greater
Than I thought I could be
But more importantly, I wanna be me
So, when I'm older, not necessarily wiser
I wanna be that six year old
Wide and starry eyed
I wanna be that teenager in high school
Discovering what the world
Really was for the first time
I wanna be that college student
Who wants nothing more than
To create worlds and help his own
And finally
I wanna be an old man
Sitting on some front porch,
staring into the sunset
Asking my kid
What do you wanna be when you grow up?

Reflect

(Or Reflections Or Mirrors, The Piece Never Had a
Proper Title)

I am not fond of reflections
Wait, no
I'm not fond of mirrors
I like lakes and chrome walls
I like the refractive lights of fogs
I despise polished glass
This didactic crystals is forcing me to face
The imperfections that have endless base
The glint in mine own eye

The scars and scrawled lines of ink
Bags underneath these eyes
But I am fascinated with these mirrors
I am fascinated with these virtual images
And I am surrounded by them
No longer in the physical sense
But in the metaphorical one
Cause everyone I've ever met
Is either me or someone like me
And if they're not like me
They are someone I envy
And their perfections
Are my faults
But their faults
Aren't my perfection
'Cause mirrors aren't perfect
Mirrors only shows what's there
Mirrors are a special type of glass
Polished from the grains
Of immolated sands
That reflect light perfectly
So man uses them
To understand imperfection
I am too familiar with my imperfection
And everyday, I get up
And I look into these mirrors
These people who I call
Friend
Stranger
Enemy
Family
I call myself these things
And only now am I beginning to realize

That maybe people aren't mirrors
But lakes and chrome walls
Light refracted through fog
Distortions of, revisions of
Something else
Not like me
But still me
A more organic explanation
Behind my actual reflection
Of these markings that
Dig deeper into my skin
Than you would ever believe
But they have become obvious because
I have lived with mirrors
I have come to live with mirrors
Not as enemies
But as friends
For they remind me
Of what I am
But also of what I could be
And I'm not particularly fond of mirrors
But I think they are fond of me
And for some reason
I get it and
Despite the aggressively passive animosity
Between the whole of us
The jaded history that jaded mirrors
I'm probably more okay with mirrors than
I'd like to admit
Because I'm the mirrors' mirror too

Life is Like... (Extended Metaphor)

Let me tell you something:

Life is like Twister
You got to navigate around other people
To find your spot on the world
Without bringing everything
Down around you
And is only made more difficult
By pretty girls
Life is like Spades
It's a pay attention game
It's a trust your partner,
But play for yourself type game
You get all the books and bags,
Tips and tricks
And can still always lose to someone
Just a bit luckier
Life is like Monopoly
With a name contradictory to itself
That drags on and on
And it's tough to finish properly
But we play because we interact with others
Life is like blackjack
Sure, you can calculate the possibilities
But it doesn't guarantee you'll win
And it kind of takes a big part
Of the game out with it
Life is like Candyland
There's really only one direction to go
And it looks really pretty to traverse upon
Although, truth be told there
Really was no candy involved
Just the image of it
Life is like poker
You play the hand you're dealt

You wear your emotions out on your sleeve
And you win when you go
Against those emotional impulses
And its terminology occasionally
Get subverted to a bad pop song
Life is like Risk
We all go through it
We all want to be a better place,
More often than not Australia
We have to stockpile resources
And it isn't done in one sitting
Life is like sleight of hand
You always wonder how the magician,
Let's call him God
Waves his hand and manages to make your life that
much more easier or more difficult
But you go along with it anyways
Mainly because you have no choice
But life's not a board game
Life's not a deck of cards
Life doesn't have its rules printed
On some box on some shelf
Life isn't neat and ordered and can't be expected to
follow
The endless amount of logic
We try to impose on a fairly illogical being
So yeah, life is all these things
Maybe a bit more, maybe a bit less
But in life, you live by your own rules
In life, you can't always make sense
Of the systems and signals
Of the exact implications
Of your sensory perception

Of a touch, wink, smile, or stare
So, yeah
Life is like Twister
We don't choose who we fall on or for
Life is like Spades
Sometimes we gotta go Board or Boston
Life is like Monopoly
It's all about us optimizing outcomes
Life is like Blackjack
Sometimes we gotta double down
Life is like Candyland
Never as pretty as we imagined it
Life is like poker
Sometimes we gotta go for broke
Life is like Risk
We certainly take them
Life is like magic
We make it up as we go along
I guess what I want to say is life is 1%
a game, 99% of what we make it out to be
Life is awkward and rarely easy, but it does abide
by the one rule games always do
The only wrong move to make
Is not to make one at all
Or rather, games are like life in that way

~

Oh this slam. Oh how this slam changed everything.
This initiated by standard paradigm for slam
strategy that I still abide to for the vast majority of
the time: gain the trust of the audience (burner), use
that trust to do something cool (hammer), and give
them something to enjoy (cooler).

And when you tie for second with one of the old gods, well you can't help but feel good about that type of shit.

And this started a feeling of invincibility and the next few months were incredible. P-Crew auditions which I went in and said my piece (the account of my particular deliberation had been recounted to me in the simplest as "You were nominated, put on the list, everyone nodded and you were on P-Crew." More complex accounts involve things like "You didn't have a good track record with slam, but it was clear that you showed the work but I was getting ready to fight for you. Didn't need to." Or "I was getting a live feed update of the September and was rocking out when I heard you were killing it."

Kim Frisch, one of my closest friends in WU-SLam read me into the group. I keep the moleskin with her message close to me at all times.

This is when I picked up handling Dungeon. Saw Carvens Lissant, Sierra DeMulder, and Nate Marshall. This is the era where I ran WURkshop. This is the era where I attended every executive meeting more frequently than some of the exec members. It was a good semester all in all.

Spring 2011

Year: Sophomore

Major: Systems Engineering

Minor: Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: P-Crew Member, Honorary Exec Member

By Virtue of Being There

When winter break came around, I was faced with a family crisis and my mother, already a survivor for cancer for around 8 or 9 years at this point was at the end. Knowing that I couldn't just do nothing, I threw myself into my work. I threw myself in to everything. I was flying back home every other weekend and it was tolling, but I wasn't about to stop.

I couldn't bring myself to.

GRAND SLAM

Round 1

Journal

February 27, 2010

I met this girl who started everything

With a simple question

“Why do you want to be an engineer?”

May 24, 2017

Today, I am finally finished

With my formal education

And now, I'm ready to make a statement.

This is the eight year anniversary of when my dad took me to the steps of this school

And told me, being an engineer was hard. But I
would learn how to destroy to create
How to create to manipulate
Microscopic materials to influence the macroscopic
world

January 23, 2040

Legacies are built upon prior generations.
My family is reaching the point
Where I learned to call myself
A son of an engineer.
My uncle jokingly tells to me
That he always knew my dad
Was going to be a mad scientist,
But he had no idea that I
Would take pride in the fact
That I'm going to be one too

December 31, 2099

Flying cars and floating cities:
The promises that science fiction
Offered to the turn of the millennium
Finally came to fruition
at the turn of the century.
The science fiction we have now portends
something much greater

July 2, 2121

After a little less than a century,
We finally finished building
What we fondly call the Tower of Babel,
Wrought from carbon chains
and linguistic arrays:

It is a fully functional space elevator
Sired by brilliant minds from every culture.
My family is proud of this.
My family started this

June 19, 2192

They did it. They cured cancer
They have made the common cold uncommon at
worst
And STDs: standard, treatable diseases.
It's funny because I think they had to see
We could go to space
Before they could fix others.
We are working on different things
We are working towards the same thing.

November 15, 2211

We built this world from cells and stars
We waged war against nature
Battling Death in the form of disease
Binding our time with machines
As we fight God in the form of gravity
And the thing is we're not fighting with ourselves
anymore

October 2, 2222

My father finally gave me the notebook
That our family has kept for generations
I don't think they ever believed
It would make it to this time
Of engineered peace
I haven't read all the entries
All the stories that led up to this

But there's only one that really matters.
I turn to the first page

February 27, 2010

And I said
"Because one day
I am going to be part of something
So much bigger than me"

Lightning

"No one ever demonstrated,
so far as I am aware,
the non-existence of Zeus,
but he has few followers now."
-Arthur C. Clarke

I saw creation sought from the Grecian people.
My mother raised me so that I could imprison my
father and now
It's only fitting that I be imprisoned by you, the
children I live

Each hero I crafted died a fitting death, but not
before passing on
The divinity in their blood
To the generation that wrecked Mt. Olympus.

My grandchildren are the ones who wrote my
condemnation.

My grandchildren are the ones who distanced
themselves from their roots.

I live on in my tomb, what you call textbook, what
you call myth.

Your centuries are like minutes, but the time it takes
for lightning to strike
Is twice as long as an eternity.

I have existed only because of my believers.
I have existed because you thought I lived in the
clouds.

You saw me as a power, but now I'm a picture.
I used to permeated parchment and resound
throughout the Western World.
In this last century, my final minute
I live exclusively in texts, in databases, in
electronics.

But as lightning strikes, as the earth burns, as
humanity is shaken,
You forget that I once threw the bolt that scorned
the earth
That I had screwed humanity over a hundred times
before.

But mass media has removed the mysticism from
my name.
I no longer command the voice of man.
Science and I use to masquerade as one and the
same.
Now? I'm a forgotten relic.

Damn it all though, if my pantheon wasn't the
greatest.
We brought the golden age to the world.

And Chronos and Gaia, from their thrones, took it
all away

Because they aren't gods, so much as a forces
And they aren't forces, so much as human
constructs
Father Time and Mother Nature are so deeply
seated in your psyche you can't ignore them.
Even if you can ignore me.

So this is how a god dies. In centuries that feel like
minutes,
Until that final moment which lasts an agonizingly
longtime
As his worshipers forget.
This is how I die.
Passive as my worshipers choose not to remember
Passive as I can no longer influence the domain I
once owned

Pensive as I contemplate, whether or not if I ever
really existed
Pensive as I wonder, will I ever be a god again
All I know
is that I will die
the same way I lived...
Like a bolt of lightning

For the first time in Edison, with George Watsky,
who just went viral, hosting we could have done a
lot worse.

At the end of all of that, despite my best efforts, I got last place. Can't really complain, I had other things I had to worry about. This was a rough semester academically, but also a great one as one of the courses I ended up taking was Exposition, which became a great boon to my writing ability. I took over WUrkshop full time and began cranking out pieces like no one's business with Eric Rosenbaum and Wanda Savala. And I undertook the project that would irrevocably change WU-SLam: our inaugural pre-orientation program.

At this point in time, I was debating on whether or not I wanted to be an RA. But I wanted a certain path, I wanted summer plans I could count on. So, on my own, I meet with our faculty adviser (interesting note, we have a faculty adviser), got the papers signed and a team assembled.

I also went to CUPSI in Ann Arbor. I saw our team get to finals stage and become the second best team in the nation. I knew I wanted that more so than anything and so I began preparations.

Summer 2011

Year: Rising Junior

Major: Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: Rising VP of Administration

I had taken great effort to return to Washington University over the summer. In lieu of internships, I was taking more classes, so this summer became a two part sequence: one in Technical Writing and one in Intro to Psychology and Nanotechnological Principles. I spent the second half of the summer in a house that would be forever tied with my history. I went to a few NPS practices while they were still in St. Louis. I wanted so badly to be a part of the team, but it wasn't meant to be. Not yet anyways.

I caught up on my writing. I spent a lot of time editing. I spent more time preparing for the Pre-O and working on the fly and getting back up to snuff and man, life was different back then.

The story of the Pre-O belongs more to its students than it is mine, but you'll feel the ripples of it. Maybe I'll some apocryphal texts later, but such is life.

Fall 2011

Year: Junior

Major: Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: VP of Administration

So, in addition to have a lot of duties as VP of Admin and a being a full time dedicated systems engineer, I really wanted to make CUPSI this year. I literally planned things out in such a way that I could get to CUPSI that year. So, clearly my first and only choice was to try and achieve the impossible by taking on September and Ursa's one more time and try to qualify in the freshman venue.

WUrksshop had allowed me to see what I was up against, I knew it was going to be a great show.

SEPTEMBER

ROUND 1

Dyspraxia

In Kindergarten

I was diagnosed with Dyspraxia:

The difficulty developing motor control

Resulting in problems with articulation,

Handwriting and general hand-eye coordination

In Elementary School

My teachers took me aside and told me

“Mikkel, you need to be taken out of class to work with a speech pathologist

We understand you perfectly, but sometimes your friends don't.”

When you're eight, being told something like this
kind of forces you to reconsider...

EVERYTHING

It also means you have to be removed from your
friends to be asked questions like

"Can you pronounce difference between 'Arrive'
and 'Alive'?"

"There's a difference?"

"What about 'Thought' and 'Fought'?"

"What are you talking about?"

After three years of therapy I still made so many
mistakes

And In Middle School

Hepatitis, not Hephaestus, was husband of
Aphrodite and the Greek God of the Forge.

Studying was always more reproductive than
productive when done with a friend

And I was never sure if I really saying anything
right

So in High school

I became a writer instead

But not before learning the way I pronounced words

Lead people to believe that I was from

Boston, Texas, New York, Maine, Minnesota, or
Canada

Never once thinking

I didn't even know where my accent is from.

Only that I was a military brat from California.

Who really wanted to start loving the sound of his
own voice

In College

I was always going to be an engineer

Mathematics and symbolic logic were always my
calling

But high school taught me

I needed paper not just to document not just
physical phenomena

But emotional context

And I needed to learn more

Than a course in linguistics could teach

That sounds from the lips, teeth, tip of the tongue

Words come from parcels of meaning

Rules and structures govern them

In that one semester of really learning about
language

I learned that my condition

Had actually made me better

Had taught me a lesson

Had forced me to reconsider everything

In sixteen years I had gone from being an awkward
kid with dyspraxia

To being a lingual engineer

Picking words with pinpoint precision

Calculating the electricity necessary to spit fire

Creating the force required to vibrate the air

To convince the world

That the mathematical formula for my success

Was better expressed

As a word problem

Cameras

To the girl I met on the Quad last night:
I still have your camera.
I have no idea how I wound up with it in the first
place
But I have I tried looking for you and have been
wholly unsuccessful.

I was slightly drenched because of a slight drizzle
When I saw you across the courtyard taking a
picture
I'm not sure what compelled me to do this
But I came up to you and said
"I always thought cameras stole souls"

You took your eyes off your camera
And looked right through me
In that moment, I think we both knew
That I was never photogenic
While the camera loved you
Even if you didn't always love it

You said it was okay though
You told me souls couldn't be digitized
There were no amount of zeroes and ones
That could convert the ethereal to binary
That you couldn't store ether in circuit boards or
electricity

But I retorted that my mom taught me
That lightning was God's way of taking pictures
And I thought that was him taking a little back
Because he had given too much before

And a single moment could be enough
To steal just a little bit of our souls, of our love back
I wasn't sure I would want my soul back from those
moments
If it would mean I would take that love away

And as though He heard my declaration, the rain
started to stop
So we talked about the weather
And God, and faith, and fate
What it meant to be in tune with the seasons
And with one another
How beauty was really defined by personal
preference
But how anything that rose from the earth was
beautiful anyways

By the end of our thirty minute conversation
The rain had stopped and the sun had set
And you had managed to convince me
To have you
Take a picture of two of us

I developed a st-st-stutter
At the thought of the camera shutter's flutter
And if it sounds fake now I swear to God
It was real then
And all I am trying to do is
Recreate the magic
Of a moment that I wanted to last forever
Like a photographer trying to capture God's flash
Or a poet trying to use a thousand words
To describe a picture and always coming up short

You asked me to smile

You said that if we had to give up a piece of our
souls

We might as well put them together

To show how happy we were

In this one moment of fleeting human contact

And that was probably when you were called away
by a friend

And I was left with you camera.

A collective of a thousand pixilated souls

Of places and people you used to know

Still do know

And I want to know them through you too

Every time I turn this camera on

I see this picture.

I'm not sure if I'm stuck in the past.

Or just anticipating a future

That will never really develop

Einstein Talks to His Shadow

$E = mc^2$: I am distraught

That is what society chose to associate with my
name

I won the Nobel Prize for the photoelectric effect
Not partially derived equations revolving around
time

And quantifiable energy

I spent my entire life trying to
Shed light on the dark corners
Where God threw his dice during creation

I spent years in pursuit of something
So small that it could not be perceived by humans
At least not as I thought it would be
The photon and electron, dualistic in nature, strange
substances
Dabbling in the realm of matter and energy
Fluorescent fireworks flourishing around us
And we recognized it only as white light

Ignoring the spectrums hidden in the skips of
heartbeats
The growing darkness that it cast

I am not sorry that my attempts to demystify
The mechanics of life
Illuminated the way to destroy it
I am not sorry that our attempts to utilize zero point
energy
Led us to the nuclear bomb

I am not sorry that as a scientist
I foresaw all these things and helped prompt them
Rather than stop them

I traded my wings of pacifism
A pencil for mathematical proofs
For St. Michael's sword
A black ball point pen
To open the gates to hell

A closed letter to FDR
This was not only possible
It was essential.

This is the unfortunate byproduct of living in a time
of warfare
Tools become weapons
This is the sad price of progress
Anything we create must help and hinder
But I paid these debts in full.

I am not sorry for Manhattan
Hiroshima
Nagasaki

They weight heavy on my conscious still
And I assure you
Whatever problems you have with my ethics,
Mine are certainly greater
But I have struggled through them
And my conscience is clear

I am not sorry that I lead you to atomic theories
models
clocks
bombs
fallout

These things I helped create

Because I gave you light as a universal constant.
You all believe in light,
In seeing the good of this world.

So I won't ever apologize for giving you the means
to blot out the sun

~

Dyspraxia was 24/30 I did earlier that year.
Cameras was written over the summer. Einstein
talks to His Shadow was the first piece that proved
the concept that WUrkshop worked. It also
continued my beloved tradition for character work.

But the most important thing about this slam was
that I broke a cardinal rule. That is to say, I won.
Outright. And my future bash brother Elliott Scheer
got second. He's my year. Freshmen took third and
fourth.

Went to IWPS for the first time, that was kind cool.
Saw someone named Chris August win by going
sentimental and he inadvertently convinced me to
go to Beltway Slam when I got the chance.

We had Carlos Williams drop by for October,
Jamila Woods in November, and Aimee Le for
December. It was a good set and Aaron Samuels
was slated to host.

Spring 2012

Year: Junior

Major: Electrical Engineering, Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: VP of Administration,

There is not much to say about before the Grand Slam other than I wanted it badly.

GRAND SLAM

ROUND 1

Built on Industry

When you ask me what I am

You think you're asking for my race

But I will never answer that question exactly how
you would expect

First of all, you think I'm all human

Second of all, you're thinking with discretion

With Yes-or-No Questions

Like a statement like "Where are you from?" can be
deconstructed down to

Are you from around here?

Are you from the states?

Are you from California/or Washington/or

Virginia/or Maryland/or Missouri?

Like a statement like "What are you?" can be
deconstructed down to

Are you Asian/Are you American/Are you mixed?

The answer is yes to all of the above

But you still not asking the right questions

You never ask me what I think this country is made
of
You never ask me what I'm made of
The answers to those two questions are also the
same

Make no mistake
This country was built on ideals
But it wasn't it built on freedom
But industry and struggle and strife

And bare knuckles/and brawls/and breaks
And broken backs/and callous hands/and bleeding
hearts
And iron/and cold steel/and metal
And mettle/and determination /and grit
And sand/and glass/and stains/and taints
And tenacity/and travelers/and towns
And hope/ and hope/ and hope

I moved around a lot when I was a kid
I was built in a series of small towns by my parents,
two travelers with tenacity
In hopes that I would be something more

Don't ever call me just human
I'm more than that
My parents told me I was more than that
My parents made sure that I knew I was more than
that

I have seen two oceans from four continents
Have criss crossed across the United States

And learned to be a builder
And learned to build myself
And learned not to rely on labels
And convinced myself I am equal parts human and
scaffold

My parents taught me how to start building
But they never taught me to stop
So I never did
I'm the poster boy for industry in this country
Because I was built on industry
Built with transatlantic and transpacific
commodities
Built without the intention of giving up or giving in

Ask me what I am
And I will tell you
I am cross-continental railroads
I am transient from every edge of the globe
I am successive summation of every part that I ever
had in me
This nation's industry is within me
So call me a machine before you call anything else

ROUND 2

Batty

WHO AM I?

I'M THE BATMAN

BAT-man

Batman

You don't notice them
But I got these marks all over

You wanna know how I got these scars?

Well, this one time
I fell into this old well
But I didn't get them from the fall
I got them from the bats
A thousand flying little fuckers
Each rushing through the air
Each taking a nibble
A nibble
On my neck
That's how I got this scar

You wanna know how I got these scars?
See when I was a little kid
My parents took me to see a show
And we were walking home
When this guy comes up to us and he says
"GIVE ME ALL YOUR MONEY"
And my mother tucks me behind her back
My father tries to reason with him
And then "BANG! BANG!"
Those bullets ripped right them
And ripped right through my face
And that's how I got these scars

After that I was always afraid of people
But I was always more afraid of bats
So I decided to make everyone else afraid of them
too
You don't see that scar

Because these scars never get a chance to heal

Because the Joker is always asking *why so serious?*
And he is always, always, always, trying to make
me laugh

*AND I CAN'T
BECAUSE THAT'S NOT WHAT THE HERO IS
SUPPOSED TO DO
AND EVERYONE THINKS I KNOW HOW TO
KEEP CONTROL*

Because everyone trusts the man in the bat suit
And no one trusts the man in a purple suit

I have been like this for so long
Alfred and Commissioner Gordon don't even
remember that I have these scars anymore
They don't question me anymore
No one fucking questions me anymore

So I'm thinking that today
I'm going to let the Joker get away
Again and again and again
Because I need him because he needs me too
Because he wants someone to fight
And I need someone to blame

And I'm batty
I mean Batman
I mean *Bruce*
I mean
I live in a city where each villain
Reminds me of my own inner struggles

And I need a billion dollar industry with my last
name on it
To back me up

But you know what?
Arkham Asylum thanks me everyday
Gotham City thanks me everyday
When I put on this cowl
And make the villains cower
At sight of my bat signal up in the air

Because that's my cue
That's my sign to start this goddamn freak show
And.
Here.
We.
Go.

Deep voice now
Rough voice now

LET'S GO

~

The only thing of note and importance of this entire thing was the existence of Batty. A piece written in November developed from an oddball idea and a lot of patient, here was one of the most important pieces I could have ever written.

Despite as good of a show as I could have hoped, despite Batty being heralded as one of the best performances I had ever managed, I got last place.

Summer 2012

Year: Rising Senior

Major: Electrical Engineering, Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: Uncertain about Everything

What you need to understand about this particular summer is that it was a difficult one in terms of poetry. The previous hardships of the results of the Post-Season were weighing heavy on my conscience and I was utterly disheartened. This was something you may or may not be able to tell with what happened next.

But I told myself a great lie: that I was doing this for my craft. Eventually, I would tell myself this enough times to actually make it an honest to god truth, but till then it was a lie. And with that started the pre-season.

Knowing that slam had become too engrained in my life for me to ignore it, I set out with the intention of becoming better, because honest to god, I really wanted to get better. The exact motivation behind my development is up for discussion.

But the following happened:

I became friends with the Beltway Slammaster, Sarah Lawson.

I became part of the SpitDat family by frequenting their open mic particular Drew Law and Pages

Martin, as well Drew Anderson and Dwayne, the Crotchet King. This part is crucial.

I sent a random facebook message to a poet I had never met before because of her Harley Quinn piece. This is the most important thing to me because we would become rivals.

I competed in the Beltway Newbie Slam, got 5th place. Probably could have won if I switched the order of pieces. But I had to redeem myself with Batty before I could leave happy and move on. Of course, that wouldn't be the last time I perform the piece competitively or at all, but it had to be done to make way for something better.

Even though I wasn't on the NPS team, I did drag myself down there to enjoy the scenery and the poetry and learn about being a slam master, however short my tenure would be. I saw a lot of really cool things from other teams and did Batty in the one venue it would always be appreciated at and went along on my way. I'm still getting recognition for the performance.

But now I had so much to prove and so much want in my knuckles.

It happens when you see so much dope poetry.

Fall 2012

Year: Senior

Major: Electrical Engineering, Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: Slammaster, Consultant, Employed

Going into the fall season, I was in a strange position. I was a senior. I was an academically strained senior. I was an academically strained senior in search of a job. I was also on top of my game and craft and prep and still ready to wreck havoc

As much as I love Ursa's, I also knew it was the place where I earn my bones. It was not the place where I would be happy winning and for once I'd love to perform for a feature. Despite knowing full well that I could become ready exceedingly quickly, I forced myself to see who the features. Having preveiled (that is to say entirely open to everyone) information, I knew that one of my favorite poets, Michael Lee, wanted to come in. Future knowledge and detail clarification made it clear that Michael Lee and Sam Cook were coming in December.

Given that, I resigned myself to waiting till December.

For the first time in four years, I found myself prepping the poets and score keeping for September. Of course I really wanted to host, but my skills were better put elsewhere. Of course I couldn't be too upset. I found that I would be competing in IWPS.

IWPS was an entirely eye opening experience and I knew exactly what I needed to do to be better.

And by the time that slam came, between seeing Adam Segal and Gabriel Cralley qualify and Franny Choi and Storm Thomas feature, I wanted to fight so badly.

Prepped multiple sets, got a lot of work done on the preliminary gambit when I got wind of a venue change. And just like that, there were two pieces that were perfect for the Gargoyle. Then there was the fact I was the only guy in the slam, although I'm not sure how that worked out when I drew the B-Slot...

DECEMBER
ROUND 1

Records

My old studio, I mean, my old school
Called me up, told me they had something that
belonged to me
So I walked into empty hallways,
Listening for the solemn echoes of footsteps
Of a past I never knew I had forgotten

I was led to a back room and left alone with
A mix table *whistles* and two vinyl records
One labeled samples, one labeled commentary
And with a *click* switch of a needle's pinprick
A pair of headsets took me back to time I knew I
would always remember

A-rih-a-rih-ahh

A-rih-a-rih-ahh

A-rih-a-rih

*I see you've were diagnosed with a speech
impediment in the second grade
You have trouble with ce-ce-ce-certain so-so-sounds*

click *click*

What they meant to say
Is that after so many years of speech therapy
They still couldn't understand me
And I should have n-n-n-known better by
n-n-n-now

click *click*

Say it again

Ri-ip

Say it again

Re-ip

Say it again

I know you can say these things if you try kid

You just need to

Slow

Down
You think faster than you speak
And your mouth can't keep up
You don't have laser pointer precision
And your thoughts aren't even on a compact disk
click* *click

They taught me tricks to combat this
Change the curvature of chords
But-work-ing-in-half-time-was-the-only-way-to-get
-the-cho-rus-to-sound-
click

right

I feel allllive
I will arrrrrive

Ri-ip

Late to class, they couldn't hold me after hours

I feel alllive
I will arrrrrive

Reh-

At home, I'd check to make sure my jaw didn't
unhinge

I f-f-f-ffought

Ri-ip

With myself and my speech therapist constantly

I th-th-th-thought

Reh

Saying it a thousand times would be enough

I f-f-f-ffought

Ri-ip

Against this idea I wasn't speaking correctly

Good. Just keep practicing.

A-riiih

I th-th-thought

click

This is one of the worst thing you could put a kid
through
You can understand me just fine
I'm done being told dyspraxia is playing double
dutch with my tongue

click

(Take off headsets)
Off the record

The only difference between my record scratches
and my stutter
Is that I taught myself how to do one and stop the
other

Even with a thick tongue I can make it needle point
sharp
Against white vinyl called tooth enamel with a
megaphone made from my lips

I won't forget these records and what they mean
Won't stop being thankful for how I still able to
reroute the tired treads
In all of my old tracks to make something worth
listening to
So don't tell me my scr-scr-scratched throat is
anything but
a reminder of how I learned to love the sound of my
own voice

ROUND 2

Related Rates

Headline: Suicide kills more Americans than Car Crashes

As an engineer and writer
The first thing that comes to mind
Is not to ask for the actual numbers
But a specific percentage
Namely how many of those car accidents
Were entirely intentional
People who woke up one day and thought to
themselves
My metal coffin should be one I already know will
be comfortable

I continue reading to find bold print
Over the last decade suicide rates has risen 15%,
while car crashes dropped by a quarter

I love how the media mystifies the mathematics
Playing off the fact the most people won't put in the
extra effort to convert quarter to 25%
25% to we are better at making a car safer
Than convincing someone there is a life worth
living
I refuse to calculate the aggregate of lives lost over
the past ten years
It'd lead to me estimates the number of families and
friends
Affected by so called preventable deaths

Footnote: The US' preventable death rate is higher than France's and the U.K.'s

Footnote: Scientists are actually imploring the government to start intervening on other preventable deaths than car crashes, namely suicide

Footnote: Nowhere in this article does it remind the reader what preventable death really means

Definition: There are lives that could have still been with us

Like there was something we could have done

Like there was something we should have done

To stop this

And it's terrifying that there are times where I can still let myself believe that

That death of 36,909 is more statistic than tragedy

That I think I can do more good making a safer car

Than I could talking to people and trying to help them

Back home, around local high schools I see

carefully placed wrecked cars on pristine lawns

A sign to drive sober, drive safe

One more reminder how many lives car crashes take in America

Four times between my junior and senior year

I attended a two hour seminar on the dangers of drunk driving

Our education on suicide was a forty five minute lecture and work sheet

I hope that changes now, but just in case

I am building a shadow gallery to showcase all the
different types of gallows we can make
Tying a hangman's noose
This is what the bullied where around their necks
Emptying a bottle of pills
This is the last meal of the lonely
Plant a smoking gun
It was the only boy who would kiss her
I'll leave the wrecked car
It will send two message now

Have the headlines read:
Some of these deaths are preventable

ROUND 3

Paroxysm (The Victim)

It's a fucked up thing to want to be fucked up
It's one of those soft spoken thing among creative
types
Like
What's your defect?
There are only two type of artists people remember:
the starving and the tortured
I mean, when was the last you heard anything
happy?

My greatest fear is that I could be so much greater
If I forsook everything and everyone
I know of a few ways
To create an emptiness in my psyche
Permanently damage myself in some way

Rip a hole in my soul
Stitch myself back to together with barbed wire

And it's a problem to want a problem
But not in the ways you would think
I have never once called myself victim
Not even to circumstance
I have led a good life
I have had everything I could have ever asked for
And then some

I've also seen people hurt
I've seen people hurt themselves
I have seen the best and the worst parts
Of this world
Of this culture

And I can tell you this much
Pain is not supposed to be amusing
Pain is not supposed to be a muse

So here I stand
Ready to celebrate all the reasons
That make life worth living

Because
If I am a victim
It's too my own demons
Brimstone voices telling me to become
The monophobic, the alcoholic
The misanthropic, the addicted
To give in to
The burning desire to self-destruct

Just to have something beautiful left in the fiery
wake

And my art comes from talking back
The fights that I have within
The days where I wake up and say
No
I will not carve victim into my left forearm to prove
a point
But I will write ally onto my right
Make my back into a shield
Make my shoulders as comfortable as possible
It's not about being a foundation
It's about being where they need you

My passion comes from helping other people fight
their battles
Standing by them in a world that's begging them to
break
Protecting them when I can
And help them heal when I can not

I build people
I build people up too
I rebuild people to
I don't ever allow myself to break

It's a fucked up thing to want to be fucked up
To want scars on your skin
And holes in your souls
To envy those
Who do not wish to be envied at all

We all are capable of making something beautiful
But don't you dare hurt yourself
Or anyone else
To do so

~

Funny story about this slam, going into the last round I thought there was such a little possibility for me to qualify that I was just glad that I got to the third round. Due to a time penalty of all things, I did manage to qualify.

Records was written shortly after IWPS. Related Rates was written over fall break at a coffee shop waiting on a bus. Victim was a challenge to write a poem about a word that did not describe me. They are important pieces.

And in that slam, I became good friends with our hosts, which would later prove helpful to me personally.

Other interesting things of note that happened this semester: it was the first time in our history where we had 32 individual people compete. And we were pressed for slots.

The week after the slam. I could get a job offer and then promptly accepted the damn thing.

In the words of one of my best friends, Brooke Husic

“and will know that you cannot fail: and you will know you cannot fail::”

Spring 2013

Year: Senior

Major: Electrical Engineering, Systems Engineering

Minor: Robotics, Creative Writing, Linguistics

Status: Slammaster, Consultant, Mentor.

Employed, and Writing a Swan Song

I have neglected to talk about Winter breaks for the past few sections, but this one bars particular mention as, much like my sophomore year, the tie I caused in my slam only allowed for one wildcard slot. This bars mentions for a few particular reasons.

1. At this point, this would be my third grand slam. For the four other seniors, it would be there second. For the other four competitors, it would be their first grand slam. The other of the Three Musketeers had sac'ed in one Grand Slam before.
2. The top two candidates for the Grand Slam were two of the best poets I had seen.
3. I thought myself as a damn good coach.

However a quick chat with Josh Aiken strengthened my resolve and went onto figuring the set list.

At this point in time, I had performed 21 unique poems on a Washington University Stage. I had prided myself on having never repeated a piece. And I was on track on never repeating a piece. Now this wouldn't be a problem if I hadn't stumbled upon what would be the piece I leave the school behind with: Records. But the following was said to

me by Elliott Scheer. “It is thematically appropriate to repeat Records.”

Furthermore, this marked the first time I met my rival, Lauren Bullock from UNC-Chapel hill and the last time I would my SpitDat fam. I gave them something good to remember me by.

Jamila Woods was slated to come back and give us concert with Owen Hill in their new band Milo and Otis.

I spent an exorbitant amount of time working on my pieces. With Records being the first, and only I would repeat on stage and being the first I would barring extraordinary circumstances, that left me with two slots.

I spent weeks in advanced working with Elliott on our pieces and by the time actual SlamPrep started, we were already memorized and blocked and lethal and we wanted to help.

The time went quickly enough and the day of reckoning was upon the lot of us. And when I drew my slot, I had the oddest déjà vu ever, I really did...

GRAND Records

My old studio, I mean, my old school
Called me up, told me they had something that
belonged to me
So I walked into empty hallways,

Listening for the solemn echoes of footsteps
Of a past I never knew I had forgotten
I was led to a back room and left alone with
A mix table *whistles* and two vinyl records
One labeled samples, one labeled commentary
And with a *click* switch of a needle's pinprick
A pair of headsets took me back to time I knew I
would always remember

A-rih-a-rih-ahh

A-rih-a-rih-ahh

A-rih-a-rih

*I see you've were diagnosed with a speech
impediment in the second grade
You have trouble with ce-ce-ce-certain so-so-sounds*

click *click*

What they meant to say
Is that after so many years of speech therapy
They still couldn't understand me
And I should have n-n-n-known better by
n-n-n-now

click *click*

Say it again

Ri-ip

Say it again

Re-ip

Say it again

I know you can say these things if you try kid

You just need to

Slow
Down
You think faster than you speak
And your mouth can't keep up
You don't have laser pointer precision
And your thoughts aren't even on a compact disk
click* *click

They taught me tricks to combat this
Change the curvature of chords
But-work-ing-in-half-time-was-the-only-way-to-get
-the-cho-rus-to-sound-

click

right

I feel alllllive
I will arrrrrive

Ri-ip

Late to class, they couldn't hold me after hours

I feel alllive
I will arrrrrive

Reh-

At home, I'd check to make sure my jaw didn't
unhinge

I f-f-f-ffought

Ri-ip

With myself and my speech therapist constantly

I th-th-th-thought

Reh

Saying it a thousand times would be enough

I f-f-f-ffought

Ri-ip

Against this idea I wasn't speaking correctly

Good. Just keep practicing.

A-riiih

I th-th-thought

click

This is one of the worst thing you could put a kid
through
You can understand me just fine
I'm done being told dyspraxia is playing double
dutch with my tongue

click

(Take off headsets)

Off the record

The only difference between my record scratches
and my stutter
Is that I taught myself how to do one and stop the
other

Even with a thick tongue I can make it needle point
sharp

Against white vinyl called tooth enamel with a
megaphone made from my lips

I won't forget these re-re-records and what they
mean

Won't stop being thankful for the fact that I'm still
able to reroute the tired treads

In all of my old tracks to make something worth
listening to

So don't tell me my scr-scr-scratched throat is
anything but

a reminder of how I learned to love the sound of my
own voice

Beside Reconciliations

*(An Intertextual Narrative
on Memento Mori)*

I do not know if you all believe in God
But I believe him a careful mechanic
He built this world bit by bit
And spends an incredible amount of effort
To make sure are all these moving parts keep
moving

Kind of like my parents

My father was an engineer, a craftsman with steady
hands
Spent his days building
My mother was a doctor, a pediatrician with healing
hands
Spent her days taking care of children

Both spent their nights taking care of me and my
brother
And throughout all of the moving
I always appreciated the incredible amount of effort
They put into making sure that no matter where we
moved
Some things stayed the same

The things I'm most thankful for
Seems oddly trivial
Never being more than thirty minutes away from a
church or a hospital

I learned not to call these places of life or places of
death
But places of transitions
Where the dead relearn how to breathe and the
living come to rest their heads

Ironic: These places of change were the only thing
that stayed constant
Long after we stopped moving
When my mother was diagnosed with small cell
lung cancer
Prognosis: one year
We settled down so she could become a full time
patient
Through her struggle I learned the true meaning of
patience
Watching her fight for her life a day at a time
While my dad's steady hands rested on my shoulder

What time my family did not spend in churches
praying
We spent in hospital waiting rooms where I would
overhear stray comments
Conversation where someone would say that sterile
rooms scare them
Would speak of thin needle and sharp scalpel
digging into human skin
Of how this type of place is unnatural

If I hear such complaints now, I retort
That sterile rooms saved my mother
That thin needle and sharp scalpel helped a team of
doctors surgically extract

Nine years no one knew my mother had in her

I grew up believing that doctors learned modern
medicine bit by bit

Careful mechanics of the human body

They spend an incredible amount of effort into
making sure the human soul still works

When confronted about God's place in modern
medicine

I give both sides the same response

You need not believe in miracles

But my mother was saved by a drug that affected
less than two percent of the world population

She was a statistical anomaly

A byproduct of her faith in God

And modern medicine

So when my friends ask me why I'm so willing to
take the first job offered

To move up north

Start life as a programmer in the healthcare industry

I tell them

This move will bring me

Closer to my mother

Closer to my father

Closer to my God

To help keep all these parts moving

In the only way my parents taught me how

With patience and steady, healing hands

#FourYearsOfEducationInThreeMinutes

When asked about my time here

I always start out the same way

It was: A premeditated accident

Me: Fimbulwinter fumbling my way through the fall

Me: Orpheus-climbing my way back to the living in the spring time

In the spring time, I learned a lot about quantum mechanics and relativity

That textbooks simplify the multifaceted rules of physics into metal springs

That self-symmetry is not a descriptive property of the universe

But a prescriptive model

And we have no problem simplifying our language either

This is why we fall

Why we fall down

Why we fall for tricks

Why we fall in love

Why I fell down the staircase at Brookings

And on my climb up

Saw comets fall from the sky

And fell for the crescent smile of a beautiful woman underneath a crescent moon

When I think back to that night

I nurse that bump on my head and say

The reasons I came here are certainly not same
reasons I chose to stay

I think back to what a friend said,

“There are people who come to this school to prove
that they’re smart
And people who come here to learn.
I’ve always respected you because I know you came
here to learn.”

And I have learned
That you never plan more than a day ahead
You take all the free advice you can
When an opportunity presents itself you damn well
take it
You can’t be afraid to ask for help
Because shit happens
But it happens for a reason
You just got to believe that these things happen for
a reason
Forgot the what-if’s or could-have-been’s
And know your own truth

This school is proof of my flashbulb memory
Every story, a picture, clear as day
It just happened yesterday
Just last week...
Last month...
Last year?
Man, I must be getting older

Man

I can't be that old
I'm six at heart
The only difference between me then
And me now
Is that I now know that
The mechanics behind bubble blowing is better
expressed as a partial differential equation

And after four years
I still don't understand relativity
But quantum mechanics never made more sense
The certainty in being uncertain
Being okay being in-between

So against all the impossible odds
Let me quantum tunnel your hands next to my heart
Coax it back to sinus rhythm if it ever stops beating
Listen: do you hear a heartbeat?
Listen: do you hear the words?
Listen: do you want to know how I describe our
time here?

Well
If you ask me how we got here
I do not know

If you ask me where we're going
I do not know

But if you ask me what we did
We do this
And we do it well

~

I'd never done a piece about my mother on stage, so I needed to change that before I left...

Funny story about this slam, I thought I was mathematically eliminated by the time I got to the third round so I said fuck it. I didn't announce my speculation that I was mathematically eliminated. I did modify the beginning to sound like *"Okay, so fuck the time. Fuck the score. I want to say thank you. I have the spent the better part of the last three years just trying to get here and I'm here and I want to say thank you for the gift of just being here and getting to do one last poem. Best graduation gift, so..."*

Yes, I pulled that move from Chris August. But damnit, I earned the right to do something like that.

I did allow myself to fall to the ground after the scores were announced that I managed to get third. Three was my arc number that number. It was my third Grand Slam and I 3 three microphones on stage [2 for Records, 1 on my shirt], the C slot. Getting third place was just really poetic. Considering that I managed to do that I won the slam.

Look at my surprise when I get in third place. There's a video of me collapsing after the results.

I finally turned on my phone to see three texts. I'll show two here, but the last one is important for narrative purpose.

"Fuck the score" indeed. Damn proud of what you showed up there tonight.

-Bryan Baird

"I am so proud of you. You have put in so much over the years."

-Aaron Samuels

And so I went home for fall break and did Bedside Reconciliations as a going away piece. Make sure they knew I planning to do a lot of good with my hands and words.

And then we went to New York, coached by the amazing Tatyana Brown.. Sam Cook had spread rumors about my capabilities as a poet. And so we made friends and so this oral history was composited and passed on in the strangest form of inheritance.

I saw Lauren Bullock on final's stage and in the moment I knew I wanted to play this game more than I wanted to do anything else.

And I finished writing a long ass manuscript. Not exactly to the caliber that I hoped, but it covers everything and that's something in an off itself.

I hope it's enough to give hope to the people who come next.

And I hope it gives you something to fight for.

"I've watched you go from the dude who rocked the dress shirts and fedoras on stage and consistently come up short to the inspiring, capable and talented poet and figure you are now. Now you carry on the legacy we left you straight to cupsi. I couldn't be more proud."

-Gerald Jackson

