THERE ARE SOME THINGS I WILL ONLY ADDRESS IN FICTION

The lights come on, bright and hot. By lights I mean the computer monitor staring me down, becoming the two-way mirror, the crappy folding chair and the bare, cinder block walls. I have created an interrogator to sit across from me in a rumpled suit, elbows on the table top. He is on the other side of the two-way mirror, a thumb in my ribs forcing me forward. The cold room is quiet except for the whir of a tape recorder, my heart beat. This is like pulling teeth, pulling my own teeth. And don't forget: eyewitnesses are unreliable.

Ask any defense attorney at the right time. Or a moment later, the prosecutor.

You are confronted. A life is riding on you and your answers. You must construct the story, bones and meat. To tell the story, maybe you fib and flub some facts to make it better, to shine the bright, hot light so the reader only sees what you show. You've been coached through the years. That is not how I talk. Even in an autobiography the author gets in the way of the story, has to omit things, make it better.

BABY'S FIRST CAR WRECK

I was so stoned. I was stoned. I was drivin' back home last night and I was eatin' right. And then all of a sudden, right at Court 'n' 64, this lady turns out right in front of me. Naw, I'd dropped Adam off already. I wasn't even lookin' though, I don't know what I was doin', but I looked up and said, Fuck, I'm gonna get in a wreck. And then I totally blacked out. I must've hit my head on the ceiling er somethin'. Hell no I wasn't wearin' my seatbelt. Anyways, I came to down in the passenger side feet place area or whatever, but I still had my sandwich in my hand. And, I was able to rum, to take a left in the intersection and park. The car was totaled. But I was totally relaxed. Yeah, I knew it wasn't my fault cuz the old lady just pulled out right in front of me and I blasted 'er. I gave the cops my information and sat down. I kept on thinkin' there was something on my face. I got kinda paranoid, you know, sittin' next to the cop and touchin' my face over and over. But nothin' was there, I thought it was blood or it felt like it anyway. I asked the cop if I could get my food and keep eatin'. He didn't mind. So I sat there and ate my sandwich, all high, right next to the cop and waited for my parents.

That is not how I talk. Even in an autobiography the author gets in the way of the story, has to omit things, make it better.
And now, driving and writing on 395 to Pasco is a water bottle. Cigarette butts float in the water like drowned flies. Graffiti covered train cars slip by on my right. Now, I'm looking at the water bottle in my parked car on the campgrounds of the gorge. It's dusty and hot; the place is a fire hazard. I will be inside and looking for my friend, looking for a singular person in a rush of humans, looking to buy a ten dollar twenty-four ounce beer. Faces and stories, I am buffeted by wind, a human buffet. Why, where did you come from? I am buffeted by wind, a human buffet. Why, where did you come from? I am buffeted by wind, a human buffet. Why, where did you come from?

He's done some dirt. I can tell, look at those nails. He's pickin' at 'em, he's fidgetin' and uncomfortable. I just want to grab him by the ears and shake the shit loose.

And it might not be such a bad idea if I never, never went home again.

DRUGS

Drugs. Drugs are the shitty friend you have that shows up way too late or way too early, never has any money, with expensive taste, spilling drinks, pissing himself, cursing in front of kids. Oh sure, he's fun and has a bunch of funny stories, but he's always bleeding from punching something or getting punched and he doesn't know when to leave and, of course, all the vomiting. Is that still fun? In a way yes and in a way no, I'm just used to it.

Two of my uncles had drug problems. Needle drugs I think. One cleaned up after years of looking crazy, living in vans and dating prostitutes. When he was hit head-on by a drunk driver and killed it was weird to see my brother's old truck on the news. My dad handled his will and finances. I can't think of the word. My sister will handle it when my parents go. Is it executor? Doesn't sound right. Sounds like executioner. (You omit you thought about writing executioner.) We looked at pictures and he looked like Charles Manson or at least some disciple. Charles Manson acolyte holding a candle, singing in falsetto. We saw his driver's license from what I will call his "Lost Years." The question arises: Should people be given field sobriety tests when renewing licenses? His photo suggests yes. My dad and I shared a humble laugh. He hardly talked. My aunt called him nigger tooth.

The question arises: Should people be given field sobriety tests when renewing licenses? His photo suggests yes.

Cigarette butts float in the water like drowned flies. Graffiti covered train cars slip by on my right. My dad's other brother went to prison after his friend crushed a bum's skull with a rock because he wouldn't buy them beer when they were in high school. He never recovered from that experience. My parents have a painting he did while in prison. My parents have a painting he did while in prison.

My dad's other brother went to prison after his friend crushed a bum's skull with a rock because he wouldn't buy them beer when they were in high school. He never recovered from that experience. My parents have a painting he did while in prison. They keep it in the attic. He hasn't worked in decades, but built his own cabin, grows his own food, occasionally freaks out, walks out into the woods to die, gets freaked out by planes, talks about getting pardoned, he can't vote, and once wrecked his truck into the flag pole in front of City Hall. He was institutionalized in Medical Lake. His name is Dick but he wants to be called Richard. Not Uncle Richard or Dad, just Richard. My mom made him eggs once and he flushed them down the toilet. He told her she should grow peyote and weed. They'd never suspect you, he said. We had a TV you had to turn up to make work. If you just kept on beating, it would work.

I may be sitting there or here, but it's not me. A TV's on, up close the picture goes to a pattern of blue, red and green. The image disappears. A problem of perspective. The act of observing electrons makes them move, you can't see them for what they are or were, a state of flux. I'm putting on a show, sensationalizing. Do you want more? Yes. The man who was my grandma's first husband died in World War II. Olive drab and blood. My grandpa drove over a mine in a jeep and survived. They produced my dad who told my mom who told me the worst thing that ever happened to me was getting a guitar, which took me places I never would have been. That in some way is the totality of my story and not at all. I am the result of a failed pullout on my parent's anniversary. My mom told me, but she'd probably deny it. And I did the math.

This seems to be working, good. A little something to go on. Just keep applying the pressure, turn up the heat.

I don't really want to include this, but I wrote it for this: I have lost count of the people I have slept with. Don't end sentences with preposition. Sentence fragment. "Sentence fragment" is a sentence fragment. I have studied geometric series; people upon people exponentially fill the room; I'm remembering a commercial, a past morning. It might be gross, I haven't decided.

EIGHTH GRADER WINS GEOGRAPHY BEE

By Randy Dillings

Michael Cooper, 8th Grade, won this year's geography bee. He is 14 and is in Mrs. Gerken's homeroom class. I asked him if he was excited and he said, "Yes. It's pretty cool." He said he thought he had a chance to win, but didn't expect it. At tomorrow's assembly in 8th period, Michael will be honored.

I won the geography bee in eighth grade. I may have made up the article and the names, but I didn't make up the story. There was an assembly at which I was honored. People don't forget things like that; I was branded. I was brought out to center court,
probably wearing a silk shirt, in the middle of the gymnasium. No spotlight necessary. I got an autographed map of the world from the National Geographic Society's president. The same map was on the wall of my bedroom.

Time traveling is rough. Much is glossed over. Rough, rough, rough like sandpaper rough. 120 grit? No, rougher. How 'bout 60? That's a bit more rough. I'd like to do away with rough. But the repetition: does it suggest sanding? I think so. Perhaps after a hangover? Sand off the rough edges. I like the Spanish word for hangover, la cruda. It means rust. But back to rough, it illustrates a point, doesn't it? This experience is grating, a push and pull. Like a "normal" weekend which is absurd, rough, as most of them are with these people; one hates or resents their mother; the other loves and defends. They have the same mother. (You omit your girlfriend's brother walked an hour and a half by himself back home in the ditch alongside I-182.)

Just give me a name, come on, a little somethin' to go on. Or am I gonna hafta beat it out of ya? It's the easy way or the hard way. You decide.

I have never broken a bone that I know of.

LIVINGSTON LEOPARDS

I was in a children's singing group in elementary school called the Rainbow Rockers. I can see the playground and the blacktop, the tall principal advocating hugs who had a stroke, the hard carpet basketball court. I see tetherball, the orange and yellow paint on the big toy. We sang a lot of Jim Valle songs. Penguins are my favorite sort of frogs, frogs! The leader of the group got divorced. Her daughter had a funny face with teeth too big for her mouth. I'm learning sign language for a song called "Love in any Language" straight from the heart pulls us all together, never apart. She was having an affair with the janitor at my school. I am walking to school in an elf outfit my mom made me with bells on the pointy shoes. It's scratchy and hot, I think it's felt.

That's the part of the sidewalk I almost rode off of on Friday the 13th. I went right up to the edge man. We're singing at the X-mas Bazaar. Back when schools still called it Christmas Break. I think X-mas Bizarre would be cool. So would standing next to Jenny. In-egg-shellsy state of looooolove? Is it Gloria? I don't know what that song's about. I wonder if they had sex in her classroom. She had a loft in there with couches, bean bags, etc.

He's jumpin' around all over the place. He's a slippery bugger, I need to pin'm down.

I have a love/hate relationship with the song "Radar Love." Why the hell did I write that?

The leader of the group got divorced...She was having an affair with the janitor at my school...I wonder if they had sex in her classroom. She had a loft in there with couches, bean bags, etc.

I somehow managed to dodge the bullets I threw myself in front of.

COLLEGE

You say it like it's a four-letter word.
It is, look at it.
Oh, I have and college is clearly a seven-letter word. You should know that, yer the English major.

You know what I mean though.
No, I don't smart guy. I went to the Academy.
Oh, I see. Can I smoke in here?

No. It says here you've both flunked classes and been on the President's honor roll.
Do you want to elaborate?

Not exactly. Isn't that enough for you?
Okay, moving on. So, you were mad about dropping out and not finishing the first time around? Is that why you put in the "screaming and shaking fists" thing? I see you removed the stuff about Seattle too.

Clearly. Is this going somewhere?
I'm the one asking the questions here. And you are the one that's gonna answer them.
You got that?
Sure.

So, the experience was rough?

Yes and no. I said rough, "rough doesn't approach that," in that when I said, basically, I said, I should have died about as many times as people wished I had. That's good. Yer openin' up a little bit. So, rough, huh? What do you mean by that?

I just answered that.

Fair enough. So you dropped out, a friend of yours stabbed himself and one went to prison. Is that right?

Yeah.

Are they in the same person? And if so, what is the name or names?
They're gonna remain anonymous.

Come on, just a little somethin' to go on. Some initials maybe?
No. I am skirting this issue.

I somehow managed to dodge the bullets I threw myself in front of.

PHS

I'm coming up on my 10-year reunion. I'm filled with a sense of dread. The flip side is I have such warm memories of high school. (You omit the casual drug use, the casual sex and pregnancies.) Current people have become ghosts and the memories are sunny pictures. I wrote a sonnet about the sentiment. Blah, blah, blah. I see
I got what I wanted, but was drowning as a result.

the pictures and the smiles and the sunshine or maybe just the gloss of the photos themselves. (You omit your dad's radiation treatment and the mask on the wall.) I see the current people, want to avoid them: the ghosts of those smiles, the missed phone calls, the drunk guy in the bar asking me what I'm up to. I want to lie. I want to bury them in my past, visit with flowers occasionally. Just phone it in, I can't make any sense of it, I'm just moving forward, I'm just moving on, don't judge your life based on mine. I was voted most likely to succeed.

He's slipped up. He mentioned phone calls. That's evidence and concrete. I can pin him down to a time and place. I've got phone records now. Why didn't I think of this sooner? I can put names to these abstractions. Get the big picture.

I can't tell you who you are. I can't even know me. Eyewitnesses are unreliable. I've heard that on countless TV crime shows. I am a construct. You will put me together as I take myself apart. I am not the puzzle, but the pieces missing. It is not my job to fill in the blanks. Where the hell am I? The concrete is warm under my feet and bees, the subtle hint of chlorine in the air. I'm running under the fiberglass slide. Bounce on the scratchy diving board. I am looking back through so many years. I shot myself with a bee-bee gun. My fingernail shattered, blood running, getting sticky and coagulating dark and thick. I cleaned it in the river, cold and crisp; my grandpa poured whiskey on it. But further back, I don't remember how old I was, just me jumping into the pool after something I wanted and was in over my head. I guess I couldn't swim yet. It was before my cousins told me an octopus lived at the bottom of the deep end. There are two distinct images: the small, white plastic figure and the huge blueness of the sky through the water reminding me of my fat cousin. (You omit the question: Who saved me?)

I got what I wanted, but was drowning as a result.

Where are his parents? He has to come from somewhere. This is like chasin' a ghost. He doesn't have a damn cell phone, no phone records. Let me put my hands on'm, grill'm under the lights. He'll cave, they always do.

[Aside] I won't give it all up. I can't. I have to have something for myself and only for myself. I feel like I'll write myself away, my blood leaving, becoming ink. There are some things you will never know. I will never give them up. The meaning you will just have to create, interpret or translate. She knows. I won't give that up. It is a thousand images, a hundred thousand words. It's me running through walls. I don't want to disappear, I don't want to.

Let me throw a pig a bone.

They were from Puyallup and Sumner. They were from Nebraska and France. They were from Spokane. They were from Missouri. They moved to Pasco because the air was good for asthma. They moved to start a life after the war. He and his father had a construction business and built some forty homes in and around Pasco. Only losing three fingertips. She stayed home and cooked. He started the first dry cleaners, Star Cleaners, in Pasco on Court St., 1948. The same year he was born. I can see the neon sign. She stayed home and cooked. She got a job cuz he was/is a drunk. He got a job when he was old enough to work at the cleaners. She was/is her mom and he was/is his father.

I was forced to do this, forced to encapsulate events and images representing the larger time period. I will testify. A month turned into a word, and a year into a sentence. I glossed over the pain, the frustration, only to return. The question remains: Am I reliable? I can't even know. At times tasty and at times bitter, can we ever get anything but a taste in our mouths?

DEATH

I can hear my dead aunt's voice right now reading that word. She liked to drink, but a rare cancer killed her. 1/10,000,000. Her boyfriend fell drunk into the river and drowned. My grandma died the day after my brother got married. She wanted to walk without pain. He put money on 6 on the roulette table and it came up. He gave the money to my grandpa. I don't know if he actually won or not. He gave my grandpa the money. And he cried. I helped carry my grandma's casket and all I could think was don't drop it. I couldn't live that down.