



10-1993

Résumé

Fred G. Leebron
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/engfac>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Fiction Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Leebron, Fred G. (Sep.-Oct. 1993) *The North American Review* 278(5):18-20.

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/engfac/15>

This open access creative writing is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Résumé

Abstract

I sat at the back of a pale classroom and watched my father teach. "Creative Inspiration," my father lectured, "is what you have as soon as you are born and the doctor slaps you on your bottom. That first cry, because you're hungry or tired or just glad to be breathing, is your first creative inspiration." I leaned back in my chair to ease the heat rising in my face. "Incidentally," my father said, grinning at the under graduates, "I've read the Sexual Harassment pamphlet, and I want you all to know I don't slap bottoms." [*excerpt*]

Keywords

creative writing, fiction

Disciplines

Creative Writing | English Language and Literature | Fiction



I sat at the back of a pale classroom and watched my father teach. "Creative Inspiration," my father lectured, "is what you have as soon as you are born and the doctor slaps you on your bottom. That first cry, because you're hungry or tired or just glad to be breathing, is your first creative inspiration." I leaned back in my chair to ease the heat rising in my face. "Incidentally," my father said, grinning at the undergraduates, "I've read the Sexual Harassment pamphlet, and I want you all to know I don't slap bottoms."

No one laughed. But my father thinks he is a very funny guy. Once he called me after midnight, breathless. "Who is it?" I said. "What?" I said. "What?" I thought somebody had died. "This is your father speaking," he said. "I have a great idea for you to build on. I think you could write a whole book from it." "Dad," I said. I thought of saying something mean. "Okay, what is it?" "You got a pen?" I was silent. "All right, here it is. It's a title. Terrific. You're going to love it. 'I TRUST YOU BUT DON'T FEED ME ANY FISH.'"

Now my father began to write on the board. It was the first class of the semester, and the undergraduates peeked at each other, wondering if they should be taking notes. Inexplicably, I found myself taking notes. I was a teacher, too, but in a different subject at another university. I was being let go at the end of the year.

My father stepped aside to reveal what he had written. His bald head pearly with sweat. He was my height, and weighed eighty pounds more. His belly popped out of his single-buttoned suit coat like a second face. On the board he'd written: I-I-I-T-B-I-I-U-T-M.

"Ten letters," he said, "that will shape this course, and that will shape you as you go out into the world." He used the stick of chalk to tick off the letters. "If It Is To Be, It Is Up To Me." The undergraduates wrote it down.

Afterwards, he signed add slips while I waited in the hall. It was early January, and my university didn't begin for another week. I had come to watch him teach because he was getting old and I thought I hadn't captured enough of him to carry me through the rest of my life.

We ate souvlaki from a lunch truck. It was ten-thirty in the morning, cold and sunny. The grease ran down my chin. "You shouldn't be eating this," I said.

He reached out and flicked a crumb from my cheek. "Neither should you."

The Greek leaned out of his truck and said, "Is that your son?"

"No." I put my arm around my father. It would not go all the way. "We're brothers."

He had been ill for a long time. It was the eating. Or it was the depression that necessitated the eating, as if souvlaki could have filled his sense of emptiness.

My father tried to allocate three months out of each year to give in to his depression. October, November, December. His father, mother, and both brothers, their deaths scattered over twenty-five years, had died in these months, leaving my father feeling more alone in the world. A

world which he viewed as essentially hostile. He was sixty-one.

JOBS MY FATHER HELD

swimming pool salesman
advertising consultant to a funeral home
Santa Claus
adjunct assistant professor of sales and marketing

We drove home. My mother was packing the station wagon for a ride to the dump. Unworkable lamps, a lidless toy chest, legs from a spent table.

"It's therapeutic," she said. "Throwing this stuff into a pit two stories deep. It gives me a satisfaction I can count on."

She hugged me. We hadn't seen each other since Christmas. My father squeezed himself into the driver's seat, and my mother slammed the trunk shut.

"You coming?"

ACHIEVEMENTS MY FATHER ATTAINED

high school all-American, breaststroke and backstroke drama award, Marietta College, Marietta, Ohio
honorary chairman, biannual national conferences on advertising for non-profit businesses

Résumé

A Story by Fred G. Leebron

instructor of the year, Ryder College, Ryder, Pennsylvania

We rolled down a frozen dirt road to the edge of the dump. A large cinder block building stood beside it. "The inside dump," my mother explained. "For the unhygienic stuff."

We got out of the car, my father limping on swollen feet.

"You know the drill?" my mother said.

"Sure." I walked three floor lamps to the rim. The frozen junk below glinted in the spare sun. Panting, my father readied to heave the toy chest. I launched the lamps quickly, one at a time, hearing them clatter as they hit. "Wait," I said to him. "Let me help."

He tried to speak, but he was breathless. He shook his head and choked on something. "Your mother wants to."

My mother hurled the table legs, then came up between my father and me. The three of us stood staring into the crater. "Look." My mother touched my arm and pointed. "Over there, next to the refrigerator. That's our old wardrobe. We did that last week." She squeezed my wrist and let go.

Cueing each other, they bent their knees at the same time, and lifted the toy chest. It began to crack even before they dropped it down the sloping side, and it slid, sideways, until it burst against the sharp corner of a metal desk.

My father wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "I don't feel so hot," he said. "We'd better get going."

My mother drove. I sat in the back seat, leaning over to rub my father's shoulders. "That feels good," my father said. My mother kept her eyes on the road. "But it's my stomach."

Worried, I waited for him to finish in the bathroom. Résumés, what my father called "life stories," were stacked on his desk and on the coffee table. He helped old students find jobs. He coached them on how to interview, made phone calls for them, and by means of a career goals test pushed them in a verifiable direction.

LIST YOUR TEN GREATEST SKILLS OR STRENGTHS

LIST THE TEN THINGS YOU HAVE DONE THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF

LIST THE TEN JOB TITLES THAT YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO HOLD IN YOUR LIFE

OUT OF MONEY, POWER, AND ACHIEVEMENT, WHICH ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE MOST?

My father waded into the den, clutching a turkey sandwich.

"It's January," I said. "Your excuses are over."

He grinned. A translucent cyst shone on his lip. "Dirty rotten kid." He took a long bite. I could smell the mayonnaise. "Have you found a job yet?"

I shook my head. "How was everything in the bathroom?"

"You should take one of my tests." He eased himself down beside me on the sofa. The shirt around his stomach layered and creased. I touched it. Behind us, on the windowsill, was a selection of clay Buddhas my father thought he resembled. He looked at me, irritated, and plucked up a résumé from the coffee table. My father made his students use a specific first-page format:

OBJECTIVE
SKILLS OF VALUE TO YOUR
ORGANIZATION

I read over his belly—"To obtain an entry level position where I can best utilize my skills in marketing and sales to your company's benefit; to advance beyond entry level and become a decision-maker in your organization." Under skills were listed "Articulating, Listening, Decision-making, Leading, Organizing, Selling"—with each skill annotated by a vague recapitulation of various life moments. "Articulating—have given presentations at various local, regional and national conferences on telemarketing, with audiences ranging from 20 to 2,000."

"This is a good one," I said.

My father nodded and coughed. "A proven winner." He flipped to the next page, the hard facts: employment, education, achievement. I always disagreed with this wrapping of the truth, but my father's students found jobs. They wrote him letters, birthday cards; they sent him Buddhas and fruit baskets. Eventually they called him about social problems, sexual problems, marital problems. He appeared at their weddings, children's christenings, traffic court hearings.

"See," my father said, pointing to the facts with his sandwich. "She's wonderful."

I tapped the paper. "Then why not put it on the first page?"

"Boy," he muttered. "You never let up, do you?" He finished his turkey sandwich. His stomach felt warm through the shirt. He hiccupped. Juices burbled in his belly. When I was eight years old, on a trip with my father and mother, I watched him eat two pints of fried clams, several orders of french fries, and a triple-scoop ice cream cone. My mother was crying, my father looked sad but full. We walked along a street of gift shops. It was New Hampshire, early summer. Stuffed owls and model lighthouses perched on pieces of drift-

wood filled the bright windows. My mother cried carefully, quietly. As people passed us, they looked away. I could still smell the food on my father. The air seemed warmer and thicker around him. I was crying. I stopped my father on that sidewalk, I hugged my father's knees. "Please," I begged him. "Don't eat anymore." He ran his finger through my hair. His hand fell on my neck. He bent down and whispered in my ear. "It's just vacation," he said. "You know how I eat when we're on vacation."

My mother stood at the sink, still washing her hands from the dump. Invoices and payroll printouts blanketed the kitchen table. "My day off," she laughed, and turned to me. "So how are things with you?"

"Jobless," I admitted. "Girl-less. Inspiration-less."

We sat together at the table. She ordered her papers, I sipped a glass of seltzer. She whispered, "Did you talk to him?"

We could hear the sofa squeaking in the den. For a moment I was lost as to whether she meant had I talked to him about him, or had I talked to him about me. She leaned forward, searching my face. Her cheekbones looked like frowns beneath her eyes. I understood. "He said I don't let up."

MY FATHER'S SKILLS OF VALUE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

envisioning-convincing homeowners from across the county of the viability, utility and beauty of yet-to-be-excavated areas of their backyards.

condoling-through a multimedia approach,

expressed genuine and dignified sympathy to attract and maintain the interest and trust of bereaved relatives of the deceased.

giving- on an annual basis, satisfied, with friendliness and trinkets, a wide array of demanding local youth.

instructing- in the latter years of his life, through sickness and financial difficulty, inspired, counseled and taught a broad and quarterly-changing cross section of college students. Continued to inform, advise and otherwise spiritually sustain these students as they entered the adult world.

From the den we heard my father sleeping, we heard his lush snoring. He had a deviated septum, gout, high blood pressure. Ten hours of open heart surgery two years ago. Wide stitches had stapled his chest.

"He's sleeping," I whispered.

"No kidding." My mother went to a rarely-used cabinet in the corner of the kitchen. A cabinet that held tureens, a teapot, a crystal bowl. She came back dangling a bag of chocolates like caught game.

"See." She spread the pieces on the table, clusters shaped by light-brown nuts. "He's still doing it."

"I know." My hand covered my mouth. A flush rose in my face.

She took my hand away. Her palm felt warm and dry. It pulsed against my knuckles as she held my hand to the table. She said, "You'll learn."

We sat, eating his candy. □



ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN REEVES