

Eye on Editorials

PAIR OF PENNIES:

How I Got the Way I Am

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Stubborn...that was my Pops.

Goofy...thank you, mom.

Precise with language...got that from my girlfriend.

There are other things, of course; I have more to my personality than just these three traits. And these people, they weren't only good for my vices—they were influential in many ways. That's the way it is, I suppose, *tabula rasa* and all that. Everybody's a chisel and a rock, chipping into others and getting chipped right back.

Sometimes there are people too entrenched in their ways to be chipped, though. There are people who have an idea for the kind of person that they want to be, and they just get to making it happen. They take the chisel to themselves, so to speak. Procrastination? They smash that right off. Self-deception? One of the first bad things to go...

These people are not easily persuaded by friends or family or circumstance to behave in a particular way. Rather, they let giants be their influences—Aristotle, Nelson Mandela, President Obama (just kidding on the last one). Those people, those with integrity and purpose, are like diamonds. And the thing about diamonds, in addition to being rare and special, is that only diamonds can cut other diamonds.

I'm not a diamond, though, I'm something else. Don't get me wrong—I wish I was a diamond. I'm something more permeable—I'm more like clay. I take from my school friend who loves philosophy texts and my high school friend who never reads, equally. I love having read, but I rarely read.

Like my father, I am instinctively skeptical of strangers, and like my liberal professors, I have the greatest faith in mankind. I'm a hopeful pessimist, a grounded dreamer, and a spiteful comrade. How did I end up as I am? Well, it's hard to tell. I'm not even sure that I know...

What I do know is that I was born to a set of parents who were highly opposite. 22 years later, here I am, commonly described as "exactly like" both of them. I have a sister

who's so much like my mom and so much like my dad and both so much and so little like me. As a kid I was quiet, a loner mostly. I didn't pass judgment because I was the judged. I didn't tell lies because I had nothing to hide. I didn't cheat because I had impenetrable integrity.

Eventually, I branched out and made some friends. When those friends over on Twelfth Street started calling the Chester kids "niggers," so did I. I learned about the "finger," how to pass tests without working, and that certain behaviors earned me the abuse of my peers.

Even later in life I learned new things. It turns out that "niggers" were people this whole time! Boy, did I feel like a humiliated, worthless piece-of-shit. I learned that although lying or cheating was easy, that they weren't necessarily right. Knowing what was right, however, wasn't necessarily enough to sway me to act a certain way. That was a huge discovery for me. I was chipped, I was defined—I was me before I even knew it.

And that's just it. In the quiet as I reflect on myself and my life, I try to be a diamond. I convince myself that I am strong. I convince myself that I have principles—I'm not a cheater, I'm punctual, I'm honest, I care about humanity. Sometimes it sticks. Sometimes, though, I wake up and lie and am late and speak hatefully against my societal brothers. I'm not as good as I want to be. I'm permeable, moldable. I'm just wet clay in the hands of my family, my peers—always changing.

I've gotten this way not because I'm strong, as I'd imagine. In fact, I'm as weak as can be. A steadfast man is one to admire, one to be respected. That man, whether good or bad, is a man who acts in accordance with his beliefs. That man is not like me. I'm a coward except when I'm brave, a liar except when I tell the truth, and insignificant even when I think otherwise. That's just how I am, and sometimes during those times of reflections I think to myself, "how did I get this way?"

Robin Becker Comes to Brandywine

Penn State's 2010 Laureate Robin Becker will present her work during a public reading on campus, Tuesday, October 26, from 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Tuesday, in the Tomezsko Classroom Building Lounge. There will be an opportunity for everyone to meet Becker, to ask questions, even buy one of her books and ask her to sign it.

Robin Becker, Professor of English and Women's Studies at University Park, is the author of seven books of poetry, including her latest work, *Domain of Perfect Affection*. Her publisher, the eminent poetry venue, the University of Pittsburgh Press, describes it as follows:

In her latest volume, . . . Becker explores the conditions under which we experience and resist pleasure. Through the use of shapely stanzas and a variety of poetic styles, the poet visits a beauty salon, a summer camp, a beach, a museum, and travels to places such as New York and New Mexico. Luminous and sensual, these poems offer sharp pleasures as they argue, elegize, mourn, praise and sing.

Calling Becker "a poet in her prime," Alicia Suskin Ostriker praises the new collection. "A deft painter of scenes and lives, Becker follows a thread of comedy in the dark labyrinth of the family saga. We could call that thread compassion. We could call it wisdom. Becker is an aficionado of old and odd paintings, of summer and seashore, of friends, lovers and autumn heat, of whatever may 'disappoint and delight.'"

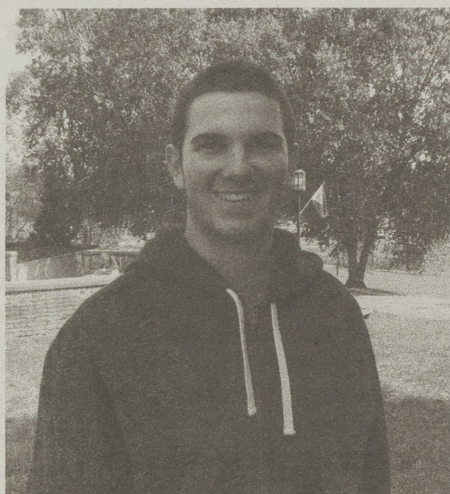
Becker has received fellowships from the Bunting Institute at Harvard, the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. She writes a column on poetry, titled "Field Notes," and serves as poetry editor for *The Women's Review of Books*. Here poetry has received national recognition, appearing in *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and the *American Poetry Review*, among many others.

Another reception later in the day is also in the works to include campus alumni and friends of Penn State Brandywine as well as the campus community.

Some of you might like to see and hear her talk about aspects of her work in advance. Consult <http://live.psu.edu/tag/Laureate> for the links.

People Poll with Kelly Crawford

What is your favorite thing about Fall?



Zack Cavalcante

Freshman

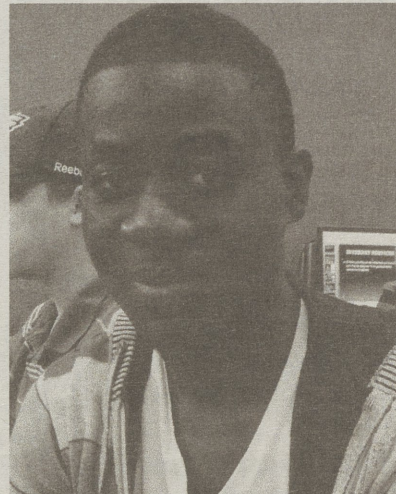
"Football season and baseball playoffs"



Jessica Fischer

Freshman

"The changing leaves and the colors"



Emmett Rolland

Freshman

"The breeze"



Amanda Masci

Freshman

"Fall Sports"