

Essay for:
Doug Clifford
College Writing 111
Monday, March 4, 2002

A Funny Little Man

The smell reminds me of fresh fruit and moist dampness all in one. I can distinguish the fragrances, peaches, strawberries and melon. It's not new to me; every girl I know wears the same body sprays. I myself am contributing to the delicious aroma with my own mixture of cucumber melon. The dampness, I can only assume, is due to the age of the building. Maybe the fact that there are no windows to open and let the sunshine and fresh spring breeze flow through also contribute.

I look around me, curious about the company around me. I stare at their blank expressions, their youthful faces seemingly in a daze, mesmerized by the walls around them. They sit like statues frozen in their seats. Maybe they're nervous, or excited about what they are about to experience. I speculate they are all here for the same reason as I am, to learn. All of a sudden he bounces into the room, his steps light and happy. He looks about 60 years old (although he's actually over 70), each wrinkle descriptive of each year he has lived. They cover him like a warm familiar blanket, full of memories. His head is bald, shiny, and reflective of the artificial lights that illuminate the room. He is rather short, probably no more than 5 and a half feet, but his demeanor more than compensates for his lack of height. His eyes are expressive of his ultimate wisdom; deep with knowledge yet bright with happiness. He is energy in its purest form. He opens his mouth to greet us, his voice soft and sweet, like an old friend caressing my ears.

His name is Professor Gross. He teaches math and right away I can tell his methods are simple, uncomplicated. He explains the equations like they are a part of normal conversation; not like the complex methods I once dreaded in my elementary years. The lesson begins with cute anecdotes about his childhood, his own early dislike of math and his learning experiences. He talks of his grandson, vividly describing the small boy with big brown eyes full of innocence and the childlike questions he asks of his "papa". I can envision them snuggled on the chair sharing conversation. I can imagine them exchanging hugs full of deep love and warm looks filled with admiration for each other. All of this, mixed with numbers and symbols of adding and subtracting, combines into lessons easily comprehended by the mathematically challenged people who sit before him.

The once lifeless gazes have now become longing looks, full of admiration. Amused eyes stare at the small man before them with slight grins brightening their faces. They wait, intrigued by his presence, hanging on to his every word eagerly anticipating his next insight. The students once filled with dread, only here out of necessity, now only dread the clock ticking away, bringing them closer to the end of this lively session.

His methods are unorthodox, so unlike that of his colleagues. The men and woman he works with, all business suits and long faces, as unhappy about being here as their students, are all so different from him. They move like robots, mechanical and emotionless. Their methods an imitation of how they were once taught. He makes his learning easy, simple. Believing you should go at your own pace he allows you freedoms not offered in other classes. He makes you want to learn. As the class comes to an end I realize that I no longer smell the dampness.

This man entered the room and brought with him fresh air and sunshine. The classroom is no longer stifled and the light no longer dull. It is as if someone has opened a window, allowed the air to cleanse the room of its dread, and with the freshness it has brought a reminder about the real reason why we are here. With his light steps and youthful nature he has inspired us and we remember, we are here to learn math.