

My Life In Five Paragraphs

by John Olson

The first punch sent me flying into a Christmas tree. The second put me on the floor on my hands and knees, blood dripping from my nose. I tumbled outside, caught a train to North Dakota, and went to college. I listened to Bob Dylan. I went to California. I got high on LSD. I flew apart on LSD. I reassembled myself. I went north to Seattle. I worked at Boeing. Boeing was dark and boring. I quit Boeing. I went back to California. I lived in a bus. I got called to the army induction center to go fight in Vietnam. I told them I was gay. They let me go. I went north to Humboldt County. Everything smelled like burning wood. I watched the bottoms of clouds burn red with sawmill smoke. I consorted with Wordsworth, Keats, and Shakespeare. I inoculated myself with Blake. I lived in a trailer in back of a Mexican restaurant. I lived in a hotel. I went to San Jose one summer. I met a woman. I got married. I got divorced.

I went north again to Seattle. I got a job in a hospital. I rode up and down on an elevator. I delivered IV stands, surgical trays, anti-embolism stockings, diabetes socks, cervical pillows, catheters, exam gloves, commodes, consultation coats and spin hematocrits. I quit that job and got another job in a mailroom. I ran mail, sorted mail, weighed mail, maneuvered mail, threw mail, shuffled mail, delivered mail, collected mail, traced mail, dispersed, disposed, and processed mail. I did this for 19 years. I began to hate mail. I got drunk a lot. I met a woman in the mailroom. I got married to the woman I met in the mailroom. I got divorced from the woman I met in the mailroom. The woman in the mailroom kicked me out of the house and began life with a Guatemalan who liked gardening.

I continued to work in the mailroom but began to live my life elsewhere. Existence is elsewhere.

I quit working in the mailroom. I met a woman who writes poetry. This made everything in life easier. Easier to be alive. We got married at the top of a hotel with all our friends. We rode pintos to the moon.

One day I noticed I was still living and so made room for another paragraph. I had room for a paragraph but nothing to put in it yet. And so the paragraph is not quite yet a separate thing from my life. It is a membranous organ. It is amorphous and void. I am free to invent whatever I want to put in it. Sometimes this fills me with panic. But then I sit down to eat a doughnut. Calm returns. I sip some coffee. I eat a banana. I eat an orange. I find a paring knife in the drawer and peel away the upper and lower poles of the orange. Then I make slices. Lacerations from pole to pole. Juice comes out. My fingers get wet. I peel the skin away. I separate the juicy chunks of orange and eat them. This could be a paragraph in the process of acquiring a text. This could be a life. The life of a man eating an orange. The life of a man finishing an orange and cleaning a plate. The life of a man staring at a plate. The life of a man wondering what to do next.

