
Concurrent Revision: How Inexperienced Writers Frustrate the Writing Process

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Selecting a topic to write about can be a frustrating experience for many writers.¹ If anything, the advice proffered to students in writing handbooks has made me more sensitive to the problems that less experienced writers often encounter whenever they are expected to develop their essays with a minimum of outside intervention. When I decided to monitor more closely the steps my students actually took in planning their essays (beginning with the initial stage of generating brainstorming lists of potential subjects through the author's more elaborate plans for collecting, organizing, and developing information into a coherent first draft), the results, especially for those students who struggled with the challenge of developing a subject on their own, were enlightening.

For many inexperienced writers, the process of developing a subject took more time and was more involved and complex than I had previously imagined. Virtually all composition handbooks emphasize the importance of a carefully planned pre-writing strategy to help students formulate their ideas. Ideally, pre-writing strategies should provide the student with an opportunity to focus a response around his own interests within a specific subject area and, typically, to direct that response to a specific audience, very often his peers in the writing class.

With these strategies in mind, I invited my students to write an essay on some aspect of their family traditions. Before

they got started on their essays, I shared with them an article published in the local newspaper by a nationally syndicated columnist who nostalgically had recollected his own family's traditional Sunday dinners during the Great Depression. What struck readers so forcefully about the essay is the ordinariness of the experience which the author chose to write about. I could not imagine that those Sunday dinners seemed very significant when the author, then a boy living on a small farm in rural Illinois, originally experienced them. Viewed from a perspective many decades later, however, events flooded his recollection of those Sunday dinners as a significant part of his struggle during the Depression and, for himself, an essential aspect of his growing up years.

Following our discussion of this article, students compiled brainstorming lists of various family traditions which they believed might provide an interesting experience for their own essays. What follows, then, is a case study which documents one student's essay as she struggled with her initial attempts to define a topic that was meaningful to her. The initial brainstorming list, which took only a few minutes of class time to prepare, is fairly representative of the type and number of experiences compiled by her peers. (All samples of student writing are reproduced in italics and include extraneous lapses in conventional spelling and syntax.)

Brainstorming List

1. Grandma over for Xmas dinner
2. Ordering out piazza on Xmas Eve
3. Sunday dinners
4. Watching late night movies and talking
5. Turkey sandwiches on Christmas night
6. Decorating the Christmas tree together
7. The traditional first jump in the pool
8. the yearly family portrait
9. Santa Claus calling on Christmas
10. decorating Xmas cookies together
11. Easter breakfast
12. Easter dinner at Grandma's
13. Family book to the oldest
14. School shopping

15. Birthday parties relatives

16. Collecting for the telethon

The first thing to notice about the brainstorming list is that it reveals a curious circularity which is typical of the initial attempt by most writers to identify or discover a subject. This circularity reflects the active mind of a writer hovering around a subject, trying to discover its potential meaning. Of the sixteen items which comprise the list, six of them focus broadly on the same subject (Christmas), while two other items focus on a similar topic (Easter). Of the eight remaining items, each raises separately the prospect of a distinct topic unrelated to any other potential subject. Given the preponderance of items dealing with a single topic (Christmas), it appears, as expected, that the writer has successfully identified an appropriate subject to write about in the very process of generating the brainstorming list.

Nor should it be surprising, then, that the student initially selected Christmas as the subject of her personal essay, and claimed that its focus (that is, the meaning she hoped her audience would discover after reading it) would express the notion—in her own words—that “the Christmas of yesterday is no longer the Christmas of today.” With at least six pieces of information relating broadly to the same subject, and with a potential focus in place to help give shape to her essay, she produced an outline which provided a sense of direction to her writing and identified potential areas for further development.

Outline

A. Decorating Xmas cookies together

- two days before Xmas
- all the family
- jokes and laughter
- no jokes, no laughter
- only mom and me

B. Xmas Eve

1. Decorating the Xmas tree

- all the family
- green tree
- colorful tree

- just mom, dad, and me
- ornaments from years gone by
- Christmas Carols
- 2. Xmas Eve dinner
 - pizza (ordered out) with chicken wings
 - the whole family
 - Christmas Carols
 - cold ham sandwiches
 - just mom, dad, and me
 - heavy metal music
- 3. Wrapping presents
 - parents room
 - take turns
 - everyone helps each other
 - already wrapped
 - wrapping in my own room
- C. Xmas day
 - up early
 - up at 11:00
 - grandma over for dinner
 - not this year, grandma over at uncle's
 - Christmas Carols
 - over to boyfriends house for dinner

The outline adheres to a fairly rigid chronological development, with the events the student has chosen to write about beginning “two days before Xmas” (with the decoration of the Christmas cookies), proceeding to “Xmas Eve” (involving the decoration of the Christmas tree and traditional family dinner, a rather informal affair consisting of “pizza ordered out”) and concluding on “Xmas day” (with “grandma over for dinner”). The contemplation of Grandma’s visit, so typical, we must assume, of previous Christmas celebrations, strikes a discordant reminder that “this year, grandma [will be] over at uncle’s.” Other temporal indicators indicate that Christmas Day activities will get the author “up early,” which to this student writer means “up at 11:00” in the morning!

Analyzing the writer’s thoughts, we once again no-

tice some of the same circularity typical of the original brainstorming list repeated this time on the subject outline. Phrases such as “all the family,” “the whole family,” and “just mom, dad, and me” appear throughout several sections of the outline and underscore the familial aspect of the Christmas celebration. Several items relate to food (“pizza,” “chicken wings,” “cold ham sandwiches,” and “Christmas cookies”) or decorations (“green tree,” “colorful tree,” “ornaments from years gone by”), or activities (“baking cookies,” “decorating the christmas tree,” “wrapping presents,” and “singing carols”) normally associated with holiday festivities. The notation “Christmas carols” appears in three different contexts and, surprisingly, is juxtaposed in one other context with a reference to “heavy metal music,” which perhaps more accurately expresses the author’s real musical preference even at this time of year. Its inclusion excites a sense of curiosity among prospective readers who almost surely will want to discover how heavy metal music contributes to the author’s appreciation of Christmas Eve dinner.

Some of the items listed on the outline also suggest contradictions which presumably the author will resolve in her essay. While the family decorates Christmas cookies together, for example, there is time for “jokes and laughter,” but the very next notation states “no jokes, no laughter.” What accounts, we wonder, for the changed atmosphere? Likewise, it would appear that decorating cookies is an activity in which “all the family” engages, but three items later there is the cryptic reminder that “only mom and me” (Dad is excluded) share at least one activity together, but which one? Wrapping presents in her “parents’ room” is a family ritual, with “everyone taking turns, helping each other,” though it is interesting to note that some presents are “already wrapped” (surely her own) while still other “wrapping [goes on] in my own room” because these gifts no doubt include presents for her parents.

Further analysis of the outline suggests at least two potential hazards even before the author has begun writing her essay. The outline itself is fairly non-descript. There does not seem to be a single item on it (with the possible exception of

the allusion to heavy metal music) which one would not expect to find on outlines of this subject written by any other student in class. There is nothing unique, in other words, nothing special or potentially surprising to set apart this writer's experience from that of her peers. Moreover, there does not appear to be a distinct relationship between individual items on the outline and the writer's previously stated focus, namely that "the Christmas of yesterday is no longer the Christmas of today." The stated focus implies that the writer will compare her present expectation of Christmas with her past experiences. The recollection of her childhood experiences at Christmas recalled from a more mature perspective years later could provide a powerful focus for her essay. In comparing these two perspectives, what potential meaning might the writer discover? The outline, regrettably, does not provide even the slightest clue.

In developing the initial draft of her essay, the student made three attempts at developing an appropriate lead paragraph under the title she had selected for her essay.

Modern Christmas

1. Yesterday, the snow fell softly. Each individual flake taking its time drifting from the sky to the ground. However, today the snow just fell.
2. In past years, the snow covered the snow like a quilt. Each new flake was an additional stitch in the quilt.
3. In past years, the snow drifted softly from the sky. Each flake was another stitch in the thick, white quilt which covered the earth. It was as if heaven had fallen upon the earth. Presently, though, snow just fell.

The title itself suggests that the writer is conscious of her essay's original aim or purpose; the idea that a "modern Christmas" is somehow significantly different from her past experiences provides at least a tentative focus for the opening paragraph. The contrast between past and present is indicated by key words or phrases: "yesterday," "today," "in past years," and "presently." In addition, the writer's use of description constitutes a potentially

effective approach to attract the reader's interest in her subject.

However, the recursive pattern of the three initial attempts at creating a descriptive setting in the opening paragraph also suggests that the author is dissatisfied with the expression she has given to her thoughts. She abandons her first attempt at developing an effective lead paragraph after writing only three sentences. Her second attempt involves the use of more figurative language: the simile, "the snow covered the earth like a quilt," is imaginative, but here too the thought abruptly breaks off following the assertion that "each new flake was an additional stitch in the quilt."

The third version of the lead paragraph is the most promising. It integrates the essay's implicit focus (the contrast between Christmas past and present) within the more descriptive context of the revised simile ("the earth is like a quilt"). The author combines the two separate sentences in her second lead paragraph into the single statement: "each flake was another stitch in the thick, white quilt which had covered the earth." Nevertheless, the paragraph ends with a hint of disappointment: "presently, though, snow just fell."

The next series of notations in the student's manuscript indicates that she has undertaken an entirely different approach to her essay and has added a new title.

Christmas Present

1. 'Tis the Season to be Jolly had fallen upon
2. The Spirit of Christmas Past invaded my dreams
one cozy December night, two days before
3. Outside the snow drifted softly from the sky adding another
4. With each falling flake, another stitch was added
to the thick white quilt which covered the earth. I
slept soundly inside surrounded by warmth, while
inside my mind the Spirit of Christmas Past invaded
my dreams.

These four attempts at developing a new lead paragraph for her essay reveal that the author has switched from description to personal narration in her attempt to generate a more effective opening paragraph. Once again, however, a recursive pattern of

development undercuts the narrative flow of the essay. In essence, the clipped, unfinished sentences reveal a writer who already is mentally revising her writing even before she has had an opportunity to complete her thoughts and record them on paper.

With seven frustrating attempts at developing a lead paragraph already behind her, the student made yet another attempt to begin her essay. In formulating this latest attempt, she decided to retain her title, "Christmas Present," and the last two sentences of her previous draft (number 7).

Christmas Present

1. With each falling flake another stitch was added to the thick white quilt which covered the earth. I slept soundly inside surrounded by warmth, while the Spirit of Christmas Past invaded my dreams.
2. It could have been any year, for every year was the same.
3. A heavenly aroma which engulfed my nostrils.
4. The inflaming of my nostrils by a heavenly aroma carried
5. My nostrils awakened me to a heavenly aroma which carried me from my bed into the kitchen.

The student's handwritten manuscript indicates that she made an editorial deletion in the second sentence (leaving out the phrase "inside my mind") before she added four new sentences to round out her opening paragraph. However, three of the additional sentences contain revisions of a similar idea: that on Christmas morning the author was awakened by the aroma of her mother's cooking. Even more significant is the fact that two of these three revisions involve sentence fragments which occur in the manuscript, we must surmise, because the author was already revising her thoughts before she had fully committed them to paper.

Recursive writing of this kind is commonplace among inexperienced writers. While a more experienced writer would continue to express his thoughts and, only after they have been developed at some length, return to revise and clarify them, the less experienced writer will often attempt to revise his thoughts immediately after he commits his ideas to paper.

Invariably, the result is almost always an unfinished, fragmentary, and incomplete draft characterized by concurrent revision.

Concurrent revision constitutes a form of writer's block which effectively prevents an author from developing even the most rudimentary initial draft.² In this student's essay, twelve separate attempts at developing the lead paragraph to her essay ended without a single completed paragraph being written. At the same time, ironically, these failed attempts reveal several sophisticated approaches to the writing task. The switch from description to narration, the use of figurative language, and the contrast between past and present ordinarily would provide a sufficient stimulus for more experienced writers to develop an initial draft of their essay.

Moreover, experienced writers are more likely to express their thoughts without experiencing a concurrent need to revise them. Less experienced writers, in contrast, unrealistically expect their initial written expression to be close to perfection and, consequently, they tend to revise their writing at the same time their thoughts are being expressed. In the latter instance, the compulsion to revise writing the instant it is generated literally usurps the ability of the writer to express himself coherently. Writing either comes to a standstill or aimlessly circles on the same point as the writer tries to "get it right" by revising, rather than developing, his ideas.

Certainly this pattern of recursive writing is illustrated in the case study. The development of the student's ideas comes to a virtual standstill as she attempts on twelve distinct occasions to revise her thoughts about the significance of Christmas even **before** she has succeeded in developing an extensive analysis of her subject or committed any of her ideas to paper. It is also interesting to recall that the student previously had prepared an outline of her essay during a pre-writing exercise. Despite the existence of a fairly detailed sketch of the direction her essay should have taken, the author still experienced difficulty writing a draft that moves the reader beyond the opening paragraph.

One can sense in the twelve futile attempts at developing the lead paragraph of her essay a desperation that, on occasion, confronts even the best writers. With inexperienced writers,

however, the pattern of recurrent revision clearly undermines the writing process and renders impossible any attempt to develop even the most basic idea. The writing process stalls as the writer repeatedly revises a text that he has not even written yet because of the compulsion to express himself perfectly in his initial draft. The irony is that, in any instance involving a pattern of concurrent revision, the writer is so busy thinking about **how** to express himself that he never manages to convey **what** he intended to say in the first place. In other words, writing never proceeds beyond the most rudimentary context because of the repeated attempts of the inexperienced writer to delay developing the text while he revises what little writing he has managed to commit to paper.

The result is obvious and predictable: confronted with a draft that goes nowhere, the writer becomes frustrated with the writing task and his own failure to communicate his ideas effectively. More long-lasting and damaging to his self-confidence as a writer is the tendency to lapse into a pattern of concurrent revision **whenever** a situation demands written communication. Needless to say, students who lapse into a pattern of concurrent revision whenever they attempt to generate written texts need to become aware of their tendency toward premature revision.

During the first of two writing conferences I had with this student, we discussed the recurrent pattern of her writing that was suggested by her twelve attempts at developing an opening paragraph. When I asked her why she tended to break off her thoughts before she had completely expressed herself, she replied that she wanted to make sure that her story sounded right. "I keep writing over and over," she explained, "until I think I've come up with the right words, the right way of saying things." When I suggested that it was her desire to achieve perfection with her first draft that probably led her to constantly revise her thoughts, she appeared surprised at first, but then admitted that she had always struggled with writing assignments because she never was satisfied with the way she expressed herself.

I surmised that this student's distaste for writing could be traced to her constant need to revise her thoughts and the subsequent frustration she experienced when she discovered

that she was not making much progress in completing the writing assignment. At this point I recommended that she try once again to complete a draft of her essay, but I cautioned her that once she began to write, she shouldn't stop to revise her ideas or worry about how she expressed herself. Then, in one of those delightful twists that often occur in writing conferences, the student asked me if she could change her subject. "After so many false starts," she pleaded, "I'm tired of this topic."

We turned our attention to her original brainstorming list of sixteen topics. The last item on her list, "Collecting for the Telethon," caught her attention, and she agreed to begin a new essay on this topic. I wanted to see her initial draft by next class, however, and I again cautioned her against writing her essay and revising it concurrently. "Revision comes later," I explained, "once you've developed your initial draft."

During our second writing conference, the student brought me what at first appeared to be three unpromising attempts at developing this new essay. The first passage consisted of a single sentence (*"In the heat of early September, eight feet pounded the scorching hot pavement"*) which she had scratched out in her notebook before she reverted to her accustomed habit of revising what she had already written. Her second attempt was a full paragraph, however. *"Every year, up until I was fourteen, I would find myself, along with my two sisters and the girl next door, pounding the scorching hot pavement in the heat of early September. In our hands we carried metal cans with a picture of Jerry Lewis and his kids on them. We listened joyfully to the music being created by the jingling of the coins. All day we would knock on doors. Sometimes our knuckles would start to bleed. By the end of the day, we would find ourselves standing outside of the grocery store by our house. The final event would be the counting of the money by my mother."*

Dissatisfied with what she had written thus far, the student then crossed out this passage and began writing her third attempt at an opening paragraph for her new essay. *"Every year, in the heat of early September, my sisters, the girl next door, and I would set out on the Saturday afternoon of Labor*

Day Weekend carrying metal cans. On the cans were written the words, 'Help Fight Muscular Dystrophy' and 'Support the Jerry Lewis Telethon.' The first contributions deposited in the cans always came from our own pockets, our allowance."

After reading all three passages, I asked the student if she recalled the advice I had given her during our first writing conference. Although she could accurately repeat the advice I had shared with her, I noted that she still seemed preoccupied with revising her essay as she was writing it. In her mind, writing and revising had become concurrent activities. I once again reinforced the importance of separating these two aspects of the writing process. "You are trying to write your essay and revise it at the same time," I explained. "That's what is slowing you down and preventing you from completing your essay." I invited her to tell me the rest of her story about collecting money for the Jerry Lewis Telethon and ended the conference by sharing some simple advice with her. "Once you start relating your story, don't stop to revise any of it until you come to the end of your story.

Whether the student was genuinely pleased with my advice, or whether she was merely relieved that I had overlooked the fact that she had not brought a completed essay with her to class that day, I'll never know. However, patience is an unspoken and underestimated part of the writing process. The next time I saw this student, she handed me the initial draft of her telethon essay—a satisfied look on her face, I'd like to think, knowing that she had written something of which she could be proud. (A complete draft of this essay is reproduced in Appendix A.)

My experience in working with students whose writing demonstrates a pattern of concurrent revision has shown me that a single conference sometimes is sufficient to remedy the problem or, at the least, alert the student to the pattern of recurrent revision which characterizes his writing process. Once students have learned to recognize patterns of concurrent revision in their own writing, they are less likely to allow premature revision to frustrate their attempt at developing an extended draft of their ideas.

Textual analysis of the fragmented samples of writing in this case study indicates that the failure to develop even the most

rudimentary initial draft of an essay can often be attributed to problems that inexperienced writers face with concurrent revision. Furthermore, an important pedagogical implication of the case study suggests that even well-planned pre-writing strategies may not be effective in overcoming this type of writer's block. After all, the student in the case study had defined a clear focus for her essay and had developed a fairly detailed outline to suggest how she could develop her ideas. The problem of concurrent revision complicates the writing process because it occurs almost immediately after the student has begun to generate a written text. It compresses two distinct phases of the writing process (development and revision) into a single mental activity that, by its very nature, precludes effective communication. In essence, the initial draft never develops or takes shape because it is continually being revised by a writer who is so preoccupied with expressing himself correctly that he loses sight of his original focus.

Notes:

1. Unfortunately, the advice given to students about writing can appear confusing, if not openly contradictory, to inexperienced writers. What is a student to make of the advice of one editor who tells him, "Pick a subject you know something about," when one page later in the same textbook the student is admonished to "write about something you do not know about" (Constance Gefvert, *The Confident Writer* [New York: Norton, 1988], 23-24)? Similarly, will students become disheartened when one author advises them to "look first at your own experience" (Edward Dornan, *The Brief English Handbook* [Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1990], 278), when just as confidently another editor asserts, "Identify a topic from someone else's experience" (Robert Marzano, *The Writing Process* [New York: Van Nostrand Company, 1981], 34)? How does a student reconcile the advice, "Never start writing until you have thought about your topic a while" (Charles Bazerman, *Writing Skills Handbook* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988], 95), with the recommendation to "select a topic quickly rather than wait for inspiration" (Dornan 278)? Are we really helping students to write more

effectively when we tell them to “make sure that [their] topic offers something special” (Robert Perrin, *The Beacon Handbook* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988], 13), or that, once they have reached an impasse, they should “try wearing comfortable clothing”(http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/block.html)?

2. Teachers, researchers and writing specialists have addressed the problem of writer’s block from a variety of perspectives, most often suggesting strategies to overcome it. Toby Fulwiler identifies seven such strategies (from brainstorming and free-writing through clustering and dialogue) that may help a writer to develop the text of an essay more completely. Hence, Fulwiler’s treatment is typical of the advice suggested in most writing textbooks. See *The Working Writer* (Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001), especially Chapter 7, “Strategies for Starting,” (65-70). Concurrent revision, on the other hand, identifies an aspect of the writing process that is distinct from each of these pre-writing strategies. It identifies a stage in the writing process when writing comes to a halt because of a tendency of the writer to want to revise his writing almost as soon as he begins writing. Peter Elbow comes to a similar conclusion in *Writing with Power* (Oxford University Press, 1998). See Chapter One, “The Dangerous Method: Trying to Write it Right the First Time,” especially pages 39-45.

Appendix

The following text replicates the first draft of the essay submitted by the student following our second writing conference. She left this initial draft untitled, and passages that are underlined below were crossed out in her original manuscript. The manuscript makes clear that the writer intended to delete these passages, though in some cases she introduced similar phrases later in her text. The underlined passages indicate that the student was still preoccupied with revising her text as she generated it, but to a significantly lesser degree than her earlier efforts. Unlike her previous essay, which involved fifteen failed attempts at generating an initial draft, her second writing experience afforded her an opportunity of completing a work-

able draft that could be developed through subsequent revision.

Every year, from age six to twelve, on the Saturday afternoon of Labor Day Weekend, I would find myself walking on the scorching hot sidewalk in the heat of early September. Accompanying me would be my sisters and the girl next door. Our hands held metal cans. On the cans was a picture of Jerry Lewis and the words, "Help Fight Muscular Dystrophy." We would walk until blisters appeared on our feet and the treading of our brand new Nikes was worn completely off. Our knuckles would begin to bleed after knocking on so many doors. But, the music created by the jingling of the coins motivated us to Soon, sweat would pour off our brows. However, our minds weren't on the heat. though. Instead, they were on the filling of the cans.

We never quit until the cans were full as night fell. Our walk wouldn't end until the cans were full. Usually, the filling would take until night fall. At that time, our weary bodies would trudge on home. The only thought in my head was of how much money we had collected. (Did we collect more than last year? Did we collect enough to make a difference?) As we approached the front step, my parents would be standing in the doorway wearing upon their faces smiles from ear to ear. The cans would be handed over to my mother. While we waited. Their daughters were doing an unselfish deed on their own and they were bursting with pride.

While we waited for the total While I laid in bed waiting to hear the results from today's efforts, my eyelids became very heavy. I fought tried as hard as I could to fight off sleep. Within about half an hour, my mother entered my the room and announced, "The four of you have collected seven hundred and eighty five dollars . . ." Upon hearing those words, sleep over took me. I slept soundly unaware that

At the time, I was unaware that we would no longer collect for the telethon. We would no longer collect for the telethon next At that I slept soundly with a smile across my face. At that time, I was unaware that next year we would find ourselves shopping in the mall instead of walking the sidewalks.

At age thirteen, there seemed to be more important things in life than collecting money. So we spent our Saturday Labor Day shopping for cloths, talking about boys, and finding new ways to wear our hair. It wouldn't be until I was seventeen that I would realize the importance of our past endeavors.

When I turned seventeen, I volunteered some of my free time at the local hospital. I wore a red and white striped dress and a little white cap. My job consisted of changing bedding, delivering and receiving bedpans, bringing meals, and spending time with the children. There was a little boy who I was particularly fond of. His name was Michael. and he had eyes bluer than the sky.

Michael was a small boy no older than mine. He had eyes bluer than the sky, hair of gold, and a smile that would melt even the coldest heart. He was suffering from Duchenne's muscular dystrophy. By age five the disease had affected his leg and pelvic muscles, causing toe-walking, lordosis (abnormal curvature of the spine), and his scapulae flared out (or "winged") when he raised his arms. By age nine, the disease had completely taken over his leg and pelvic muscles. He had been confined to a wheelchair for six months. Six months before I met him, the disease had confined him to a wheelchair. He was confined to a wheelchair.

We spent many hours together playing board games, strolling pushing him through the courtyard of the hospital, and talking about almost anything. One day he said to me, "Chris, there are two things that I want to be when I grow up."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I want to be a doctor and a pilot."

"Why?"

"I want to be a doctor so that I can help other kids with muscular dystrophy. I want to be a pilot because I want to soar through the clouds like the birds. Do you think I can do it?" It was his turn to ask a question.

"I know you can," was my reply. As those words escaped from my mouth, my heart sank. According to the doctors, Michael's condition was worsening. The disease was rapidly weakening his cardiac muscles. and he probably had He would never live to become a doctor or a pilot.

When I left the room later that afternoon, a lump appeared in my throat. “Why him, God, why him?” Tears swelled in my eyes as I thought, “Why him, God, why him?”

As the months passed, I became closer to Michael became the little brother that I never had. He helped me to see the little things that life had to offer. I had never really looked at a flower, watched the birds soar, or listen to the crickets until I met him. This little boy changed the way I looked at life and made my problems seem obsolete. I only wished that there was something, anything that I could do something for him

Three days before Labor Day Weekend of that year
I bought him a Three days

A week before Labor Day Weekend of that year, I bought him a model airplane kit. His eyes sparkled and his face lit right up. He worked busily. I had never seen him so happy.

Later that day his happiness was interrupted Later that day, his happiness was interrupted by a coughing attack. The disease was destroying his respiratory system. He looked at me with sad eyes. “Chris,” he said weakly, “I want to say good-bye.”

“This isn’t good-bye,” I replied.

“I’ll be back from Ohio in two days and we’ll work on your airplane.”

“I’m going to miss you,” his voice quivered. He sat up quickly and hugged me real tight. Tears streamed down his face. and his voice quivered

“Hey, calm down. I’ll be back,” I said reassuringly. At that time, he loosened his grip hold and laid back down. Within minutes he was asleep.

I went back three days later only to find his room empty. On his bed laid a finished model airplane. I took it and headed for home. On his bed laid the finished model airplane. Gently, I picked it up and headed for home. Gently I picked it up. Then I headed home.

Michael’s funeral was on the Saturday afternoon of Labor Day Weekend. However, I would not I did not attend. Instead, I found myself walking on the scorching hot pavement in the heat of early September. In my hand, I held a metal can.