Personal Essay Sketch

It was almost as if it was yesterday. The low lighting lit up my paper just enough so my writing was visible. There were about 3 to 4 lamps around the classroom, each fitting nicely in a corner. On one of those corners sat the teacher’s desk. My high school English teacher, Mr. Frode, was a slightly old, calm, and collective man. He was extremely open to almost any idea, never judged anybody, and couldn’t resist writing. He absolutely loved to write, he was very fitting as my English and creative writing teacher. Frode was interesting, so interesting that I took his creative writing class just so I could spend a little extra time with him.

I would rank Mr. Frode as one of the most interesting beings I have ever been with. The man simply does not compare to anybody else I know. Patience comes easy with him. A student once stole his Ipod touch, and the man hardly seemed upset. Another student flat out swore at him in front of his students. Frode completely shut the child down while remaining almost emotionally untouched. He was not there to argue, he was there to teach. In his creative writing class he always discussed with us about writing itself, as if it were some magical way of transferring or converting thoughts, feelings, and events into another form. But there were thousands if not millions of different ways you could portray and perceive an event on paper. Each way it was wrote, with each word, and each syllable, it was different. The connotation of literature is extremely sensitive. This was the world that my teacher lived in. He was like a mad scientist that dreamed of equations and formulas. Except for Frode those formulas were more like sentences or words put together in just the correct amounts in order to convey a perfect meaning or feeling. It didn’t take long for someone to realize he seemed a bit different from the average person. He wasn’t just there to teach you English or creative writing, he was there to teach you life lessons. A true teacher. It got to the point where I began to ask myself “Why him?’, “Why is it that he seems so different?” I figured he probably had an interesting background, so I began to ask around.

Many of my friends mentioned that he used to be a Trappist monk for about 4 years. Trappist monks typically refrain from speaking unless absolutely necessary. And because he was a monk, he meditated quite often (at least in his case). I thought that was an important piece in his history. I knew meditation could have a variety of health benefits, and might be contributing to his overall state of mind. Of course meditation could not possibly be the only factor in determining Frode’s behavior. Each and every one of us behaves based on our genetics and environment. But I had a hunch that his meditation practices played a good deal on his personality. This led me to wondering not just about my teacher’s personality, but the shaping of the personality itself, which in fact can be done through meditation (Keown, 98).

“Just try it for 5 to 10 minutes when you’re just starting out. Your mind will wander, but don’t force it to stop wandering. Just refocus your mind.” This was my teacher’s tips about meditation when I finally picked his brain about it. The idea is to sit in a calm, quiet area - a place where you will not be disturbed. Then you are to sit upright, in a comfortable position, and focus on something of your choosing. This could be your breath, or just your body itself. One by one you will want to relax each muscle, starting from the top or bottom of your body and slowly working toward the other end, until you have every muscle in a rested and comfortable position. Then you can focus on, for example, your breath. Notice how your body feels and moves when you slowly breathe in, and out. Notice the temperature of the air you breathe, and the amount of air your lungs take in. At this point the mind will begin to wander and daydream. Simply refocus the mind onto your breath and keep doing this for as long as you feel.

As a beginner it will be hard to meditate for even just 10 minutes at a time. But once we are able to block out thoughts and truly focus, what exactly is happening in there? What process does the brain undergo during meditation? Damien Keown, a bioethicist on Buddhism, shines some light on the subject in his book *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. “Research suggests that the brain generates more alpha waves when in this [meditative] state, indicating a condition of relaxed creativity.” There is clearly something interesting happening in the brain during this mysterious process.