

## Precious Life



### **I.     *What is the center of my world?***

Academia has always been a significant focus of mine; my academic development and success took priority, and influenced many of my decisions, both in the short and long term. I grew up on a boarding school campus surrounded by intellectual minds, and I found purpose excelling in the world of academia. I learned to learn by approaching the object of my curiosity with distance and simulacra. I often prioritized reading and thinking about a topic over living it, over experiencing it. I would learn to cook by reading about others learning to cook, rather than by baking a pie myself in the kitchen. Curiosity is one of my driving life forces, but this approach to learning drove me to feel detached from reality— it made me feel isolated in my curious nature. It wasn't until joining Johnston, and learning about various alternative, more embodied education models as we have in this class, that I reflected on what education meant to me and re-examined if I was living in a manner conducive to my beliefs.

It was powerful to read the pedagogical philosophy that we did in the beginning of the class. I had never considered the spiritual and collectivist aspect of learning. I began to understand curiosity, the will to learn, as a force that could be directed and that would direct me. Humans are born knowing relatively nothing compared to what we learn biologically and mentally in order to function. Much of living is learning. But to what end is curiosity part of human nature with the sole function of keeping us alive? Existence is not simply to remain physically alive, but to embody life; to interact and affect a world outside of yourself. To this end, I see curiosity as a function of human nature, driving humans to interact and connect with the outer world. Curiosity serves the physical and spiritual bodies of our beings. So to confine curiosity and learning to a classroom, to books, and to solitude, flattens the concept, and misled my understanding of my basic nature. It was transformative to reconsider curiosity and learning, and to redefine for myself what had been defined for me. It was like realizing that I was using a word to mean something simply because that's what I had associated it with, not by what it meant. John Dewey and Ralph Waldo Emerson consciously organized the dissonance I'd felt learning in traditional academia, and poetically framed learning and curiosity to the depth of my experience. Throughout the class, I continued to learn more and more about myself as I engaged with various communities of learning; I became more involved with Johnston by attending community meetings and events, I participated in Renewal, and I shadowed a Tucson Waldorf School. As I saw learning manifest in diverse ways, it became clear to me that education is a product of fundamental human nature; it is our expression and creation. Likewise, this collection of reflective writings is both a creation and culmination of my learning.

◇ Curiosity drives me outside of myself and into the world.

◇ All direction is redirection,

learning through the mind directs living through the mind.

learning through the body directs living through the body.

◇ We should not confine our living by the limits of our minds.



“Educators and education do not want to deal with the affective dimensions of learning, yet that...is  
where our motivation lies”  
*(Hard Travelin')*

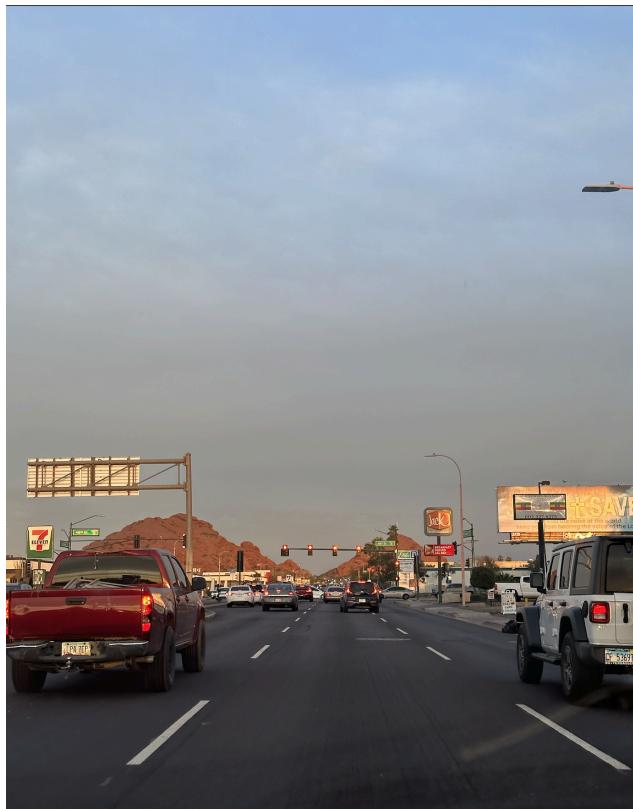


“The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of  
planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is  
nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts.“

*(The American Scholar)*

## ***II. Where does curiosity drive me?***

It drove me to Tucson to see a Jewish Mystic  
who lived in a desert home built in the 60s.  
Her home smelled of pepper and spices,  
with a stone floor and a cat.  
We sat on the red couch in the afternoon  
speaking in tongues:  
She told me to record my dreams  
(I already do)  
and then she described how she'd met her grand-daughter in her sleep  
before she was born  
and I told her how I've known someone I've never met  
and how I'd seen my great-grandmother's spirit in the sky  
She nodded,  
then said to live in questions—  
so to study the unknown instead of living within the known  
—and to determine what was true for myself.



At the Renewal Dinner, I was briefly introduced to Linda Braun, a Johnston Alum of '79. I was intrigued by her experience as a Waldorf teacher, though our passing conversation was cut short by Tim's speech, and we parted ways. We exchanged numbers the next morning at the Director's Brunch, and two weeks later, we finished our conversation over the phone. At the end of the call, Linda suggested that I look around Redlands for possible Waldorf Schools, and added that if I was ever near Tucson, I was welcome to stay at her home and tour the Tucson Waldorf School she helped to establish. The offer may have been simply polite, but I was on spring break and happened to have plans to visit Phoenix in the coming days. Curiosity drove me seven hours on twenty-four hour notice to stay with Linda, who graciously and in true Johnston fashion, opened up her beautiful home and mind to me. The school was set on a beautiful old ranch at the Catalina Foothills, and when we arrived, the students were filtering into various classrooms. Linda had arranged for us to sit in on a fourth-grade class, and I watched in wonder as the children learned through art and song. Linda introduced me to many of her friends and former peers, and I got a chance to speak with them about their teaching experience: what they have learned about themselves, child development, and the human spirit. As I left the school amidst the storms that filled the valley, I saw myself as a girl, learning to read through fantasy and learning to live by playing pretend. Imagination continues to shape my becoming, and it was profound to visit a place and its people that also understand imagination to be a function of learning and being. I suddenly understood why the school felt familiar— I had found a part of myself reflected back by a community.

### ***III. How to live to learn? // Intention as an Inner Structure***

I think of curiosity as being fluid in nature, and needing structure and direction to actualize learning. I came to Johnston knowing how to learn. I was independent, disciplined, and self-directed, though the expression of those qualities were often confined (being self-directed was good, so long as it followed the syllabus). Tim described the phenomenon best in his ACLA 2016 essay on learning and parties, "...in the University, a camp is erected to monitor and supervise the behavior of students, charged both with financing their own education and their own enclosure". I feel there is often an illusion of freedom in institutions, where "freedom" is praised so long as it serves the institution, which has led me to recognize the complexity of formalized education. Liability and financial concerns are often relevant, and understandably become prioritized to secure institutional preservation, often at the expense of those the institution "aims to serve". At Redlands, the relationship between Greek life and colleges is a paradigm for this phenomenon. Fraternities and sororities are a large student community that often contribute to a sense of larger school community and joy through the parties and events they host. Due to liability concerns, and reacting to the current climate of college press surrounding hazing and drug related incidents, the school has tightened their grip on fraternities and sororities, and by doing so, indirectly exercised control over the student community. This is where interests clash; the school is acting out of an interest to preserve the institution, not to preserve the freedoms and communities of the student body.

I will always exist in different manifestations of institutions, and as I reflect on moving forward through my life, I see how it will be integral to understand how my authentic existence fits within the interests of the institution. In this way, I will be able to work in tandem with institutions when aligned, and in "Parallel Polis" when conflicting. The ability to lead myself, and step outside of an institutional approach when necessary, is a lesson I learned from Johnston. Educational institutions act as outer structures that facilitate learning with established pedagogy and practices, and though an outer structure is sufficient, a strong inner structure can also accomplish what an outer structure aims to.

#### **IV. A CRY FOR AUTHENTICITY !!!!!!**

In January, I attended the Conference for Undergraduate Women in Physics. I had applied in the fall on a whim, and gladly accepted the offer to visit San Diego (with food and accommodations covered!). It was the first conference I'd attended, and I had no expectations. I certainly did not expect to learn what I did. As the conference was mostly run, attended, and staffed by women, the conference had an inherent undertone which explored identity. Though there were direct discussions that addressed the shared experience of being a woman in spheres "ruled" by men, there were also many indirect explorations of authenticity. In Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell's presentation about her experience discovering pulsars, she dedicated a section to discussing other people's "almost discoveries" (as pulsars appear as "blinking stars", it's likely that they had been casually viewed by many before they were officially discovered). Burnell told the story of a debate between a woman who had seen a "blinking star", and a man who responded that there was no such thing, and even if there was, he saw a fixed star. Burnell went on to explain how this experience was not unique; there were many women with pulsar sightings. As it turns out, the Crab Pulsar blinks 30 times per second, which is close to the limit of what human optics can register, a limit which young women are particularly sensitive to. Therefore, when she saw a pulsar, he only registered a star. There are limits to the information that any individual can obtain, as knowledge is bound by perception.

This story ruminated and resurfaced a few weeks later during a discussion in one of the mock classes of Renewal, "Seeing Life Differently: Strabismus, Mono-Vision, And Johnston", led by Melanie Herzog and Tom Boman. Desks were arranged in a circle, and though I was the only current student, the age of participants ranged from my age (20) to the early 60s. Tom started off the discussion by describing his lifelong experience with the condition of Strabismus, and how his biological difference changed his perception and affected his life. He opened up the conversation by saying he was curious about the ways our individual biological constitution changes our perception, and what it's like when you perceive differently than what is infrastructurally supported as "normal". It was a truly fascinating conversation, where we talked about the myth of normalcy and made a case for neurodiversity. It reminded me of the book "An Immense World", which details different examples of how animals perceive sensory information, and how what they are able to perceive, as well as what they aren't, shapes their "umwelt", their perceptual environment, and their "world". This phenomenon exists in humans as well, beyond neurodivergence and a young woman's optic range. I believe that there are many nuances to physical perception, as well as mental interpretation, that shape the information an individual obtains. I was reminded of the Taoist writing, "Whether I really feel his existence or not has nothing to do with the way it is". How reality exists to me is not the whole story of how it is, but nevertheless exists as a piece of truth within it.

We've discussed how the living learning of Johnston creates space for authenticity, and I would like to further discuss the function of authenticity. I believe that there is a rather existential importance to

authenticity, and it is one's responsibility to assert their authentic reality outside of their head to the best of their ability.<sup>1</sup> By learning from one another, we transcend the limits of individual perception and build collective knowledge.

How do we live in practice of respecting authenticity, both our own and others? The man saw a star, the woman a pulsar. He shared his truth, she shared hers. Both perceptions gave valuable information, be it the existence of pulsar or the biological limits of male optics, and both should be honored for the sake of knowledge and existence. I feel that all people's expressions should likewise be loved and honored, even if we cannot understand or place the meaning in their perception. What is unknown to us doesn't define what is, and I believe value is inherent to authenticity.



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<sup>1</sup> Authenticity can manifest in many forms, (such as fashion, art, words, and personality) though it is not defined by its medium. Authenticity is not bound by form.