

What Difference Does Writing Make?

Leading Writers on Writing

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Obsession

By Liam Merrick

The bright flashing lights caught her eyes, startling her. Blinking, she slowly walked towards the dazzling wall of colour and sound. She reached out to touch the seat before she sat down. Her eyes took in her new surroundings, the golden sign atop the machine, the spinning icons, with cherries and bananas turning in constant cycle. She was amazed at the sounds of life coming from the machine. Reaching into her purse she took out a shiny gold coin. She slipped the coin into the slot and watched as the columns lit up and the music grew louder. Her eyes never left the screen. But what harm could it do, she was having fun and it was only a couple of dollars.

She took hold of the lever, her palm covering the round handle. Wrapping her fingers around the ball, she pulled the lever down. It gave easily, not at all like she imagined. She watched as the icons began to spin, becoming faster and faster until the colours nearly blurred. She smiled and clapped her hands together as the spinning icons aligned to show a row of cherries. A small gushing of coins came forth from the slot. Quickly counted she guessed she had won about \$10. Taking one of the coins from the bowl where they had fallen, she inserted it into the coin slot. It was time to play again. She couldn't stop now, she knew she could win more.


It felt weird, his mum not being here, she should be home by now, but she wasn't. He didn't know if she was held up by work or if she was out with friend. He knew that normally his mum

would be making dinner right now, while he watched her cook. But their family ritual would not take place tonight. He had to cook tonight. His mother was out and his older sister couldn't be bothered now, she was studying. As he neared her room, he saw the door was slightly ajar. Peeking through, he saw his sister at her desk, pen rushing across the page. Books mounted atop each other, piled high on either side of her. He didn't want to distract her from her studies. He gripped the side of the door and gently closed it, careful to be quiet. He didn't see his sister smile as she heard the door close, how could he? He had dinner to make.



The lights and sounds coming from the machine had entrapped her. A woman who prided herself on always being on time had been on the machine for hours. Had she forsaken her children for this machine? Raising her hand from the coloured buttons, she tried to rub the tiredness from her eyes. By chance, at the exact time her hands moved away from her eyes, a man next to her stood and drained his cup. With his hand raised she could clearly see the face of his watch. She gasped when she saw the time. Hours had rushed past while she had sat silent, staring at the glowing colours of the screen and continued to pour money into the machine, just to feel that wonderful sensation of winning. Grasping her cup of coins, which had dwindled to almost nothing, she headed for the door. As she left the bright, well-lit building she noticed just how dark it was outside. She was normally home when it was still light. It was pitch black now. When she pulled into her driveway she noticed that none of the lights were on. Taking care to be quiet, she opened the front door and entered her dark, empty house. She walked into her kitchen. Turning on the light she noticed the bowl of cold pasta waiting for her. Silent tears slid down her face. Even after neglecting her children in favour of a machine they took care of her. Never again she swore. Never again would she pick a poker machine over her children.

But she did. Over the following months, she spent more and more time away from her house and her kids. At first she kept to her promise of staying away from the machines. However, the desire to play was just too strong. The poker machines became her life. At work, her thoughts were dominated by her plans to play. Every day her lunches became longer as she rushed to the nearest sports bar, to spend as long as she could playing the pokies. Her children had become accustomed to depend on themselves. Her youngest child had taken on more responsibility than anyone his age should have. His teachers did not understand that their star pupil was too busy looking after his older sister, who had taken her mother's rejection in a different form. She had not burdened herself like her brother, but had gone down a far more destructive path.



He was worried about his friend; she had not been the same for months. She had changed, and not for the better. She spent less time studying and more time hanging out with the jocks. He knew what they did to her and he knew that she let them. He wondered why she let those guys abuse her. What he didn't know was his friend had lost a mother, not to illness or separation, but to obsession. She felt like her mother had rejected and abandoned her. She allowed those guys to have her, to try to replace the affection that she no longer received from her mother. She believed that by letting men use her she was receiving the affection she both needed and craved. They would never abandon her like her mother. But they did. They used her as she used them, they did not use her to feel affection or love. They used her for sex. To them she was nothing more than a whore.

"Mum, we've had enough, if you don't get help we're leaving." He stood tall as he gave his mother the ultimate choice, to choose between her obsession and her family. Tears stained the eyes of all three members of this broken family. His sister stood beside him, looking smaller and weaker than he had ever seen her. She had become a different person. She spent less time on her studies, no longer interested in her future. He turned his head away from his older sister back to his mother. She had tears

pouring down her face — dark streaks of makeup followed the wet trails. As he looked at her, and saw what she did to his family, he hated her. He hated her for ruining their lives, and their futures. But seeing her as she was now, he could not help pitying her. No matter what happened, she was still his mother.

She looked at her two children through her tear-filled eyes. She hated herself for what she had done to their lives. Her son had grown beyond his age. He ran the family, taking on the responsibility of both son and father. If the situation were different she would be proud, but seeing him only brought sadness to her already sore heart. Her daughter had destroyed herself, her mind and her body while she had obsessed over playing games. Her daughter had given away her innocence again and again, in a vain hope for love that should have been provided for her. “My babies ... I’m so sorry” She broke down, tears flowing rapidly down her checks. She fell to her knees as the weight from her heart came crashing down around her. Her two children surrounded their mother in a hug. Nothing would ever be the same for this family. On the long road to recovery there would be bumps and downward spirals, but the family would face the future together.



Liam Merrick wrote this essay in 2006 when he was in Year 11 at Xavier College, Kew, Victoria.