

Geraldine Malone
Exercise #4: Items
April 22, 2008

Stuck on the Wall

I knew I'd never live up to the stigma. Brilliant savant. Perfect SAT score. Ivy League matriculated. A future in medicine or law. I didn't fit the mold. Truth be told, 1190 was the best I could do after three cracks at the dreadful exam and I never considered visiting, let alone applying to, an Ivy League institution.

From the moment I left the commencement ceremony, parting through cloaked classmates and stagnant June air, I knew my reign held no rule past the football field's ground. Life would quickly move on; someone else would capture the temporary prestigious title. I would be left scrambling for a new goal, a new identity. I *was* Valedictorian. And then who would I be?

"I'm so glad it's you instead of a geek. You're like normal—and involved."

A once studious, now drugged-out classmate boosted my ego in the girls' room. Even the little people sung my praises. My dichotomy had them all fooled. As a brain I aced every honors or AP class available, held officer positions in Student Government, Honor Society and Spanish Club. But as a jock I participated in eleven out of twelve athletic seasons, earning Captain in both field hockey and lacrosse my senior year. I was the all around student. I was Valedictorian, had to be Valedictorian, and in its pursuit, I left little room for other rites of passage.

I busted myself to beat out M. D., whom my guidance counselors continually warned was close on my GPA tail. I had to be first, had to be the best. For what? Other

than a trinket to dust from time to time and a scholarship, I wonder what I truly gained by graduating best of the class. Peer respect? Small-town fame? An identity crisis?

My past has been stuck on the wall for eight years, proudly displayed at eye level. And I hardly look at it, unless someone points it out, prompting me to question its origin. The gold embossed walnut and onyx Principal's Award relics who I was—who I once strived to be. Its gold letters jump off the glossy black background, shouting the lies I've lived by:

“Way to go! You weren't the smartest student, but definitely the hardest working. All those late night and early morning cram sessions were worth it. Didn't it feel good to rub your high test scores in your peers' faces? Hard work really pays off, huh?”

Yeah. If that were all it said.

“Do you feel like a phony, wearing a title meant to go to a naturally smart person? Were all those A's worth never having a boyfriend, just boy friends? Worth never kissing a boy? Never attending parties or sharing a daring weekend adventure? Never feeling confident in the presence of your peers outside of school?”

Nearly a decade after I won the academic race, I'm a teacher, not a scientist like the students who graduated second and third. But hey, I was Valedictorian. I had to be Valedictorian. And now. . . I have this plaque.

Cheap Ruby Taps

Shoes I love, but I detest cheap shoes. Slathered glitter, glued so faintly that each step adds to a dazzling trail, only illuminates their inevitable walk to the landfill, the final shoebox for plastic soles. No pair of shoes racks my nerves more so than red, glittery,

Dorothy knock-offs sold year after year at low-end, bargain retail shops. Some genius in design hit it big time when he marketed the red patent leather Mary Jane for kids who yearn to be just like Yellow Brick Road walker.

Although there is no reason to buy such wastes of textiles outside of Halloween or dress-up attire, I can't deny my own childhood desire to own a pair. But I never did, perhaps fueling my disdain for them at this stage in my life.

Like most children with active imaginations and shaky understandings of fashion, I recall standing in a Payless shoe store, longing for a flashy pair of my own. *I would look so rad strutting my stuff in school, click clacking the slight heels down the tiled halls.* But, I feared, *What if I looked ridiculous?* The possibility of humiliation inhibited my plea for purchase. My parents weren't frivolous with money; so something as tasteless as red glitter glorified tap shoes would not be something they'd easily spring for anyway. Without asking, just mulling over my thoughts one foot in front of the racks, I could hear what they'd say: *They are impractical. You'll never wear them. They'll make a mess. You don't need them.*

They were cheap and unnecessary. I wouldn't have worn them; I didn't have the gall to pull them off. I hate the appeal they still have over countless children, and me year after year after year. My dreams of walking in Dorothy's shoes remain in a shelved shoebox. *Do they come in a size 8?*