Notes From Her Desktop

It had been a bad week. Her father was beginning to exhibit signs of age-related dementia. She and her sister called him groundhogs-dad, a twisted attempt at consolation. She fell into a construction hole and bruised her ego. Her Ficus dropped all of its leaves. And her dog died.

She contemplates these events as she stares at her desktop, attempting to finish at least one essay today. There are five or six extraordinary literary pieces of potential incandescent brilliance speaking to her in funny accents. Family meatball stories mix with displacement stories and hair stories and student stories and word games and politics. She paces in her bathrobe. She would smoke if she didn’t think smokers just really were so stupid. So she makes some tea. And thinks about walking her recently deceased doggie, which of course results in heaving, uncontrollable crying fits.

She craves closure, a clearing out of the cranial cobwebs. “Onward through the fog.” So, here it is. Everything you always wanted to know about the contents of the questionable author’s unfinished desktop and more.

Her life in six word sentences.

Her father’s brain; her mother’s heart. Her husband’s nightmare.

Her daughter’s mother; her advisor’s student; her students’ teacher. An artist’s subject; object of his affection. A musician’s muse.

Always someone else’s definition of her life.

She was bored.

So, she made meatballs. Everyone’s are different.

Just like people.

Begin with the ground beef. You may also add ground pork. Tofu is never an option, with apologies to vegetarians. Veal also a no-no, as it smacks of inhumanity, fully acknowledging the hypocrisy of the aforementioned commentary.

Add eggs, a splash of nice red wine, a lot of Parmesan cheese, a little ricotta, maybe a little mozzarella in small chunks, some day-old Italian bread, some basil, some oregano, maybe a little thyme if you’re in the mood, and definitely lots of garlic. Maybe throw in some mushrooms. Schmush (not a real word) using fingers. Form balls and sauté in olive oil, then add two cans of whole Italian tomatoes with
basil (first pureed in blender), a little nice red wine and cook for three or four hours on low heat. Feed a house full of your closest friends.

Some people are spicier than others, just like the meatballs.

She loved to dance to the wa, wa-wa-tusi.

Some people do crosswords. Some play games. She likes to play with redefining common words. Intractable. Unable to manipulate farm equipment. A friend’s definition of idiosyncrasy—two morons talking at the same time. She sometimes made up her own. Apocalypso: Rhythmic dance for the end of days.

MENSA has a contest every year to find the most hilarious creation of a new word from an old one, complete with definition. She especially liked these and wished she had invented them. Ignoranus: one who is both devoid of information—and an asshole. Sarchasm: The gulf between the witty and those who clearly just don’t get it.

Elitist bastards!

She reads her students’ essays. They use the wrong words. Spell check is the likely culprit. They write about Al Gore’s Incontinent Truth, obviously painful, and a new copulation of essays, to be sure replete with penetrating analysis (her colleagues’ penciled note.) Another student writes that drug companies have finally found a cure for male “impenitence.” She ponders the pharmaceutical facilitation of the language of the apology.

She thought she’d write a book: Live from the Melting Pot: New York Stories.

In truncated moments. Waiting for Cezanne at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A older woman enveloped in fur. A much younger lover. In and out in a huff. “This is not Cezanne Cezanne!” She said. She said. Sharing a table nearly as small as a large plate in a NY City restaurant after waiting an hour for the privilege. Grateful. Obsequious. A strange Central Park encounter with a man in a hospital gown. Wanna get stung by a bee? Sitting in traffic on a crumbling antique bridge threatening to collapse into the Long Island Sound. Repeat every weekend for two years. A car wrapped around a clothesline pole. Nervous laughter. A side mirror left to sit as still life on the hood after having been swiped off by a madly pedaling bicyclist. An Italian restaurant in the Bronx, a smoking waitress and red velvet on the walls. A bottle of
Anisette placed on the table with the espresso. Clear fluid in the cup after five hours of conversation.

She dropped her very first graduate seminar because she didn’t understand the post-modern-speak of her colleagues, only later to learn this particular genre could be defined as the absence of an idea about anything.

She wrote about a bad hair day. She had just relocated to the frozen tundra of rural Pennsylvania from Flagstaff, and she missed her friends. She missed the sunshine. She missed their voices in her home. But, her universe would enlarge. She would make new friends. And her disposition would improve. Most importantly, so would her hair.

She wrote yet another political campaign ad and faxed it to the DNC. Why Smart is Good. The French-club Mom. The Chess-club Dad. Rob the Scientist. Jane the Doctor. Mary the Writer. Peter the Professor.

Elitist Bitch!

But, SRSLY…Screw Joe-the-Plumber. And the incoherent Sarah Palin. And now for your continuing entertainment, the new faces of the vacuous Michelle Bachman and the Ken-doll Romney and the dread-cowboy-Perry. See: thinking with the dumb stick. Thank you, Ling.

Another essay looms large.

She mused about direct and inverse relationships. The Brain and the Penis; Sarah Palin as hot? The larger the trash pile, the greater the likelihood of voting Republican. The greater the narcissism, the smaller the brain. The larger the vehicle, the smaller the penis…and the greater the likelihood of voting Republican. An astute study in stereotype.

She momentarily re-thought the Hummer.

What if…this 30-something man wearing the cowboy hat and driving the bright orange Hummer listened to Pearl Jam and Jack Johnson within the confines of his monstrous behemoth? What if the seat beside him was normally occupied by his partner, who worked for a not-for-profit environmental organization and volunteered at the local food bank? Was it possible that this Pennsylvania-cowboy-30-something pulled his Hummer into the gravel driveway of his solar-paneled geodesic dome made completely from green recycled materials, entered his residence, turned on NPR, pulled up a chair in front of his zero-carbon emission pellet stove, picked up his New York Times, sipped on his caramel
latte, just as his poorly paid partner drove his or her used Volvo 244 DL Wagon into the very same driveway?

She nearly hit the median and instantaneously reverted back to type. Cowboy-Hummer-Man was no better than others of his genre. Ah. Her own intellectual universe fell harmoniously into its agnostic, Starbuck’s guzzling, NY Times reading, Volvo-driving, Obama-loving place.

She continued in her reverie, oblivious to the fact that she was driving. She perceived recurring images in nature. Jesus in the rye toast. The Christian fish in her husband’s pancake. Joseph Stalin in the fabric pattern of a favorite armchair. Jesus yet again in the linoleum. FDR in the kitchen floor. The Virgin Mary in the tree trunk. Stigmata in the peanut butter and Jelly sandwiches. Going to hell now. Copulating squirrel figures in clouds. Better still, Jesus in clouds. Large, twig-like spermatozoa on the sidewalk. The sacrilege of preceding and/or following a Jesus reference with the words copulating and spermatozoa. And yet, procreation is every good Catholic’s life mission.

Catholic irony.
Catholic guilt.
Protestant therapy, with martini.
She was tired.
And, ah, there was always the heavenly Ambien on the night stand.

When not asleep, the author lives in a 60-year old money pit, landscaped by a beautiful oak tree, a green yard and a productive garden from which to eat non-toxic veggies all summer… assuming the moles and the voles and the slugs and the hideous rain don’t eat and/or kill them all first. No traps. No chemicals. No veggies either.

Barbara Kingsolver might approve of her lifestyle.
Except maybe for that closet full of shoes.
And the three-nights a week of take-out in Styrofoam containers.

Proceed with caution to Thursday-night Thai.