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## Past, Present, Future: How Time Affects Identity

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# Past, Present, Future: How Time Affects Identity



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Keith Maus

Senior Capstone

Practical and Professional Ethics

Creative Project

Doctor Qun Wang

Division of Humanities and Communication

Fall 2016

Past, Present, Future  
By Keith Maus

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## Senior Project Proposal

1. Keith Maus, PPE

2. Past, Present, Future

3. My project will be the creative option. I decided to use both poetry and short stories. Last semester I took creative writing and it really struck a chord with me. I find it and these tools to be an extremely valuable way to analyze oneself. Each story or poem will focus on my own self-identity and development by looking at my past, at myself today, and myself in the future.

4. I decided to use this option in regard to self-identity because I think poetry and short stories are both amazing tools for growth and self-analysis for self-identity.

5. I intend to write around 10 poems or short stories that each showcase a part of my identity, with a focus on my development.

6. Last semester I took creative writing (MLO 8) and was really surprised at how much I learned about myself and how rewarding writing can be. Since then I have been looking for reasons, or excuses even, to write more. I also know how much I can learn about myself now and can use this last assignment to learn a little more.

7. I already have two pieces that are at a level I could use for my project, as well as a variety of ideas I can develop. I'll devote time to think up ideas or work on pieces. A technique I like to use is writing or brainstorming outside, so I will definitely try to go into nature and get to work.

8. My goal is to write two pieces a week at least. That would allow me to finish before the end of November and will allow me to have the Thanksgiving break to finish up any lingering assignments I haven't finished by then.

## Enes' Son

Joe's mother, Enes, never liked having her picture taken. Even when someone was taking home video of the family she could be seen noticing the camera and moving out of frame. When she picked up her months-old grandson and asked Joe to take a picture of her, he knew the cancer was too far along for her to make it. A sweet moment ruined by overzealous cells. A small gift to the newest addition to the family; a picture with his grandmother before she would pass.

Growing up on a poor farm meant lots of vegetables and only vegetables. So many she swore them off when she was old enough to do so. Poor diet isn't something to take lightly, though if it wasn't for the cancer it would have been a funny story later in life. "Enes ate so many vegetables when she was young she decided never to eat them again!" it would have gone, another anecdote shared by the family.

Joe did not cry at this moment, nor did he at the funeral. He had to stay strong, he told himself. His two young sons needed a good male role model.

Twenty years later, Joe's father fell down while bringing in the groceries, which led to a broken hip and a severe case of pneumonia which he wasn't able to recover from. He called his ex-wife. He let her know his father, whom he angrily made her call dad a decade prior, passed away. She was the first person on his recent calls list so she was the first he notified. Again, he did not cry.

A few years before Enes died, Joe started working in construction. In the 1980s this was good work. It quickly allowed him and his new wife, Lynn, to get a down payment for a house.

On his own he went to look at options. Down a long road with a “*Not a Through Street*” sign, he found one that appealed to him. Calling it a fixer upper was a nice way to put it. But he knew what he was doing, he was a carpenter and it was a low asking price. When he brought Lynn to see it, she was shocked. It was dark, one room was damp, the ceiling had holes in it and from those holes a few kittens fell and died. She cried.

After years of trying, Joe and Lynn finally got pregnant. With a third family member, named James, on the way he needed to make sure he could provide. It was time to really push for that promotion. It would require more time at work but it would be worth it if he could keep the income flowing. Maybe they could buy a nice T.V. in a few years. Besides, it was a woman’s job to take care of kids.

The new family member was only new for three years. The energetic youngling soon had a baby brother on the way. This time was easier for the wife, even if the delivery room was devoid of a focal point. For the second time Joe held a baby boy he helped create. He was happy. This son will one day want to be just like him.

By the late ‘90s, Joe had been working for the same company for about 20 years. He bought that T.V. a while back and the holes in the ceiling have long been fixed. He wakes up at 4:30 in the morning to darkness and a full day. Years ago his older son would sometimes be awake and tell him to watch out for possums on his drive to work, but James’s never awake that early these days. He walks past his dark grey ‘87 Chevy and jumps into his work truck, driving 45 minutes, Monday through Friday. The sun beats on his bare torso as he builds houses, making sure to clean up as he goes. Ladders move, windows are flashed, lunch is left

over spaghetti. At the end of the day his 45-minute drive is reversed but, due to everyone else getting off work, he must drive through traffic this time and it takes a bit longer. He gets home and no one's outside. They have the largest yard on the block with three spacious gardens and plenty of grass, but none of it's being used like it used to be. He pulls up the long drive way and heads straight for the fridge to grab a Coors Light. Any chores the yard needs done are taken care of now before it gets dark. Afterwards it's time for a shower and plenty of lotion, plus a chicken for dinner. The whole family sits together, sometimes they watch *Jeopardy!* or *The Simpsons*, like tonight. Another rerun is playing on that nice T.V. he bought. They had seen it before, so why were they watching it? He starts getting mad.

He sucks on his teeth and asks, "Didn't we just see this one?" Initially he sounds calm but the way he lingers on "one" tells his family what is about to happen. Both of his sons stare at their plates.

"Why do you want to watch the same fucking thing?!"

He slams his silverware onto the table and gets up, lurching over to the T.V., smacking the power button. No one in the family knows how many beers he's had. He turns on the radio and tunes into *The Savage Nation*. Conservative hate spews from the speakers, fueling Joe's rage about Clinton and "gangbangers." His family hopes he'll calm down or go to bed, anything, but no such luck. He starts ranting, finishes his beer, and starts cleaning the table. He looks at his younger son's plate and sees he didn't finish his canned green beans.

"Finish your green beans!" he yells, thinking of the necessity of vegetables, while his son just feels scared.

Dirty plate in hand, he goes to the kitchen and throws his plate in the sink, then sits back at the table to listen to more radio.

“God damn niggers,” he says as he shakes his head, before launching on another drunken tirade. Some days his family hides in another room waiting for him to stop. It lasts until he finally retires for the night, usually early since he needs to wake up at 4:30 once again for work.

Years have passed since that phone call to his ex-wife. He lives a couple hours away from the old, dilapidated house he fixed up, finding another cheap fixer upper. He lives alone, tending to his growing garden and large yard. The tomatoes came in well this year. He sees his family once or twice a year now, at Thanksgiving or family reunions. He tries to remind his sons that his generation is aging and they won't be around for much longer, hoping they will come to more family functions. He tries to remind them that he is aging and he won't be around much longer. He wonders, when that time does come, if his sons will cry.

## Red and Blue

Red shirt, blue shorts

Blue shirt, red shorts

Who's the president?

The Animaniacs are real!

We must go to Subway, nothing else will do

Before classic rock comes country

I like it, I love it, I want some more of it

When I grow up I want to be a construction worker

A room full of toys

Turtles, Rangers, maybe Transformers

The bunny is the leader of an ever growing collection

The biggest yard on the street is actually the second biggest

But you'll never hear me say that

The world is pretty big but my end of the street is big enough

With trees as tall as the sky, the hills a struggle to climb

The sky is so blue but my blue shirt is more blue than that

## Over

Going to Hawaii on my birthday should have been great, but there was always the threat of going to the water.

A 10-year-old self-conscious about his weight seems so unnecessary, and who is to blame?

The scariest place in the world is the locker room. Not because of any preexisting features, but from what I hide under my shirt.

Planning ahead means wearing my PE shirt under my normal one all day; just take off the top one, swap shorts, and I'm ready to jog the mile.

Otherwise the tiny locker door is only so good at hiding me from everyone else.

Above an L or XL is a white button up, above that a jacket. Doesn't matter that it's June and hot outside, layers hide things.

If we're swimming maybe I'll wear a shirt in the pool. Or just stay out of the water because I conveniently forgot my suit.

Trying to suck it in, always looking down, to make sure it's not too noticeable. Turns out the worst view is from the top.

Sincere compliments feel like mockery, though true mockery never came.

Maybe the time my dad got mad at me for having bad push up form was enough to dissuade me for years.

My brother was the active one, I liked playing Playstation. And I wouldn't want to play with him anyway.

Maybe my little brain couldn't understand those gross vegetables and exercise were good, when they were yelled from a beer stained mouth.

Or maybe I just couldn't comprehend actions had consequences.

Anyway it happened, it happened.

He wishes and wishes and wishes for relief, but one day he'll find out

Wishing for change is cheap when you do nothing to achieve it

## Why I Take Long Showers

Because you told me not to

## Autumn

He didn't remember living through spring or summer, but he remembered fall

So hard to forget, so easy to remember

Its stormy days and cold months, its rain and snow

Overlooked are the nice days, the sunny days, the warm days

The warm days were the best, what he misses the most, what he longs for

When the days are long and cold, longing for the warmth, like a blanket to envelope

Maybe winter is around the corner, but sometimes it feels like it will never arrive

Maybe even the storms would be preferable to a complete lack of weather

Or maybe giving up, so easily done, not going outside to feel the cold, will be fine

But giving up makes him lose out on the warm days too

Days at the park, a day at the beach, a nice walk across town

Should he forget fall? Ignore it? Pretend it never happened?

Laugh, make jokes? Embrace it, think about it, look at photos

He tries to move on, but can't seem to do it here

Winter will come

Sometime, eventually

And he must wait

## I Write Good

Three pages was hard

Five pages was hard

Ten pages was hard

Fifteen pages was hard

But here I am, I've written all of you and defeated all of you

The definition of a thesis eluded me for far too long

The rod that supports everything else, and all I needed was a closet organizer

Meant for speeches, an outline works the same

The smallest idea put down for expansion, movement, or deletion

Really doesn't matter what I do with it because it's already there

It's not high class material but it gets me the grades

No longer crippled by fear of the word essay, the sky's the limit

I have nothing left to prove, nothing left to prove to myself

RTI or not, plenty of opportunities

Fifteen pages is doable

Ten pages is standard

Five pages is simple

Three pages is easy

## Ode to Vegetables

To Tomatoes

Who I can top a pizza with, put on sandwiches or in burritos, and who makes Tapatio *even* better

To green beans

Who were always there, always around, but can be steamed or stir-fried or baked

To broccoli

Little trees that can also be steamed or stir-fried, cheese need not be used

To zucchini

Cooked in a pan, under a chicken, cut in circles or wedges, Italian like me

And to lettuce

You're kind of pointless, but Romaine is green and makes me feel like I'm healthy

I'm sorry I hated you all so much, I see I was wrong

I base meals around you now, the steak is the side

I get lost when I run out of you, staring in the bleak, colorless fridge

Weeks go by and I don't visit the gym,

but a day goes by without you and I truly am worthless

A suit and tie, a family, a job, nothing will make me feel like you make me feel

I love you, even when I forget it and neglect you

And I now know neglecting you is neglecting myself

## Peaches and Cigarettes

She's passed out in the passenger seat  
Gear shift and e-brake in between  
She wakes up, leans over  
Sending my mind spinning  
Inebriated by the scent of peaches and cigarettes  
All I need is a few more shots  
To get where I want to be  
A few more shots  
But by then,  
The moment's gone  
And I'm alone in my bed once again.  
As big and vast as a continent  
From sea to shining sea,  
But not much shines at 5:00 in the morning.  
My friends tell me it's a bad idea  
But no need, I already tell myself.  
"She's no good for you"  
Yeah, I know.  
Tomorrow will be different, I won't go out  
I won't see her  
But then she says,  
"Let's go to the bar!"  
"Hang on, I'm getting in the car."

## Red and Blue

Blue shirt, gray pants

Gray shirt, blue jeans

Trump's elected somehow

The real fantasy world is in my head

Any sandwich shop is good with me

After industrial comes anything, I'm not picky

I like this, I like that, I'll try more of this

When I was little I wanted to be an astronaut

A shelf full of toys

Turtles, Skywalkers, Batman

The bunny used to be a girl, but she hid it for years

The yard's small these days but just sitting out there is fine

And I'll tell you all about it

The world is kind of small so I think I'll go somewhere I've never been

With trees as tall as the sky, and hills I can climb

The sky is so very blue

## I'm Happy When it Rains

Most would say it was a shitty day, all dreary, cloudy and rainy, but this morning looked good to me. Some would cite counterculture or irony for why they like the rain, but I just like it; it makes me happy. Don't think I'll ever get why so many run scared through it. Look out! It's water! FROM THE SKY!

The peppermint tea, steaming in the black mug in my hand, is still a little too hot, I'll give it a little longer. My tongue and I will both be better for it. The concrete I'm sitting on, dirty and cold, isn't bothering me like it would on a normal day. But this isn't a normal day. The quiet air feels perfectly crisp after a few too many days of being sick. Cross legged and leaning on the wall I watch a scrub jay in a pine tree, bobbing his head every few seconds, and let my eyes unfocus. The fuzzy world I'm greeted with is like an entirely new one. Hundreds of little spots shine in my periphery, little UFOS zooming and zipping around. They're easy to see today in the clouds. The colorless void in the sky is juxtaposed against the vibrant grasses below, making everything momentarily look desaturated until my eyes register just how beautiful the green really is. Then the greens start popping out from every pine needle, the cones look like dozens of minuscule fires. I get glimpses of ice plant through the fence, adding their own particular colors into the mix. It all almost brings a tear to my eye. Most would say it's a shitty day, all colorful, cloudy and rainy.

I close my eyes and listen to the rain's crescendo. Maybe I'll put on my brand new shoes and jump in a puddle today, anything seems possible right now. I let my head rest on the wall and my mind wanders some more. I wonder how many people at the capstone festival tomorrow will be happy about the rain. I can't imagine many of them are. It is FROM THE SKY after all.

## Reflective Essay

### ● **Aesthetics**

First off, the image I picked for the project was found by searching for “the unknown” in Google Images. I did this because I wasn’t sure what picture I wanted to use yet, but only a few rows down I found a picture of a foggy bridge. I thought I could add in some color to the foreground to get quite an interesting effect. The start of the bridge, closest to the camera, is full of color and it looks like the bridge goes forever; this is childhood. The middle of the bridge is devoid of childish color, the end of the bridge looks closer, and you’re out there on your own; this represents adulthood or the present. The distance, the future, is foggy and it’s impossible to know what will be there at the other end of the bridge. Honestly it took me way too long to get the color on the image the way I wanted it, but I eventually figured out just the right way to add it in. For the rest of my project I decided to use creative writing to get it done. The main elements I used were poems and short stories, with two short stories, one at the start and one at the end, with poems filling in between.

The voice in all the pieces is generally myself, with some extra circumstances. On one poem I tried to give it a very young voice since it represents my childhood. It’s a bit more random and disjointed because kids are pretty random and disjointed in many ways. At the same time, it also represents how hard it can be to remember our childhoods, instead only remembering feelings or small parts of a memory; somewhat randomly and disjointedly.

I didn’t use much dialog in my project, I don’t seem to be drawn to do so much,

especially with poetry. In one particular instance I had trouble deciding whether or not to keep it in because it contains an extremely derogatory word. Ultimately, I decided to leave it in because of my personal experiences with the word. Unfortunately, it was authentic, and while I don't want to offend anyone, and maybe it's selfish, I didn't want to sugarcoat it.

- **Audience/purpose**

Right from the onset I knew who my audience was and who I was writing my project for, and that was myself. By this point I have proven to numerous teachers, instructors, and professors that I can write, I can pass my classes, I can learn, I can do this. I feel like I don't need to do that anymore. Just a quick look at my transcript will show anyone what I mean. I wasn't going to write a paper about a topic I don't really care about and I wasn't doing this project to show off a poster board like an elementary school student at the end of the semester. I decided to take all I had learned from creative writing and do a project that would immediately benefit me and probably reveal some hidden fact or trauma about myself that I wasn't aware of. I don't see how a research paper or essay could have that same impact. I found creative writing to be such an effective tool for learning about myself when I took Deb Busman's class last semester that I jumped at the opportunity to do it some more. It was rather nice having a second chance to do more creative writing while I was still at Monterey Bay.

- **Process**

My process was pretty simple in some ways because I needed only my laptop to do work. Anytime I was feeling motivated or creative I just opened the laptop, opened a new Word document, and then started writing. Sometimes I would get a few lines in before realizing the idea wasn't going to work or I'd write a few lines, save the file, and never come back to it. Sometimes I would write a good amount but end up cutting out a small portion of it to be used in a different piece. This freedom to start when I wanted, edit as I needed, give up if I felt like it, and finish when I finished was a very nice and unique way to spend my last semester at CSUMB. The topics and subjects of the pieces were all about my life so I didn't need to research much. I spent a lot of time just thinking about various parts of my life and trying to remember things I hadn't thought of in a while. One particularly vivid moment was remembering the classroom I took middle school music in. The Sublime poster I stared at almost every day while I practiced the sax is almost as clear as it was back when I was actually in the room, yet I hadn't even thought about that room in such a long time. I was surprised to find such a defined moment in time, feeling separate from almost everything else, but so easily slipped into; for a brief moment I felt like I was 12 again.

In my proposal I mentioned I would try and go out into nature, like Fort Ord, and do some writing out there, but that didn't quite happen. Often I would be at home, get an idea or decide to work on my project, and just start working right there. I never really set aside a time to go outside and work, it totally slipped my mind. Something I do remember, though, is looking through the window of my backyard a lot. Usually I worked in the living room of my East Campus apartment and just a quick left turn of my head reveals a brief glimpse of trees and sky. Turns out, nature was there the entire time and

I never really noticed. Even the little backyard, which turned from brown dirt to bright green plants after the first rain of the semester, was a nice place to do some writing. This is one of the main reasons I love this area so much! While it may not be an expedition into Fort Ord or The Pinnacles, I don't lose my connection to nature that I now realize is so lacking back home in San Jose.

- **Thematic and social/historical context –**

My project fits very well under the search for identity part of our section. I don't know if this is typical for everyone, but I noticed I never really take a step back and think about my own identity. My project basically forced me to do that, though. The search for identity is never done because identity is not static and could change up until we die. In my opinion, all we can do is try and understand what makes up our own identities and go from there. My project was designed to do just that. Similar to the idea of intersectionality, our identities are multifaceted and each person has a unique mix and variations of what makes up their identity.

I think poetry is one of the most personal ways of writing. Nonfiction autobiographical stories are about one's life, and personal in that regard, but that's not why I think something's personal. Unless a writer is aiming to make plutonic poetry, the pieces written will be saturated, like a sponge full of water, with their own feelings. A poet can write just about a feeling or a girl or a parent and, while it might not seem personal to a reader or they might miss what the writer really wanted to say, it doesn't change the poem. Some of what I write is very personal, especially in the project since it's all based on myself, but I may leave out keywords or names to not make it obvious

as to what I'm writing about. To me, my first audience, it all makes plenty of sense! If I start writing poetry for others, then I'd love to learn to play more with feelings. To me, good poetry can relay a precise emotion and get the reader to feel exactly what the poet wants them to feel in an extremely subtle manner so the reader isn't even aware. Good poetry gets better the more you analyze it, the more you unfold it, the more you understand it and the more you understand yourself. Did any of my poetry get to that level? Perhaps, maybe on a small level, maybe a tiny light at the end of the tunnel turned on and I was granted access, however briefly, to a new level or writing.

- **Artistic Tradition and History**

When it comes to writing, I think we are influenced by almost everything we have ever read. I've not written enough to find and understand my own voice, but I think whatever it is has been influenced a little bit by lots of sources. Sometimes I'm very aware of this, like when I see something I know I would like to incorporate into my own works and internalize it for later. Sometimes it's an unconscious addition. Almost a peculiar mix of the two came when I read Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*. This novel is about O'Brien's experiences in the Vietnam War and how he and others in his platoon dealt with returning home. While O'Brien could have written his story in a linear fashion, he instead wrote it nonlinearly. A chapter that takes place early in the Vietnam War is followed by a veteran's struggle of going back home which is followed by another story from the war itself. At the same time, O'Brien reveals more and more about the characters. These two aspects of his writing converge in such a way that the reader gets the story in a nonlinear form but still gets the same experience as most

straight-forward novels. I thought this style of writing was really amazing and special, but very hard to do well and probably beyond my own skills. Once I finished one of my stories in my project, I realized I used a very similar style, but in a much shorter form. I was very pleased and surprised that I could do that. A time I consciously took inspiration was last semester in creative writing. We had a guest speaker, who's name I unfortunately cannot remember, who told a very emotional and personal story of her childhood. One particular aspect of her story got me thinking about doing a similar idea but from my own experiences. The outcome ended up being one of the pieces from the class I was proudest of.

## Synthesis Essay

When I excitedly signed up for capstone, I didn't bother reading what the class theme was going to be; I saw Qun Wang and that was all I needed to decide my capstone would be 8am Friday morning. When I finally thought to check out what the class would actually be about, I read the full title and thought it was going to focus on immigration since our theme starts off with "border crossing." Turns out, I didn't do anything under the border crossing umbrella, and focused on the last part of the theme, search for identity. I quickly chose a project type and was on my way to finishing my last semester at CSUMB.

The project type I chose was a creative project. The first option, a research paper, sounded as unappealing as, well, a research paper. The second option, an internship, sounded too much like going to work, which I wanted to avoid for my last semester, though I did like the idea of that kind of project. Lastly, and most importantly, the creative project was very alluring. Not often do I get to express myself for a grade creatively and I was excited for the chance. At this point, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. The semester prior I satisfied my MLO 8 requirement by taking creative writing. That class was one of the highlights of my academic career. It was like a breath of fresh air after being trapped in a cave for too long. I recall my first assignment from English 1A at my junior college in 2010 being very much like this class. The professor told us to go find somewhere on campus and just write for a bit, so I found a little spot near the student center and just watched the clouds and trees, writing about whatever. That assignment got me excited, just like creative writing did. Unfortunately, as soon as we

got back into the classroom, it was back to essays. It felt like I was about to see an entire new world, only to be pulled back down to the dark one I already knew. At the time, I was frustrated because that first assignment was so freeing but didn't represent the rest of the what we ended up doing. Now, thanks to creative writing, I know exactly why I was frustrated. It's because creative writing is explorative and fantastic, it makes me learn about myself, it's fun and I enjoy doing it.

In my creative writing class, we had an end of the year portfolio that consisted of numerous pieces we wrote over the semester. Just doing the assignments allowed me to learn things about myself effortlessly. When I found out I could do almost the same thing, a collection of poems and short stories, but this time do it specifically to learn more about my identity, I jumped at the opportunity. That end-of-the-year portfolio handed me information about me even though it wasn't necessarily designed to do that. I searched through my identity without any thought. So this time, doing the same but actively applying our theme sounded like a perfect match.

Each piece I wrote was made with the search for identity in mind. On the surface, a poem about vegetables, or with one line, or written randomly might not seem like it would get much identity searching done, but as I pointed out in my reflective essay, my main audience was myself. These pieces may seem silly but vegetables have become a big part of my life and my one liner and random poems were written to try and catch the way I was feeling at the time. And, indeed, my search has been fruitful. For a long time I said things like, "I don't know why I like things, I just do," but now I feel a little better at articulating why I like things. This is due to assignments like this, that put me in just the

right mindset to critically think about myself. Turns out, the best way for me to search for my identity is through creative writing.