Digging, Down Under

An Honors Project (HONRS 499)

by

Brandy R. Matthews

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Thomas Koontz

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May, 1994
Abstract

The following project is a collection of personal essays detailing thoughts, events, and insights which occurred during a semester exchange to Deakin University in Australia. The essays discuss not only the physical details of the study abroad, but also the student's journey toward self-actualization.
"Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death."

-Anais Nin-
Almost one year ago I decided to complete my honors thesis requirement by writing about myself. Although this may be an atypical approach, it is an ideal culmination of my own undergraduate degree. I am convinced that the past four years of my life have been spent with a major in exploring Brandy and a minor in exploring the world; for this fact I am eternally grateful. On a daily basis, I encounter so many people who have never taken the time to introduce themselves to the being inside their own body. However, that is a topic for another day.

Anyway, last spring when I was notified of my acceptance in the study abroad program and my placement at a university in southeast Australia, I believed this offered the perfect opportunity to complete "my creative-slash-reflective masterpiece". Just because I maintain a high GPA does not mean I never make foolish assumptions. My initial plans involved basic journal writing, but, alas, I was no Anais Nin. With my tendency toward flowery language and page-long sentences, it took me most of the night to capture the simplest events of the day. This not only left me exhausted, but also quite discouraged because all of that writing meant so little time to actually do anything worth discussing in the journal.
Using the invaluable critical thinking skills I have acquired in the past few years, I decided to alter my plans. I began to jot down simple phrases or quotations at random times throughout the days in hopes that these would stimulate my memory enough to create character profiles of the people I met. Leaving the journal technique by the wayside, I still encountered a couple of difficulties. First of all, absorbing the details of a situation with a writer's mind often makes the experience itself impossible to grasp. This should not have been a shocking idea. It has been espoused in chemistry with the fact that compounds often exhibit different properties than their elementary components and in philosophy with the tenets of the holists versus those of the reductionists. The concept is even found in literature; for example, it is noted in *Women in Love* that D.H. Lawrence's autobiographical character, Birkin, is incapable of spontaneous action and burdened with choice due to his knowledge of and attention to details. I am assuming that the aphorism, "One must learn from one's own mistakes," was at work for me in this instance. I tried to adopt less rigid thinking. When it was practical and possible, I wrote things down; when pausing to reflect was detrimental to my own experience, I reminded myself that the perceptions of the memory are often more interesting and colorful than the actual sensations.

As for the second difficulty, it is slightly more personal. I had developed a great deal of interest
in Faulkner's presentation technique in *As I Lay Dying* and hoped to incorporate a similar style in my character sketches since the journal idea had not come to fruition. I made a sincere attempt to create a work of this kind from my encounters in Australia; yet, I was blocked by my own fear. Who was I to contemplate mimicking the style of someone as profound as William Faulkner? Thus, the second problem was cut and dried: the dichotomy between self-confidence and fear of failure. I truly believed I had something valuable to say and the tools with which to say it well, but I was uncomfortably aware of the possibility that no one would listen.

As of today, all of the previously mentioned problems have been overcome to an extent, and the following pages are the result. I have chosen to write a collection of personal essays about a few exceptional episodes that occurred during my stay in Australia because this suits the information I have in the form of journal entries and assorted notes, but, more importantly, because this style recognizes my greatest potential at this point in my development as a writer and as a student of life. Perhaps, someone will learn something from what I have to say. Perhaps, that someone will be me. That would be the ideal finish to my journey. Not only the journey half way around the world to the island "Down Under," but also the four-year journey of self-discovery I have taken in my own mind.
COMMON CENTS
As a child of the television generation, I am often struck by the metaphorical relationship between myself and situation comedies, long-cancelled series, catch phrases, and theme songs. Such was the case when my plane left the LAX runway: "Believe it or not, I'm walkin' on air. I never thought I could feel so free. Flyin' away on a wing and a prayer. Who could it be? Believe it or not, it's just me." Who could forget "The Greatest American Hero"? Unfortunately, the only word in the title of this short-lived series that would modify me is "American." The theme song, however, was highly applicable. A wing and a prayer was just about all I had. What I am trying to disguise with words is the fact that I had absolutely no cash. Two credit cards and the power of positive thinking were my only funding because the plane ticket for 10,000 miles of air travel had completely eliminated any semblance of a savings account in my name. For reasons beyond me at that particular time, I wasn't concerned with my financial situation. I just knew that I would be taken care of.

I learned some important lessons about money and prosperity while I was in Australia, or rather, I discovered a wealth of unconscious knowledge regarding this subject. Upon arrival I had to make a mental budget. The food allowance I was to receive from the university would have to
cover both food and living expenses. I dealt with this possible hindrance by living on baked potatoes and two-minute noodles for six months. This menu provided plenty of money to enjoy the atmosphere and beer at the local pubs. As for travel expenses to be accrued at the conclusion of my study at Deakin, those would barely fit on my credit cards if I took the bus, stayed in roach motels, and did not charge anything else that might catch my eye. If you are wondering why it is necessary for me to go into the dry details of my planned budget, so am I. The point to be made is that I was abroad on a shoestring, but through gifts beyond my comprehension, I didn't want for a thing.

Being a closet adherent to Romanticism, I like to pinpoint my strokes of luck to a specific moment. I was waiting at the bus stop in Geelong, the city nearest the university to which I was on exchange, and this strange and dirty little man approached me and asked for a dollar to cover bus fare to the beach. I gave it to him without a second thought; my friend Lisa gazed at me in disbelief. "Didn't you just say that you had only two dollars to get you through the rest of the week?" It was a Tuesday. "I only need 65 cents to catch the bus back to campus," was my reply. Sitting on that bus I turned the scene over in my mind and knew exactly why I had behaved in this way. There is a poem by an incredibly amazing woman named SARK that I keep
with me always. It is titled "How to be an Artist", and it has become my creed to live by. "Give money away. Do it now. The money will follow." So say the poem and a little voice inside my head. That voice is a blending of my mother with her philosophy that, "It's only money.", my grandma with her firm belief in Divine Order, and the echoes of the innumerable gifts I have received and given.

The money did follow me, like a shadow. The university paid for a four-day excursion to the points of interest in Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, the state in which I had found temporary residence. Trains, trolleys, gardens, museums, vendors: it was a metropolitan wonder, and then, over my spring holidays I saw another side of the city- shops, cafes, clubs, and pubs; this was also at the expense of another. A virtual stranger took me into her home and would not hear of allowing me to pay for anything during a two week period of adventuring. New friends never hesitated to lend me cash in the days just before my monthly food allowance was to arrive. My family sent me 20's sporadically allowing me to attend concerts and college functions, the times memories are made of. Perhaps, the most overwhelming gift came through the mail from my grandfather. He and I have never been particularly close, and he has always been somewhat of a miser. These facts contributed to my damp lids when I received $200 and a scrawled note
saying, "Someone told me you could use some brews and bus fare money. Have a good time." I had more than a good time; I had the experience of a lifetime, and much of it was at the monetary expense of others. However, there is no debt involved, for giving to the cosmic trust is purely an act of joy. I am consciously aware of this following my journey, and finances can burden me no longer. The TV theme song continues, "This is too good to be true..."
CULTURE SHOCK WAVES
I am going to a land of rugged adventure, the place people refer to with a wistful look in their eyes, as if to say, "I'd love to go there some day." I am going to ride a camel through the Outback. I am going to find out why the Aussies have those cork-bits dangling from their hats. I am going away from everything I know in order to seek out who I really am, and I am more excited than I can ever remember being, with the possible exception of my first kiss.

I am tired of being in this airplane; I have been sitting in the same position for twenty hours next to a Vietnamese man who snores and speaks no English. What have I gotten myself into? I already miss my friends. I need a drink. "Yes, scotch would be lovely." I can't believe this guy at customs is giving me such a hard time. His accent is so thick, but I can't miss his puns about my name. "Your parents really did it to you didn't they, mate? Oh, don't worry, I reckon it's not the worst name I've seen come through these gates." Welcome to Australia, 'Brandy, You're a Fine Girl.' I wonder who's going to pick me up at the airport. I have no cash; what if I need money for something? I hate this guy who's driving me to my campus. He talks too fast and is very pretentious. Maybe I've journeyed half-way around the world to live with geeks. Maybe Mel Gibson and Paul Hogan were not college-educated. This room is a
prison—no heat, brick walls, I have put my life on hold for the experience of a lifetime...torture.

Leo—what a relief to meet someone with that incredible accent who speaks audibly and without putting on airs. "Nice to meet you, Jonno. Yes, I'll come out and meet everyone soon." As soon as I catch my breath and my heart that is trying to sprint out of my chest.

"Okay, I think I've got it now. A stubby is a beer in a bottle, and a tinnie is a beer in a can. Both come in a slab which is like a case at home." I'm living with a bunch of guys who have a band. Could I have chosen a better location on my own? No way, "mate". Everyone is so laid back here. People don't look forward to promotions; they wait only for vacations, I mean, "holidays". Can I skull (!?) a beer and then retrieve a ten cent piece from a bowl of flour with my teeth? "Why not." I love this place.

This university has no sports scholarships, no funding for intercollegiate sports. Sport is for recreation, friendship, and exercise here, resulting in the intramural programs in which all skill levels participate with such a low stress factor. The university is a place for higher education not high finance. I will be tested according to the British system with three-hour essay exams at the close of the semester. No spoon-feeding here. Either you want to learn, or you don't. "Yes, Josh, I'd love to go out with you guys." Maybe I don't
want to learn so badly, after all.

I am living amongst friends, people with similar values and attitudes. However, that doesn't stop me from walking into people on the sidewalk because I instinctively veer to the right. It doesn't keep me from getting hit by a car or help me convert pounds to grams when I am trying to order lunch meat. It can't help me remember how tall I am in centimeters when I am trying to buy stockings, and it doesn't prevent me from saying faucet instead of tap or cringing when I hear the word "reckon". Being in a place that intuitively feels like home does not make me want Vegemite on my morning toast or butter on my turkey sandwiches; yet, I cringe in every town at the sight of McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Seven Eleven which represent the immediate gratification plague which threatens to control the home of my birth. My new friends adore these spots. Can I explain it to them before their vast and underpopulated country falls prey to the American dream? No, I cannot. They ask me about guns--do I have one, have I shot anyone? This is their vision of the land from which I come. If someone is murdered on their continent it makes the headlines. If someone is murdered on my continent, it is probably one of my next door neighbors.

I haven't become an expatriate or anything. Why should I? I have to go back soon. Back to my family--that will be
warm. It's amazing that I think of my homecoming as warm when I am leaving the tropical summer sun for an Indiana winter. It doesn't snow here in Geelong. I'm not ready to leave. I haven't changed nearly as much as I expected to. Instead I have discovered that in completely new circumstances, I like myself just the way I am. I really came here for the opportunity to take on a new identity, and then found that I didn't need to. People like me just the way I am. I wonder why I am never satisfied. Maybe it's the success paradigm or that immediate gratification thing. Maybe some people are just generally unable to be fulfilled, no matter what their cultural background. Maybe I am ready to go back.

Change always sounds exciting. I hear the magpie cry outside my window, a kaiotape of sadness wishing me a safe journey.

Back home again, in Indiana. Everything is just as I left it—rushed, inflated, superficial. I was out of breath, running to keep up, the moment I first arrived. Now I am back in shape and running to escape this madness—just looking for another G'day.
A MODERN LOVER, REVISITED
The reef was fantastic! So much life to be seen, so much life that I had no idea existed. All the turmoil of the dark waves on the surface made me so panicky, but as soon as I trusted my own breath and submerged my mask, I felt so peaceful. There was a world that relied on the motion of those waves for existence. What luck to be a visitor. I decided to respect the ocean in that moment. God, it was so powerful and vast. I felt so small. Do you know what I'm talking about? Probably not, you seem so relaxed in the surf. Anyway, the kingdom under the sea was not surpassed by the rainforest. Ferns that predate the dinosaurs stood tall and proud of their ability to withstand the test of time while I looked on in wide-eyed wonder. Vines, moss, bizarre-looking root formations surrounded by thick mist—it appeared so chaotic. However, it was an organized chaos (that's what I used to tell my mom about my bedroom!). On the bus trip back to the youth hostel I thought a lot about that chaos and realized how valuable it is. Think of those ferns; their cell structure is unlike any other living thing, truly prehistoric. They survive because they are meant to in the natural order of things, but how many people could make it in that forest? The chaos in our immediate surroundings seems so far out of sync with the earth. It scares me. Sorry, I sound like an
evangelistic greenie... Just count your blessings that you live in such close proximity to so many natural wonders.
For me. Meanwhile, I'll continue my search for the miraculous here in the corn fields of Indiana. There has to be something, doesn't there?

Take care of yourself and remember our motto: Regret borne of hesitation will follow us to the grave.

-Brandy-

I am consistently amazed by the philosophical tone my letters to Aaron acquire. Especially in light of the fact that I expect no reply; I don't need his written response because there is a certain knowing that supercedes written communication. That sounds so hopelessly romantic and whimsically unbelievable, but it is an evasive reality, an unexpected gift I received during my stay in Australia. This isn't a love story, but rather a picture of bonding which will not fall prey to the fickle ways of romance.

It began almost too quickly, only a few days after my arrival. Being rather reserved in demeanor, I hadn't spoken to many of my flatmates yet and was taking some quiet moments to absorb the nature of the place that was to be my home for half of my twenty-first year. On the third evening I wandered into the television room to find a crowd of people. This guy burst out with,"G'day, Brandy. I'm Aaron and I'll be around here most of the time so I thought I'd say hello."
An immediate tenderness welled up inside me at the paradoxical nature of his courage in addressing me, the stranger, and his embarrassment in doing so. He had broken the ice for everyone. We would be friends. Ironically, in a later confidence he informed me that he had been dared to say something to me. No matter, the lines of communication had been opened, and only two days later I was to find him in my bed.

It was "Society Night," Deakin University's college interpretation of the prom. I was decked out in black, as usual, a choker of pearls, and a french twist. How exciting to feel beautiful amongst people I knew nothing about. I roamed about exchanging cordial introductions with several students, but mostly just gulped down my cocktails and clung to the other exchange students. A couple of hours into the event, I spied Aaron standing alone near one of the bars. I approached him, taking in the cling of his white silk pirate shirt across his broad and well-defined shoulders. He looked shy, hiding behind his shoulder-length hair and minimal goatee. I may have half-mumbled,"Hi...", but vividly I recall touching his forearm, quickly, gently, knowingly. Immediately we became mutually absorbed; conversation came rushing forth as if some dam had been destroyed. His friends looked on in laughing amazement while the other exchange students expressed concern for me in my state of mild intoxication. We were at once apathetic
toward the others in our excitement over foreign conquest and our awareness of our similarity in difference. What was I doing? I had come to Australia to seek refuge from sensual pursuits, to bury myself in literature, in writing, in creative conversation; and there I was taking a bass-guitar playing surfer back to my room. It was all irrelevant at that point. There was a connection, a connection that went beyond words. Words, which had been my refuge, which I had treasured as my only hope for true communion with other people. Endearingly, he displayed his youth and moral upbringing by suggesting that we only needed to talk once we arrived in my room. In retrospect, I'm sure he was startled by my prowess and disinhibition. Silence does not always signify shyness. If he was shocked by my behavior, he recovered quickly and was an adept and attentive lover. Afterward, I actually slept while he was in my bed. That alone is a significant occurrence in my life. We woke to find that our attraction had not waned with the disappearing effects of the alcohol we had ingested the night before. Things became heated once again, and then Aaron made a quick exit pleading that his mates would tease us mercilessly if they were awake when he left my room. I laughed aloud at this statement. Once again I caught him by surprise; he asked what the laugh was about. "It doesn't matter right now," was my only reply. With a brush of the lips, he was gone.
The following afternoon brought us together once again, only this time we were surrounded by 150 psychology students in a huge lecture hall. He gave a bit of a smile and a quiet hello from behind his crimson blush. I began to wonder if I had imagined this entire "spiritual connection" idea in my usual haste to romanticize life. The next few days brought no sign of Aaron, and I feared that he was avoiding his friends in an effort to eliminate the possibility of seeing me. Fortunately, this was not the case; he arrived at my door late one Sunday evening to deliver an obviously prepared speech regarding the fact that he "wasn't in the habit of love 'em and leave 'em" but had been forced to go home for a few days and work. I smiled at the breathless sound in his voice and the way he nervously shifted his weight from side to side. Again, he asked me what was so amusing, and I avoided a direct response for a second time.

It was nearly a month before the two of us were able to steal some time to talk again. I was busy making cultural adjustments and new friends; he was busy with his social network, which amazed me in its diversity and scope. Due to mutual acquaintances we ended up at the same pub one evening, and I managed to find a stool next to his. The conversation was liquid, flowing comfortably. We discovered that we had strikingly similar tattoos in the same location.
Neither of us felt surprised in the least. We pondered our career goals, or shall I say, lack of career goals although we both studied psychology and felt we owed some debt to humanity. It was a given that the initial physical intimacy we had felt would be revisited after we left our friends at the pub. We walked hand in hand to his place without a great deal of conversation. There was no denying our compatibility behind closed doors where the barriers created by society may be discarded. After about an hour Aaron decided it was time for "the talk". Of course, I had to giggle at his declaration of fear of commitment and his fear that I would come running back to America and vanish like a mystical being. Yet again, he asked me to explain how I found humor in the situation. This time I let the truth be known. "Have I ever called you? Have I come around to cramp your style with your many friends? Have I ever said anything about commitment of any kind?"

"No," he responded in mild confusion.

"With me, what you see is what you get," I continued. "I have had an incredible time with you. There is just something about your way that really complements the person I have become, but I cannot imagine where you got the idea that I was looking for commitment. It doesn't take a genius to realize how futile it would be to travel 10,000 miles from home in search of love."

Now it was his turn to laugh. "You aren't like any other girl I have ever met. You have been laughing at me
all along haven't you? I was concerned that I had been demeaning you in some way, but you had control of the situation all along. You, Brandy, are a different sort of bird." On this note, I decided to return to my own room; Aaron, forever chivalrous, insisted on escorting me, and along the way we decided to try the platonic route of friendship. He mentioned the fact that sex and true communication together are somewhat overwhelming. This caught me off guard at the time; however, I was to come to understand his thoughts soon enough. Even after convincing ourselves of the benefits of being in a "hands-off" pairing, we could not resist a final kiss when we arrived at my door. I felt incredibly liberated that night and to this day cannot discern the exact reason why.

The remainder of my time on the southeast coast was to pass like a summer, seemingly shorter than the other seasons due to the hypnotic effects of heat and life in abundance. I was to meet many people, many men, and to encounter a lifetime's worth of amazing sights, but there was always a special reserve within my being for the lengthy conversations Aaron and I could create across a room full of people without ever uttering a word. The turn of his head, the crook in my smile became components of our own special language. Perhaps, I had not abandoned my yearning to study communicative measures, after all.

Our affair came full circle just a week before I was to leave his hometown for further travels. I had gone out with
some companions, a band I lived with, who I affectionately refer to as "my boys", and we ended up joining Aaron at the same pub in which the two of us had met. Time had passed; he was seeing someone else, and I had outside interests, as well. We tried to make small talk as everyone instinctively left us alone. He began a sentence about the band we were listening to in the outdoor beer garden, but finished by expressing his wish to tell me something important, something he had been wanting to say for a long time. It intrigues me that he said "a long time" because we had only known each other a few short months. Somehow, it seemed as if we had always known each other. If my life were designed in Hollywood or by the publishers at Harlequin Romance, confessions of true love would have been appropriate at this point. Nevertheless, Aaron looked straight into me and assured me that he would never forget me because I had been his first lover. The tears seemed to miraculously condense on my eyelids as I sat in wide-eyed disbelief, holding his head to my chest like a mother comforting a child. My free-spirited counterpart had just made a shocking revelation that had taken a great deal of courage for one who always plays it cool. I was sad and sorry. I was happy and overwhelmed. He was unburdened and went on to express his joy in our silent conversations and his doubt that he could make that connection with another woman. I assured him that he would and spoke to him of my own first lover, with whom I had shared a similar code in silence. I wished him true love; I still do, something tangible and complete, not fleeting and broken, like me.
On the day I left he held me as he had on that first night and stroked my hair across the back of my neck. "You're shaking," he observed in a quiet voice.

"I'm not so great with goodbyes, yet," I whispered through the lump which was to remain in my throat for many days to follow.

"Be happy," was all he said. In that moment I realized that something beyond the realm of language had truly transpired between the two of us. I hadn't imagined it. Maybe it was a mingling of souls. Maybe it was just a youthful fling. I do not know for sure. I am sure of one thing though: I am happy.
FOR THE LOVE OF A WOMAN
Ignoring the cramp that creeps up my thigh, I listen intently to Adrienne's heated comments regarding D.H. Lawrence. She complains of his Victorian mindset and his portrayal of women's feelings through a man's eyes. She prefers Virginia Woolf and Sappho. In the neighboring conversation I overhear Brenda describing her lover as laconic and reserved. The moment is surreal to me; sitting on the floor of an authentic Thai restaurant in the heart of Melbourne, Australia, with two aging, lesbian radicals. I am overcome with my own naiveté. Adrienne is the daughter of a Nobel prize winner; she herself has a double degree in biology and chemistry and has spent her life as a builder, in between her trips around the world. Brenda was born in the United States but has resided in Australia for twenty years. She is the administrative nurse of a cancer institute when she isn't visiting friends around the globe or restoring her cabin in the Outback. What a wealth of knowledge and experience sits before me. I can only be awed at their generosity in taking me into their home and treating me like an honored guest. Brenda had gone to college with my stepmother before she became a dual citizen. That was our only connection, and, yet, I was treated with the utmost respect and kindness.

For the first few days of my stay in their home I was
constantly aware of their sexual orientation. It permeated my thoughts and disappointed my conscience. I had always considered myself extremely open-minded when dealing with sexuality, but my own homophobia surfaced almost immediately. The first morning when I awoke, I gathered my paraphernalia to take a shower and walked to the end of the hall to find an entirely open-concept bathing room. No door, no shower screen or curtain, windows on every side of the room, and Brenda and Ade just beyond those windows working in their exquisite garden. I actually had to muster up my courage just to disrobe. Then, to be totally honest, I had to employ the ostrich technique and close my eyes, imagining that if I could not see them then they could not see me. I felt so Methodist, so Midwestern, so uneducated, but I could not deny my apprehension.

As one week blended into the next, I began to relax. I watched as Brenda leaned over to kiss Adrienne before dashing off to work and was struck by the familiarity of this scene. My dad engages in the exact same ritual with his wife. I eavesdropped on their morning discussions of world news and financial burdens over coffee and cigarettes. My grandparents create a similar picture each day. I even saw them bicker as my parents had, both being too stubborn to give in. They were in love and had been for ten years. Their relationship wasn't purely sexual any more than the heterosexual relationships I had seen since I was a child.
Brenda told me of her first lover one night over champagne. He had remained a close friend. Adrienne, being a jealous partner herself, did not discuss her previous relationships, but I am convinced that she has always been a lover of women. I turned these thoughts over in my mind on several occasions. Toward the end of my stay in their breathtaking home I recalled a discussion I had engaged in, years before I could have known I would meet these women. The crux of the discussion dealt with a continuum model of sexuality on which the majority of the population falls somewhere between total heterosexual attraction and total homosexual attraction. This idea solidified in my consciousness during my stay with these two phenomenal women. Although I did not find myself attracted to them or their other female companions in a physical way, I have accepted the possibility that I could one day fall in love with a woman. She could be my soulmate; she could be a mistake. At this point, I don't believe a "she" is likely to materialize for me, but, if nothing else, I have become aware of the fact that love can evade the gender-specificity that plagues reason.

Upon my return to the States I was informed that Brenda and Ade had decided to separate. One of them had engaged in an affair with another woman. My ideas were confirmed. Relationships are double-edged swords, no matter what identities the lovers wear. Every person is equally susceptible to heartache and elation.
TO BREATHE OR NOT TO BREATHE
Breathe. Breathe, dammit. Breath, brea, bre, breath. This dialogue in my ears ceases as the water seeps in my mask and the intense pain through my eardrum overwhelms me. I begin to lose touch with reality and accept my impending doom.
My solitary intent is to escape the dark water that smothers me. I long to shed the heavy, binding equipment and fill my lungs with fresh air so that my screams will not be silent to others and deafening in my own ears. My sole desire is to surface as quickly as possible. Rationality is long departed; I don't even care if pressure changes crush my lungs. I will die anyway. Through an act of God (disguised as a tattooed scuba instructor) I reach the world of my birth in a conscious state, immediately throwing off my mask and realizing that blood is trickling from my nose and ears. I failed. I did not touch the coral of the Great Barrier Reef. I cannot bask in the knowledge that I can truly do anything I have the desire to experience.

I was merely a weak victim of panic and had to settle for visiting the wonder of the world below the surface in only the visual modality. I strove to ignore the ache and exhaustion that followed my diving attempt in an effort to appreciate the awe-inspiring colors and
intricacies of the world's largest living organism. Even to a mere snorkeler, the essence of the kingdom under the sea far exceeded the pictures I had seen; I was powerless, minute, alien. I was in love with the vibrant colors and petrified by the constant swaying which was as consistent as the beating heart of the monster that had once lived underneath my bed. The paradox of my feelings toward this fascinating force of nature surged from my fingertips to the very quick of my being. I smiled as I reboarded the boat, three miles from any visible land form. Then I got seasick.

The tumultuous waters of the Tasman Sea provided the locale for a parallel experience, one in which I grappled with fear and left the victor. It was an amazingly clear day in early spring, and my flatmates and I were all bored with our studies. We piled into two cars and headed out for Jan Juc beach, which was only about 30 minutes down the Great Ocean Road. I had been sick all week and was going along only to enjoy the scene and take a few photos. At least that's what I thought when we first arrived. As we all descended the 150 stairs that led from the cliffs to the beach, I spied "the rock". This wasn't just an ordinary boulder; it was a cliff which had been craftily removed from its counterparts by the strength of nature. Before I realized what was happening, I was climbing up one of its sides. More than once, my friends who had already reached the top had to offer their arms as incentive when I
began to lose my footing on the slick surface. I reached the elevated surface with only two choices: jump or fall and break my leg trying to climb back down. I watched my special friend, Aaron, jump. He grinned up at me through streams of water. My heart pounded like the bass drum in a parade. There were slivers of rock jutting out through the water; my jump would have to be precise, and (Breathe. Breath. Breathe...) the water was such a long way down. I put my hand over my nose and took flight. Going, going, going, ice water! The exhilaration of the jump coupled with the chill of the water caused me to gasp when I reached the surface. I wiped my eyes and instinctively headed for a spot upon which I could stand. I climbed a little ledge and basked in my own adrenaline glow. The tickle of the sea weeds undulating under my toes added to my pleasure as I inhaled the salty air. My friends and I exchanged tales of each jump in breathy voices as the tide came rumbling inland. We took pride in the spontaneity and simple pleasure of youth while silently thanking the Fates that no one was injured.

Fear is my enemy, and the ocean is not my friend. It is vast and intensely powerful, with too many important tasks to even notice me in my insignificance. As long as I can rely on my own faculties, I am an able observer of the brilliant workings of another world. However, when I allow fear to invade my body, my life can be dowsed like a flickering match.
HOW DO YOU SAY GREYHOUND IN GERMAN?
Riding on a Greyhound bus for 52 hours would represent many people's idea of pure hell, but when one has limited funds and a strong desire to experience natural wonders, the discomforts of crowded, muggy quarters and ankles that appear to have acquired elephantitis become secondary in the preliminary anticipation and the reflection of the post-trip. On a trip of that length so many things happen: I had to sit next to a whining child, as well as a sick, elderly woman (not to mention the young man who was playing rap music full blast on his Walkman.) There is a lot to be learned from fellow travellers. Most of the people taking the bus were either senior citizens or backpackers; this made sense to me because both take a leisurely approach to their freedom, striving to evade their grim realities, death and responsibility, respectively. Needless to say, my encounters on the bus added a certain depth to my trip abroad. Not only with regards to the people I met, but also to the opportunity to visually experience the country across which I was traveling. How fascinating to stop momentarily in each tiny community along the east coast of Australia.

Although volumes could be written about the thoughts, experiences, and dreams to be had in over 100 total hours of bus travel, one particular event has maintained perfect clarity in my mind. It occurred about five hours north of our departure from Brisbane; I was half way to my
northern destination of tropical Cairns. The day was overcast and balmy which made everyone on the bus rather drowsy, but the stagnant air of the vehicle prevented sleep for most of the passengers. We pulled into a small town which was actually no more than a wide place in the road, and the driver told us we could take a ten minute break. I didn't feel much like moving; it made sitting back down that much more uncomfortable. I decided to just vegetate and take inventory of people's snacks when they re-boarded the bus. Several candy bars, sodas, muesli bars, potato crisps, and bottled water seemed to be the favorites. However, one man stood out from the crowd with his choices. He was an older man traveling with what appeared to be his wife. They spoke in a foreign tongue which I later discovered, after intense eavesdropping, was German. As he took his seat three rows ahead of me, he handed his wife a box of Ritz crackers and kept hold of a tall container of cream, which he proceeded to open and swallow directly from its carton. I watched with amusement as an expression of surprise contorted his smiling face. He spoke rapidly to his wife and reached for a translation dictionary which he had stored in the pocket on the seat in front of him. Discovering the error, the couple shared an intimate laugh and waited anxiously for the next stop at which they might quench their thirst.

Through the work of a strange miracle, I managed to
sleep for the next few hours, awaking in early evening when the bus stopped to make a freight pick-up. This particular stop only involved a few moments so I would have to wait to go to a stationary toilet and refresh myself after the nap. Little did I know just how long I would be waiting...As the bus pulled away from the freight stop, I heard a gasp over my right shoulder and noticed the old German woman in an expression of terror, holding her crooked hands up to her quivering lips. She passed her row of seats and began to plead with the driver in frantic German. Only then did I begin to understand what had happened; I shared my fears with the bus driver who repeated them in a makeshift sign language to the near-hysterical woman, and she nodded in tearful agreement. The woman had gone to the toilet in the back of the bus, and her husband had gone to an outdoor facility at the last stop. When the driver pulled away, the woman was still in the toilet and had no idea that her husband had been left behind. Unfortunately, none of the other riders had noticed either because the couple was seated very near the front of the bus, and a movie preoccupied most of us.

The bus driver became infuriated and screamed in the old German woman's direction, "We'll pull off to the side of the road and see if he has the sense to walk and find us. If not I reckon he'll have to catch tomorrow's route and meet
up with you later!" As if an old man is just going to take off jogging to catch the bus that left him. The woman looked at me in helpless horror to translate the driver's furious tones. Hello; Good-bye; Bless you; and Do you speak German are about the extent of my German sentences, but somehow she understood and began to weep silently with her arms wrapped tightly across her chest. I wasn't the only person who could sense her fear, helplessness, and pain. The bus driver announced that we would go back for the man. The major problem with this plan of action was that we were in a huge bus on a two lane highway with very few exits. We had to drive further north for half an hour before finding a turn around, and by the time we returned to the freight stop, the old German man had found a good Samaritan to pursue us in his family car. The bus driver was now beyond exasperation, and the wife was exhausted in her grief. She may not have been able to understand the words of the driver, but unpleasantness is universally interpretable. I felt like laughing at the slapstick quality of the trip; yet, I had to empathize with the poor woman.

The irony of the story's end is the detail I can recall with the most clarity. As the bus barrels down the primitive highway, we are all on the lookout for a maroon car which is similar in body style to a Chevy Nova. When we find it nearly an hour later, it is off the side of the road
with the hood raised. The German woman spies her husband pacing in front of the car and lets out a cry of relief. The bus driver gets off the bus and immediately begins to scream at the man for delaying the trip for everyone. The owner of the car shakes his head in disbelief; his engine overheated in the frenzy of pursuit and has major structural damage as a result, a head gasket or something like that. I realize that life is often unjust in the punishments it bestows upon innocent people. I also realize that love is alive and well as the couple settles back in their seats and tightly grasp each other's hands. In the end, I just sit back and smile through glassy eyes as the old man apologizes with a bowed head to the entire bus, in German. There is no translation necessary.
THOUGHT

Thought, I love thought.
But not the jiggling and twisting of already existent ideas
I despise that self-important game.
Thought is the welling up of unknown life into
consciousness,
Thought is the testing of statements on the touchstone of
the conscience,
Thought is gazing on to the face of life, and reading what
can be read,
Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to a
conclusion.
Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges,
Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.

-D.H. Lawrence-

Thanks to everyone who makes me think. You have become
a part of who I am.