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1 May 2013

WRIT 3100

Critical Reader Response

*Bird by Bird* by: Anne Lamott

People say trust is the key to a lot of really vague things: relationships, happiness, life, etc. but these are all about trusting others. Trusting yourself is the real key to all these things and so much more. Anne Lamott's book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* explains that not only is trusting yourself and your intuition the key to life, but it is the key to writing. "You get your confidence and intuition back by trusting yourself, by being militantly on your own side. You need to trust yourself, especially on a first draft, where amid the anxiety and self-doubt, there should be a real sense of your imagination and your imagination and your memories walking and woolgathering, tramping the hills, romping all over the place. Trust them. Don't look at your feet to see if you are doing it right. Just dance" (Lamott, loc. 1462).

I think Lamott is right in saying that trusting yourself is key mostly from personal experience. Before I took WRIT 3100: Poetry Writing, I hadn't written anything since I was 12 years old because I was too embarrassed that someone would read my work before it was perfect. When I was a kid, I was the kind of kid that wrote her mother books for every holiday, which she still has, and my dad even once wanted to try to get one of my books published. It's what I did for fun, and people thought I was weird for it. The last book I wrote was about me

and my two best friends getting to go to the mall by ourselves for the first time. I had drawn my own pictures for it, and I was really proud of myself, but when I showed my friends they laughed at me because it was boring. The last poem I wrote before this class was actually the only thing I am still proud of, because it was for a writing contest for a child abuse prevention organization. I still have it framed and on the wall at my mom's house because I won a \$100 savings bond that I can't deposit until I'm 32. I stopped writing because I didn't think it was worth the embarrassment when the work sucked.

Lamott's book talks about "shitty first drafts" in a way that really opened my eyes. As a kid I always wanted to be the next Dr. Seuss, and really I still do, only not quite so dramatic. He was my role model because his books were like he just let his imagination run wild and it came out with these perfectly made-up creatures and things. I like to think of Dr. Seuss as the master of shitty first drafts.

Lamott talks about letting your imagination run wild a lot in *Bird by Bird*, but I think the best part is about the school lunches. She describes this sandwich bag in so much detail that you almost forget why your writing, and then she tells us that the point isn't the sandwich bag, the most important part of that description was a guy standing on the fence, and that tomorrow she will take time getting to know him so that he can be a character in her story. I think this is important because my mind runs a little wild sometimes too, and the result is usually terrible but I could probably find something really great in it to write about later.

This book is a great assignment for beginner writing classes because it really goes into how to write mentally, rather than the mechanics of it. While some professors might say otherwise because of that reason, I really think that if students, who might not have liked writing in the first place, read this book before anything, they might be a little more encouraged.