

because she was my equalizer." He now recognizes, "It would have lasted longer, the upraised standing, if I had pampered her. . . . [B]ut I had too much of the Bragg side of the family in me for that." He also acknowledges that racing in the parking lot was "an insane thing to do." Although Bragg devotes relatively little space in the essay to telling us what he believes the significance of the incident to be, he balances his remembered thoughts and feelings with his present perspectives.

Considering Topics for Your Own Essay

Bragg has focused on a particular incident that tells us something about himself both as an adolescent and as the man he would become by his mid-thirties. Think of incidents early in your life (before you were 11 or 12 years old) that are particularly revealing about you, both as a child and as a person of your present age. You might try to think of incidents that tested or challenged you, or incidents in which you behaved either typically or atypically in relation to the way you remember yourself to have been or think of yourself now. Perhaps you experienced a dreadful disappointment or an unexpected delight. Perhaps you were in danger or you accomplished something you now think you were unprepared for.

Jean Brandt wrote this essay as a first-year college student. In it she tells about a memorable event that occurred when she was thirteen. Reflecting on how she felt at the time Brandt writes, "I was afraid, embarrassed, worried, mad." As you read, look for places where these tumultuous and contradictory remembered feelings are expressed.

Calling Home

Jean Brandt

As we all piled into the car, I knew it was going to be a fabulous day. My grandmother was visiting for the holidays; and she and I, along with my older brother and sister, Louis and Susan, were setting off for a day of last-minute Christmas shopping. On the way to the mall, we sang Christmas carols, chattered, and laughed. With Christmas only two days away, we were caught up with holiday spirit. I felt light-headed and full of joy. I loved shopping—especially at Christmas.

The shopping center was swarming with frantic last-minute shoppers like ourselves. We went first to the General Store, my favorite. It carried mostly knickknacks and other useless items which nobody needs but buys anyway. I was thirteen years old at the time and things like buttons and calendars and posters would catch my fancy. This day was no different. The object of my desire was a 75-cent Snoopy button. Snoopy was the latest. If you owned anything with the Peanuts on it, you were "in." But since I was supposed to be shopping for gifts for other people and not myself, I couldn't decide what to do. I went in search of my sister for her opinion. I pushed my way through throngs of people to the back of the store where I found Susan. I asked her if she thought I should buy the button. She said it was cute and if I wanted it to go ahead and buy it.

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When I got back to the Snoopy section, I took one look at the lines at the cashiers and knew I didn't want to wait thirty minutes to buy an item worth less than one dollar. I walked back to the basket where I found the button and was about to drop it when suddenly, instead, I took a quick glance around, assured myself no one could see, and slipped the button into the pocket of my sweatshirt. I hesitated for a moment, but once the item was in my pocket, there was no turning back. I had never before stolen anything; but what was done was done. A few seconds later, my sister appeared and asked, "So, did you decide to buy the button?"

"No, I guess not." I hoped my voice didn't quaver. As we headed for the entrance, my heart began to race. I just had to get out of that store. Only a few more yards to go and I'd be safe. As we crossed the threshold, I heaved a sigh of relief. I was home free. I thought about how sly I had been and I felt proud of my accomplishment.

An unexpected tap on my shoulder startled me. I whirled around to find a middle-aged man, dressed in street clothes, flashing some type of badge and politely asking me to empty my pockets. Where did this man come from? How did he know? I was so sure that no one had seen me! On the verge of panicking, I told myself that all I had to do was give this man his button back, say I was sorry, and go on my way. After all, it was only a 75-cent item.

Next thing I knew, he was talking about calling the police and having me arrested and thrown in jail, as if he had just nabbed a professional thief instead of a terrified kid. I couldn't believe what he was saying.

"Jean, what's going on?"

The sound of my sister's voice eased the pressure a bit. She always managed to get me out of trouble. She would come through this time too.

"Excuse me. Are you a relative of this young girl?"

"Yes, I'm her sister. What's the problem?"

"Well, I just caught her shoplifting and I'm afraid I'll have to call the police."

"What did she take?"

"This button."

"A button? You are having a thirteen-year-old arrested for stealing a button?"

"I'm sorry, but she broke the law."

The man led us through the store and into an office, where we waited for the police officers to arrive. Susan had found my grandmother and brother, who, still shocked, didn't say a word. The thought of going to jail terrified me, not because of jail itself, but because of the encounter with my parents afterward. Not more than ten minutes later, two officers arrived and placed me under arrest. They said that I was to be taken to the station alone. Then, they handcuffed me and led me out of the store. I felt alone and scared. I had counted on my sister being with me, but now I had to muster up the courage to face this ordeal all by myself.

As the officers led me through the mall, I sensed a hundred pairs of eyes staring at me. My face flushed and I broke out in a sweat. Now everyone knew I was a criminal. In their eyes I was a juvenile delinquent, and thank God the cops were getting me off the streets. The worst part was thinking my grandmother might be having the same thoughts. The humiliation at that moment was overwhelming. I felt like Hester Prynne being put on public display for everyone to ridicule.

That short walk through the mall seemed to take hours. But once we reached the squad car, time raced by. I was read my rights and questioned. We were at the police station within minutes. Everything happened so fast I didn't have a chance to feel remorse for my crime. Instead, I viewed what was happening to me as if it were a movie. Being searched, although embarrassing, somehow seemed to be exciting. All the movies and television programs I had seen were actually coming to life. This is what it was really like. But why were criminals always portrayed as frightened and regretful? I was having fun. I thought I had nothing to fear—until I was allowed my one phone call. I was trembling as I dialed home. I didn't know what I was going to say to my parents, especially my mother.

"Hi, Dad, this is Jean."

"We've been waiting for you to call."

"Did Susie tell you what happened?"

"Yeah, but we haven't told your mother. I think you should tell her what you did and where you are."

"You mean she doesn't even know where I am?"

"No, I want you to explain it to her."

There was a pause as he called my mother to the phone. For the first time that night, I was close to tears. I wished I had never stolen that stupid pin. I wanted to give the phone to one of the officers because I was too ashamed to tell my mother the truth, but I had no choice.

"Jean, where are you?"

"I'm, umm, in jail."

"Why? What for?"

"Shoplifting."

"Oh no, Jean. Why? Why did you do it?"

"I don't know. No reason. I just did it."

"I don't understand. What did you take? Why did you do it? You had plenty of money with you."

"I know but I just did it. I can't explain why. Mom, I'm sorry."

"I'm afraid sorry isn't enough. I'm horribly disappointed in you."

Long after we got off the phone, while I sat in an empty jail cell, waiting for my parents to pick me up, I could still distinctly hear the disappointment and hurt in my mother's voice. I cried. The tears weren't for me but for her and the pain I had put her through. I felt like a terrible human being. I would rather have stayed in jail than confront my mom right then. I dreaded each passing minute that brought our encounter closer. When the officer came to release me, I hesitated, actually not wanting to leave. We went to the front desk, where I had to sign a form to retrieve my belongings. I saw my parents a few yards away and my heart raced. A large knot formed in my stomach. I fought back the tears.

Not a word was spoken as we walked to the car. Slowly, I sank into the back seat anticipating the scolding. Expecting harsh tones, I was relieved to hear almost the opposite from my father.

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18 ... m not going to punish you and I'll tell you why. Although I think what you did was 37
 ... I think what the police did was more wrong. There's no excuse for locking a
 ... n-year-old behind bars. That doesn't mean I condone what you did, but I think
 ... been punished enough already."
 ... s I looked from my father's eyes to my mother's, I knew this ordeal was over. 38
 ... h it would never be forgotten, the incident was not mentioned again.

Connecting to Culture and Experience: Shame

Paragraph 17, Brandt gives us a vivid portrait of how excruciating the feeling of
 ... ne can be: "I sensed a hundred pairs of eyes staring at me. My face flushed and I
 ... ke out in a sweat." Shame, as this description indicates, involves a desire for the
 ... munity's approval or a dread of its disapproval. (The words *shame* and *guilt* are
 ... n used interchangeably, but they have different connotations: *Shame* involves
 ... iety about social acceptance, whereas *guilt* is a more private, inward-looking emo-
 ... associated with morality.)

Identify one occasion when you felt ashamed. With other students, take turns
 ... fly explaining what happened and why you were ashamed. In whose eyes did you
 ... the most shame? (Note that Brandt, for example, feels shame at being thought
 ... as a criminal by strangers in the shopping mall, but she feels even more ashamed
 ... h her grandmother and perhaps most ashamed with her mother.)

ashamed
shame
guilt
shame

Analyzing Writing Strategies

Reread the essay, paying particular attention to Brandt's use of dialogue—recon-
 ... structed conversation from the time of the event. What do you learn about the
 ... author from what she says and how she says it? What do you learn about her rela-
 ... tionship with her parents?

For more on dialogue, see
 Chapter 14, pp. 580–81.

The story begins and ends in a car, with the two car rides framing the story.
 ... Framing, a narrative device, echoes something from the beginning in the ending.
 ... Review what happens in each car ride. The writer assumes you might think of the
 ... beginning as you are reading the ending. What effect might this awareness have
 ... on your response to the ending car ride?

Framing
71

The Writer at Work section on pp. 66–73 includes some of Brandt's invention
 ... notes and her complete first draft. These materials show how her focus shifts
 ... gradually from the theft and subsequent arrest in her first draft to her emotional
 ... confrontation with her parents in the final version.

Read over her notes and first draft, and then comment on this shift in focus.
 ... Why do you think Brandt decides to stress her confrontation with her parents?
 ... Why do you think she decides, against the advice of the student who commented
 ... on her draft, to cut the scenes in the police car and station? Notice; in particular,

thinks readers will like her story because she suspects many of them will recall doing something illegal and feeling guilty about it, even if they never got caught.

The First Draft

The day after completing the invention writing, Brandt reviews her invention and writes her first draft. It takes her about an hour to write the draft, which is hardly written and contains few erasures or other changes, indicating that she writes steadily. She knows this will not be her only draft.

Before you read Brandt's first draft, reread the final draft, "Calling Home," the Readings section of this chapter. Then, as you read the first draft, consider what part it plays in the total writing process.

* It was two days before Christmas and my older sister and brother, my grandmother, and I were rushing around doing last-minute shopping. After going to a few stores we decided to go to Lakewood Center shopping mall. It was packed with other frantic shoppers like ourselves from one end to the other. The first store we went to (the first and last for me) was the General Store. The General Store is your typical gift shop. They mainly have the cutesy knick-knacks, posters, frames and that sort. The store is decorated to resemble an old-time western general store but the appearance doesn't quite come off.

We were all browsing around and I saw a basket of buttons so I went to see what the different ones were. One of the first ones I noticed was a Snoopy button. I'm not sure what it said on it, something funny I'm sure and besides I was in love with anything Snoopy when I was 13. I took it out of the basket and showed it to my sister and she said "Why don't you buy it?" I thought about it but the lines at the cashiers were outrageous and I didn't think it was worth it for a 75 cent item. Instead I figured just take it and I did. I thought I was so sly about it. I casually slipped it into my pocket and assumed I was home free since no one pounced on me. Everyone was ready to leave this shop so we made our way through the crowds to the entrance.

My grandmother and sister were ahead of my brother and I. They were almost to the entrance of May Co. and we were about 5 to 10 yards behind when I felt this tap on my shoulder. I turned around already terror struck, and this man was flashing

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some kind of badge in my face. It happened so fast I didn't know what was going on. Louie finally noticed I wasn't with him and came back for me. Jack explained I was being arrested for shoplifting and if my parents were here then Louie should go find them. Louie ran to get Susie and told her about it but kept it from Grandma. By the time Sue got back to the General Store I was in the back office and Jack was calling the police. I was a little scared but not really. It was sort of exciting. My sister was telling me to try and cry but I couldn't. About 20 minutes later two cops came and handcuffed me, led me through the mall outside to the police car. I was kind of embarrassed when they took me through the mall in front of all those people.

When they got me in the car they began questioning me, while driving me to the police station. Questions just to fill out the report--age, sex, address, color of eyes, etc.

Then when they were finished they began talking about Jack and what a nuisance he was. I gathered that Jack had every single person who shoplifted, no matter what their age, arrested. The police were getting really fed up with it because it was a nuisance for them to have to come way out to the mall for something as petty as that. To hear the police talk about my "crime" that way felt good because it was like what I did wasn't really so bad. It made me feel a bit relieved. When we walked into the station I remember the desk sergeant joking with the arresting officers about "well we got another one of Jack's hardened criminals." Again, I felt my crime lacked any seriousness at all. Next they handcuffed me to a table and questioned me further and then I had to phone my mom. That was the worst. I never was so humiliated in my life. Hearing the disappointment in her voice was worse punishment than the cops could ever give me.

Brandt's first draft establishes the main sequence of actions. About a third of it is devoted to the store manager, an emphasis that disappears by the final draft. What is to have prominence in the final draft—Brandt's feelings about telling her parents and her conversations with them—appears here only in a few lines at the very end. But mentioning the interaction suggests its eventual importance, and we are reminded of its prominence in Brandt's invention writing.

Brandt writes a second draft for another student to read critically. In this draft, she includes dialogues with her sister and with the police officers. She also provides