
“I shall do this, not because I am noble or unselfish, but because life slips away, and because I need for the rest of my journey a star that will not play false to me, a compass that will not lie...”

I do this not because I am courageous and honest, but because it is the only way to end the conflict of my deepest soul. I do it because I am no longer able to aspire to the highest with one part of myself, and to deny it with another. I do not wish to live like that, I would rather die than live like that...

I am moved by something that is not my own, that moves me to do what is right, at whatever cost it may be...”

- Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*

I'm Supergirl, and I'm here to save the world...

And I wanna know, who's gonna save me?

- Krystal Harris, "Supergirl"

Do you feel like a chain store, practically floored?

One of many zeros, kicked around bored

Your ears are full but you're empty, holding out your heart

To people who never really care how you are...

- Blur, "Coffee and TV"

I'm through with the past, ain't no point in looking back

The future will be, and did I forget that I found a new direction

And it leads back to me?

- Kylie Minogue, "Spinning Around"

Sometimes, I feel the fear of uncertainty stinging clear.

And I can't help but ask myself how much I'll let the fear take the wheel and steer.

It's driven me before, and it seems to have a vague, haunting mass appeal.

Whatever tomorrow brings, I'll be there with open arms and open eyes...

I'm beginning to find that when I drive myself my light is found.

- Incubus, "Drive"

"Shards"

*Based on the written drafts, memoirs, and recorded events of
The Christine Files Vol. 7: "It's Not a Dream, It's a Reality Gone Bad!"*

Christine "Silverfox" Malazarte

Dedicated to "The Four"

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June 13, 2001

"Coda: The End of the Manifested Destiny"

What is the definition of "I'm ok?" Mine is either being down by the gym hitting a puck against the wall or sitting by a tree and writing odd thoughts like this. But to others, it's appearing to be dangerous. It's always been me to take time alone and express myself in my own way. I am an oddball, the different one, who prefers to look into her own mind and try to answer that question of mental stability. I appear fine, I feel fine, and my "friends" are still there, waiting for me to wake up from my dream and tell them that I'm still breathing. I've gone so long without friends that it really doesn't matter whether or not I'm with them or not. *I'm social when I want to be and myself when I can be.* I don't need the approval or support of others to be happy. Many times, I get neither, but I feel high enough about myself that the "optional" box is checked.

There are people that I do carry in high regard, mostly because they care to hear how I feel and how I am doing. It's so much better than talking to yourself, your hockey stick, because I get a verbal response. The only difference between a hockey stick and a human being is that I can't tell a human everything. On the other hand, I can't tell everything if I don't know everything.

Will I ever fully figure out how I tick? Is there some other dimension to me that's waiting to come out in some fit of rage, a tense situation, or for no reason? I've got to watch out for that. As for now, I'll just throw my lottery balls into the fate machine and see what they dish out for me. It's only the things I choose to do and the boosts of those who care that will tip the scales in my favor. I'll just hang on and try not to fall off my hypothetical boat.

School is over, I have begun my introspective journey, and I ask the sky, will there be anyone at the end to wait for me? I cannot force myself to expect a party.

I am God's personal Pandora's box...His own little riddle. Fine then! I'll make sure that I'm funny.

June 14, 2001

"Pointers"

It's all over. This tumultuous year of junior-ism at CAMS is all over. And what a ride it has been. People came and went, teachers skipped on and off their problems, and I've become a much more legitimate representation of me.

June was a jump-start year, and I can never express or fully measure the many ideas and motivations I have received. But, I can share a few...

"In your busy life, don't forget to give some time to your heart."

- Paus (as la Señora Suarez)

"If you go through school just for the grades and just to get into college, you haven't gone to school and you're wasting your time." - Class of 2000 Alumnus

"ONE DAY AT A TIME!" – Vogel

When June comes around, people's schedules tend to free up. That means that people start to free up. They are no longer the monotonous robots that trudge in and out to meet demands, and that means they're human again! The time constraints in the real world restrict the human side of people to show. They become paper-like, flat, one-dimensional, only in their places because they have to be and gone when someone else wants them to be.

The words pamper and comfort, are vulgar. Doing those two things means that you're not working hard enough. The administration hasn't ground your skull in far enough into the ground. This is where diseases such as "senioritis" and suicidal tendencies

come from. But how can you do what you're supposed to do without shutting down on yourself?

Pure drive and self-motivation. You need a reason to keep on going, a phrase you can say to yourself, a person to think about, or an image that tells you to go for it, but only use them as jump starts. The only person that will benefit is you. If you go through life being everyone's indentured servant, that's all you'll be.

Be vulgar! Take time to pamper and comfort yourself. You will eventually break down if you keep running. **YOU ARE NOT A MACHINE!** Your parts are not always replaceable! Oh, and let's not forget this one...

"Be honest. Lying won't help you. It only delays the inevitable, and of course, you won't like the inevitable...so you might as well get it over with now." - Mr. Almeida

June 15, 2001

"The Chaos Was Over...For Now"

The adjustment from school life back to home life is an awkward experience. One moment, you're spending time in the chemistry lab copying homework and the next you're here on a lopsided leather couch, writing things you'll probably end up typing onto a computer. (Ok...that was a stretch, but there is really a stark contrast from 9:33 AM now compared to last Friday.)

Coming back to greeting dogs and a reason to use the computer for non-academic purposes only means one thing: you're on vacation. So much to do! So much time! Where to start...

200 ft. and bad antenna wiring are what's keeping me from getting the personal Internet access of my dreams...

The ironic part of my house is me. I am too technologically ambitious, and it can't keep up with the times. Relocating is out of the question, because I still love it, despite the wiring deficiencies.

Houses and homes are two different things. The house is merely the building, a pile of wood, cement, and insulation. The home is the part of the house that makes you feel complete, reassuring you that there is a safe haven and a place in the world where you're welcome regardless of anything that goes on outside. It's the same for everything else. You have to find the part of that beloved object that really makes you feel that it's yours.

200ft. is only a temporary issue, and so is the impulsiveness of wanting to move. In the long run, we could potentially become the perfect service area. It doesn't hurt to dream some more.

"A Goalie's Reflection"

It seems to me that all the training and hours of stopping shots have amounted to nothing more than shots getting past you when they really count. Maybe it would have been better if I had spent those hours doing something else more healthful...

But what else is there that gives you that adrenaline rush, the feeling of the puck slinging itself into your glove webbing, the screaming of a modestly sized crowd, and the other team banging their sticks in disgust, wishing for those few seconds that would have meant the difference between a loss and a tie?

Does it really matter how good you are compared to how dedicated you are to it? There are those who are the greatest in the world and don't participate in morning skates and those who need more work than Michael Jackson's nose and skate out there with every chance they get. What is the difference?

When the puck drops, how will you race and block it? You're the goalie, you decide.

June 15, 2001 – August 22, 2001

“\$17.57 and a Dream” – Lite Version

One of the highlights in the living cube known as my room is my extensive jersey collection. Most have been bought for their looks, but there are the selected few with their own histories of greatness.

“Tremors of Black Biscuits”

The home and away versions of the original Mach I Tremors jerseys, known as the “Dawg Pack” in their debuts at Irvine Gretzky Center, were the beginnings of my goaltending career. Their arms are much too small to accommodate my current armor, but just wearing them was a big deal. I was the alternate, the spare part that replaced the starter after he got creamed with five goals in the first half of the first game. My trademark “desperate” style of play was born, where I would butterfly for every shot and cheat to the glove side. We lost that game, but I proved to myself that I was headed for an illustrious career between the pipes. I haven’t turned back since, because there’s no reason to. I’m happy.

I am free. Putting on that equipment is like covering up the problems of the day. I feel invincible, and pucks fear me. The full range of motion I still possess despite the padding allow me to turn goaltending into an art. Arms fling to and fro. Body gets thrown in front of 6 oz. pills. Head receives a few dings...ahh the feeling of being one step closer to a concussion.

Many consider me insane to subject to what they deem as “self torture.” Well then, I’ll continue my insanity. The only drug to treat it is more hockey.

But why hockey? Why not crocheting or ballet? It's an odd thing, but there's a hypnotic trait to slapping a puck or ball against a wall or into a net. You can take all your aggression out (safely) and channel it through the stick. The only way you can do that with a crocheting is to take the hook and jab it into someone's eye.

Wait, I know...it's the speed. It's that adrenaline rush when you race for the puck in the corner, or you versus a breakaway. It's the unpredictability. Once the puck is dropped, it can go anywhere. Infinite possibilities, choices, and outcomes are packed into a shaped piece of rubber. No game is ever exactly the same.

Hockey is life. The suspense varies from game to game and the momentums change from minute to minute. It also requires thinking and responsibility. I am a goaltender, the team's quarterback. I can control the game. I see all, direct all, and help all. I carry the largest burden. I am the last obstacle that prevents the puck from hitting the back of the net. Any action I take could mean the difference between a save and a goal. Gotta love those odds. Of course, life wouldn't be as exciting as a hockey game all the time, but it can get pretty close.

My hockey career had its lowly beginnings and slow starts. It took more than five years to get to my current position as a Tour Elite goalie, but it wasn't until a rocky start as a defenseman that brought me to that point.

"Capitalistic Kings"

I first hit the cement donning a set of \$60 Brookfield Inlines with the free wrist guards, a gift I received after attaining my green belt in Tae Kwon Do. The rink I would start on was no more than a pipe dream. It wasn't until I saw some off-season ice players on quad skates shoot ice pucks with screws for runners that I got the idea to go to Sportmart and invest \$15.43 on a Franklin Street Hockey stick and ball and \$2.14 at Ross for Easton gloves.

So, on a slightly humid day in early August 1996, I scored my first goal into a rusty net next to the once vacant cement lot next to the area where I was first inspired, which was now a rink. After 7th grade started, I continued to teach myself, returning every Friday afternoon to spend at least one hour perfecting my moves.

I persuaded my parents after many months that I was ready to go out and play in a real league. They submitted to my demands, probably so that I could shut up, and I entered myself into the team selection draft.

As soon as my skates touched that surface, I froze. I could barely keep up with the other players, but I was determined. As a last resort, they placed me on a team called the Kings. I was the only girl, but not the only rookie, so that was reassuring. I got my first assist in the first game, and we ended the season in 2nd place. I remained with this team for seven seasons, but we received a name change right after that inaugural season, becoming the “Capitals” and moving up to the lower Bantam (14 and under) division.

My defensive play turned into instances where I’d be on the floor deflecting pucks with my stick, skates, and sometimes head. This was fun! Maybe I should try goalie...

And the answer was a resounding, “NO!”

“What about your chest?” my parents ranted. “The stuff is way too expensive, and they shoot too hard.”

It would take another two years to get to that next stage, but I wouldn’t have gotten there without my Kings practice jersey and uncrested Washington Capitals home replica.

“Robbie and the YMCA S.K.A.T.E.”

During the summer before I entered CAMS, I came across an empty, newly built rink during a self-given tour of the university. Little did I know, it would become the jump-start to personal greatness.

I heard the announcement as a freshman inside Mrs. McVay’s English class, twiddling my thumbs while waiting for papers to be passed back.

“Interested in roller hockey? Come down to the hockey rink by the Velodrome on Wednesday.”

It was Tuesday, and my schedule was clear. Torrance Skate Association was off-season, so I decided to give it a shot. Along with a fellow CAMS student, I went to the rink, signed the waivers, participated in the clinic, and had a decent time. I thought little of the event until four months later, while studying for an upcoming Spanish test in the University Game Room, I saw another clinic being held there. I had been inside too long, and it felt like a good time to take a break. So I walked down the long stairway and past a couple buildings to watch the show. The man whom I talked to those many months ago, intercepted my path. His name was Robbie, the director of the program, confined to a wheelchair after a car accident. We talked for a while, and I agreed to come down to a practice.

I was an instant hit. The players, mostly young rookies, never seen a girl play hockey, and I gave the current hot shot a run for his money. I entered the league, and chose the number “34,” the number of my favorite goalie of all time, John “Beezer” Vanbiesbrouck.

I started my first season and spent half of it as a defenseman, scoring two goals, a few assists, and a couple penalty shots. But after a while with that, I became bored, and decided to take advantage of the free goalie equipment available for use.

My first shot as a goalie was during a Wednesday practice session. I put on a cheap pair of Ferlands and saved the first few shots. It was addicting and became an obsession to learn, as I used my 8th grade graduation money to buy a pair of Felix Potvin Koho goalie pads and purchased a blocker and catching glove during a trip to Las Vegas at The Sports Authority, diverting both of them to opposite sides of the store to give myself enough time to smuggle them under the seat of the Expedition. It took them four months to figure out my motives, and it was met with much disagreement.

I split time with the current goalie of my team, the “Heaters,” and we slid our way to the championship game, ironically against the hot shot and a fellow teammate from the Capitals. Their goalie was a charismatic boy named Randy Seguiera, who was on a wheelchair. This was my fourth game ever as a goalie and first in a championship. We barely won, 9-8, assisted by a 17-year-old named Jacob, who would score by slapping pucks down from the opposite side of the net. The victory was bittersweet, for it was the last game Randy would play on this earth.

“Randy passed away this morning,” a teary eyed Robbie told me two days before our first tournament in Irvine.

I couldn't believe my ears. The surgery had gone so well. We were determined to win it for him, the greatest goalie the program ever had. It was those words that pushed me to play goal with even more intensity. We fought valiantly, but succumbed to the more experienced teams. But I think he would've been proud.

After Irvine, our travel team was officially established. We organized the second tournament in his memory. His number was retired, and nobody can wear that number for as long as the rink stands.

After that tournament, we became the Mach I Tremors, a name inspired after a recent earthquake. We traveled to the Burbank YMCA to flex our more prepared muscles.

This is where another CAMS student comes into the game. His name was Matthew Valentine, a person who was enthusiastic about the game, and was willing to come out and learn how to play. He had actually envisioned putting together a team to play at the rink, and came to me one day, after school, and asked if I'd be willing to join. I figured it didn't hurt to try...CAMS didn't even know what hockey is, and still doesn't to this very day.

I could remember him during his first day out here. I was out of my goalie gear, donning my defenseman equipment and popping pucks at the net. He could barely skate, and shoot for that matter, struggling with getting the hang of getting around the rink in his new, bulky getup. And out of a moment of frustration, he just stops trying. I work with him for a few more sessions and explain to him that it's taken me so long to get to the level I was, and if he kept going, he would be able to do the things that I was doing, shooting the puck at will, skating in every direction, and controlling the puck. He makes drastic improvements, and before long, he was a full-fledged member of the Tremors, shooting pucks harder than I ever will. He now dedicates weekend after weekend coaching little kids, sharing his love of hockey with the young ones.

Then it was time to make it to the big time. Hawaii...3000 miles across the ocean to play on some naval base's tennis court...a trip I never took, because my parents wouldn't let me. For some odd reason though, they won the championship without me, the starting goalie. And the heart disappeared, and the team split. To this day, I have no idea why, but I consider myself as one of the remaining members of the travel team that no longer exists.

After the breakup, Rob's league was stagnant as week-old water in a rubber tire, and I went off to look for greener pastures. I went to HealthSouth in El Segundo, where I had played my fourth tournament, joining in pick-up roller games to pass the time, and I became an instant hit there too! I became a welcome sight every week, my parents gained more confidence in my skill, and one day, I heard the six words that I've wanted to hear.

“Would you like to play ice?”

I received a chest protector, pants, helmet, and glove upgrade. Branches Hockey game me a goalie stick in a sponsorship, and after waiting another week for my red Nxi chrome cage helmet and CCM 455 goalie skates, I was ready to try my wings in the mysterious world of frozen water and rubber.

8 PM, January 10, 2001. This would be the first time I skated on ice with full goalie equipment, and I can easily say it was a slippery experience. When I put as much force into kick saves and stacking pads as if it was a roller surface, movements were uncontrollable. By the end of that ordeal, I came to one conclusion: PLAY LIKE DOMINIK HASEK! I was known as the goalie that flunked Goaltending College, but hey, I was stopping the pucks.

I continued on to the roller hockey tournament circuit after a call from an all-boy team that needed a girl to play in goal to comply with the rule that a girl had to be on the surface at all times. We defeated everyone except Team Mission (an elite Koho team), whom we met in the championship game. We were defeated easily, and as a reward for my participation in the slaughter, I received a stick to the back of the head and a date with the boards while clearing the puck out of my end of the rink.

Two weeks after that fiasco, a women's team based out of San Diego known as the Rinkside Rockettes contacted me to play goalie for them. This was my first all-women's tourney, with a game style starkly different from the roughness of men's play. We fought our way through the standings, defeating everyone, with the most memorable against a traveling team from Argentina. We barely won our first meeting, 2-1, and made it to the championship game with 4-0 record and my personal record of two shutouts. And then the loudspeaker blared.

“VISITORS! WE’VE GOT A SPECIAL GAME FOR YOU ALL TONIGHT. WATCH THE RINKSIDE ROCKETTES PLAY AGAINST THE ARGENTINIAN NATIONAL WOMEN’S TEAM FOR THE GOLD DIVISION CHAMPIONSHIP AT 5:00PM ON RINK TWO.”

So I watched them win the semi-final in a shootout, and my defensemen, only the tender ages of 12 and 13, pigged out on Icee and pretzels. Full stomachs led to a loss, 5-0 to exact, and that championship was once again another one of my life's Loch Ness Monsters – elusive to capture, but awesome when seen.

I finally did get that championship, with a team called the Tour Riot, in my next women's tournament, and as extra icing on the already sweet cake, the MVP goalie award, a record of four shutouts, allowing a mere two goals in the entire tournament, and my name in the "Hockey and Skating" newspaper. Now, if only they spelled my last name correctly...close enough.

A month later, I am invited back to play with that team again, holding a 4-0 record with two shutouts and my second MVP goalie award. I'm probably doomed to have my name misspelled again, but it's not like it's being engraved in a medal or something...the victories just keep coming with the women's circuit, and I pray that the new Mach I Tremors could reach that plateau as well.

I am looking forward to my next tournaments and my chance to shine once again. It's time to really have some fun now.

"The Patrick Roy Protégé"

My goaltending life is divided into two facets: the practical and superstitious.

The practical is the side that stays simple, only planning to make the save properly. It keeps the game in perspective, winning or losing, and remains there in front of the net, playing the angle and staying square to the shooter.

"See puck stop puck. See player in front of net, knock 'em over."

The superstitious is the side that keeps the practical one in the game. It is the one that wears the non-hockey celebrity signed Beezer jersey and listens to Robbie Williams' song, "Rock DJ" before suiting up, puts on equipment from left to right, whose helmet's neck protector has the number "451" written on the corner, standing for its favorite book of all time, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and circles the net before settling in the center of the crease.

"Tap the posts to make sure they're still there. Sing to yourself, and piensa en Español." (Seriously, I actually start talking to myself in Spanish while the game is going...you'd be surprised how that keeps me focused. Scary, huh?)

Even after all that, it is my goalie stick that is responsible for the remainder of the superstition. There are many markings on it, not just from hundreds of shots, but also from my sharpie marker. I write sayings and other messages on it, and during intermissions, the play is on the other side, or I start to fall asleep (only in women's ice), I glance at those inscriptions to stay alert. On the part of the handle that faces the shooter, I wrote Sra. Vogel's immortal words, "One thing at a time." Just like in school, it is important in

hockey. Too many things are going on at the same time, and it's necessary to keep it all in perspective or it becomes overwhelming. The other side of the handle that faces me contains the stats of my stints against Team Argentina and my two Bauer Cup championships. The underside has my nickname, "The Rock DJ," and the initials of what I will only refer to as, "The Four," next to it. Many ask me who those people are, and I just tell them it's personal. All I can hint is that I've literally worshipped them for a long time.

So where does "the Rock DJ" come from?

It's completely non-hockey related. I was the disc jockey of the many of my 8th grade dances the school held. When Robbie Williams came out with the song, "Rock DJ," old classmates who saw me again started calling me that just out of the blue, so there you go.

Lastly, it's the fun factor. Goaltenders need to be entertained. It takes a special person to want to stand in front of a net for hours and hours on end. You'll either get bored or annoyed, depending on how much you feel it's dragging for. For me it's fun...I can't say anything else but that. It's like a trip to another world. Your movements are the language, and the scoreboard is invisible. Without keeping the score sheets, I can't say what was my most "horrible loss." There is no such thing. I like to call it more of a "demoralizing learning experience."

You learn more from a loss than a win. Winning is fun, but when it's always done in margins of 8-2, all I get is a front row seat to a slaughter. It even came to where I got so bored, I asked to be traded to the other team so I could get some shots. Horrible deficits encourage me to keep going, because that's where the flashiest saves come from. It doesn't matter what the score is by then, it's how you stop the puck that makes you a goalie to remember. Futile desperation is the key, and when you're desperate enough, the victory will come.

When all three of those come together, everything just seems to fit right and be in place. The pressure is off, and I'll know that the game will be less unpredictable.

June 16, 2001

"Russian Rendezvous"

After learning about Sr. Paus' adventures in Moscow, I remembered an encounter I had with a Russian...one that reminded me once again about another dark times of isolation. I haven't discussed this incident with anybody, and this the first time in five years that I've reopened another one of my many covered wounds. But, this is for you, Ely, wherever you are...

In October 1996, a young man named Ely flew in from Russia and remained in Nativity for about four months. He was Jewish, and since there were no schools able to satisfy his religious needs, it was Catholic school for him. He remained with the 8th grade class, a group of snobbish, insulting, and just plain cruel students, who made him feel separated and different, only because he was a foreigner, an innocent visitor.

When I saw how they treated him, it broke my heart. I understood how he was feeling, because I was also a recluse, a fellow foreigner in the eyes of the class of '97. Whenever I passed by them during recess on my way to the field, they would get out of their way to point their fingers at me and laugh. I had a minor medical condition that required me to wear a hat outdoors or suffer from painful, migraine-like headaches. They would later rub my face in the mud later after Ely left, through a gesture that to this very day, is the biggest insult to my intelligence and talents.

To make a long story short, it was customary as newspaper editor, to publish a graduation issue for the leaving class. I pulled it off before the deadline and distributed my work to them for free. I saw the disgust in their faces as I passed a copy to each one of them. And the paper flew! Not in popularity, but in the form of paper airplanes, many of

which landed next to trashcans. Why couldn't they just have taken the extra step and placed them in there? My self-esteem plummeted to where I didn't touch a computer for a whole week. I had even heard one student say as he threw a copy around, "Oh, it was written by that _____ with the hat. Anyone got a lighter? Mine's empty."

But with Ely, the ball was in the 8th graders' court, and he was being pummeled mercilessly. Something had to be done about it, and I vowed to make sure that he wouldn't become another victim of the mental bashing. So, a week after he arrived I went up to him during recess and introduced myself. He was sitting by the chapel alone, and responded to me with a smile. I sat down with him, and we talked. This continued for as long as he remained at Nativity and we both got to understand small portions of each other's culture and problems.

When I think of him, I think of his strength. No matter how bad the insults got, he continued to take them without complaint. And that smile...it took away both of our troubles and made me forget my anger. I grew stronger from him, because he taught me that the only person that could defeat you is yourself. When your will to conquer expires, you succumb to the pressure. The 8th graders found out what I was doing, and the hostilities escalated to attacks on both of us.

"Christine likes a Jew! Christine likes Ely!" they would chat as they singled us out during recess. Even my classmates in 7th grade backed away, and from that point on, Junior High became 6th, 7th, 8th, and Christine and Ely. Any small conversation was overheard and spread like wildfire. They tried to distract us by any means possible, such as screaming and throwing balls at us. We couldn't avoid them, as their satanic faces graced the narrow hallway every time we traveled from class to class.

A few weeks before he left, he was switched to the 7th grade religion class because the material we were covering was based on the Torah. Then, my teacher walks in with a copy of Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. Ely's eyes lit up, and he raised his hand.

She picked on him; he stood up, and gave a three-minute speech on the book. And when he was finished, the room was silent, except for the sound of my own clapping.

After he left Nativity to follow his father to Germany, I never saw or heard from him again. I do hope that he is all right and that he found a group of people who allow him to be himself and respect him for the great person I knew him as.

June 17, 2001

"Outlet Stores"

It's hot in Lake Elsinore. It's just way too hot. Factory outlets are located in areas like this to torture shoppers, making them feel like good deals come at the price of comfort.

This Dairy Queen is dirty. If it weren't for the miracle of protective plastic, I wouldn't have even dared to start writing here. These papers have to stay decent enough so I can copy this on the computer.

It has been two years since I've been back, and it's stupider than ever, especially because everything for sale is either expensive or refurbished...

I'm now here in Pechanga, the infamous "entertainment center," which is a light way of saying "non-minor fun." As soon as we saw the security guard in the front, our tour to the outside of the facility was over. It is proof that when you're in the desert, it sucks to be a minor. It's hot here too, and I'm chugging an Aquafina while inside the local convenience store. Outside the window, the hills beckon the sun while "Three Times a Lady" plays in the background. A breeze passes by, and it seems too quiet to be a casino area. This is silent torture. My mom, aunt, and uncle are off gambling, while I am stranded in this wannabe 7-Eleven figuring out what to write next while glancing at the latest issue of the Press-Telegram's "La Prensa." Now, Rod Stewart's "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You" is going off, and my brother just came back from the restroom, chewing gum as he walks toward me. It's the waiting game now...how long will it take them to lose all their money?

June 18, 2001

"Smelly but Still Mine..."

The computer lab was nestled between the 6th and 7th grade rooms. It was a tiled, dusty hole with the smell of a twenty-year old equipment and decaying paper floating within its walls. I spent many an hour in the back corners, broken Kenmore air conditioners clicking behind me and Tandy paperweights in front, forming my legion of willing followers. Near the emergency 2nd door, there lay the computer that I fell in love with as a young 5th grader...the "\$4000 machine."

Comparing to today's standards, this DOS based, Tandy 286 with an 80 MB hard drive, single-speed CD-ROM caddy drive, and 640k RAM would be more useful as a doorstop, but to me, it was an open book waiting to be read. Every chance I got, I would explore the command prompt, trying out new key combinations and discovering hidden programs. The interactive encyclopedia made up for the outdated physical one I had at home, and the knowledge I gained from tinkering with it passed on to any other PC that needed it.

And then Michelangelo came to visit my floppy disk friends. This virus attacked the boot sectors of computers, leaving them crippled and unable to boot. My mission was to clean the disks that contained the infection and repair the computers that were hurt. Thirteen days and 300 disks later, the lab was safe once more, and my presence in the lab was more welcome than ever.

Until I graduated in 1998, there were only four computers that were useful. The rest were about ten years overdue for a replacement. When a computer only runs on 5 ¼" floppies and a 16 color maximum resolution, you'd rather put it out of its misery than use it.

Sixteen brand new Compaq Presarios arrived on schedule, and the first one set up, in the same corner where I hid away but one row down was fired up by my eager hands. It ran like a dream, just like that \$4000 machine purred for me in 5th grade. And it had sound! It was the first time in my life that I possessed a computer that didn't freeze or die when bombarded with commands. I typed away and blared Wynton Marsalis for all to hear.

Upon my return to Nativity for my most current documentary, I rushed back to that room, opened the door with excitement, and that smell entered my nostrils once again. But something was wrong...terribly wrong. I turned to my left. The "\$4000 machine" was gone! I panned the room. The tables were completely empty, the dustless imprints still prominent on the fake wood desktops. The corner computers where I once hid were lifeless their insides gutted like they had been in a fish stick factory, parts splaying the floor. And the Compaqs, all 16 of them...my special customized one among the pile, were stacked together, monitors included, on a side desk facing the cabinets on the right side. A label stuck to the side of three bearing the words, "TO BE REMOVED."

My beloved lab, just like my legacy at Nativity, was fading away. This was the end of an era, a chapter in my computer life. It was too difficult to even leave it, knowing that my last thoughts of the place would be depressing and forever imprinted in my memory.

"My God, what have they done to you?" I whispered as the door clicked shut behind me.

June 19, 2001

"The Color Yellow"

As far as I can remember, I have loved the color yellow. When I was five, my dad gave me a 1:18 scale yellow Chevrolet Corvette. I prominently displayed it in my room, until my brother crushed it with a hammer in an instant of boredom, but since then, my goal in life has been to acquire one of those sun-hued beauties. The curves were sleek, the power overwhelming, and the grace and precision unlike no other vehicle on the road. Every time I see one pass by, I imagine myself sitting in it at an intersection, revving up the engine, and waiting for the traffic light to reluctantly turn green.

Of course, the chances of me receiving one as my first car are slim to none, but getting a car in a yellow tint will appease me for now. It's a small reminder that my dream car isn't too far away. I know it won't be too long. That Corvette is waiting for me somewhere, I have to earn it first...that's the hard part. It will be smooth driving from there.

"Straight Down Carson"

I just took the longest solo walk by myself in two years. Going down this way meant strolling past the building where I received my first public education, First Lutheran School. Many times I have gone by it by car, but it was the first time in eleven years that I stepped foot once again in its premises. I dared not to venture far into the campus, donning my twenty-pound hockey bag and stick, and besides, I wouldn't have been recognized. I was a tiny little speck back then, a finicky kindergartener who, like in other instances in my life, a recluse. More often than not, the other students would avoid contact with me. I knew too much too early. I was a disease.

It was hard to show my intelligence. I had to hide it to keep all the kids from laughing at me more. So I did hide it, sneaking a peek at a book on the Mohorovicic discontinuity or Salmon P. Chase in my encyclopedia when everyone was sleeping in their cots and the teacher was finished reading a couple chapters of Charlotte's Web. When the lights came back on, it was my turn to be "normal" again.

So, when I peered over the wall into the corner classroom where I spent 170 days in solitary confinement, nothing had changed. Cots still lined the floor, and I heard an argument between a young boy and a young girl. They were calling each other names, but this time, the girl was winning.

June 20, 2001

"All Odd on the Western Front"

So the race for the documentary began once again, with a trip back home. I had inadvertently left the Adobe Premiere (video editing program) CD at my house, and I set out on foot from Yoshio's house in Lomita to my casa in Carson, about four miles away.

Whoever designed Premiere deserves to be tied to a tree and shot. There are too many bugs, and learning how to use it, especially on a deadline, is more of torture.

And we left, me with my trusty mailbag, a new tag-along friend with a backpack, Yoshio voluntarily carrying my goalie skates that needed sharpening, and Martinez and Shawna dressed in Yoshio's best pajamas. Nobody on the streets asked us questions, probably because they thought we were deranged, going down Lomita Boulevard in our odd get-ups. And when Western Ave. was in midst, we invaded the house of our associate, Mr. Estrada.

After settling down there and watching VH1 for a few minutes, his mother comes home. We tell her a summary of our trek down the street and she offers to give us a ride the rest of the way. We squabble and eventually accept, and twenty minutes later, we are back at my place munching on chicken nuggets and eggplant Parmesan lasagna. We had conquered four cities: Lomita, Harbor City, Torrance, and Carson. Many miles were eaten up, and I wish that it were the same for this documentary.

It's as if we're back to square one, and we haven't made any progress. Nothing's working, and all hope of successfully completing this by the end of the summer is starting

to fade. I think it's just the daunting task of getting the stupid program to work. I'm only a week into the summer, and I feel like it's all coming to an end.

I care too much about this documentary to see it die in my arms. There has to be a way to get this stuff to cooperate, some trick, some sort of bribe...but the only thing I can think of is to go straight to Adobe and hold the designers hostage. I am determined to complete it...but the only question is when?

[June 21-July 10 reserved for Christine's 6th Annual Summer Story, "How to Involve Three Teachers and a Few Cameos in an Odd Predicament" and "Encounters of the Foreign Language Kind B-Sides"]

July 11, 2001

"Christine the Counselor"

I am a wanderer, someone who likes to be alone and whose personality, image, and demeanor was forged from the tempered oven of isolation. I float from person to person, group to group, and place to place. I am someone who wants to be heard, yet prepared to be once rejected again and forced to move on. There are a few who do want to listen to me and take some of my advice, and the irony is that I give them on experiences that for me, do not exist yet or I believe that will never happen.

As far back as I can remember, I was the odd one out. The girls found me freakish and the boys feared me. I couldn't fit in anywhere, and I found that the only way to deal with it was to ignore the rest of the world and do my own thing. Up to this moment, it's working. My "happy" façade is pleasing everyone, where that definition of 'pleasing' is that they don't mind I exist because I am only one...the sharpest needle in the haystack population.

I was sharp. I was fiery. I was the brashest outcast of them all. When other social rejects saw me, they wanted to know why they never saw me in a corner crying or feeling sorry for myself. And they asked away, about life, about rejection, and about my forte, being alone. The school created its clicks, and the non-conformists approached by the drones. I was the "Lucy" of Nativity Catholic School, the person who, despite her own problems and faults, had to approach and solve everyone else's.

Many of the patients in my unofficial practice were new students, outcasts, and boys. I talked to more boys than anyone else, and it seemed like I'd be the only girl they'd

talk to. I befriended a few of them, and those in turn took the liberty of confiding many an issue with me. Unfortunately, lots of their questions needed to be answered by a person whose social life existed.

“How do I get a girl to like me?”

“How can I be accepted into groups?”

My question was, “How the hell was I going to answer those?” But then it hit me. Give them your point of view. Just tell them what you do.

Two explained it all: Be yourself.

What I really meant to say was, “Be yourself, pray it works, and if it does, you’re lucky, because it never did for me.” Those two words worked for my patients. They found their niches among schoolmates, and a few found their girls. So they were lucky, very lucky. Those boys are now socially functioning properly and now have lives. And I was still in the same rut I had been in since the very beginning.

Being myself means being incompatible with the rest of the world. I am destined to be the counselor whose advice works for everyone else but me. It’s another punch line in the joke book known as Christine. I think I was stuck here on this rock under the “special case” section of life to be a laughing stock to the rest of the world.

I believe that no matter where I travel and what I do in life, I will always wear the badge of the “special case.” I dare to be different and I’m not even trying. This seems to scare the living daylights out of others. Being shunned and avoided is common, and after many years, I cease to even care. I hide the disgust with another façade. Yeah sure, I’m fine. No, I don’t mind the corner...it’s comfortable back here in the dark. Maybe that’s where the wit came from. I had to sharpen my mouth to keep my fists down, and in some cases, that didn’t work either.

My natural actions were met by shaking heads and praised when others copied. Relationships and lives grew under my anonymous supervision, whereas I continued to sink into my dark pit of despair. My destiny was clear...

I HAD NO FUTURE IN A SOCIAL LIFE...probably in some other sort of life in a room with surveillance cameras and padded walls, but not with people. I'm surprised though. I'm not an insane shell of a human yet. It's as if I've surpassed the depressive muttering and came to where I can rely on myself. The world hasn't given me many choices, just enough to poke out a decent path.

Now I realized why certain people "appear" to be concerned. I am an odd case. The only shrink that understands me is in the form of a stick with black liquid in it. I'll keep 'em worried...makes it more exciting for me.

July 16, 2001

"La palabra rara"

It's about 12:40 AM, and I am performing my final eBay searches for the night while installing the scope to my air rifle. Kylie Minogue's "Spinning Around" blares from the speakers, and my eyes wander off to the bookcase at the corner of my desk. The yearbook peeks out in front of the US history book, and its plastic protective cover reflects off the ceiling lights. I pick it up impulsively and flipped to the only page I book marked, the section that Drs. Paus and Vogel signed. I studied their messages over and over again, and one word came to my attention: ¡Ánimo!

When translated, including the exclamation points, it means, "Cheer up!" I do remember being reclusive at the end of the year, with the tree sitting and the stick handling...alone. Alone like always, and the happy façade was peeling off bit by bit. I'm always like that during this time of year. I know that it's another start to more solitude, because when school ends, "friendships" fade, if they ever existed in the first place. May times, my semi-depressive state is hidden, but for this year, I was surprised that some observant people noticed. Now that there is a slight awareness of my life-long problem, will I get any help or advice?

So the counselor needs the counseling! Nobody understands enough to do that, and I obviously don't trust anybody to where I can say everything. I am still traumatized from the past, and I can only confide in myself and myself alone. There is nobody on this damn rock that cares to know, or has the time to want to get to know me. Happiness without masks are small pipe dreams to me, dreams that make me more depressed just thinking about them.

If ¡Ánimo! is translated without the exclamation points, it means “soul,” “courage,” and “spirit.” When I look at the summer as of now, it appears that this half of the vacation has been a trip of revelation.

So where does revelation tie in? There have been many days where I would simply walk miles on end and dive into the mental video collection of my past to see why I am this way. Now that I have figured out where I am in the knowledge of me. I am still troubled, and I’ve got to cut myself away from the bondage of loneliness and search for a greater meaning to life. The answer is out there somewhere...the summer isn’t over yet.

Is there a hidden meaning to the events of the past month or so that neither me nor anybody else I know of? I am confused because it’s probably there and I just can’t see? Nevertheless, it’s given me a chance to pick at myself with a fine-toothed comb and get some clues on how I tick. I have a hunch that that may be small portion of that elusive explanation. I have the summer. I have my senior year. I have the rest of my life. I can’t let it remain a mystery forever...it has to hit me.

I am tortured with this perplex thought, and the fact that my sleeping habits are also falling victim to it as well. For the person who wrote that to me, *estoy alegre que tú me entiendas...más o menos.*

July 18, 2001

"The Contractor's Cocoon"

Ever since June 24, I have spent the hours of 10AM to 5PM, Monday to Friday, either building new computers or using my down time to watch the CAMS office workers pack books and supplies away in preparation for the new buildings. Everything is stuffed in Carlé's room, with Fiedler's biology racks in the center, Delaby's (the new 11th grade math teacher) boxes of IMP books nearing the back, McVay's new material towards the far door, Denman's history books by the left back window for safekeeping (he's staying behind in SAC 2), and about a couple dozen foreign language boxes marked, "Paus: 3128," weighing about two full Sparkletts water jugs each. Time wasn't on my side, as I was ushered out of the room...if only I could practice my rusty calculator-less math. The mass of boxes was tremendous, and that wasn't even counting Conley's cargo, about 45 boxes of chemicals filling the chemistry lab.

Psychology class comes and goes, and I walk towards the computer lab. It is 12:55, and the door is closed. I didn't have my hockey stick with me to dribble a puck up and down the pathway between SAC 2 and 3, and granting that Javier's other job is running on schedule, I had over an hour to kill. So I walk...walk like a blind rat in a maze, aimlessly wandering out of SAC 2, toward Parking Lot 4, turn the curb toward the exiting road, walk toward the rink, hobble on to the Extended Education Building, and take the rest of the perimeter back to CAMS, returning just in time to see Javier and his accomplice open the door.

The walk is my mid-day semi-adventure. Anything just zips across my mind...the weather, odd memories, problems that need solving, people that need saving (that counselor

“problem” again), and the future. Oh, and let’s not forget those mental hockey games! Puck goes here, puck goes there, and the image of me robbing Fedorov or Sakic of a sure goal in a penalty shot, performing some sort of Joseph, Treitak, or Hasek save...and then I wake up and find myself on the field between the Extended Education Building and the rink surrounded by hungry ducks pecking at my Timberland shoes.

Ahh yes, those Timberlands...they have been my means of transportation across state lines, hockey places, and duck fields. They have seen so many sights, like the grand pathways of the Las Vegas Strip, the many malls surrounding Southern California, many a hockey store and rink, the infamous campuses of Stanford and Berkeley, and most of Los Angeles. My constant companions since 9th grade, and in some days, the only things that make me feel comfortable in odd situations, reassuring me that when I felt ready to run, I would have the rockets to assist me. And the many times when I wanted to run away, yet were planted in place by an adhesive known as *fear*...

July 20, 2001

"When Partition Magic Fails, the Copy Room Prevails"

After a long day at the computers and other technical difficulties, such as cloning PCs with a program with more bugs than my house, I figured that another walk for twenty minutes would help me to calm down and find other solutions so I could go home early. It boggles me why my summers are spent between class in SAC 3135, journal writing in 3148, and the lab of 2104. Wasn't I supposed to have a vacation or something to that effect? But it's ok...at least I can practice my hockey a little bit and rehabilitate my knee, so it's been useful.

By the end of the summer, I will be more battered and war-torn than I was before school ended...due to all these hockey injuries. But it's ok...I'll be well rested. The occasional stings can be ignored.

So, during this self-proclaimed recess, I start wandering toward the dirt ramp and onto the Mindanao road to Parking Lot 4. But my mind threw a curve ball, diverting me to the left of the usual way and toward the building that truly belonged to CAMS alone, SAC 4. It was dotted with trashed science aids, tables, plexiglass, and the crate that carried the Conobot I to its fateful battle at the L.A. Sports Arena.

When I think of that competition, I think of the road from Exhibition Park to USC, where the robot underwent emergency surgery at its machine shop, and as my position as Project Management/Systems and Engineering Leader, Head of Public Relations, Alliance Recruiter, Troubleshooter, and referee to 40-member squad, it was my obligation to eventually ramble to that university, and follow the robot to the "hospital." It was a mini

college tour, and I got to spend time down there until about 6PM on one of the competition days. What a college choice...and it had an ice hockey team! But where was the roller hockey?

If I was told that I had to choose a sense to lose that would prevent me from living normally in exchange for hockey, I would gladly give up my hearing. It would be a great loss to me, because of my great love of music, but my ability to play hockey is a piece of myself that would ultimately kill me if it was gone, and the loss of my journals would destroy whatever was left. All I would have left would be my computer talent, but as much as I get a thrill out of taking them apart, they can never take the place of hockey and writing, two abilities that allow me to be me.

I examine the partially varnished box and its Master-locked latch and run my fingers along the notches in the door, drilled, finished, and written on by my own two hands. It was my test of control and leadership, and like everything else I have done, it goes under the rug. Nobody will remember my achievements, my work, my accomplishments, and all will go publicly unlearned. I am the only one who can say that I ran the team, held that Dremel, ground down aluminum frames, took that inventory, and ordered forty (err, should I say, 39) to do my every bidding. The glory will return to me, the trip to USC, and the leadership role will come back again in only a few months, accompanied by a Conobot II...another broken wreck.

I back away from the crate and stroll back toward SAC 3. All the blinds to the windows of the administration offices are shut, but the ones closest to the side entrance door – the copy room. I looked at my watch. Ten minutes had passed since I left the computer lab, and I decided to play my mind's game. Leaning on the rail of the walkway, I fixated my eyes on the window and remembered another B-side.

July 21, 2001

"Peeping Paus"

It's November, and I'm lumbering up and down the hallway of SAC 3 with a handful of flashcards containing vocabulary words. I reach the Challenger Center doors, turn around for another lap, and notice that the office doors are shut and Señor Paus is standing next to them, the overstuffed leather bag that I have dubbed his "office" on the floor, suggesting that he had been there for a little while. When I reach him, we say our 'holas' and I run out the side doors to go around through the front entrance to open the office doors from the inside. I dashed down the corridor and opened the doors, and to my surprise, he had disappeared.

I figured he had found his way in, and I turned back to enter the copy room to chat with a couple of my friends in the middle of their teacher's aide jobs. The room was musty, and the window was open as far as it would go. Duplicators churned out page after page of worksheets, while we talked, until I turned my head...

Out of nowhere, Sr. Paus' head pops up on the window with a look that could be best described as inquisitive and desperate, requesting someone to just give him access to the office. We jumped with either surprise or fright, probably both, and I rushed to the entrance, propped the doors open, and let him in. It was exactly like that scene from "Psycho," all but the shower and the knife. Every time I pass the copy room, I almost expect him to do that again. Someday I'll ask why he didn't just go through the window, but he'd probably answer me with something like, "The duplicator was in the way."

July 23, 2001

"The Kid at LAHC"

A view from the balcony of La Corte Hall takes me back to the summer of 1992. In order to help strengthen my supposedly bad reading comprehension skills, my dad enrolls me in a in a three week course at LAHC (Los Angeles Harbor College). It was held in a classroom lined with display cabinet full of replica human skulls and other skeletal portions from various species of primates. I sat closest to the exit door. The room is unbearably humid, and the air conditioning, if there was any vent, wasn't running.

Now, take a look at the date. Summer of 1992 would've meant that I would be entering 3rd grade that September. (I was actually destined for 2nd grade, but administration felt I need a "challenge.") This would cause me problems later during the first days...

The first day of class started off with us introducing ourselves, stating our names, what grade we were going into in the fall, and a hobby that we enjoy doing. And I heard the names and grades rattle off...So-and-so, 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, even an 8th grader! My turn was up, and I shakily stood up and addressed the crowd of fifteen.

"My name's Christine. I'm seven and I'm going to 3rd grade. I like to fix computers and read books."

Me and my big mouth. I had just dammed myself to more pointing fingers and avoidance...and they had to do it to the little one who didn't know any better. I couldn't

talk to anyone extensively, except when the “teacher” told us to organize some group squabble. The most interesting part of the course came towards the end of the three weeks, when a research paper was due on any reasonable subject. It turned from comprehension to writing. It was my chance to have some fun, and a new philosophy was born: If you can’t join them, defeat them by the book.

I was determined to leave their jaws on the floor and shatter them beyond recognition, so I wrote a paper based on an article I read about the Packard Bell/NEC Corporation. I wish I still had that paper, but you should’ve seen those juveniles squirm! My victory was set in stone...and now they want to ask me how I can do those kinds of papers with the greatest of ease.

I walked out of the room with my backpack slung around one shoulder answering in reply, “You’ll figure it out when you’re older.”

So after the last day, my dad asked me if I had fun. Still smug from the research paper, I just said, “Yeah, I liked those human skulls.” I’ll never remove that incident from my memory, because every LAHC Extension schedule that comes in the mail is a reminder. But that doesn’t stop me from breaking the seals and opening it...the “learn to draw” program sounds a little appealing.

July 25, 2001

"Demises"

I have recently learned of the demises of old classmates and alumni, some of whom, based on the way they when I was going to school with them, would have been unheard of. Who is to blame?

It's as if the education standards and concern for the well being of students in Catholic schools has gone down the tubes since I graduated in 1998. I'm thankful when I got out of there when I still could. As a famous bumper sticker put it, "A Catholic Education is an Advantage for Life." But what kind of life? There's either too much shelter or too much exposure, and with the stark contrast of public and private schools, it is next to impossible to find a decent median.

As a former Catholic school student, I can easily say that every stereotype about the system, except for the demonic nuns with the rulers, is true. Girls come out as slutty whores with no other mission in life than to do it with every boy they can find. Boys only want to do it with the girls; all of them either end up in jail, on drugs, raging alcoholics, or all of the above. From my class of 35, only a handful of the students are still mentally and somewhat physically healthy.

So what did I really learn from Nativity? Daring to defy the politics of the system will have you marked for the rest of your life. The more you try to fit in, the less you'll be wanted. The lesser you are of a prostitute, the less teachers will listen to you.

Those teachers! I wonder if the Archdiocese even does background checks on whomever they hire, because I could name many a potential sex offender. I pass by a

classroom and the male teachers are surrounded by at least half a dozen girls who are probably talking to him about more than just the weather. Each one is equipped with skirts ten inches above the knee and some sort of bribery mechanism, such as money or themselves.

It's bad, and it still shows to this very day...makes me feel ashamed to even mention that I came from that place. Now, imagine me in a Catholic high school. Everybody is guaranteed to come out deranged to various degrees. That's the insurance included with the tuition.

Have the cons outweighed the pros? The scale is teetering on a needle, and that answer will always be challenged. Catholic schools are ironic, because the good morals and education labeled on them has produced many a screwed up child to add to our society of yahoos. Like we needed more post office workers...

I wonder why I'm not a slutty whore like every other girl that came out of that place. After eight years of that junk, I would've expected to be a much different person, but it's as if I've held my own revolutions and ignored the temptations. So maybe the pros outweigh the cons by a few ounces, assuming that the person I am now is good. I was forged from bias, rejection, and the fight against ending up as another victim of Nativity. I've won that battle...I just hope to have enough pep to stand up to the next war.

July 27, 2001

"Rituals and Relatives"

I love music blaring loudly in the background while I'm working. It is meditative, especially during late nights while I hang my hockey equipment after a practice, game, or tournament. It is one of the rare times where I can take my time and reflect back on the day, without any distractions. In many cases, the soundtrack for this time ranges from Robbie Williams to George Gershwin, depending on the mood, whether it is happy or melancholy. For the half-hour that I can take to put everything away, I am locked in my own little storage room in the garage with a radio and sopping wet gear.

Usually, the pants would be the first things out. It would get its dose of Febreze imitation and hung in front of a cabinet on one of the many specialized bike hooks that dot a pegboard. My Brian's chest protector submits after a tug o' war battle and is hung on a wire clothesline. It's the bulkiest piece of armor I wear, and the 2nd most common place that pucks greet. But with the reassurance of Kevlar reinforcement, it's worth caring for. After those, my Franklin "Salsa" blocker comes out of the bag. It is placed against a couple wood pallets, in front of a fan blasting on high. Under that is the star of the show, my Boddam catching glove.

In its Chicago Blackhawks home colors, it simply stands out in front of my equipment and is the first thing players notice when they take their shots. It often steals the show and in many instances, the game as well. It is the envy of every other goalie below me, and when that puck hits that webbing, I look up and see my opponents squirm in disgust and frustration.

Now why red and black for my equipment's color scheme? There are many reasons, but a minor one is a small tribute to a couple goalies I've admired that once played for Chicago: Jeff Hackett and Dominik Hasek. I often consider Chicago as the "Diolosa Dumping Ground," where all the relatives on my mother's side migrate to when they get sick of Los Angeles. I still don't understand why they all go there, but maybe I'll take a visit there someday to investigate...if my parents will let me get on a plane.

Many relatives dot the globe...Las Vegas, Arizona, Chicago, Cleveland, Maryland, New York, Alaska, Saudi Arabia, London, Munich, Oslo, Sweden, and of course, the Philippines. Diversity makes it all so interesting, and there are those aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, and nieces I haven't met yet, but have heard of my often inflated exploits, courtesy of my overly proud parents who put me on exhibition like a cheap porcelain doll at a swap meet.

Don't you just love it when they do that? It makes you feel like you've done more, seen more, and are more than you really should be. If only they really knew what was really going on...they'd be so shocked. But I think I'll spare them the shame and put on another façade. I have as many facades as hockey jerseys, and like that collection, I acquire more over time, conforming to every opposite of my feelings and qualities. Hell, reader, you don't even know which one I'm using right now to write these pieces!

When school comes back around again, so many will ask you how your summer was and if you did anything special. Most will say, "nothing," but there is something that did happen in that period of time. It happened inside of you, your own personal space. It's the realization that another chapter in your life is coming to be while the other retires into obscurity. The idleness, for me, is not that, and I'm still trying to keep that previous chapter alive. Some thoughts are fleeting, but getting them down on paper, is a sort of remembrance of the lives you lead.

"Lives" is plural, because we all live in a world of dimensions that are unique and different from one another. We have to choose which one to live in and which one to show

to the rest of the world, just like a library of facades. It's a complicated web of bridges, decisions, and paradoxes, and for a few people I've known, they've gotten lost. I'm just starting to get there...

July 28, 2001

"Christine the Plagiarist"

When I was about six, I found an unused writing tablet in a drawer at my grandmother's house, and I instantly started writing...not stories or thoughts like these, but just to get my hand moving and to get something down on the paper. I would open up a random page from the encyclopedia set my parents gave me for my fourth birthday, glance at it to see if it was interesting, and start copying.

At this time, I had a fascination with paper money in large denominations, so to fill up the first few pages of the pad, I copied the text of the money article, drew the charts, and made pictures of the bills. Later, I got adventurous and attacked my aunt's pocket books, using a paragraph or two and then creating alternate endings for the characters. That led to the long-lost series of stories involving my alter ego, Agent "Silverfox" Riker, about six years later.

To this day, I can't remember where they are in the house. That area in my writing life is clouded and separated from other memories. I often question if it was "implanted" in some sort of way. But I'll tell you, the notebook really did exist...it's in the house, somewhere.

As every year passes, images of your youth just fade. It's like decay, or some method for your brain to clear up what it thinks is 'clutter' to make room for other items. The mind is an eternal retrofitting project, its stability always questioned and its completion either unknown or never. It wouldn't be until many years later when I start to realize that my writing was preserving what my brain was sweeping away.

July 29, 2001

"Reflections and What's Really There"

On the third night of the 2001 Northern College Tour, I had the opportunity to have a late night conversation with my roommate, Esther Kim, while Tiffany and other roommate were fast asleep. It was a little past midnight on a nippy spring night at the Travelodge in downtown Berkeley, and both of us were high on Sprite and perky after a walk through town with our respective groups.

My group consisted of nervous girls who made sure I was at the front of the line so that when I get mugged, they'd have a head start in running. So, when I decided to cut across the lighted part of the front lawn of UC Berkeley to reach the tour bus, which was obviously in sight, they watched me while clinging to each other.

"Let Christine go...she's a hockey player."

Yeah, sure...a hockey player without her stick and no exposure to anything related to it in three days except the Mighty Ducks leather jacket I wore on my back. I was wired, and the microscopic fish taco at La Salsa didn't give me anything to burn off. I figured I'd take the shortcut. Security wasn't looking.

The journal I was working on, the middle of Vol. 4 of the Christine Files, "Catch Me While U Can," followed me wherever I went. I jotted down ideas while munching on overcooked Wendy's chicken nuggets at UC Santa Barbara. I scribbled stories at Santa Cruz. I even wrote down a sentence or two while waiting for the bus. It was the only thing I could do that reminded me of home, because my hockey stick was just too long to fit in the overhead compartments, and the puck I carried in my pocket was a useless without it.

Esther and I sat across each other on the small coffee table, and for about twenty minutes or so, we worked on our respective assignments, me with my journals and a half of a math worksheet, and her with “Los Composiciones” and other Spanish bookwork. Out of the blue, she puts her pencil down and asks, “What are you writing?”

“Reflections.” I answered. “Just thoughts about this trip and the weather.”

Esther asks if she could read a few of my entries, so I gladly hand her a few loose-leaf samples. A few minutes tick by, and after flipping through the third page, she lifts her head up, gives me a perplex look and raises one of the questions I can never answer fully, “How do you do that?”

She explains that she could never write “that way,” that she states everything literally and asks me how I could write more than what’s obvious. I realized that my perspective was, in some ways, unique. I turned the slightest object or event into some sort of analysis or flashback. I couldn’t conjure up the words to explain my writing. The words just came to me automatically when I needed them. I didn’t have to think. It all flowed from my brain straight to the pen. It was talking without moving my lips.

I used this conversation to help me find where these ideas were coming from. They have to have existed in some point in time, as if I have this ability to see past what’s really there and merely use the observed settings as springboards for some sort of higher thinking. This conversation went on for about an hour and a half, until Tiffany’s snoring became too loud for us to whisper...

The rain-drenched sun greeted my groggy face, as I woke up and found that I had mysteriously fallen asleep on the bed. I pack my bags up and board the bus, where my group and I were then taken to the entrance of UC Berkeley. There was an hour to kill before the tour started, so I stroll down to a McDonald’s three blocks away to eat a belated breakfast. I sit by myself facing a sunny window enjoying the usual, two hash browns, two

biscuits, a large orange juice, and a view of the street. My mind is wandering again, guessing how many eBay auctions are waiting for me at home, the fact that Conley used to be a full fledged priest, the puck that was poking me in the side, a scene with my 7th grade math teacher spending an entire class period talking to his lawyer for some odd reason, and whatever that weather beaten storefront sign was saying in Cyrillic.

I don't know if it's by nature or some habit instilled in me when I was little, but I have to study my environment and read any sort of text within my visual range. I hate confusion and not knowing where I am, what's really there, or at least being slightly familiar with my surroundings. You're vulnerable when you're lost, and I don't consider myself the vulnerable type. It'll take a lot to bring me down...I've taken so many mental beatings over time, and being physically misplaced should remain a very minor setback.

August 2, 2001

"A CAMS Summer"

When it's a CAMS summer, there is no such thing as a vacation...well, at least one that lasts for consecutive days. There's always a computer that has to be built or destroyed, a story to be written, and an assignment to be done. And the college hunt! I'm up right now at 2:30 AM, Pacific Standard Time, staring at websites and statistics. It's not that bad...I'm technically running on time in other places. In Denver, it's 3:30, the time when most CAMS students wake up during regular school time to finish the work they should've done six hours before. In Chicago, it's 4:30, the time when my cousins rise to go work at whatever they're doing over there, and in New York, it's 5:30, and my aunt is probably drinking her coffee while overlooking Central Park...

So, I'm gazing intently at this newly made list of potential places to waste another four years of my life, and all of them are no farther than Clark County, except for the 'other' Loyola and this university called MIT. That's enough racking my brain...I can put this off for another few hours. At least I had some clue.

"Do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself...after you've prodded it with a stun gun and threatened it with a pistol."

August 5, 2001

"Playing in the Dark"

I have just gone through one of the roughest tournaments known to date. What a way to introduce myself back into the men's hockey circuit again. Although my numbers didn't really show it, I certainly it was one of my better performances. I didn't realize I could stretch THAT far...

Pucks, glow-in-the-dark ones, fly toward me in the moonlight, with nothing to guide my position but the dimmed streetlights of the CSUDH parking lot and the slight outline of my goal crease. It's pure instinct with that type of play, and it's not for the conventional player, who has the luxury of an indoor rink with lights, running water, and electricity...it's for those who were bats in a previous life.

It's a feeling of home, a personal responsibility of ownership that the ritzy rinks lack. Where else can you stay for hours on end and simply play, without the worry of game schedules and closing time? Find that anywhere else in the world...

It's another instance of fate. If it weren't for that Wednesday afternoon in February studying Spanish in the game room, and peering out the window in a moment of boredom, I don't think that rink would've come into my life. I bet even hockey wouldn't mean as much to me as it does now. I treasure it more than most things, because it has influenced more than what I can write about.

August 8, 2001

"Puttin' On a Show"

When a tournament is played in the dark, nobody wants to show up because they're afraid that they'll crash into other players. When nobody shows up, I receive job openings. Unfortunately, the teams I play for have a tendency to kind of, let's put it lightly, stink. In spans of ten minutes, I can be rattled with more than twenty shots, mostly point blank and on breakaways. I have no control over the scoreboard's bias, but I do have full reins on my attitude toward the game. I was put there to have a good time, so regardless which way the digits go, play like the NHL scouts are watching.

Goaltending is an exhibition, where every game is a chance to try a new move, play like you're Curtis Joseph, and see how many ooohs and aaahs you can coax out of the crowd. When you have fun playing, it doesn't matter what the score is. What's important is your joy...winning is merely the icing on the cake, and like all other sweet things, the taste gets bland and ordinary after a few too many servings. Losing is a humbling experience, but for me, I've seen more than my share of those. It comes, it goes, you move on. It's another failure that's easily forgotten and thrown into my subconscious bin of personal adversities. I'll conquer by coping.

August 15, 2001

"An Alternate Future"

This thought was brought up during a chat with my buddy "Al" regarding my progress with the documentary project, and after much thought, everything that has happened during this summer was more of fate.

What would have happened if everything went as planned or expected for the summer? Well, here would be a partial explanation...

If the Spanish course had existed, I wouldn't have taken the job at Boeing. Since the Psychology class existed in place of Spanish, I didn't take the job at Boeing. If I took the web design job at Boeing, I wouldn't have written these stories and built 12 of the 40 new computers for the school. If I hadn't written these stories, I would be missing half of my documentary and bits and pieces of ten years of my life. If I didn't get the chance to go do the computer work in the lab, I wouldn't have fixed my documentary's technical difficulties and would've just given up. If I didn't fix the technical difficulties, I wouldn't be here typing this up and preparing to edit all that footage. If I didn't take the time to record all that footage in the first place, all those talks and everything I wanted to say to both Paus and Vogel would have never existed...

August 19, 2001

"Forced to Make You Happy (at My Expense)"

As I sat in the counselor's office the other day to finalize my class choices, my current GPA flashed across the computer screen: 3.83 (unweighted) or 3.98 (UC weighted). I was pleased with what I saw and while on the way home, I told my father my status in school with a smile on my face.

"That's bad. Why isn't over 4.0?" he grunted between clenched teeth.

The words sliced through my heart. I had just come from a successful three-hour practice scrimmage against a couple visiting hockey players from Russia and wanted to end my day on a good note. I slouched on my seat and just told myself to take it, just like all the other times, and not to show that I was hurt. I imagined myself months from now, as I stood in my storage room hanging up my equipment for the night, with the head of admissions giving me the news I expected.

"Miss Malazarte, since you are 0.02 away from a 4.0, we cannot accept your admission to Yale...Camino. Please take you belongings and don't let the door hit your butt on the way out."

Those numbers...those grades...the punishment that comes with every "unsatisfactory" report card. I get scolded for receiving the grades many a student would kill for. It's been this way as far back as I can remember, ever since my infamous promotion from first to third grade. My marks faded during that adjustment, and by the end of the year, I had received four B's. Speech after speech followed, along with forced

listening sessions of therapy tape after therapy tape on concentration. I was no longer some cheap porcelain doll they could flaunt around; I had become a decapitated Barbie. Frustrated my parents took me out of Nativity for a week to look into enrolling at Lomita Magnet School. As we drove around, they continued to run their mouths while I pretended to sleep. I let them waste their air; there was no point in fighting back, because I knew they were going to verbally beat me down if I continued to persist. I got lucky, they gave up, and I was back at Nativity to finish the school year.

Fortunately, I was able to graduate without moving schools, but without a few bumps and jolts. By 6th grade, I was receiving a couple B's, and they started the relocation tirade once more. They cut off the meager privileges I had, TV, computer, and the like. I was already restricted, no friends, no parties, and no social activities unless they were educational. There had to be a way to get out, so I did what I mastered in, sneaking instances of freedom behind my parents backs. When I received access to the computer to type, I connected it to bootleg Internet service. When I went to the library, I told friends to meet me there and then hide when my parents arrived to pick me up. And of course, I would stay after school to talk to teachers and use the computers in the lab to write stories based on these difficulties.

There were some good years in between where I'd get lucky and ace everything, and my parents would once again start their bragging tour. When I'd ask them what they thought about my progress, they would shrug their shoulders and give me an 'I dunno' look. They didn't expect me to do my best, they expected to be 'numero uno,' beat everyone, and stand out, even if it meant to lose whatever I had of my childhood to study.

If my acceptance to CAMS was a fluke, it's the best one that's ever happened to me, with the second being graduating 8th grade without a single B, thus no yelling or good compliments. I continued to wear my school mask at home, lying and saying that I was doing fine and that I was taking the classes they wanted me to take. But in reality, I was doing fine, to my standards. I made school fun, to make up for the years that I couldn't do

so, and with report cards no longer requiring a parent's signature, it was easier to save myself many a monotonous speech.

My parents are the type who don't know how to help me to do well without depressing or restricting me. When I hear from my classmates that their parents just want them to do their best, I grow jealous. They're encouraged, and they don't fear the consequence of falling a little short. I'm on the other hand, am scared out of my wits to go home, always praying that I can intercept the mail and make up a legitimate excuse. I have always had to find a positive environment to learn elsewhere. This is one of the reasons I turn to teachers. They are unbiased, open to what you think, and want you to do what you believe is your best.

I've been fortunate to share my thoughts with a selected few that have chosen to spend the extra time to talk. They are the academic environment I often dream of, one free of reprimand and full of reward. I cannot change how much of a failure I am in my parents' eyes, but I can change how I look in my eyes, because I am the only one who knows when I'm performing to my full potential.

I am a beetle, the kind with the beautiful wings hidden under a drab exoskeleton. I am forced to choose between going to the colleges they want me to go, take the major they want me to take, and please them, or choose a starkly different path and offending both of them. Shall I go the other way? This Christine says yes...I must preserve whatever is left of my love for useful education.

August 20, 2001

"Grogginess, Two PCs, and Some Sort of Introduction"

Today was the first day of freshmen orientation here at CAMS, and as I worked on repairing my personal computer and Mrs. Bater's finicky laptop, other fellow seniors who had nothing else to do brought groups of freshmen around to give tours of the campus. Whenever a group would come by, I would stand outside the computer lab with a smile, tip my Atlanta Thrashers baseball cap, and give a minute speech on what the room had to offer. I could see mouths drool over component specifications I rattled off and classes that were up for grabs, while others listened intently and were probably plotting what kind of games they could play inside.

I was peppy, still startled from a close call this morning, with the principal. While a friend was foraging through my MP3 collection, she came across song she wanted to play, one that shouldn't be played when anybody's around. As the first couple seconds blasted on, Mrs. Clark's shadow hit the corner of my eye, and I jumped out of my chair and lunged toward the speakers to cut its power, right before the first profane word uttered out of Terrence's mouth.

"Not now!" I bellowed, as the speaker went mute, kicking the chair of my friend who still didn't realize what potential trouble we would have gotten in if I didn't act any sooner.

All that, and it was only 10:00 AM. I would spend the rest of the day watching installation progress bars lurch toward completeness as a zombie who only received three

and a half hours of sleep in the past thirty-six. By four in the afternoon, programs weren't finished loading, and I put my head down and drifted away.

And so I began to dream once more, dream of a time and a place that will never exist in the world I live in, a place where I have a clue of what I am and why this "self-induced" madness persists to poke me and flash images of 'disappointed' parents and other angry people in its sick form of torture. This realm is a mental bowl of subtraction soup, with every sip diminishing bits and pieces of the wall of resistance shoddily erected in a futile attempt to walk away and continue my normal life.

Release me, foul demon! Loosen your grip so I may turn around and slay you! You are not after just me, you are after my soul, and I will fight to the depths of eternity to spare its well-being. I have gone far enough and understand where the weaknesses of your temptations lie, and soon will be the time to strike back.

August 21, 2001

"Breaking in the Freshmen: Round 2"

The day began with the realization that the contractors for the new school were taking too many shortcuts in its construction, and our "moving date" leaned toward October. We, the seniors, were destined for a final exit in the SACs, a last chance to cherish our beloved bungalows for a little while longer.

The computer lab was sweltering, with the air conditioner turned off because of asphalt fumes from the roofers above us. It remained this way until Physical Plant brought in a few fans to accompany the one I stole from the counseling center, and it became tolerable for the afternoon. And then a circuit breaker blows out, taking two fans and a third of the computers with it. This was going to be a normal day here in SAC 2104.

There are only three rooms that I will probably remember when I'm gray and old, looking at CAMS as a senior citizen at some old folks home: SAC 2104, 1103, and 3148. These rooms held many a strange incident, memory, and person that have imprinted some sort of thought provoking event in my writing, spurring vignettes such as "Forced to Make You Happy (Part I)," "Foreign Language B-Sides," "Satan in Suspenders," and "The Walk (Angel of 1103)."

As I watched the new freshmen poke at the computers I helped to build over these couple months, I imagine what stories the fate machine is brewing for these young, hopeful students. I wonder if there is one out there whose journeys have emulated some that I have gone through, and if the vicious circle of problems is attacking him or her the same way it has done for me. When break time comes around, I stand on that balcony again, far enough from the tar fumes, and contemplate about the time ahead, where I must embark on another

few years with new people, new places, and new ideas, becoming the freshman once again, with another blank volume in my life to write in, another root of unpredictability and hopefully less torment and more enjoyable moments than the last few chapters.

August 22, 2001

"Experience"

It's 2:49 in the morning, and I have just finished a two-hour conversation with my coach and very good friend, Robbie Lambert. It was the first time I had spoken with him since a fight with my folks, and it was all in good timing.

No matter how much you mute out your parents, you're going to end up realizing that they were right. It doesn't matter how stupid you think their point of view is. After thinking about all the stuff they've put me through, speeches, therapy tapes, and the like, this new altercation is no different.

Rob had to go through similar agonies like mine, even up to the self-help material, and he says that the biggest thing he's learned about it is that there is nothing you can do about their approaches on taking care of you. You just have to take the thrashing and try to learn from your mistakes, so you can remain out of the vicious circle for a little while longer.

Then why do I continue to fight back? Is it just because I don't want them to win or just to get a hold on that one moment when they could just leave me alone? Parenting is a paradox, because you have to depress the kid in order to make him or her a better person. Their advice, or torture, depending on what side you're on, is like cough syrup. You don't want to take it because it tastes like crap, but you end up doing so and later feeling better when the stuff kicks in your system.

August 23, 2001

"Multitasking"

The last day of 9th grade freshman orientation came and went without a hitch, with Mrs. Bater taking advantage of the newly built computers' ability to use the TV as a computer monitor and my voice reduced to a raspy shell of its former self after teaching a class on the many wonders of Microsoft PowerPoint at the top of my lungs for a straight 45 minutes. I looked at my watch and it was near six in the evening, and five computers were still waiting for me to prep them for surgery.

I propped each one on a table, unscrewed their cases, inserted boot disks, and turned all of them on at once. From that point on, I shuffled from one system to another, checking on what type of work was needed, but one computer received the most attention. It belonged to an incoming freshman. He had seen me in the lab and had talked with me before the orientation started about repairing his computer. He was an energetic boy, still healthy, untouched by the ravages of pressure from CAMS, who watched intently as I inserted and removed hardware, wiped out hard drives, and blew out years of dust from its insides with an air compressor. He would ask me questions and made sure he knew what I was doing, and I would explain my actions to him and the reasoning behind it.

By 8PM, the computer was finished, and his dad came in to talk to Javier in the other room about the freshman's interest in building a new computer for the family. I poked around the other four computers to kill some time until he returned, and about ten minutes later, father and son came back to me, with the father handing me a \$20 bill, for working on their computer.

I couldn't take the money. After building and repairing more than 25 computers just during this summer on a volunteer basis, I just didn't feel that what I had done deserved any payment. It was a CAMS tradition. Students (or their parents for that matter) just don't pay each other to fix computers or do things for one another. We just do it because we can, because we have that talent and we are willing to share it for the good of others.

When the father left the room to place the computer in the car, I gave the \$20, which had been lying on the table next to me, to the freshman, telling him that a 'thank you' was just enough.

August 26, 2001

"The End of This Line"

Computer parts are splayed across my desk, rough drafts of stories litter the floor, and my work area is a war zone, with boxes, cords, and screws in every nook and cranny of what was once was the dining room. At this time in ten days, I will be sitting in a classroom and preparing for senior year, the end of the journey through CAMS.

The number ten, the magic number of this summer...the bits and pieces of that many years put on paper...the memories that reaffirm themselves in my mind...and the realization that it's not all over yet. There's still more to do, more to see, people to meet, and experiences to be experienced. Only death can stop this spinning world known as me, and if all goes well from this point on, my world will continue to turn.

To condense a life and attempt to translate it into words paints an incomplete picture of an identity, but in some cases, it is all one can do.

This is a peek into the keyhole of my life's door.
