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Writing Sample

Note: This is the first section of the Critical Introduction to my dissertation, *The Last Weinrip*.

The Last Weinrip — Introduction

“It was you who doomed yourself,
man of hard fortune. From no other,
from nothing stronger, came your mischance.
When you could have chosen wisdom,
with better opportunity before you,
you chose the worse.”

—Sophocles (*Philoctetes* 1095-1100)

“The pains we inflict upon ourselves hurt most of all.”

—Sophocles (*Oedipus the King* 1360-1361)

In every man...there is one part which concerns only himself and his contingent existence, is properly unknown to anybody else and dies with him. And there is another part through which he holds to an idea which is expressed through him with an eminent clarity, and of which he is the symbol.

—Wilhelm von Humboldt, “Autobiographical Fragment,” 1816

I

In discussing the demise of Willy Loman, his most resonant and enduring character, Arthur

Miller once wrote, “A point has to arrive where a man sees what has happened to

himself” (“Nature” 8). To step back and evaluate one’s life is a colossal task. As millions of

audience members and readers have witnessed, Willy cannot bear the grim realization “that life...had slipped so unaccountably through his fingers” (Bigsby viii). Similarly, I’ve often wondered if a time ever came when my father, Perry Weinstein, could step back and, as objectively as possible, assess his own life. Did he ever stop and wonder about that life, one in which he soared to great heights of financial and professional success and had a beautiful wife and loving family, only to face his end having lost everything but what must have been anguished memories of all he’d had and squandered? What was going through his mind in those final hours and days leading up to the moment he died, alone, at the age of 63, in a tiny room of a Hollywood, Florida efficiency motel located just steps from the sand on which my father spent many a night when he didn’t have the money to sleep with a roof over his head? Throughout the downward spiral that defined the last decade of his life, that seedy room on Connecticut Street, with little more than a queen-size bed, TV, a small refrigerator and two-burner hotplate, would be Perry’s final destination after a long odyssey of decline.

Such is the setting and situation Larry Weinrip faces in *The Last Weinrip*. As the creator of the fictional character, and the son of the flesh-and-blood man whose experience provides the model for Larry Weinrip’s story, I chose the sand of a south Florida beach at night, a setting on the edge of oblivion, to give Larry the opportunity to reflect on a life that has, for the most part, slipped away. The mysteries of the ocean, both literal and symbolic, are mere yards from the place he lies. Above him, the full moon shines down like a single judgmental eye. Its pale light casts a glistening path across the water, stopping abruptly at the horizon, evoking the image of a journey mercifully coming to an end.

The actual end of my father's strange path through life took place in that efficiency motel room: Two hundred decaying square-feet, at most, concealed inside a nondescript white bungalow just one block from the ocean, in an area populated primarily by transients and tourists. Many a morning my father would jog on that same beach when he had sufficient breath, no thanks to the two-pack a day cigarette habit he maintained for three-quarters of his years. The fictional Larry Weinrip shares the identical habit, the physical damage from which to his lungs and arteries comparable to the destruction he's done to any number of lives that have revolved around his own crooked orbit. A wife, three children, a business partner and numerous others count amongst the casualties. When my sisters and I were tasked by the Hollywood Police Department with cleaning out that Connecticut Street motel room and salvaging my father's scant material possessions—a small transistor radio, a cracked teacup half-full of coins, a ragged pile of clothes and a prosthetic front tooth conjoined to a plastic dental bridge—it was not difficult to understand that collection as the final poignant emblem of a man whose "life had unaccountably slipped through his fingers" (Miller). Certainly evidence of the addictions the man battled were also there—the alcohol, most recently—as was the glaring lack of self-esteem that defined so much of my father's psyche. Amidst the mess, the decay, and the hollowed-out sense of the abyss, perhaps the most notable symbol of all was the three or four ashtrays scattered around the room—overflowing with stamped out butts, matchsticks and piled ash, and the random beer cap and other scraps. The metaphor of an entire life burned down to charred rubble is clear. So too does the fictional Larry Weinrip, like Miller's iconic Willy Loman, "land in the ash can like all the rest of them" (*Salesman* 106). For both my father and these fictional

characters, these destinations are most often self-directed. At one point in the novella, Weinrip himself admits: “the man I was, and lost, had been discarded by my own hand” (142).¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses refer to pages in the manuscript of *The Last Weinrip* by Clifford W. Evan.