

Angie Louise / GRANT APPLICATION ESSAY QUESTION #3:

"DISCUSS THE WAYS IN WHICH YOUR WRITING IS ROOTED IN PERSONAL PAIN."

Funny you should ask. Well, not funny exactly, but bitterly amusing. For me, innocence died in September of '77, just two months after that magical July when divine inspiration caused me to vomit up a bold, timely adaptation of the classic Cinderella story entitled "Disco Cindy" and bully my fellow campers into performing it. Still giddy from applause during back-to-school week, I decided to devote the bulk of fifth grade to the workmanlike crafting of dirty limericks. But when I passed one to Scott Taylor, he giggled like a little girl and got me busted. Thus began my first steps down the lonely road I've traveled ever since, the one so many other geniuses have trudged before me. Noble and belittled, I stumble in the dust, ahead of my time yet somehow years behind everyone I know, pelted with the foul vegetable reek of rejection and taunted by visions of the million-dollar home God meant me to have.

There's more, if you can take it. (Scott Taylor couldn't. I was too edgy for him.) In eighth grade, after laboring selflessly to produce a comprehensive dictionary of Spanish profanity, I was caught in the crossfire of a violent controversy that erupted over some excerpts I'd notated on the back of my orchestra folder and accidentally left behind in Spanish class. In an Inquisition-like move, the principal threatened to ban me from the Easter trip to Mexico. I vividly recall experiencing a complete dissolution of personal integrity as I spewed craven sobs, forced to choose between the validity of my life's work and my God-given right to make out with Bobby Cartland on the tiled roof of a Mexico City motel. In retrospect, I can say it was just like that moment in *Sophie's Choice* when Meryl Streep screws over her daughter. Some choices shouldn't have to be made.

The Establishment tightened its fascist python stranglehold on my creativity as I entered college and discovered that the University of Illinois offered not a single major in any of my areas of writing expertise, which by that point included making up fake TV guide entries, practicing signatures for potential stage names, creating a secret language my roommate and I could use to insult everyone in the dorm cafeteria, and vulgarizing the lyrics to "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Short stories and poems, that's what these freaks wanted, and God help me, I fell for it and wrote some. Twice a week ten of us sat around in rags defacing Xeroxed copies of each other's offerings and pronouncing them *uneven* and *contrived*. Helplessly, I felt myself longing for these nonentities to like my writing, admire me, relate to me. It's been nothing but hell ever since. Over and over again, today, this very moment, ostracized and alone, my fragile artist's ego collapses under the eternal agonizing questions: *Is it good enough? Is that guy at the next table looking at me funny? Will the new barrista make my foam fluffy this time?* With this, the pain digs deep, so deep I have to get a brownie to go with it, and it turns out - as if by chance - that they're out of the ones with espresso frosting. Well, not out, exactly, but the one that's left is kind of puny, and its corners are deformed. Don't tell *me* I haven't suffered.