

Kenneth Graham
Multicultural Counseling
Mid-Quarter Integrative Writing
November 1, 2005

Time to Think

Samantha and Jacob were finishing up their work at the office. It was a Saturday afternoon and they were the only ones working in the building that day.

“Come on Sam, let’s get out of here!” Jacob yelled from the other side of the office.

“You go on. I’ve just got a couple of things to take care of.” Samantha was painstakingly reorganizing her desk. Everything had to be in its place or it would look messy when she returned on Monday. She couldn’t just leave everything and take off like Jacob, that would be so uncivilized. Besides, a messy desk meant messy work.

At that moment the elevator bell sounded and within a few seconds the door opened. A Hispanic cleaning woman looked around and pushed her cart into the office as the doors closed behind her. She seemed a little surprised to see people there, but went about her business.

“No, I’m not going without you. As soon as I’m out of here you’ll remember something that we didn’t do. Then you’ll decide to take care of it yourself, work up here until midnight, and I’ll look like the jerk that left before everything was finished. Then you’ll get all the credit and everyone will talk crap about me behind my back. *‘Samantha is such a go getter and Jacob is such a slacker’*. No thank you.” Jacob paused for a second. “So are you coming or what? What the hell are you doing anyway? We’re finished. Right?”

Samantha finished straightening her desk and grabbed her purse. “All right, we’re done. We can go now. Geez! Do you always have to rush me? You’re going to make me forget

something.” As Sam comes around the corner she sees Jacob repeatedly pushing on the elevator button, as if to make return faster.

As they waited for the elevator, the cleaning woman pushed her cart up near them. She stayed far enough away so as not to be too intrusive. Jacob starts pushing the elevator button again.

“You do know that doesn’t make the elevator get here any quicker?” Sam casually states.

“I know, but I feel like I’m doing something.” Jacob stops pushing the button and turns to the cleaning woman. “That was fast.” He says in a critical tone.

Sam was confused as to what he was referring to, “What was fast?”

“I wasn’t talking to you, I was talking to her.” Jacob motioned his hand towards the cleaning woman. “You’ve only been up here a couple of minutes and you’re already done?”

“Just a quick touch up on the weekend.” Nina said with a shy smile, not looking directly at Jacob as she spoke.

Jacob grunted in response. He watched the numbers above the elevator door getting closer to their floor. The doors opened and Jacob was the first one in. He didn’t have the patience to wait for Sam, let alone the cleaning woman. He was tired of being polite and letting the woman go first. He was tired of women.

Sam was second on the elevator. She gave the cleaning woman a nod and said “Hello Nina.”

Nina nodded and pushed her cart into the elevator and stood in the back corner.

Jacob had pushed the button to the Lobby and waited for the doors to close. When they did, they didn’t shut all the way. There was a gap of about six inches.

“Great!” Jacob muttered as he put his hands on the big silver doors and tried to force them shut. After struggling for a few moments, the doors shut and they started their 33 floor descent. After what felt like only a second the elevator stopped.

“Did we just stop?” Sam said to no one in particular. “I think we just stopped.”

Jacob and Nina were both silent. Neither of them liked the thought of being stuck in an elevator. Jacob began to press the Lobby button repeatedly.

Again, Sam asked “We’re not moving, are we?”

“No ... we’re not moving.” Jacob replied sarcastically in frustration. “What the hell? This piece of crap.” Turning to Nina, Jacob asks “Has this ever happened to you?”

Nina shakes her head back and forth but says nothing. Jacob fumbles around and eventually finds the emergency call box. He pulls out a telephone handset and presses the red call button. He doesn’t hear a dial tone, ringing or a voice. He presses the button a few more times.

“Man, you really like pressing buttons.” Sam says jokingly.

“Do you have any better ideas?” Jacob snaps back. “Maybe we should just scream at the top of our lungs. Maybe we can wake up the security guard that’s sleeping in the lobby, oh I don’t know, maybe thirty-two floors below us. Jesus Christ!”

Sam replies “Well you forced the doors shut, did you try forcing them open?”

Jacob drops the handset on the floor and moves in front of the doors. He tries to pry his fingers between the two doors but they are now tightly sealed. Placing one hand on each door he tries to force them apart, but they do not budge. Jacob uses all his strength and begins to grunt and shake, but nothing moves.

“Damn it!” He yells in frustration. Jacob looks at the ceiling and says, “I can’t even crawl through the ceiling. There aren’t any tiles to pop out. Isn’t that a fire code violation or something?”

“Oh God, this is not happening to me.” Sam says slumping down into sitting position. She pulls her cell phone out of her purse and sees the ‘no service’ message blinking on the screen. “Are you even listening to that thing? They’re probably trying to talk to us right now.”

Jacob picks up the handset and puts it to his ear. “Nothing. I don’t think this piece of junk works. That’s probably another fire code violation. Doesn’t anyone ever test these stupid things? And who made me keeper of the call box?” Jacob drops the handset sits on the floor.

They sit in complete silence for about fifteen minutes before Sam finally speaks. “Well, your wife will notice you’re not home and eventually call someone.”

Jacob sits quietly for a moment and then sighs, “Uh, don’t hold your breathe on that one. Our divorce was finalized last week.” He pauses and looks away. “I, um... “

“I’m sorry. I didn’t...” Sam hesitates.

Jacob interrupts, “Well *you* must have someone ... boyfriend, roommate...”

“No.” Sam hesitates. “Just me. I don’t even have a date on a Saturday night! No one is going to notice that I’m missing until Monday morning when I don’t show up for work. Kind of funny, huh?” Sam muttered the question loud enough for only herself to hear.

Jacob turns to Nina and asks “What about you, Chatty Cathy? You’ve been awfully quiet through this mess. You guys always have big families don’t you? Someone’s going to come looking for you.” He waits for her reply but when she doesn’t respond he looks at Sam and says “I don’t think she likes me.”

“Just leave her alone. I wouldn’t respond to you either if you were talking to me that way.”

Nina finally speaks during a long pause in the conversation. “No. It’s okay. But don’t count on anyone to come looking for me. Since it’s the weekend, I’m the only one cleaning

today. The weekends are normally pretty quiet so they don't need a lot of staff. Even for a building of this size it only takes one person. And for my 'big Hispanic family', she looks directly at Jacob, "I'm going to disappoint you on that one too. I live in a dorm on campus and I don't have a roommate. They're going to come looking for you guys before anyone will notice I'm missing. Sorry." success

As they sat in silence, not knowing what else to do, Samantha began to drift deeply into her thoughts. *"What am I doing here?" she thought to herself "I don't even really like this job and I'm working on Saturday?! I worked so hard to get here and I don't even care anymore. All those years of school and all that studying! You would think something good would come out of it. Just more and more work. And what's my reward for hard work? Promotion? Fulfillment? Success? No. More work. Emptiness and loneliness. God, what have I gotten myself into? I should be doing something that makes a difference in the world. Maybe I should have joined the Peace Corps or one of those environmental groups. Maybe then I'd have a sense of accomplishment. And then men ... 'there will always be time for that later'. That doesn't seem to be happening either. Everyone people dated in college, why couldn't I? Why would that have been such an obstacle to my school work? My sister was no big help in that department. Why would she claim dad abused her? That's so gross. I was there, I think I would have remembered something like that. Dad would never have done something like that. She just wanted to hurt him or get attention, that's all. He would never have touched us. I don't even remember him spanking us. She needs counseling or something. I probably get a lot more done without a man around anyway. I wouldn't be able to put in these extra hours at the office and I've seen what happens to people who don't put in the extra effort. Smaller offices and paychecks for one thing, not to mention promotions. But at least they're not stuck in an elevator ... 'course what would I be doing if I wasn't working on a Saturday?"*

At the same time Nina is also thinking to herself. *“God I hate white people. Why do they always have to make those judgments about me? You can’t trust them farther than you can throw them. I wish people would stop looking at me as ‘a Hispanic’ and start looking at me as an individual. I’m not a bee in a hive. What do I have to do to have people respect me? No wonder I smoke. These people stress me out.”*

Jacob sits back in frustration and closes his eyes. *“My father would really enjoy this one.”* he thinks to himself. *“One more thing for him to rag on me about. I guess it’s all for the best. All that criticizing ... toughened me up and got me prepared for the real world. People aren’t going to be nice to you out here unless they’re trying to take advantage of you. He meant well. Man, I just want to get out of here, go home and work on my model cars.”*

Just then Nina jumps up, pushes the maintenance cart out of her way and lunges to the front of the elevator. “Open up, open up, open up!!” She yells and pounds her fists on the door. “Open up now! Now! Now!” She continues to scream like a child having a tantrum.

Jacob stands up and Nina stops pounding on the door.

“Its okay, Nina, is it? We’ll find a way out of here. I’m going to rip this panel of buttons out and try and force an alarm to go off.” Jacob announces and then proceeds to start kicking the panel.

“Hold on tough guy.” Sam says standing up. “I’ve probably got something in my purse that will work as a screwdriver. I might even have a screwdriver!” Sam walks behind Jacob and digs through her purse. *‘Always be prepared’* she thought to herself.

Nina declares, “You need to stop. You don’t know what you’re doing and you’ll probably make things worse. Just stop and let’s think about this for a second.”

“Okay ... let’s try to pry the doors open again.” Jacob suggests. “You two push on that door and I’ll push on this side. I think these doors are somehow linked together so

they'll open at the same time. Maybe if we have all of our energy working at the same time they will open."

Nina and Sam silently agreed and positioned themselves at the door. With open palms on their respective doors, all begin to push.

"It's moving!" Jacob exclaims as the doors slide open enough for them to get out.

"Hooray! We did it!" Nina said to Jacob and Sam, grinning ear to ear. They in turn beamed at her. Their ordeal was over.

As they headed their separate ways each had their own thoughts about their time to think in the elevator.

"Not all people are so seemingly prejudice I guess ... that Jacob guy... he wasn't so bad in the end. He did just get divorced ... probably having a tough time ..." Nina thought as she walked away.

"I need to call my kids. That Nina could have been my daughter ... she's the right age. I feel like such a jerk ... 'you people' ... how rude. I need to change my ways ..." Jacob made a pact with himself to be nicer to everyone.

Sam walked down Fifth Avenue trying to decide how she would turn in her two weeks notice. She wasn't sure what she would do with her newfound freedom, but vowed to make better use of it than sitting in an elevator on a Saturday making other people rich.