

Writing Prompt 3: Separate Paths

Write a short memoir piece about someone you know (a family member or childhood friend) who took a divergent path from your own. This essay is as much about you as it is about your subject, so don't shirk on self-analysis when you try to help the reader understand why you and this other person are not or are no longer on the same path.

This person could be someone you never saw again, after a certain point in time, or could be about someone you once were close to, but aren't close to now. Or it could be about someone who is still in your life, but you or s/he have gone in a different direction from what one or the other of you expected.

Some people have used this prompt to explore a friendship that went south because the other person went down a road the author couldn't follow (i.e., drugs, or dangerous living of some other kind), or the other person shipped out to Iraq or Afghanistan, or the person entered a completely different social milieu. Some have used this prompt to write about siblings. Some have used the prompt to write about how going away to college, to St. Lawrence, exposed them to a different world and they aren't the same people as they were kids.

Another option would be to write about how you thought you were on one path but chose another, and the difficulties some people had—try to focus on one relationship—in accepting what to them seems like a departure, but to you might simply mean becoming yourself. (And yes, you can use this prompt as a way to explain to your grandmother that you have decided to major in English/creative writing instead of economics or biology!)

Focus on one relationship.

(With thanks to B. Minh Nguyen and Porter Shreve, who helped inspire this prompt)