

An abstract painting featuring a complex, layered composition of brushstrokes. The primary colors are a vibrant red and a muted, dusty blue, set against a light, off-white background. The strokes are expressive and somewhat chaotic, with some areas showing significant overlap and blending of colors. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and emotional intensity. The text 'DILEMMA OF A DYSLÉXIC MAN' is centered horizontally across the middle of the image, rendered in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

DILEMMA OF A DYSLÉXIC MAN



DILEMMA OF A DYSLEXIC MAN

by Bert Kruger Smith

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A NOTE

Dilemma of a Dyslexic Man is a true story. It was printed originally for the Twentieth Annual Conference of Southwest Foundations. This edition contains additional material.

Although Dwayne's case is more extreme than that of many dyslexics, his use of the medium of educational television and his multiple coping mechanisms have helped him to become knowledgeable in many fields.

At this time no startling improvement in reading has been effected through private class work, but Dwayne continues with his medication and with use of talking books for the blind. He is enrolled as a full-time university student and is making excellent grades.

Two faculty members from The University of Texas at Austin served as critic readers for the original manuscript. We appreciate the help of Dr. William Harmer, associate professor of curriculum and instruction and director of the Learning Disabilities Center, and Dr. Norris Davis, professor of journalism, who read the document for content, authenticity, and style.

Bert Kruger Smith



In a large Texas city a young man paints pictures in his spare time, writes song lyrics, plays the guitar, and engages his friends in discussions of everything from the findings of Gallileo to subtle points of physics or the writings of Socrates and Plato.

None of this would seem too remarkable except for one fact. Dwayne, 32, can neither read nor write. He is a victim of dyslexia, a dysfunction of the brain, although until very recent years he simply thought of himself as either damaged or stupid. Nothing in his looks reveals his problem. A large man, he resembles a college football player. He dresses neatly, speaks well. His clear blue eyes look directly at one, and his dimples show often. His face is pleasant, bearing no evidence of the ravages of a disability which he has been struggling all of his life to conceal.

Many people have dyslexia. But what is amazing about Dwayne is the variety of coping mechanisms he has used throughout the years to keep others from knowing of his disability.

One doctor who heard Dwayne's story asked him, "Why do you try? What keeps you going?"

Dwayne replied, "I am like a match which has been struck. The only way to live is to burn. And to burn I need fuel—information and knowledge."

While Dwayne has been absorbing knowledge from every source he could find in the past dozen years, he has been more diligent—

even frantic—in concealing his disability. He has refused jobs, turned down promotions, and spurned romance in order to keep his secret. For until he learned a name for his ailment, he halted through life thinking of his disorder as something shameful.

All dyslexic children are aware that something is wrong with them. Mostly, like Dwayne, they think of themselves as stupid. Dwayne, however, offers unique insight into the inner life of a dyslexic person. He knows not only what it was like to be a school failure, but he also is aware of all that was missed. Dwayne's sensitivity, his ability to conceptualize, and his insight into the processes of learning bring a fresh look and new knowledge to the whole area of dyslexia.

What caused Dwayne's dyslexia? No one knows for sure. In addition to rheumatic fever, Dwayne suffered from numerous childhood diseases. The attendant high fever with measles is often pointed to as a possibility, but findings also seem to demonstrate a genetic component as an offender.

What is dyslexia? It is one of a number of learning disorders, revealing itself in a variety of disabilities in reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes verbal expression. Dyslexic children like Dwayne are normal or above normal in intelligence but are unable to comprehend the written word, although they have no impairment of eyesight. The number of males to females suffering from dyslexia is three to one, and the degree of severity of the condition may vary greatly from person to person. Generally such children are thought to be daydreamers in school, or they are categorized as "not trying."

Where did Dwayne's dyslexia manifest itself? And what did he do about it?

As in the case of most dyslexics, the initial discovery was amorphous, not specific. Dwayne was a bit slow in sitting up and walking, but then so are many infants. He was quiet, but his blue eyes and dimples made him an engaging child. He spent hours looking at toys and taking them apart. He had friends and played with them during his pre-school years.

Dwayne's school teacher mother and engineer father were proud of their fine son. He and his sister, almost three years his junior, made up a wonderful family.

And then came school. Although Dwayne was able to get through the first three grades with adequate report cards and no gross difficulties, he knew that something was wrong with him. When he stood up to recite in class, the children laughed at his expressions. He feigned sore throats, did everything he knew to keep from going to school—painful school where he had to try and try and try and never quite succeed in being like the other children. He soon learned that if his mother read an assignment to him, he could begin to memorize it and recite it in class. The coping mechanisms started to work.

"I spent my days in pretense and avoidance," says Dwayne. Because the other children did not seem to accept him as part of their gang, he would go on the playground with the youngsters but would hide in the bushes. When a sympathetic teacher insisted that he join them, he began running up and down the playground, as if he were running with the group instead of alongside it.

By the time he reached the fourth grade, Dwayne was in real trouble. His mother would work with him at night. He would attempt to memorize and to copy what she showed him, but there was no carryover. The next time he saw the same word or sentence, he could not recognize it. He had to repeat the fourth grade.

Dwayne's quiet demeanor and his efforts made him liked by his teachers, despite the fact that many of them recognized that he cheated on tests and in assignments. One of his more effective coping mechanisms was to hide behind someone else in the classroom. He would slump down, or he would move his desk so that he would be out of the teacher's immediate vision. That technique, coupled with the fact that he chose the back of the room, kept him frequently out of sight and mind of his teachers. Another method of hiding his disability came when he was called on to read a passage from a book. He would hurriedly turn to some paragraph he had memorized and would begin to read it. His teacher would be impatient with his lack of attention, and she would say, "Dwayne, you're not paying attention. Find the place, and sit down."

"All my time was spent in learning how to 'get by'," says Dwayne. "I would study the teachers to learn their methods of giving tests and of grading. I fought as if every day were a new battle which had

to be survived. I learned to put down answers in my own kind of understandable shorthand on pencils, inside of socks, on my fingers, anywhere. I systematically changed my way of cheating and worked at the project constantly.”

The highlight of Dwayne’s scholastic life came when his entire school began competing in a spelling contest to choose top persons for national competition. By this time Dwayne was in the sixth grade, and there were several hundred spelling words on the list. He worked daily at memorizing the list, and in the competition in his classroom finished third in a class of 34. “I didn’t want to win,” Dwayne says. “I knew that I could never learn the hundreds of words needed for national competition. But I wanted to rate high. And I did.”

Sometimes Dwayne accomplished his assignments by “trading” with his friends. A talented artist, Dwayne had been drawing and painting since early years. When friends had assignments which required sketches, Dwayne would do the sketches and they would do his writing.

Finally, after two years in the fourth grade and two in the sixth, Dwayne was moved into the seventh grade, without an elementary school diploma. Life grew tenser as the competition stiffened.

His mother was puzzled. She knew that Dwayne’s skill in taking apart clocks and putting them back together and in working on cars was high. Yet she could not understand his nonlearning. When a teacher approached her and suggested that Dwayne be put in a class for retarded children, she refused. But for Dwayne, who overheard the conversation, here was additional proof that he was dumb.

Dwayne’s father did not share his mother’s sense of bewilderment. Rather, he pinned his son’s problems down to lack of motivation. (Had he known that Dwayne was trying with every ounce of energy in his body, he would have been surprised). He would take Dwayne into the kitchen, close the doors and say, “We are going to stay in here until you get this lesson finished.” Dwayne would try. His father would grow angry and soon would pound the table and yell—while Dwayne froze with anxiety and humiliation. At other times his father would endeavor to understand. “What is wrong, son?” he would ask. And Dwayne would shake his head and turn his face to hide the tears, saying, “Nothing’s wrong, Dad.”

Or, "I don't know."

"I lived a big lie," says Dwayne. "I would devour funny books because I could get the story. I adored mechanical jobs. I drew whenever I could, but I never let anyone know that I really couldn't read, couldn't make sense out of a written page."

The scholastic crisis finally came in the seventh grade. Here Dwayne was assigned to a teacher who, he was sure, was out to destroy him. She refused to let him sit in the back of the room. She would not permit him to cheat. She insisted on his performing. He begged the principal to move him, but the teacher said she wanted him in her class.

Dwayne left school. He was 15 years old, and was failing the seventh grade. There were teachers who suggested that he be advanced to the 10th grade, laying his lack of progress on boredom. But he knew better. Unskilled, unprepared, and unable to fill out a job application, he walked out of junior high school and did not return.

His father got him a job in the warehouse of a furniture store. The work was hard, and Dwayne soon recognized that he was not a man to do a man's job. But he tried. And when he lost that job, he got another at a bottling company.

His coping skills were needed in job applications. When he was handed an application to fill out, he suddenly looked at his watch and said, "I didn't realize it was so late. I have a doctor's appointment. May I bring this back tomorrow?" Or, "My father is circling the block in all this traffic. Suppose I take this application home and return it later." Then at home, his mother would fill out the application and give it to him to return.

The Korean war came along, but Dwayne's childhood rheumatic fever caused him to be classified 4-F. He went to work as a helper on a truck for a furniture store. How did he manage to direct the driver in delivering furniture? Let Dwayne tell it. "I found the location of the store on a map and began working from there. Although I couldn't read the names of streets, I could sometimes match them up between the map and the street marker. Or I could have the driver help me spot the street from the map before we left, and then I could give instructions in numbers of blocks instead of street names. Later, when I was promoted to driver, I would throw the

map to my helper and ask him to read it out to me—as if I didn't have time to bother.”

The furniture store offered Dwayne a salesman's job. He refused, and they insisted that he could do the work. Thoughtfully Dwayne went over what he would have to do as a salesman. Could he make out sales tickets? Would he be able to copy tags? He tried the job for a few days and then resigned. The strain was beyond his ability to endure.

He was offered the job of assistant manager's assistant in the furniture department. Again he refused—and refused the assistant manager's job also. He said “no” to a top job in the rug department, knowing that he could not compute feet and inches needed for carpeting. After he spotted several people trying to steal, he was offered a store detective position. He turned that down also. It was a civil service job, and he could not take the examination.

Someone persuaded Dwayne to apply for a reserve police department job. It was an after-work stint, evenings and holidays, and Dwayne applied in person, stating his age as 21 instead of 19. For two and a half years he served as a reserve policeman, always vigilant and careful to keep his inability secret.

“I carried a clipboard,” he says; “and when I had to check some infraction, I looked at the front sheet where the various ones were listed. Then I would copy the word very carefully. Often when I had to put a name and address, I would ask the person himself to write it.”

The writing of reports posed a special problem. Dwayne solved that one by offering to do the leg work on a report in exchange for the other person's writing the report.

He learned other methods of avoidance. If he were with a group of officers and noticed that a captain was looking for someone to undertake an assignment perhaps beyond his competence, he would turn his head and pretend to be in listening attitude with another policeman. Then when it looked as if the assignment might be in the squad car, which he could handle, he would stand alone and look around as if waiting to be called. When he was invited to try for the police sergeants' force, he was tempted to learn where the tests were kept and to steal one and memorize it. “But the irony of the plan struck me,” Dwayne says. “I couldn't do it.”

Finally, Dwayne's performance was so good that he was asked to apply for the regular detective department. He refused, with a flip remark like, "I wouldn't look good in a hat." But even as he said it, he hurt for the opportunity missed. "I couldn't go on in that capacity," he says, "because it was too serious a job to involve people's wellbeing in my disability."

Various events caused Dwayne to seek new employment. After 12½ years at the furniture company, he changed jobs and moved to a chain store, where he became manager of the furniture shop. When pieces of furniture were set for delivery, he learned to tell by the telephone numbers approximately where the address was. When he needed to make reports on damaged furniture, he referred to a notebook he carried which spelled out "split wood" or "broken leg" or some other description. Then by looking at the notebook letters, he could copy onto his report sheet.

How has Dwayne been able to conceal his disability in all of the ordinary workings of his life? He drives a car (having obtained his license without taking the written test) and takes long trips by observing highway numbers and by boning up ahead of time on directions and mileage. In a restaurant he has a simple technique. "If it's a truck drivers' stop, I look up and down the counter and notice what the meal of the day is. Then I order that. If I go into a regular restaurant, I order chicken fried steak. Or if it is a sea food restaurant, I select some kind of fish."

In his desperation to communicate, Dwayne tried three methods. He thought that if he could learn the Morse code, he would have a way of storing information for himself. Although he tried steadily, he could not master the use of the code.

Then it occurred to him that Braille might provide the answer. He could read with his fingertips and gain knowledge that way. Although he was able to learn the mechanics of Braille, he had the same difficulty he had with ordinary reading; he could not translate the words his fingers touched into the symbols needed for his mind to comprehend.

Finally, Dwayne wondered if a foreign language would provide help for him. He selected the most phonetic language possible and set out on a course of learning German. He soon found what other dyslexics and their teachers know, that a foreign language is an

impossibility to anyone with a severe language disorder.

Finally the breakthrough came one evening when he was in his early twenties. He returned home from his job and saw a program on educational television. The program was on Zen Buddhism. Dwayne sat down in front of the set and was instantly absorbed in the discussion. The vocabulary exceeded his ability to comprehend, but he knew that he was grasping the essence of the subject. Soon Dwayne was following the educational programs on television. He heard a Scandinavian physicist and scientist. He looked around the room and recognized how certain properties came to be. He understood rain and liquid and grew excited with the understanding and the remembrance. The black cloth of nonlearning was lifted from his eyes, and he saw and felt and remembered and understood.

Every day he rushed home to watch television and soon bought his own set in order that he would not need to miss a program on archeology or psychology. He would log in his mind when the programs would come on. After he had watched them, he longed to know more. Laboriously he would copy the letters of a name like Gallileo and just as laboriously search for them in the encyclopedia. He would take a page and try to read, getting a word at one time, another word at another. Slowly he copied the words he did not know and painfully tried to find them in the dictionary. If there were some part of an explanation he could follow in the dictionary, he would bring that knowledge back to the encyclopedia statement.

"Sometimes I would work for a month and a half to try to translate one page in the encyclopedia," says Dwayne. "I was astounded that there was so much information and no one seemed to care to learn it."

How could he learn more? Dwayne found that children's picture encyclopedias could help. Also, on the television programs the speakers usually referred to some special books. Dwayne bought those books, tried to learn what some idea in them was, and then engaged a friend in conversation about the books and the ideas. The friend generally would borrow the book; and when he returned it, Dwayne would talk with him about the ideas expressed. Then he would share the book with another friend and discuss it with him.

But learning did not come fast enough. "I began to think that

I was too emotional," said Dwayne, "and I decided to try to put aside all emotions, to destroy them, in order that I could learn better. For a year I attempted to obliterate emotions. What was the result? I had stomach trouble and constant headaches. And when I painted, I painted a man with a face of stone. He had no ears, no eyes, and no mouth. I knew then that man could not live without showing his emotions."

Dwayne's physical discomfort was so great that he sought out a physician. Numerous tests showed no physical cause for the pains, and the doctor said, "Does anything trouble you?"

Dwayne decided that he would share, that he must share, his problem. "Doctor, I want to level with you," he said. "I have grave trouble."

"Tell me," said the doctor.

"I cannot read or write," Dwayne said slowly. Then he lifted his eyes to look at the doctor, but the physician was not looking at him. He simply stared at the floor and offered Dwayne some pills for his stomach discomfort.

"I cannot tell you how let down I was, nor how bitterly disappointed," says Dwayne.

Before long Dwayne's fingers began growing numb, and his arms. He was pressed into seeking another doctor's opinion. For the second time, the now 29-year-old man said, "I cannot read or write." Only here he found the doctor looking into his eyes and saying, "I have heard of problems like yours, and I am going to send you to someone who may be able to help you."

Relief flooded Dwayne. "To know. Just to know that I was not the only person in this world who had this problem was enough to give me courage to see the other doctor." There he was able to open up, to tell the physician what he had not been able to say to anyone else. He could explain how it was to stand inside a store and to see a big sign advertising a brand of furniture, then to look over at the furniture itself and to find the sign and the furniture interposed. "My mind sees one thing, and my eye comprehends something else."

The doctor nodded. He had heard of dyslexia, or congenital word blindness, or any one of the half dozen names by which this disorder is known. He understood what Dwayne was expressing when he said, "Words change before my eyes. Sometimes they are all right;

at other moments, they get mixed up; sometimes they are upside down. I can read for awhile, then I get weary, and the words change."

Before long Dwayne was enrolled in a program geared to teaching reading to dyslexic children. Despite the fact that Dwayne was by now almost 30 years old, his intelligence and his aptitude for learning worked in his favor.

Dwayne is now embarked in a program of training. His physician helped him to get funds from Vocational Rehabilitation to aid in his schooling. He works at his reading, every minute of his available time. On some books he was able to read one half page in an hour; now he has brought his skill up to two and a half pages in the same time. Talking books for the blind have given him an entire world of learning material.

"Some friend gave me a copy of *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran," Dwayne commented. "Many people give me books. They think I am an avid reader. Strangely enough I was able to read page after page of *The Prophet*, to read and to comprehend, and to know the essence before my eyes began to cross and change."

Because he lived with his parents and was frugal in his expenditures, Dwayne was able to save several thousand dollars. He had a few rent properties, and one day decided that he had to live on his own and in a creative fashion. At the back of one of the houses he owned, he began to convert a garage into an art studio. When it was completed, he moved in.

There he lives and paints, dictates words to songs on his tape recorder, plays music, entertains friends. His mail still comes to his parents' house, and his mother writes his checks. Romance? Not for him. "I was engaged once," he says, "and broke up the romance. I refuse to marry and to reproduce a child like myself."

Far from satisfied with his progress, Dwayne longs for knowledge and the ability to grasp it. He refuses to continue his painting. "I have done the best I can. I do not have the exposure to other peoples' thoughts in order to paint better."

By most standards Dwayne's progress is outstanding. By his own it is insufficient. Here is how he put it to a friend to whom he dictated the following:

"Sometimes my mind operates like a rapid running computer; I

sometimes feel like laughing out loud. It's that easy. So easy I doubt there is such a thing as congenital word blindness, or dyslexia. But this feeling doesn't last long. Suddenly without warning I am jerked into an unreal but believable world where symbols and thoughts are like liquid lizards or little elves disappearing, leaving their shadows to tease me and make me think the shadow is real. Symbols talk in inverted echoes. Everything tells me to put my hands to my sides and surrender, but I refuse; so I extend these thoughts in lyrics with rhythm and symmetry, and there is comfort where there was pain."

Or at another time he said, "If I had complete mastery of the English language, I could not describe the feeling of any one minute of a day. We can only think thoughts that we have words for, so I have been told. I know that feelings do not have such a handicap. I think some day I'm going to argue that point, about no words, no thoughts. . . ."

When he was very depressed, he described a cold day thus: "The clouds turned gray and rolled like huge swells of water on the ocean. I felt lonely and depressed. All color seemed to be bled from the earth. . . . Once inside, I knew the truth—it was my mind that was the carrier of a cold and angry world, my eyes that bled color from life. . . . Later . . . I watched the slow fire. As I did, my thoughts became like dried rocks on a creek bed. They came from somewhere, but now they went nowhere. Thoughts without any names filled my head and blinded my eyes, ran down my cheeks. Both hands could not stop them. I was a warrior whose armor had failed him. . . ."

Later as he gained a bit of confidence, he said, "To be one with the world is to be one with God. Harmony and balance are the greatest comforts, but disorder is the greatest creator. Is the sun not warm because of its disorder? . . . Today the sun is full and warm. All that surrounds it is beautiful. I can take my hands off my head now. Chicken Little was wrong again."

The desperate longing to soak in learning, to communicate it to others, to share in the knowledge was expressed in a letter to his physician. Dwayne dictated: "We are the product of a will to create; so we are creators, but what do we create? Perhaps a mistake. Nature has, and always will, make mistakes . . . I took a deep look at man that night, and I saw man as a material extension of the will that fills

a vacuum. . . . With this revived awareness, my hunger was that of a vacuum, and I seek to fill the vacuum and feed the hunger of man's world. But what of mistakes and the speed to time? And I thought, man's successes and failures of past and present are frozen in twisted symbols on millions and millions of pages for anyone who can melt the symbols into thought. And my ears heard my mouth speak these words: 'I can not! I have not! and I never will.' And my anger and emotions grew with their echo of every word in my mind. In a fit of anger, I hurled a black book across the room, crying 'No' to the echo and then in a soft voice I said, 'I will learn if it kills me'."

And to newly-made friends Dwayne said, "Some people cry in fear of the exploits of the adventures; some wave flags and laugh nervously. Some are like me standing silently with their minds running wild and their feet standing still."

Dwayne's feet are moving. He has set out a plan for himself. If he can learn to read and write, he wants to do one of two things, either join the Peace Corps or take training to teach dyslexic children. Most recently Dwayne said to friends, "Every day the world is a little different and so are we in our concept of it. Lately for me each day has been better than the one before. I feel like a fast growing tree in a damp sunny forest always finding myself at sunrise taller and stronger than before."

If Dwayne's training is successful, the gigantic concealment and camouflage can terminate. He can redirect his creative energies away from his disability and into those great areas of wellness which he exhibits in his writing, music, and painting. In the Peace Corps or in a classroom he will be able to bring to young people the knowledge of what it means to fight through the jungle of nonunderstanding and emerge into the sunlight of learning.

He will be able to read these words about himself. He will gather the fuel to keep him burning in his quest for knowledge for himself and for others who need his help.

AN ADDENDUM

Dwayne's story, like life itself, continues unfolding. He meets failures, knows small successes, becomes discouraged, garners new strengths.

Recent letters demonstrate fresh determination and achievements, despite rebuffs. They also show the artistic quality which colors Dwayne's life via words, clay, and paint brush.

Dwayne's success may be measured less in his scholastic marks and outside recognition than in his inner ability to respond to life's beauty, meaning, and challenge.

... I'm dictating this letter while working on a piece of sculpture. I'm pinching and pulling at clay which I have entitled the 'Tree House Guard.' Though I've titled it, I'm not even sure what it will be when I finish. Perhaps it will never be finished. Perhaps it will never have a mold made for it, or I may never decide on a material to cast it in. But nevertheless, I've started something, and the more that I work on it, the more I find myself committed to the idea of it. I'm thinking maybe the mold will crack or the material will be uncondusive to my sculpture because of my ignorance to it. Therefore, I've started something that I'm not sure of. I've just come from my classes at Junior College where I am enrolled as an auditing student. My subjects are Art Appreciation and Basic Psychology. I'm not sure if I'll be able to finish them either. But I've started something and the more I study, the more I become committed to an uncertain goal. It's both easy and hard for me. Sometimes I study a very small amount and accomplish a great deal—and at other times the reverse is true. I don't know what I am going to do. Maybe someday it will be easier to know what I have done. But that looks like a long way off. I am permitted to study only two classes because I'm auditing. I'll have to take a High School Equivalency Test if I want to enroll for credit. I don't need the credits the way I see it, but this is the only way I can get more classes. That's the big decision in my mind right now. I know that I could cheat and get the exam behind me. I really mean it; I know I could do it. I've figured it all out. But I don't

want to do that, and I don't know if I can do it on their terms. At least it would rob me of an awful lot of time that I could be using to develop the things that I *can* do instead of the things that I can't do. I'm beginning to have a better understanding of the things I can do. I'm taking tests in my psychology class. I might have told you once before, it seems at times I have a charmed life. My psychology teacher is new at the college; she's been spending the last two years I know working as a psychologist in schools for children with learning disabilities. I hadn't told anyone when I enrolled that I could not read or write. But just before the first test I explained it to my psychology teacher. It was a little puzzling to her, I believe. I mean I think she didn't understand why I was going to school, but I didn't try to explain too much. I just gave her the facts and asked for some help. I took my first test orally and much to my surprise, I made an A. There were 36 students in the class and 5 A's given. You know I even doubted that she gave me the right grade. I thought she had made a mistake and was trying to give me false security. It was funny to believe that I had made the A. I mean, I really knew it, and yet at times I really couldn't believe it.

Later I received the text book on records from the Library of Congress. The next test was put on a tape by the teacher, leaving a portion blank after the question, and I verbally replied. This time I had to get rid of my doubts; I made the second highest grade in the class. When the psychology teacher told me I had made another A, I noticed puzzlement in her eyes. I think she's doubting. I suppose the reason I'm making these grades is because I'm trying harder than the other students. If they tried as hard as I try, I think sometimes I couldn't keep up. But maybe that's a bit of the old doubter coming through again.

I didn't try to take tests in Art Appreciation because I thought it would be too difficult to explain to someone who is not familiar with such problems. Though we really had some great conversations in class, I think it would handicap my activities if he knew I had never read an art book. I'm enjoying the charade. The art teacher and none of the students know who I am or why I am there. The only information the teacher has is my IBM card which reads auditing—artist. He's curious, but he has never asked. At first he

seemed to think that I was a teacher who had decided to sit in on his class; then apparently he got more information about me. He sometimes throws questions at me when the subject gets very deep; and when I'm through responding I feel that we both have a surprised look on our faces! It's really fun to have someone to talk to about art."

When a book on learning disabilities was sent to him, Dwayne replied to the author in this fashion: "Saturday morning I was sitting around the studio thinking what a dull day this was going to be. I had spent the whole morning trying to figure out the future. I took a walk around the block; and when I returned home, stomping the wet grass off my feet, I saw in my door a package that a neighbor had left. The mailman had made another mistake, I thought. When I opened it and read the title, I said to myself, 'That's really beautiful. Someone who knows me and knows of my difficulties has found a book that will be informative or helpful for me and they have sent it to me.' I thumbed through it thinking what a very kind gesture this was and how I would have liked to have done it for someone else.

"As I began to struggle over the words, I suddenly had the feeling that this book has the same effect as a sculptured piece of art or soothing and exciting colors on a canvas. I realized that I was looking at a piece of art. What I was holding was your creation, part of you, just like David expressed the flowing movement that Michelangelo felt, and Van Gogh's paintings expressed his energy. I think I see a difference, or maybe there is no difference, but I thought that it's not only a work of art, but it's a tool that will help shape other people, that will give them courage until help can come or give them a direction to find help. It must be wonderful to know that you've created something that will truly be a positive effect on people who can appreciate the effort. With clay and paint you never know.

"Two months later I was no longer employed and was busy painting my rent house when the letter came from the Peace Corps. I was sitting on the front porch, scanning the paper that would have the answer. I knew it was this letter that would say yes or no. I kept going over and over it to make sure I knew what it said. Finally I was sure—all doubt was removed—I had read it well

enough to know that I was being turned down. I sat there with the paint brush in my hand with the paint drying on my fingers. I guess I was waiting for a clap of thunder—or the clouds to turn black. I expected something would grab me from the inside and pull me wrong side out, but it didn't happen. I just climbed up on the ladder and began painting the house white. I painted for a long time, just thinking nothing. And then I guess I felt something very healthy—anger. I don't like the feeling of anger, but it was better than what I had expected. I began to talk to myself saying things like: I don't need the Peace Corps to do what I really need to do. The Peace Corps would be the easy way. It's not the only way. I only wanted to use them for transportation to get to a place where I could be of use, a place where there would be a need. There are the Hopi Indians on the Mesa Verde Flats, I thought. Why should I refuse people only 1,000 miles away? Their need can be as great as someone's need 10,000 miles away.

"The house was soon finished and all my business affairs were taken care of and my time was my own. My obligations and ties were becoming completely severed now. Now I can move in any direction that I feel, or even stay right here for awhile if I want to.

"Lee and Judy reminded me of my desire to go to school. It wasn't as ridiculous an idea as some people might think. In a matter of two days I was enrolled in college.

"I'm using college as a test to see if I can attend full time. The Rehabilitation Center said they would pay my tuition if I took at least 15 hours a semester and of course there is still the test. So, I don't know. The way I have to study, 15 hours might be too much of a load. And it might take me the rest of my life to get a high school education. Last week we visited a special training center for children. This was a field trip for our psychology class. While we were watching the children through the observation windows, I recall thinking that it might be worth trying for a degree so that I might direct my energy helping those who need it. I don't know, I don't know if I could work that hard. As I think about it it sounds ridiculous—absolutely ridiculous! A man who can't read or write, having a degree and even more ridiculous having it in Special Education. But I keep toying with the idea as if it could really happen.

"If I believe that it could happen I think I could find the energy to do it. But I don't know if the education system could accept the idea, and I wouldn't blame them if they didn't. But the thought is there and it keeps bouncing like a rubber ball, coming back to me each time I throw it away."

In speaking about a counselor who was helping him with his college enrollment, Dwayne wrote: "I called her a few days later and she had found out that I would not need to take the GED test because I was already enrolled. It seemed as if I had slipped in the back door, at least that's the way I felt. I pictured myself slipping through a thin crack as the door was being shut on a windy, brisk fall day. I saw myself looking out through the door, watching the wind toss leaves around. Maybe I saw just a little smirk on my mouth as I stood there among all the students facing their books. I am sure you have rushed inside a building on a windy day and felt the warmth of a crowded hallway. It was wonderful, just beautiful. I tried to tell her how it made me feel—though I needed to say nothing. I think she knew it, knew the feeling just as I did.

"I'm so glad to find such beautiful people, without them it would be a strange and cold world. I hate to think of the people who don't know the feeling, I want everybody to feel that way.

"I think of you that way. . . . Doesn't it feel good? That's what we are doing . . . all of us who know it. We all want everyone to feel it. That's what your work is doing, passing it on and letting it grow.

"There are still going to be problems, I think of that sometimes, but I'm ready for it. I think I've been given just enough, just enough to keep going . . . and I mean going forward. I don't think about failing anymore. I mean I don't let myself—Not very much anyway. There's too much ahead to think too much about the past."

