The Portrait of the Dead

Every day, you come in contact with portraits of the dead. Every portrait tells a story. Portraits do not have to be just visual pictures. They can also be done with written words. Words can be just as creative, lovely, and moving as a snapshot. Essay 2 is your chance to write a 5+ page portrait of someone who has died. It can be a relative, a famous person, or someone you have never met. There is one catch. There will be three voices in this paper: Yours, the dead, and the voice of a person alive, whom you will interview. Through your words, you will create a portrait. Through this portrait, your audience should leave feeling a connection with, and perhaps love or hatred of, the deceased.

The Assignment: Write a 5+ page portrait of someone who is deceased. There should be multiple voices in the paper. You will need to interview someone who knew the deceased and include their voice in the paper. Often, just like a picture, a portrait takes a snapshot of a single event and does not encompass a person’s total life; however, that snapshot can tell everything your audience needs to know about the person.

When I evaluate the portrait, I will be looking for:

- **Clear purpose and focus.** There should be a reason you have chosen your subject. What is so important about them that you have written about them and that your audience wants to read about them?
- **A strong lead.** You must make the reader want to continue reading after only two or three sentences. (ties in directly with purpose and focus)
- **A snapshot of a funny, dramatic, exciting, or emotionally filled, anecdote (short story).** Portraits often rely on anecdotes and a strong narrative to catch the reader’s interest.
- **Written from multiple points of view.** You will need to make clear decisions on points of view and stick to them.
- **Dialogue.** Let your audience hear the voices.
- **Go beyond descriptions and tell something of the character of the subject through the subject’s own voice.** Let the subject speak for themselves using direct quotes and actions.
- **Clear scene and setting.** Where it occurs will help the portrait move toward your goal as the writer.
- **Obvious knowledge of the subject.** This will require spending time with your interview subject and great listening skills.
- **Effective Structure.** Your reader must be able to follow the story and enjoy reading it.
- **Clear writing that is free of distracting errors**
- **Honesty.** This is NON-FICTION. It should be as accurate as possible.