

# The Tactics of Hope

By Pamela Cytrynbaum, Northwestern University



My name is Mr. C to the y  
 not afraid to cry  
 flows so smooth you think  
 that I lie  
 Better known as that man who  
 likes to teach, and I always  
 feel  
 ready to make a speech  
 I spend most of my time trying to  
 avoid the rhyme because rhyme  
 doesn't pay  
 You can usually find me piecing po-  
 ems  
 Together like high quality  
 quilts, patches  
 & squares borrowed & found  
 my poems keep you warm &  
 safe  
 I secretly wish I was a good writer  
 this is true  
 Some day I will be known for my  
 integrity  
 above all else  
 I would like to thank my son for my  
 rebirth  
 My name is Mr. C. to the Y call  
 me C-Baum  
 Better known as the man who likes  
 to write even when I don't

know what to say I write  
 and write anyway  
 I spend most of my time crafting  
 a rhyme  
 You can usually find me trying  
 to do what's write

I feel like an autumn leaf,  
 reddish orange & ready to fall  
 My mind is a spinning top  
 Can't quite keep it all  
 And now know that knowl-  
 edge is  
 found in every small snatch of  
 molecular moment

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*“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.” – bell hooks*

Why do so many stories of soul-sized living always include this sentence:

“All of this (fill in wonderful social-ly-just work, innovation, extraordinary accomplishments) was actually inspired by a (fill in what kind of teacher, often high school but not always) teacher who first saw my potential and told me I could do (fill in the great work/art/writing/contribution) what I, myself, could never envision. So I'm here today because of a great teacher.”

What is it about what a great teacher sees in us? How do they push/pull/lure it out of us, mirror it back to us, deepen it, and then somehow stuff it back into us in such a way that we feel complete ownership over the very skill/passion/talent/dream we could hardly even speak before?

Joe Cytrynbaum, my beloved brother, was *that* teacher. Mr. C. And then some. After his shocking and senseless



death on July 11, after the weeks of stunned numbness, the agonizing pain, I was left with the deep, aching regret for the 40 years of questions and conversations I was supposed to have with him, and now, never will. Of all the myriad questions flooding me, none haunts me more than: What makes you the great teacher you are? How do you do the extraordinary work you do, every single day, no matter the student, the obstacle, the limitations, the conflicts? How do you engage so fully; how do you compel students like some giant, beaming magnet?

How do I know he did this? Because they told me. Hundreds of students, former students, colleagues, department chairs, principals, all made sure their great Joe Stories were heard. They wrote them on Facebook. They left them on voicemails. They sent them around and around on long e-mail chains.

Scores of Joe's students came to the memorial service we held for him, for them, for us. Room for 700, more than 1,000 people packed into the room, snaked around the

lobby, out the door, wanting in.

In that service, many of the most heartbreaking, heartsoaring moments came from the spoken-word poetry performances of his students.

Apparently no one could resist his relentless confidence in their learning.

Talking with and listening to his students, I found him right there. Beside them. Where he'd always been. Turns out, his magic came in both the big things and the seemingly smallest gestures that made all the difference. At the beautiful memorial service Umoja Student Development Corporation held for Joe, student after student walked up to the stage at Manley High School and performed their spoken-word poems they wrote to ease their loss and celebrate Joe's light in their lives. The poems were astonishing. There are no words to describe their words. So you simply must read them.

Vasawa "Thekingofvrworld" Robinson sparked the first flame in what became a wildfire of student verses about Joe, woven to-

gether by their love and pain, spread stratospherically through Facebook.

Vasawa titled it, simply:

### A TEACHER. A MENTOR. A LEGEND

*If i could fly away, what would you do? what would you say. if i could fly to a better place. would you understand.....*

*sitting in a room that fit about seventy people. where our pads became skin, our pens became needles. injecting ink. it became an addiction. it became a habit. the word of the day you'll say. then we'll proceed to write about a topic. you'll grab your journal, freestyle your writings. while you took a bite of some snack that was organic. seeds, you planted. life, you didn't take for granted. when it came to danger you never panic. you was calm. like the seas. your spirit will forever live in me, like my lungs and kidney. when nobody didn't believe*





*in me. you did. you stayed on me. reminding. to applying knowledge. VR you can be so much better if you go to college. i would say it ain't that easy. he would say then VR explain it to me. he'll hear my excuse, then he'll say V is you crazy, your talented, you have a gift. saying to myself. what do Joe see in me? trying to avoid reality. using my imagination, to erase my past memories. covering it up with jokes and laughs. Joe saw my pain. He spent time after school getting to know me. playing a role. my father didn't audition for.*

*believe VR Custom Kickz will not just be a dream. but one day i'll own my own store. Joe didn't want you to settle for less, he wanted you to strive for more. somewhere close to excellence. becoming a father, Joe became a parent. i can honestly say i never saw Joe act Cocky and Arrogant. wait a minute. one time in the honda. when he showed off his cassette deck. his collections was Public Enemy. Rakim, to KRS-One on cassette tapes.*

*driving through the hood. one time i even heard joe say what's good? your death was unexpected and i think everybody else would agree. that your son was the addition, you was subtracted. leaving an improper fraction. to be calculated by the ones that love you the most. i'm going to miss you. i'm going to miss the time when you dropped the S word. then real quick replace it with shute. then i said what you say. you said the S word again. following up with chute. that was funny, there's not enough space here on facebook to explain the feelings i got you. like you told me let my soul live through you. no more nothing less. as i gazed unto the sunset, it's like i can see your halo, and your wings are opening up. singing...*

*If i could fly away, what would you do? what would you say. if i could fly to a better place. would you understand...Yes i will. cause you was A Teacher. A Mentor. Joe you was A Legend. I will always Love You. Flipside 4 Life. Rest In Peace. -VR*

Ethereal D. Watts, a former student Joe stood up for at his wedding, picked up the verse and wrote his own:

### A TEACHER. A MENTOR. A LEGEND

*Peace and Blessings to the FLIPSIDE FAMILY!!! Is what you would have said to us when we meet. Why did you have to leave? A legacy you brought us, with rocky as the next best born.*

*A teacher who taught teachers to teach better, mental thoughts flowing from your cerebrum like a running river stream to help us better. You spoke with wisdom and much knowledge, and even had us focus on going to college.*

*The knowledge you spit from wherever to whoever broke down barriers, to rocking villages.*

*Man I miss it.....*

*Silly haikus sends the class laughing by the excitement in your voice when you spoke it, constant thinking while*

writing was in progress. A signature move you would do: Looks up at the class while we write and flash a smile like giving us your blessing from a silent prayer.

I miss that time when I would come to the UMOJA office and you would be standing there with your arms stretched out with a smile on your face while you looked at me and said "E-REAL!!!"

And I would say "That's not my name, it's BLUE!!!" Then you would spit a funny rhyme.

Man how time flies.

A mentor because you had that gift, to better the lives of others. But you became less of a mentor and moved more over to a father to me.

I may never told u that, but it's true. I remember when you developed me into a poet, and I took up the name E-REAL for you. I remember the time I couldn't wait to get out of class just to show you the poems I wrote, and even some days I would run to your office.

And now the legend has just begun, We as in the flipside family and every single person life you impacted shall

live on through US. I don't know why you had to go..... I don't know if this is a poem.....

I don't know how to move on..... You were one of my groomsmen, I thought you would be here for a while. We all thought it. But we never would have thought that we would lose you as soon as we did. YOU ARE MY TEACHER. YOU ARE MY MENTOR. YOU ARE A LEGEND!

### Ed' Juan Eddie Edwards: Is There A Meaning To Life?

Is There A Meaning To Life  
Cause I No Longer Know  
I Am Just A Lost Soul  
Walking Down This Broken Road  
I Was Told That I Was Meant For  
Greatness  
But Now-A-Days Greatness Dies  
Within A Flick Of The Wrist And  
The Blink Of An Eye  
So Is There A Meaning To Life  
When The Hopeful Becomes The

Hopeless  
When The All-Knowing Becomes  
Dumb  
And When A Guardian-Angel Wings  
Have Been Clipped  
Well If This Is So I Guess This Life I  
Can No Longer Deal With  
For I Am Slowly Losing Hope For Better  
Days  
It Feels As If All I Knew Is Wrong  
And My Guardian-Angel Joe Cytrynbaum  
Is Gone  
So Is There A Meaning To My Life  
Because It Feels As If My Heart Is Being  
Ripped In Two  
The Little Angel And Devil On My  
Shoulders No Longer Fight On Telling  
Me What To Do  
For They Are Confused  
And I Know That I Am Doing Some-  
Things That Can Have A Bad Impact  
On My Life  
But I Feel That I Should Just Live  
With No Regrets  
And Later-On I Can Deal With It  
So Is There A Meaning To Life For  
Someone Like Me?





## L'Tanya Soblessed Hamblett

*SITTING HERE STILL THINKING ABOUT A GOD SENT ANGEL FROM ABOVE. HE WAS PUT ON THIS EARTH TO LEAD YOUNG ADULTS IN THE RIGHT WAY. HE INSPIRED MANY YOUNG ADULTS TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAM AND WE DID BECAUSE WE HAD SOMEONE TO BELIEVE IN US AND TELL US TO KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK. NOT ONLY HIM BUT THE UMOJA STAFF. THEY HAVE DID ALOT FOR MANLEY STUDENTS AND ME PERSONALLY MYSELF WANT TO THANK YOU ALL. WANT TO THANK YOU FOR ALL THE COUNTLESS THINGS YOU HAVE DONE FOR US. THANKING YOU FOR TAKING TIME OUT OF UR BUSY SCHEDULES TO DEAL WITH US AND OUR MESS AND GIVING US ADVICE. AND ALSO GETTING SUM OF US OUT OF TROUBLE. THANKING YOU ALL FOR BEING SO ENERGETIC, AND THAT STARTED OUR DAYS OF SCHOOL WHEN MANY OF US FELT LIKE GIVING UP OR NOT BEING THERE. THANKING YOU ALL FOR THE MANY TRIPS YOU HAVE PROVIDED FOR US TO FURTHR OUR EDUCATION OR FOR LEADERSHIP RETREATS. THANK YOU FOR THE MANY PROGRAMS: JUST US, AND WOMEN OF DESTINY , SCDC, FLIP-SIDE, AND MANY MORE. YOU ALL DOESNT KNOW THE IMPACT YOU PUT ON MANLEY. YOU MADE MANLEY A BETTER SCHOOL. SO THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART. JOE WAS THERE FOR ME WHEN MY GRANNY DIED. HE KEPT ME GOING BY SAYING HE KNEW SHE WAS A WONDERFUL PERSON BECAUSE IT SHINE THROUGH ME. AND HE DIDNT EVEN KNOW HER. BUT YOU ARE UP THERE WITH HER NOW. SO NOW YOU CAN SEE HOW WONDERFUL SHE IS. GOD SAID WELL DONE MY SERVANT, COME ON HOME WITH ME AND REST. NO MORE PAIN AND NO MORE SORROW. RIP JOE. U WILL BE DEEPLY MISSED!!!*

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A few hours after the Umoja memorial celebration I stood, with my sister(-in-law), Joe's wife, on their back porch, staring at a mountain of boxes cleared out of Joe's office. His files, notes, lesson plans, strategies, research. Right in there. Was he in there? Could I find him, somehow?

I thought if I dove into those boxes, read every single lesson plan, every note jotted in the margins, every edit he made to the lesson while he was teaching the actual lesson; if I memorized his learning outcomes, goals, methodologies, pedagogical framework; if I pored over every word of his dissertation, could I get to him? Could I get him back?

I could delve into his brain and somehow watch the magic, get the tour, find the key, the answer. How do you get under the skin of teaching excellence?

One of the countless tragedies of the loss of my brother, a personal loss I cannot yet begin to fathom, is that I never saw him teach. I can't believe it. How is that possible? We talked about teaching all the time. For hours. Yet, I never made the time or took the opportunity to observe him in the most natural of his many habitats. That is one of my life's greatest regrets.

And so this quest. Into his mind; into his mindfulness; into the wild of his energy and passion and planning and endless attention to the smallest detail.

After spending hours in my brother's teaching mind, I did indeed find marvelous lesson plans, engaging writing prompts, masterful self-advice and observations penciled in, chicken-scrawled in, crammed passionately into all the white spaces. I have so much great teaching to take into my own classrooms. And part of my question is answered.

Begin from hope. In one of Joe's daily schedules he jotted a reminder to himself about how to brainstorm a Code of Conduct. His handwritten addition: "*Frame In Positive=WE WILL.*"

He began his work with students, always, with an opening ritual, a chant, something to honor their gathering. He ended with a closing ritual, same idea. It was always a privilege for him to be among his students and his colleagues. He never, ever lost that. Not

in the bureaucratic twangles or the overwhelming, impossible To Do lists of his life and work: fight for justice, work for equality, revolutionize education. All to be done before lunch is over.

Another note to himself: "*Know WHY you're doing WHAT you're doing—intention.*"

What is it about a great teacher? What makes this kind of teacher tic? What I know from Joe's writing and planning and revising and rethinking is that great teaching is insanely hard work. It takes extraordinary mindfulness, incredible openness, meticulous planning and yet, the wild-eyed ability to throw everything out and respond to the immediacy and organic nature of truly engaged learning. *This* isn't working. *That* got them talking and writing. Let's chuck *this* and go with *that*. This cognitively dissonant practice made my brother's teaching both full of high standards, rigorous, well-planned and structured content while also being profoundly alive, immediate, responsive, essential and deeply engaged and engaging. What student could resist being captured by this magical combination?

Jotted beneath notes on curriculum ideas, Joe wrote: "*The group process wk = in follow up convos outside of the group – Look @ tactics of hope.*"

Vasawa's line indelibly etched into my heart: *He spent time after school getting to know me. playing a role. my father didn't audition for.*

It was true. Joe spent so much time thinking and writing about the cultural, economic, musical, geopolitical, emotional, physical, literal, metaphorical, political, meta-physical place from whence his students came. In a poem responding to a "Fear of" prompt, Joe wrote one of the most heartbreaking pieces:

*Fear of losing people, of  
writers not returning  
Fear of not challenging you  
enough or  
in the right way  
Fear of not improving*

*Fear of implosion  
Fear of one comment too many  
the comment that broke your  
back  
Fear of disrespect  
Fear of you deciding to leave and  
give up*

In his poem entitled “Dilemmas,” Joe grappled with finding his students where they’re at, where they’re from. What must it have been like to have a teacher who cared so deeply, who worked so hard to know you? It’s striking how he struggled to know himself here, as well, to find his own place, role in these lives, and in the “bigger picture machinations” made invisible to his students by their need to simply survive.

Erin’s Note: This poem is about 21<sup>st</sup> Place—the community in which Joe not only worked but lived. Joe naturally connects to the young people in schools and out—always aware and connected to the youth culture. In our neighborhood, from the littlest preschooler, affectionately named “Little Man” who truly adored Joe, always looking for him through our gate, always asking—“Where’s Joe?” to an older boy just on the brink of ganghood—hopeful and vulnerable. This poem speaks about the older boy, our neighbor. Joe befriended him when he was ten years old or so.

## Dilemmas

*Guys rock the block  
Have it on lock  
11 years old hits the joint  
I’m shocked*

*They corrupt him  
Disrupt him from silly tac on seat  
transgressions  
Brain cells killed  
Growth stunted  
As the shorty gets blunted  
Laughing at clouds of collusionary,  
illusionary  
Belonging*

*Up and down the alley  
Watch your back  
Crowns, forks and hearts*

*Flipped, dropped and cracked  
Brick wall vernacular  
Scrawled and painted, etched and  
scratched  
Each day i decipher  
Spray painted narratives in black and  
silver  
Krylon missives give me misgivings*

*Hoodies cloak identities  
Who are your enemies?  
Men in Kevlar with shields and cuffs?  
An eye for an eye for an eye for an eye  
for an eye etc.  
Always worry bout bullets getting’ ya  
Can’t see bigger picture machinations  
Frustrate you with rap sheets  
Metaphors ink your skin  
Like Gwendolyn wrote, “We  
Sin sin.”*

*And the dilemmas  
Begin*

*Mom works long late hours leaving  
you to figure it out  
Works two jobs, three jobs  
Sobs  
For losses  
Condescending bosses  
She crosses her ankles, sighs as she  
rides the blue line  
west  
Doesn’t know you joined them  
At ten jumped in  
Now your kin  
Can’t seem to win  
Dilemmas continuing*

*Still go to church  
Eyes fixed to the crucifix as you pray  
that Christ can fix  
Oxymoronic models of misunderstood  
manhood  
Tattooed tears you won’t cry for thir-  
teen year old killed  
in a drive by as  
Officer Ryan shakes his head, “Live by  
the sword, die by  
the sword”  
His cliché’ untoward as  
Blue lights flash a big brother blink  
Politicos press flesh and don’t address  
the  
Real dilemmas*

*When Tupac talked of thug life he  
meant to inspire you  
When the bullets hit did he die for  
you?*

*My young friend  
I don’t know how to help you*

*This poem, my offering  
A set of cryptic images collaged to  
absolve you  
And me  
In hopes that we can be free of these  
Dilemmas*

I interpret his poem called “Portrait,” as Joe’s exploration of some of the role models he competed with for his students’ respect. It feels unfinished, so I think the rest of it must be deeper in one of those boxes. But here it is. As always, I am struck by both his empathy and lack of judgment.

Erin’s Note: This poem is about “Romeo”, the gang leader, on 21<sup>st</sup> Place where we lived. He was a dynamic presence on our block, and certainly a magnetic personality influencing the young men and much else in our neighborhood. You could hear him coming from afar, Romeo and Joe had long, long talks all of the time. A conversation between friends. Romeo confided in Joe his stories and personal battles...

## Portrait

*Arms painted with cryptic phrases/  
RIP’S & the organizational  
/iconography, gang affiliation  
And the name of your love  
etched forever in blue ink on your  
neck  
Blue Chicago Cubs hat with the  
Red “C” sits/ tilted to one side/  
Pit bull physique and you look 19  
but I know you are 30  
Your clothes hang loose/ always  
Baggy/ 4x shirts and 40 inch  
waist/ head shaved clean/ BIC close  
Your smile cloaks the rage unleashed  
by your fists/ tattooed knuckles/ tat-  
toos  
on the palms of your hands/ a  
self-inflicted stigmata*



*A walking contradiction/ guns  
you hate but know you need*

He also struggled mightily with where he himself was from. E-town, Evanston, Illinois – nationally renowned for its voluntary integration efforts. Joe and I, our friends, their families, were all part of a great experiment from which we benefited enormously. Joe struggled to make sense of the disconnect – and the connections – between being an upper-middle class college professor’s kid, and the lives of the working class and the marginalized African-American students we came up with.

*You assume when you see me with  
My white skin and fancy stroller  
that I am here to displace  
you, to take over the neighborhood  
Push you out  
I am not, and yet I am  
I am part of the process  
Guilty even if it isn’t my intention  
it doesn’t need to be intentional  
Because it’s structural and systemic  
Gentrification happens so quick  
appears natural because it’s so slick*

From his poems I learned more about his sense of himself as outsider/insider, of his grappling with who he is, what he does, and how what he does makes him who he is.

**Mr. C**

*I am Joe aka Mr. C. aka Joe, Josh  
I spend most of my time writing  
and finding ways to write  
I secretly wish I had my own  
school  
You can usually find me at Manley or  
Collins Academy or Douglas Park  
or up in Evanston  
I would like to thank YOU for reading  
this  
I will someday be known for being  
a kind person*

Equally stunning to me were the stories they told to introduce their poems, the moments and memories of their teacher that they carried with them up the stairs, onto the stage. These are the moments of grace, the white space between the lesson plans, the pedagogical outcomes, where the magic happened.

A young woman got up to the stage and offered a simple, elegant, life-altering teachable moment. She was too scared to perform her first poem. Couldn’t do it. Shaking with fear and self doubt. She looked out, and saw her teacher, Mr. C, that big bear of a man with his gigantic, goofy smile and dancing chocolate-brown eyes so full of love, unquenchable optimism, and irresistibly deep, deep confidence in us all. What was his teaching

magic? The open sesame that tripped the wire in her brain that unsealed the Pandora’s Box of self-esteem and promise and hope and sheer guts?

*“He gave me the thumbs up sign.”*

One young man, lanky, and taut, introduced himself by saying he never thought poetry was for him, not his thing. And then my brother cajoled him into giving it a try. So he did, clearly undone by his teacher’s intense powers of compulsion. And it wasn’t terrible. In fact, he thought his poem was great. So he showed it to his teacher.

*Now I’m picturing my brother wrap-  
ping this kid in one of his famous  
bear hugs, high fives, loud, LOUD  
praise and affirmations all around.  
A heartwarming story. I’m ready to  
weep again. This is the secret of his  
greatness. Unconditional love. Total  
acceptance and support. . Lure them  
in, and then kill ‘em with praise and  
positive reinforcement, right?*

But the young man looks down at the memory, staring back at him from the floor, and says: Mr. C read it over, and pronounced it “a good place to start.”

*What? Are you kidding me? Crushing  
his spirit? Destroy him? What peda-  
gogical playbook is this coming from?*



*Why would he do that?*

My brother told him now the hard work of revision, of editing, of precision begins. Go back and revise it. Let me see your second draft, he told the young man, whom I assumed would then say he dropped out, reliving all the other profound rejections he'd faced, and that now he regretted the chance he never got.

But no, there was a second draft. And a third. And dozens more poems and drafts and hard work and praise earned and kept. The young man rose to the challenge, kept at it, keeps at it. Praise and confidence nobody could take away because it had been given to the student by the student – with a little help from one of the world's great teachers.

Joe, Mr. C, thought and wrote about his new baby son, and his students, in equal measure. As a father, as a teacher, he taught and wrote his way toward a kind of depth of understanding and empathy almost unfathomable.

Will his students ever know how they were known? He did not live in "their" neighborhood as poli-

tics. He lived in the neighborhood of his students as their neighbor.

*I write to shed light on the hidden/ the held back and the pushed down/  
My poems tell stories and seek to break down/ Assumptions/  
like scientific analysis, it's calculus/ so take a breath and listen as I christen this poem.../*

#### **Fatherhood/**

*Cause poems can parent and raise children, nourish like water and sun*

*My son  
Meet your first poem.....*

*You heard the words, and rhymes*

*Metaphors and \_\_\_\_\_ verses  
Energy, a stage and a mic/*

*In your mother's arms  
the world opened again as it does daily*

*Your brown green eyes  
transfixed by energy emanating from gesticulations and shifting*

*vocalizations modulations*

#### *Poetry*

*You can't even understand the words but you understand the story/ lyrical metaphors  
but these rhymes aren't nursery*

*Trust me*

*You will soon fully comprehend  
the poly syllabic pacifier that has hold of your brain*

Maybe the greatest lesson I take from the privileged perch of my beloved brother's mindful mind, is that right alongside hypervigilant diligence, respect for the organic interruptions of lesson plans S-curving away from you and back to your students, and exactly high expectations, the super not-so-secret ingredient to his master teaching was, it turns out, an old family trait: An unquenchable, unstoppable passion to teach, to push yourself relentlessly to do it better, to reach them more deeply, to get right up into the grill of your students' learning. My brother and I come from a family of teachers. It is our family trade, handed down from our parents. What we learned, what we observed, what we were fed, was the essential truth of engagement. For Joe, fully engaged teaching meant not only getting into his students' heads, but into their shoes and chairs, too. He wrote right there, next to them, right with them. He walked beside them. He tried on their shoes and walked marathons in them. They watched him write, heard him perform, learned as he narrated his own anxious imperfections. And all of it kept him on fire. Kept them all on fire.

Nearly every writing prompt he gave them, he wrote, too. Tucked inside the mountain of Joe's boxes, embedded quite literally in his lesson plans and dog-eared, pen-smudged, marginalia-filled notes and schedules, are a treasure trove of hundreds of poems he wrote, alongside his students, beside them. Message: *I am of you. Our journey is the same.*

One of my great regrets is that I never saw my brother teach. I never taught with him. We never wrote about teaching together, never collaborated





on all of the ideas we explored endlessly on the phone. Somehow, finding his lesson plans, his notes, I thought I'd find him. And I did. And it is a blessed curse. Discovering his poems has been a searingly painful, wonderful gift. They are pieces of him, of his heart, we have to hold onto. But reading them, reading them, for me, is G-dawful and cruel. If I could pray, I would pray for the time when I might read them with joy and memory, with his hope, inspiration and boundless optimism, his revolutionary spirit, his vast empathy. Today they simply break my heart and make me miss him, impossibly, more.

But, they make me want to teach.

### Can't write at night

*Can't write can't write at night can't write right at night just can't write at night...right?*

*So tired real tired yet wired not inspired though I desire a fire of inspiration but I just can't seem to get my mind right to write at night. Ahight!? Mismanaged misinformed misguided misused misunderstood not good mistaken wrists shaken cause I'm tired and it's late and I just can't fight through to write right this late at night.*

*So I think and think as Bob Dylan turns to Neil Young turns to Elvis Costello turns to Digable Planets turns to, "Stop, hey what's that sound? Everybody look what's going down" And I keep it mellow through the fog and mist of my weak and tired wired shoulders and neck through this perpetual mic check*

*But the images and words and ideas sit tight in my dream differential, you know, that Freudian reptilian chillin dream maker. The subconscious. But I can't launch this piece of creative HUH!!!! Back breaker of a mist twister of a written that I am unable to write tonight this night not so different than all other nights.*

*And I feel a little warm, a faint sweat layer on my brow—cliché' but so true sweat on my brow, dang, all I come up with is these clichés brow sweat and such.*

*But the warmth is actually to be exact just above my brow making my forehead gleam.*

*Maybe I have a fever. I definitely don't feel quite right and I really know deep down that I shouldn't write at night anyway.*

*And then I feel it in my chest and stomach and I need to shave. I will*

*shave in the morning, no doubt. And I will feel tired. Because my inability to write messed up my night and ruined my sleep.*

*So...*

*where do poems come from, anyway?*

**10/1/07**

*I am a bear, hungry tired mellow  
I roam Douglas Park, loops counter  
Clockwise*

*LISTENING to the underground  
sounds of*

*Sense one, a Chicago original  
Or guitar roars of Sonic Youth  
when I feel poetic, WILCO abstrac-*

*tions*

*make me think  
Every morning I arrive at school,  
energized by adolescent energy and  
hope*

*See beauty and greatness clad  
in white tees, black pants  
or purple and khaki,  
smiling hope*

*5 or 10 years, I will still write  
and teach and learn*

*A little better, A little wiser*

*A graying bear*

*Always half asleep*

*or*

*half awake*

