Winesburg, Indiana: Dear Class of 2011

Deb Olin Unferth
Winesburg, Indiana: Dear Class of 2011

Abstract
Dear Class of 2011, The room as I sit looking at it (once again) is the usual square-and-rectangle composite, only now it contains an additional rectangular item: this handheld reading device for which I thank you, though it will not stave off loneliness, if that’s what you were thinking. At this point I don’t even care anymore. It’s fine, let it be there, loneliness, I like it. In fact I’m so used to it, I prefer it that way because then I can do things exactly as I think they should be, exactly as I want them.

Keywords
loneliness, technology, news, apathy

Cover Page Footnote
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Dear Class of 2011,

The room as I sit looking at it (once again) is the usual square-and-rectangle composite, only now it contains an additional rectangular item: this handheld reading device for which I thank you, though it will not stave off loneliness, if that’s what you were thinking. At this point I don’t even care anymore. It’s fine, let it be there, loneliness, I like it. In fact I’m so used to it, I prefer it that way because then I can do things exactly as I think they should be, exactly as I want them.

I have all my news stories lined up on my new handheld reading device, hundreds of them, and I’ll read them in the order I think is best. For the next two years I will be slowly catching up on my news story reading. Two years from now, while you are home for the holidays, come check in on me and I assure you I will be almost caught up on my news stories, all my favorite columnists, all the little tips for daily living and pieces of nutritional advice that you know I’ve been waiting for, my favorite stories about the White House, what one government said about another. I will have read them all and have a solid schedule for reading future ones. If I’m busy one week, I’ll have to hurry home and catch up on my news story reading because one can get far behind with these handheld things and you know the pain, the sense of a lack of completion one feels when one has to delete a bunch of news stories unread—not that you missed something important (though you may have, who knows),
but that you didn’t complete the series. (Where does that need come from? I don’t know.) Now that I have this new handheld reading device I can plan away and download furiously, every tip and news bit and update, get them all on this thing before it’s too late and they vanish, before the Internet space hatch closes over them and they are gone. What will happen if they do vanish? Nothing, of course! Who cares. It will be simply another incomplete project like all the others. Who cares. I never finished Ulysses (who cares). I didn’t clean out the car (who cares). I don’t know how to love (who cares). I’m alone in this room (who cares). My only baby died (who cares). My brother’s in a wheelchair (who cares). The sky glows (who cares). I never figured out what I wanted (who cares). I still have years to go (who cares). I can hear sounds outside—school buses, voices, rain (who cares). This minute will never end (who cares).

Yours,

Emily Walls

Emile Durkheim High School English

Deb Olin Unferth is the author of *Minor Robberies* and *Vacation*, both from McSweeney’s. Her next book, *Revolution*, is forthcoming from Henry Holt. She teaches at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.