



# The Write Life

## Writing the Crap Draft:

Why Write  
Through  
Rather Than  
Write Over

The Crap Draft

Deadlines and  
Distractions

Dear Writer Letter

Volume 2,  
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May, 2010



# The Write Life

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## About Us :

The Fairfield County Writers Group (FCWG) of Connecticut was founded in 2008. Originally created as a regional chapter of National Novel Writing Month, FCWG grew into a local community of writers who are committed to writing not just in one month of the year, but every month of the year.

This magazine is an extension of that appreciation. It provides writing prompts and inspiration to craft new ideas; articles on how to better your writing skills, overcome writer's block, survive the life of a writer; and short stories.

Visit <http://www.FCWriters.com> for other offerings from FCWG.

We also have started up a CaféPress site. Check out some of our offerings: <http://www.CafePress.com/FCWriters>

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# Muse Food

## It's Not the Size That Matters...

Relativity. Perspective. Context. They all relate to each other in that a single object, person, place, time, event, universe, atom, or even name, can have an infinite amount of possibilities associated with it.

Think about it. A cube, the size of an apple could hold, well an apple for one thing. It could also hold kryptonite, rare coins, car keys, jewelry, water, a portable sun. Anything.

A room, with an obelisk in the center of it, will mean

something unique to each and every person who reads this. That's perspective. Every person's concept will be relative to each other because of the obelisk.

Now for context. What is your obelisk made out of? Size? Color? Any other objects in the room with it? Any people? Animals? Plants? Weather, elements, or lack thereof?

Write about your obelisk, and see where it takes you.

## One Words

Try basing a story with one of the

below words:

Alone

Lascivious

Everyday

Yoga

Stationary

Prom

Cuisine

Raid

Translucent

Diary

## One Liners

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

So, you're a mob boss now.

'Lolwhut' should never be an actual response.

Loneliness is a disease that can lead to death.

I will always believe in you.

The level of satisfaction you just gave me should be illegal.

Sometimes, even crumpets can kill.

Make it up as you go along, that's what I do.

The dread pirate Rubber Ducky bobbed atop the bathtub bubbles.

You could have chosen anywhere, but you just had to come here?

Did he just go 'Squeak' and fall over?

## Photographic Inspiration



Use an image as a starting point for a new story or to help jumpstart a sluggish scene.

# Muse Food

## Water, Water, Everywhere...

Sometimes the best beginnings to a story are in truth, the middles. Right in the heart of plot – where momentum has already been built and characters are interacting beyond the inevitable Getting To Know You situations when people first meet.

Start a story in the middle of the water. Where, how, why, when, who, and what are all up to you, as long as there's water. Lots and lots of water.

Dropping characters in the middle of an ocean, or

pushing one into a puddle makes for an enticing beginning. Actions occurred to get your characters into such a predicament, but that's for you to retell glimpse by glimpse over the course of the story.

For now, focus on the water at hand, and see where it takes you. Who knows, maybe it'll even get you a fully fleshed out story.

Have fun, and try not to get too wet.

## One Words

Try basing a story with one of the below words:

Hope  
Bliss  
Cheesecake  
Pause  
Break  
Rewind  
Reconnoiter  
Interstellar  
Velvet  
Reflection

## One Liners

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

Who ordered all the bad weather?  
You can't run forever.  
This life, if you consider it as such, is only just beginning.  
Didn't you just have blond hair?  
You have no idea how weird it is to have no shadow.  
I am your master and you will obey me.  
Everyone, listen up and listen good.  
You threw a waffle at me!  
Get on or get off, 'cause this baby is gonna fly.  
It's been good though, hasn't it?

## Photographic Inspiration



# First Class

## Why Write Through Rather Than Write Over

Someone once said, “Whenever you delete a sentence in your NaNoWriMo novel, a NaNoWriMo angel loses its wings and plummets, screaming, to the ground. Where it will likely require medical attention.”

Those of you familiar with NaNoWriMo will likely remember this as something the creator Chris Baty said at the beginning of NaNo 2009. This quote is one that helped me get through NaNo last year. It is one that I kept repeating to myself even as I made the angels fall to the ground.

The reasoning behind not deleting is that you can always go back, edit, and change things. During National Novel Writing Month, it is more important to get the words out than to create a perfect draft.

There is a certain number of words that must be written each day, and it doesn't matter how horrible the prose is, so long as you are writing it. I have found that this is true not only during November, but during any time of the month when I am writing too.

While it can be tempting to press down the backspace button or delete paragraphs at a time when you are reaching a stuck point, it is often better not to. Change the text to white, but keep writing. It is always easier to keep going rather than start over in the long run, and you'll feel more productive.

I have found several times that the paragraph I have wanted to get rid of actually changes a significant part of my plot. It adds something that deleting it would have gotten rid of. Not to mention how much fun it can be to read back over your manuscript once you reach the end, and laugh (or cry) at the early paragraphs.

Getting stuck and feeling like the sentence you just wrote is crap is a very common feeling. I've pressed backspace I don't know how many times just in the space of this article I have written so far. We all get perfectionist about our writing, wanting it to be better and better.

Here's the news: even bestselling authors have issues with their written work. It's in the nature of a writer

to hate what they are working on, no matter how much praise their trusted few early-readers give them.

What I have found is that the more I try to fix a sentence, the worse I think that the following attempts at that sentence are. I can never figure out the 'perfect' alignment of words, and the more I struggle over them, the more frustrated I become.

This leads to periods where I just give up on writing for days at a time, and sometimes I never go back to that story. The characters never even get to see the rising action or the climax of their plot, and slowly, the bunny that gave me the plot dies.

Writing through gets you to 'the end' faster. It gets you to that place where you feel a sense of accomplishment – you wrote a novel. You can go out, treat yourself to a nice dinner and a week of actual sleep.

Then, you come back and start to edit it. If you always are rewriting each sentence ten times before moving onto the next one to make it 'perfect', you will reach the end a lot later. You still won't be satisfied with what you wrote so editing will still be necessary.

And chances are some of the NaNoWriMo angels whose wings you removed with your backspace abuse will be very, very badly injured.

The angels exist even outside of NaNoWriMo. They are just writing angels during the eleven months of the year when it is not NaNo, but the same theory still applies – deleting a sentence causes them to lose their wings.

Remember the angels – and keep your finger off of that backspace key. Eventually, you will figure out the correct wording. Just not today.

By Lauren Welch

# First Class

## The First Cut Is The Deepest

You've written your story. You've typed up the words "The End", or some fitting equivalent. Now, it's time to start slicing up what you've written, and get to work on revising.

The first revision of any piece of writing is usually the hardest. All those clever one liners and intricate plot twists you put in. All those engaging characters, and diverse sceneries. They all need to be put under the microscope, figuratively speaking.

My first pass with the red pen involves such cosmetic touch ups. Fix the spelling, the grammar, and any dangling participles that might embarrass me later. Once I make sure all those ugly red squiggle marks in MSWord are dealt with, I prepare myself for war. War against my words.

That's where the real cutting and slicing occurs during the first revision. Making sure everything is where it's supposed to be. That's why the first cuts are the deepest. Especially since I tend to jump around a lot when writing the first time round. Unless you're capable of handling time travelling characters, it's best to put your story in chronological order.

That is unless you're writing one of those awkward See The End At The Beginning type of stories. I've never been a fan of those, it always felt like I was seeing the last page of the story. Spoilers. Never appreciated them, and always tried to avoid them.

I take note of names, places, situations, pertinent plot points - all the important bits and pieces that I want to keep track of in my story. Then I make sure that those points remain consistent throughout the whole piece. I have yet to write a piece on the first run without messing up someone's name, or filling a six-shooter with twenty bullets, or some equally awkward slip-up.

some equivalent term depending on if it's a series or a one-shot deal. The story bible details names, dates, places, the must have events of the story. Create one while revising your work, it'll help ensure you covered all the plots and sub-stories you wanted. It also comes in handy if you can't remember which character was the red head.

I've never been a big fan of editing. I always feel that with each cut of the literary scalpel I'm disfiguring the original feeling behind what I wanted to convey. It probably explains my dislike of academic professors who are obsessed with making their students rewrite their work until it becomes a Frankenstein's monster of words and phrases.

That is not to say that editing doesn't have its place though. A misspelled word here, a missing comma there. Proper spelling and punctuation can make an incredible difference in a piece of writing.

Proof of this fear would be my zombie apocalypse novel: *Slash & Burn*. I have 15+ versions of the plot, created over the course of about 5 years now. I kept on revising, version after version, trying to find the right combo.

Then, going back to my first revised version, *S&B 2.0* as it were, I saw just how far I'd strayed from my original concept.

Too many revisions, diluting the original feel of the story. I've since archived the other versions and have been using version 2.0 as a template for my latest attempts. It's been surprisingly effective. I'm not stumbling over all the troubles and misdirections from the original crap-draft, but I'm also not bogged down in endless 'what-if I did this' tangents with the story that plague later drafts.

# Writers Sphere

## The Crap Draft

The crap draft. Everyone has one – that very first draft of a novel. Your story in raw form. Even the most published authors had early versions of their stories that they slaved over for hours to bring to the form that is sold in most major bookstores.

It is important to realize this – everyone had a crap draft, no matter what the current version is, no matter how amazing it is to read.

Getting finished with the draft, reaching the point where you could write ‘the end’ is the first step to becoming a novelist. It gives you the right to brag about the story you wrote even if it needs a complete rewrite before it is even editing worthy. But you did it, you wrote a draft.

While the very thought of printing it off to edit it, to attack your story with red ink, may make you cringe, you still completed a draft.

The important thing is that you finished. You beat down your inner critic and inner editor for weeks, maybe even months to get the story to reach the end. It is done, and you can celebrate the completion before you brave hitting ‘print’.

Once you do go about editing, you will see how much crap there is in the draft, and how much there is worth saving and polishing into a better form.

When you finally get to the point where you feel as though you could edit, save the edited version as a different document name and keep the original crap draft.

It will show you how much progress you make each time you edit, and it can be used to compare with works from other years to chart your very progress as a writer. And someday, when you no longer cringe thinking about it, it can be a source of amusement.

The first story I wrote that exceeded 50,000 words is nowhere near being halfway done. The way it is now, it will never be halfway done. At this very moment it is on a flash drive buried at the bottom of my desk drawer to someday be rewritten when I can summon enough courage to open the file.

I did once before, and it was the very essence of a crap draft. Yet it was the first thing that I had written that was over five thousand words, I was young and new to writing long plots.

My writing style has changed drastically since then, and I can see the difference in my writing no matter how horrible my current draft of my work-in-progress may be.

Look back to your earliest works; they are probably not as wonderful as what you are currently working on. The tenses might not agree and there might be places where you wondered how much sleep you had gotten in the days before writing it.

Then look at your most recent work.

While the prose still might make you cringe because of how cheesy or cliché it is, it most certainly will be better than that very first draft of your first novel.

The crap draft is a fact of life for a writer. It will always exist to haunt you. But the most important thing is to keep writing, to ignore the horrible prose and to keep going. Once you reach the end, things can be changed.

What you thought was crap may actually be the scenes that change the very dynamics of your plot.

**By Lauren Welch**

# Writers Sphere

## Bull, Baloney, and the Crap Draft

Writing a novel is a huge undertaking, a serious and terrifying commitment that can eat years of your life.

So forget about writing a novel. All you need to write now is a draft. The rough draft. The "crap draft." I like that name best. It tells you exactly what to expect from that first draft of your brilliant novel.

It's the crap draft because you are going to screw it up. Let's just put that out there now. Whether it's your first novel, your third, or your seventeenth, your first draft is not going to be pretty.

Write it anyway. You have to write it. Get it down. Get it done. As Ms. Frizzle said, "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!"

All well and good to say just write, isn't it? Telling you to "just do it" doesn't get you anywhere but staring frozen at a blinking cursor. What you need are techniques.

Well, there are lots of them out there, and guess what? They are pretty much the same as the ways to get around writer's block. Because writer's block, and writing (too) slowly, redoing the first chapter again and again, fixing everything before you move on, are two aspects of the same thing—fear. You're afraid to get it wrong. You're afraid to mess up. You're afraid to be laughed at for your typo-filled first draft.

Get over it. Writing well—digging deep and pulling the reality out of your characters to splash there on the page—takes real courage. Getting published—sending your precious work out there into the world to hear back time and time again that it's "not for me" takes serious *cajones*. Editing—oh my. If you have not edited before, you cannot even begin to imagine the guts needed for editing. It is a glorious, tedious, terrifying process, and without tons of faith and courage, you will not make it. So start developing that courage now. Dare to screw up.

"I'm not afraid. I just want to make it the best I can, and that takes time."

Baloney. Well—I know one person who writes like this. She mulls over stories forever before she starts to write them, and then she types as fast as she can, and her story is utterly brilliant, requiring very little editing, and almost ready to go. She's the only one I know who works like that. Every single other person who has told me this (and I talk to a *lot* of writers) has left the "perfect first draft" idea behind them as they grew in their craft.

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So. Baloney. You will be coming back to it to edit. You will know more about your sto-

ry and your craft when you do. Write it. Leave it. Move on.

"I was taught that if I can't do it right, I shouldn't do it at all."

Bull. That's what editing is for, and even that—well, I have great admiration for Holly Lisle's techniques. I think I've even promoted the idea of using her one-pass revision. When I did, I should have said "but." It's called "one-pass" BUT. Don't expect to do it in one go. I like the method because the improvement, one draft to the next, is incredible. Not because in one pass I have a saleable manuscript—I don't. As I tell anyone who asks and some who don't—Holly Lisle can do it in one pass. I need more.

"I'm going to have to fix it. I might as well do it now."

Well, no. You might as well *not*. When you spend too much time on one scene, you lose precious momentum. You lose that tenuous view in your head of the whole book, the whole story, and you lose coherency because you are too focused. Let it go. Type "Need more emotion here!!" and move on. (This is the *ONLY* time you may express your frustration in extra punctuation—because then when you are editing, you can use search to find those spots and fix them.)

"If I don't have time to do it right, how will I find time to do it over?"

*This is how writing works.* You will go over it at least twice more, and probably more than that—if you ever finish it at all. And if you don't get a move on, you probably never will finish.

In every article, I try to present a range of options. We are all different, and what works for one won't work at all for another. This is the exception. I can tell you what it takes to finish a first draft because I've done it ten times now, and it takes the same things from all of us. Things we can simply choose to have.

It takes courage, and persistence, and a dash (at least) of madness. Dare to write. Dare to screw up.

Who dares, wins.

Now go write.

**By KD Crotwell**

**\*Chris Baty is the founder of NaNoWriMo. Ms. Frizzle is the science teacher in the Magic School Bus series. Both are worth your time to investigate.**

# Write Life

## Deadlines and Distractions

Deadlines can be daunting. You have X amount of work to do, and only a certain amount of time to do it. Usually, deadlines are short – just a few weeks for the entire project. Sometimes, such as when you are writing a book or thesis you are given months. Of course, when you have such a far away deadline, it can be very easy to put off all of the work until a week before the deadline ends, which is one of the worst things that can happen.

Putting off working creates a lot of stress, can lead to emotional breakdowns and even increase procrastination because you just don't want to deal with all of the work that you suddenly have to do. Of course, procrastinating when things get to be like that only make the situation worse.

Some people work great under that pressure. They are even the most productive when they have a major paper or project due the next day and they have barely started the research. While I do admit that cracking down, working really hard and finally finishing can create an exhilarating rush, it is too much stress for me, and I never know quite what I actually wrote.

I am much more in the middle – I hate doing things the day before they are due, but when I am given several weeks, I procrastinate way too much, forget about the deadline and suddenly realize it when there is less than a week left, at least for schoolwork. For academic papers, I can't just sit and write it if it is long. If it is a page or two, I can get it finished quickly. But the longer the paper is, the more often I have to stop working on it for a half hour to procrastinate and to get my thoughts untangled.

For writing, I love having deadlines. My muse works great under that pressure, and I have found that some of my best work has come from when I've written with a deadline. Obviously, setting deadlines myself doesn't always work because distractions and procrastination take over and I change the deadline to fit my current needs. Having a tangible reward once I reach my goal is always the most helpful – even if it is just a printed certificate.

One thing that I have found that always seems to crop up with deadlines is distractions. They pounce on you like a cat in a wild mood, and drag you away from what

you are supposed to be doing. Distractions and procrastination can go hand in hand – if you are unable to ignore the distractions until they go away, they will very quickly turn into ways to procrastinate. It seems that the most distractions appear right before a deadline is going to end. Suddenly the phone won't stop ringing off of the hook, or a friend who you haven't seen in ages wants to go see a movie.

So far, I have not found a good way to beat down the distractions. Using a computer, the internet can become a very big distraction and mode of procrastination. Sure, the best thing for that would be to write by hand. You could sit outside if it is sunny and still see what you're writing. But then the other distractions creep up. Making elaborate maps for your story, drawing characters, figuring out placements of objects in a room... Or various duties at work that you are supposed to be performing.

It can be very hard to ignore distractions, particularly when they are work-related because if you ignore them, you suddenly will have a whole lot more time on your hands to do whatever you want. There are times when life can be entirely evil, and try to take over your every thought so you can't even think about what your main character was doing.

The best thing that I have found to help me ignore distractions even just for a little while, is music. Music can be used to block out your roommate's phone conversation with her boyfriend, and can be used pull yourself away from life, to relax so you can get into a frame of mind that might make writing possible. Listening to music has been the most successful thing that I have tried to get me to stop procrastinating and to get my work done, so I can do what I want.

Procrastination and distractions come with deadlines, there is no way to have one without the other. Find out what helps you beat away the distractions – background noise, waiting until everyone else is asleep so there won't be any chance of interruptions, or locking yourself in the bathroom so you can just think. Then, do it the next time you want to accomplish a 5,000 word day, or the next time you have forgotten about that project you have to present for work.

# Write Life

## How to Get a Life

I'd like to call myself a master procrastinator, but I don't think I am. To me, a master is someone who knows all the ins and outs. Someone who has *mastered* a technique. I'm more of an unconscious procrastinator. I don't do it on purpose – I have to catch myself in the act. Reading spam before deleting it on my blog? Hey, once there was an honest comment in there! Tinkering with the colors on YouTube before I embed a video on my LJ? Hey, it'll look more professional if the colors don't clash! Changing my persona on Firefox? Well, I'm bored with–

Okay, I'm caught.

It's four in the afternoon. I've been meaning to finish this all day, but instead I've updated and downloaded and cleaned up on my daughter's computer. I've answered emails that have been waiting a week or more and really, could have waited another day or even forever. I've done dishes and laundry and I even cleaned out and washed my purse. I've stopped by my favorite forums repeatedly. Usually I'm much better about getting on with what I want to be doing, but not today. Why?

Because I didn't know what to write for this article. I had about two hundred words, "quit wasting time saying you can't and get going proving you *can*." I wanted to get on with my editing – *my* writing – but I needed to put my commitment first and write this. Even though I didn't know how to do it.

Now I do. And mostly it boils down to – Get a life. But not just any life--your life. The one you want. The one filled with the stuff that's important to you.

The trick to sticking to a budget, it's said, is remembering what you really want. Budgeting your time is much the same. How many games of spider solitaire do you really want to play in your allotted hours on this mortal coil?

Distractions are the mortal enemy of progress, and whoa mama, there are so many out there! Why, on our computers alone we can find mahjongg, solitaire, old stories we may get back to one day, and then there's the internet...

Oh wait. You say what you really want to do is write a novel?

Are you sure? *Really* sure?

Make a list. Write down what's important to you. Ten things, right now.

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Next, ask yourself how much of today

you've spent on those things. How much of today have you spent on stuff not even on your list?

In a blog entry, Jennifer Crusie talks about this exercise, remembering it from a book called "What Color is your Parachute?" She points out that for writers, our thinking time is our work time. How are you spending that work time?

If you're at all like me, you don't set out to waste time. It just sort of...happens. So here are some ideas to help keep it from happening, and to drag you back when you stray.

Set a deadline, and then share it with a friend. This is what NaNoWriMo and NaNoEdMo are about. Impossible deadlines and people to cheer you on till you find the deadline isn't impossible after all, and look what you did!

Set a time. Do you write best in the morning? Get up a bit earlier and do it. Is evening your awake time? Set aside a time and place.

Set a goal. A page a day, an hour of actual work a day, a hundred words a day...hey, don't laugh. A hundred words is completely doable. And once you've done it, you may just go on. There is no trick to being productive – it's just a matter of getting started and keeping going.

Set a precedent. Make your writing a priority. If it's not important to you, how can you expect it to be important to anyone else? And that leads to the next thing.

Set some boundaries. We all have friends and family that we love. But writing takes time, and a lot of it is spent staring at the wall. You won't get anywhere if every time you're not typing, someone wants your attention. (Not to mention that if your family is like mine, they won't wait till you stop typing to jump in!) So set some boundaries – and be sure to honor them. If you don't give them the time you promised, you won't get the time you asked for.

Choose a dream. What are you working towards? A published novel? A New York Times bestseller? A world tour? Plan it out, and write it down. Then break it into steps, and plan those.

Most of all, get to it! Whatever project you are working on, when you get those spare moments of peace, start with it. If you wait until you've checked all your email addresses, checked on the news, signed up for Twitter, ironed out that glitch that is changing the background of your icon on...

Well, you get the idea. Now get to work! And get *your* life.

By **KD Crotwell**

# Literary Latte

## Dear Writer Letter

Dear Writer,

If you're reading this letter, it probably means you're feeling desperate. Maybe your writing didn't turn out the way you wanted it to. Things came up. You don't have the time you thought you would have to write. Maybe you did start off with a high word count, and full nights of sleep, and then your fortunes cruelly changed.

There are lots of perks to writing. The excuse to drink as many caffeinated beverages as your system will hold. The chance to drop anvils on whoever you hate, at least writing about it at any rate. Please don't drop a real anvil on someone, the police tend to frown on such activities.

There are drawbacks too. The things you remember at times like these. Nights out on the town, or even home with friends, are history. So are long baths, daytime television, sleep, and many other things that have gone out the window for this literary goal of yours.

Sure, it looks bleak right now, but what's sacrifice without the reward? Don't let these sacrifices be for nothing!

There are people who can help you. There are forums of people just like you, looking for ways to climb out of their word-count holes. Find them, sympathize with them, but don't let them stop you from making that tough climb.

They will be there at the end of the road when you make your way there and writing the final words of your story.

When things look this bleak, it's time to call in the big guns. Add your plot ninjas, let your plot derail into a glorious mess. Do whatever it takes to gain ground on that illusive word count. Remember, the first draft is allowed to be, and expected to be, crap. Utter, glorious, undeniable crap. *But*, from there, it only gets better.

Enough slacking, get back to writing!

Sincerely,

Charles J. Muir

Literary Director



## Upcoming Events:

Upcoming events have been put on a temporary hiatus while we restructure the website, and prepare for another evolution of the FCWriters organization.

Stay tuned.

## Next Month:

Next month's issue focuses on the topic of **Quantity vs. Quality**. We'll also have new writing prompts, articles, and a new short story series by one of our illustrious writers.

## How To Subscribe:

To subscribe, register on our website at: <http://www.FCWriters.com> to receive future issues, and read through our back issues, all available in .PDF format.

## Brought To You By:

The FCWG is managed, maintained, and run by **Charles Muir** of New Canaan, CT. As Literary Director, he oversees the day to day operations of the writing group, produces this magazine, and schedules local events throughout the year.

The back-end, behind the scenes work is done by our Technical Director, **Calvin Williams** of Brooklyn, NY. Calvin single-handedly ensures that the website and all its components run as smoothly as possible.

Staff Writer **Lauren Welch** is currently a college student in Indiana. When she isn't slaving over class work, Lauren enjoys tormenting her muse to try and get something written.

Staff Writer **KD Crotwell** has held some twenty jobs so far, most having nothing to do with writing. This has given her great motivation to complete some nine novels in draft. In the Great Game of Publishing, she has achieved the status of "Agent Passed for Market Reasons." She is actively working towards "Agent Fainted With Joy."

## Contact Us

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## Expense Sheet

Below is a summary of our monthly financials for not only producing this magazine, but running the online writing group throughout the course of the year.

Our expenses include webhosting fees, magazine submissions, local event materials, and general group maintenance.

Annual Donations to Date: **\$405**

Annual Expenses to Date: **\$380**

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Total Annual Funds to Date: **\$25**