9.2
EMBODIED CV (ABRIDGED)[1]

Denise Comer

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2019: "Research Presentation When I Cried for Four Days in a Hotel Room over My Marriage Ending." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Pittsburgh, PA.

2013: "That Time I Almost Vomited before Speaking Because I Was So Nervous about Sharing My Controversial Research." Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference, Savannah, GA.

2008: "Panel Presentation Scheduled Four Weeks after the Birth of My Third Child, for Which I Had Planned to Fly with My Infant across the Country, but Actually Couldn't, and So Asked a Friend to Deliver the Paper for Me, Only to Have the [Male] Panel Chair Write Me a Snarky Email: 'Didn't You Know You Would Be Having a Baby When You Applied for This Panel?' " Modern Language Association, San Francisco, CA.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

2016–present: "Article-in-Perpetual-Progress, Suspended Indefinitely Because Every Time I Consider Opening the File My Chest Tightens."

2013: "Article Completed While My Mother Was in ICU and I Was Making a Four-Hour Drive Multiple Times a Week for Two Months."

2003–04: No articles because I was a new, first-time mother, had gained fifty extra pounds during pregnancy, and was suffering from postpartum depression.

PROGRAMMATIC ADMINISTRATION

2016–17: Year when I avoided my office as much as possible because programmatic morale had reached an all-time low amidst labor-related pressures and a problematic proposed redesign of first-year writing.

https://doi.org/10.7330/9781646422340.c009.2

GRANTS

2017: Grant report I wrote while standing at my kitchen counter, groaning from backache caused by my awareness that the project had failed.

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

2017: Digital scholarship site I had to delay several months because I had developed finger-joint swelling from writing too much.

My Embodied CV could have so many more entries, tracing across my scholarly accomplishments the deaths of loved ones, stressors and challenges, pains and illnesses—countless moments of embodied writing.

I write from, with, and through my body. Awareness glides across my fingertips as I feel the keyboard's plastic squares, my lower lip pushes up slightly too much in concentration, my toes curl together, ideas surge through my stomach and throat. Occasionally, I craft a sentence or discover an insight that sparks a tingling sensation across the nape of my neck.

I write in airplanes, cars, hotel rooms, and lobbies, in my office, on treadmills and stationary bikes, sitting in my favorite living-room chair, and lying down in bed. I write in libraries, classrooms, coffee shops, and restaurants. I write alone, with colleagues, and among strangers. I write in the company of my children and, until recently, in the presence of my husband.

My twenty-two-year marriage ended abruptly during spring semester 2019. Actually, as with many marital endings, it was not really so abrupt. Our marriage had weathered several almost endings across the years.

One of these almost endings occurred on a Tuesday evening in June 2016. At the time, I was midway through teaching a three-and-a-half-week compressed-format course, hosting an international scholar and writing partner who was visiting from across the world, leading a team of graduate student research assistants for an ongoing research project, and preparing a conference presentation scheduled for the following week. Against these obligations, my marital crisis simply did not have room to unfurl.

With Tuesday evening's watershed marital moment looping in my head like tinnitus, I nevertheless proceeded as planned and taught class on Wednesday morning. Canceling would have only secured twenty-four hours respite since each day of class constituted a week's worth of material. Unable to form coherent thoughts, I arranged small-group activities. As I circulated among students, my heart pounded, my breathing

was rapid and shallow, my stomach wrenched from dread and shock. I heard sounds as though I were under water.

Over the following days, I wrote the upcoming conference presentation while moving in silence around my husband, deciding intentionally not to decide about whether to stay in or leave the marriage. The international scholar visited, and we dined at restaurants instead of in my tension-filled home. My larger, ongoing research project, however, stalled. For a few weeks, I oversaw the qualitative-coding work I had already provided to the graduate student assistants, but I did not distribute anything thereafter. Nor did I analyze their coding. While I have since begun and completed other research projects, I have let *that* project lie completely dormant for three years because I associate it with that June 2016 marital crisis. The mere thought of opening the research file spawns nausea and agitation.

As bodies do, my body found its own way of processing the crisis I had buried beneath my work: over the ensuing three years, I developed a chronic nerve issue in my foot, which ultimately required surgery; endured eight months of physical therapy for a frozen shoulder; suffered through oral surgery for a suspicious but fortunately benign cluster of cells my dentist found; and discovered and treated basal-cell skin cancer on my chest. For me, as I have continued to write, revise, research, and ideate, these three years have produced a gradual skimming of parts of my body. A nerve severed here, scar tissue broken up there, gum tissue removed here, thoracic skin carved away there. Small parts of my body deleted like unneeded, problematic words.

Nearly three years of marriage counseling and an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program later, the actual ending of my marriage occurred on a Monday in March 2019. During the weeks leading up to that Monday, I had been in the midst of preparing my dossier for promotion.

Despite sensing the marriage's end was nigh, I forged ahead with the dossier, feeling more security in that text than in my marriage (a statement that signals the shakiness of the marriage more than any confidence in my bid for promotion). Sitting at Starbucks over several writing nights, I dutifully crafted a professional, intellectual narrative, synthesizing my scholarly trajectory, significant research contributions, academic collaborations, and future areas of research.

But the narrative kept crumbling at the edges—seeming to me only a partial account, a disembodied narrative masking the ways my moving, breathing, aging body had produced, ingested, and digested this scholarship.

What I really wanted to write, as tears sometimes streamed down my face, was the memory of being newly married in 1997, when my husband sat in the audience at a regional conference offering moral support while I read aloud, with trembling voice, my first-ever conference paper. Or I wanted to write about the way his warm, familiar body felt next to mine as I sat on our couch, writing on my laptop while he napped on a Sunday afternoon. Or I wanted to write about how my stalled marriage has mirrored my stalled research project for three years, painfully cemented in that liminal category titled "Work in Progress."

I suppose my Embodied CV could be more balanced if I were getting distracted while writing from the butterflies of a new romantic possibility, or if I integrated more joyful writing occasions, of which there have, thankfully, been many—a writing group that consisted of walks around campus, moments of writing near the ocean or surrounded by mountains, a collaboration with four inspiring colleagues, for which we gather periodically around an oval wooden table, laughing, commiserating, thinking together.

These embodied writing joys most certainly exist alongside my embodied writing pains, colliding across my CV, providing lived testimony to the inextricability of my body and my body of scholarship. And so I turn toward these more heartening embodiments of writing, even amidst the tatters of my twenty-two-year marriage, now no longer a work in progress but instead one more erstwhile section of an ongoing CV, beyond which I hope soon to discover a new, unwritten, but ever-so-promising future area of inquiry.

NOTE

1. Inspired by Haushofer, Johannes. 2016. "CV of Failures."