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## Selected Writings

Ian Goldstein

*University at Albany, State University of New York*

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# Selected Writings

An honors thesis presented to the  
Department of Journalism,  
University at Albany, State University Of New York  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in Journalism  
and  
graduation from The Honors College.

Ian Goldstein

Research Mentor: Thomas Bass, Ph.D.

May, 2012

## **Abstract**

These writings make up the different forms of journalism that put together my thesis/portfolio. These selections illustrate the expansive reach of the journalism major. My thesis includes articles covering various issues. The research and writing that went into each piece was an important step in my journalism career. Inside are two narrative pieces, the first one short and simple and the second a lengthier, more extensive piece on religion on college campuses. The piece after that is one called *Senseless*, a story on a product that seems to be marketing false claims to users. My most personal essay succeeds those—it is called *Confronting Apathy* and is about the experience of seeing my Grandmother with Alzheimer's with my mother and sister. I hope these articles are as enjoyable and significant to the reader as they were to me when I was writing it.

## **Acknowledgements:**

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Professor Elaine Salisbury for teaching me how to write an investigative piece and scrutinize subjects in the piece as closely as possible.

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## **Scholarly Portion**

Narrative Journalism intends to tell a story. The objective is to relate a deeply personal or event to the public in a clear, concise way. These pieces can take several days, months or years to complete and sometimes require the journalist to immerse him/herself into the story for an extended period of time. This is called immersion journalism. An example of this is Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed : On (Not) Getting By in America*, in which Ehrenreich investigates the troubles low wage workers in the United States face. She becomes a low wage worker and sees problems they face like paying for daily costs of a hotel than they would pay to rent an apartment or how the poor will pay for unhealthy food because it is cheaper and they may not have access to refrigeration.

*Elevators and Eggrolls* and *College Students, Religion & Darth Vader* are two narrative pieces that, while not extended immersion articles, they required research into the background of the subjects being interviewed as well as on-site interviews about the persons with whom I was speaking.

*Elevators and Eggrolls* is a piece that attempts to encompass the essential components necessary to label itself a narrative work. The opening paragraph, or lead, usually states the facts and introduces the reader to what they will be learning. The reader is introduced to the piece by being told to “picture walking into the lobby” of where they live and reacting to the surprise of the elevator opening and seeing a girl handing out Chinese food to oncoming riders. The element of mystery and surprise as well as some facts are placed here.

It is significant after having an intriguing lead to state facts about who and what is included in the story. The facts stated in the second paragraph were, the focus of the piece,

Natalie, and her motivation for running the event. It is not only important to intrigue the reader, but include facts in narrative pieces.

*College Students, Religion & Darth Vader* tells a story with a lead that attempts to hook the reader, but later gives statistics and background from the focus of the story as narrative pieces do. “According to a 2003 study by the Higher Education Research Institute of over 110,000 college students, a total of 79 percent of respondents said they shared a belief in God and 81 percent said they frequently or occasionally attended religious services.” The focus of the story is on Cathy Reid and her journey from growing up religious, rejecting religion to finding it again and embracing it. Though the story is centered around her, it is important in narrative works to educate the reader on the subject being discussed. Since this piece is about religion on college campuses, the facts about how students feel about religion are significant to include.

A narrative story can begin from overhearing someone and investigating. *Elevators and Eggrolls* began from seeing a flier on campus about this event occurring. It quickly turned into a story about a girl who wanted other on campus to experience her culture. *College Students, Religion & Darth Vader* began by meeting a campus minister who was passionate about her religion as well as how she had gotten to where she was.

Narrative journalism allows readers to relate to the characters that are being portrayed. While narrative is about storytelling and allowing the reader to be interested and connect, the truth takes precedence. Gay Talese, famous for writing one of the most important narrative pieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Frank Sinatra Has A Cold*, was at a Boston University narrative conference in 2010. He said of his work narrative journalism, “I don’t want something juicy; I want the closest I can get to the truth.”

*Story-Based Inquiry: A manual for investigative journalists* defines investigative journalism as “exposing to the public matters that are concealed –either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding.” Investigative journalism involves exploring a single topic , usually associated with crime, political corruption or wrongdoing. Like narrative journalist, Investigative journalists can spend a long span of time on story.

*60 Minutes* was created in 1968 by Don Hewitt, a television producer and executive. The show has since won over 90 Emmys and has been the longest running program that was scheduled during American network prime time. The show has investigated stories ranging from hackers on the internet to a controversial piece on Brown & Williamson and it’s alleged manipulation of tobacco, increasing the nicotine and therefore increasing the impact on the smoker. This piece made Jeffrey Wigand, former vice president of research and development at Brown & Williamson a significant part of American culture in 1996 due to his allegations toward the company he worked for. The weekly news magazine illustrates why investigative journalism is important. Steve Weinberg, a professor at the University of Missouri says investigative journalism says investigative journalism involves "reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers or listeners." *60 Minutes* reports relevant and timely stories that encompass what investigative journalism is about.

What separates investigative journalism from any other form is that it seeks to expose the truth, not by telling a story, but by doing the public a service in getting them information regardless of making into a story format.



The goal of *Senseless* was to investigate a diet product called Sensa to examine whether the company was selling was legitimate item the public should buy or if it should be taken off the market. The first sign that of this product's falsehood was the advertising. The television commercial for Sensa appeared to be hiding something when they did not reveal what Sensa actually was. The main selling point of the product was that by using it, one could "look good and feel good" and all one had to do was sprinkle this product on every meal they ate in order to lose weight. The commercial showed no details or specifics as to how the product actually worked; instead they showed images of attractive users saying how much it benefited them.

This piece was significant in learning about investigative journalism because it taught the idea that one should not trust a product when it is being advertised as safe and effective. The more it was investigated, the less people wanted to tell. The salespeople insisted on the effectiveness of the product above anything else. Spending weeks making phone calls and setting up interviews made me realize not every interviewee would open up as they had in my narrative pieces. This was getting to the heart of investigative journalism, finding the truth and exposing it.

Investigative journalism pieces are meant to be first-hand accounts in which the journalist is uncovering information as opposed to citing it. Investigating Occupy Albany was a significant investigative journalism piece because I wanted to see if the protesters actually had goals and were not joining a cause with no motive other than being a part of group. Going to the site, filming, taking pictures and interviewing protesters and organizers of the rally gave background and allowed my story to become a primary source for the Occupy Albany movement. Speaking with a man who worked for 30 years and soon found himself laid off, to a mother who was barely able to discuss her father and her current financial situation without crying, to a young

boy who was at the rally holding up a misspelled sign, each story was informative as to why members of the community were protesting.

Memoirs are considered to be a subclass of autobiographies. They differentiate themselves from autobiographies because of their structure, focusing more on the development of the author's personality rather than only their story. Memoirs usually have some type of takeaway, thematic idea and involve either a lesson or realization happening to the author.

A good example of a memoir writer is David Sedaris, a Thurber Prize for American Humor winner as well as being named Humorist of the Year in 2001 by Time magazine. Sedaris uses humor to assess social norms and discusses the complexity of human relationships. He draws upon his personal life in his essays for humor and critiques of society. For example, in *Let it Snow*, an essay by Sedaris, he discusses how school was cancelled while he was in fifth grade due to snow and how it affected his home life. "On the fifth day of our vacation, my mother had a little breakdown. Our presence had disrupted the secret life she led while we were in school, and when she could no longer take it she threw us out. It wasn't a gentle request but something closer to an eviction. "Get the hell out of my house," she said." Having the days off took away from his mother's time to herself. She locked them out and Sedaris is able to make his sad stories of childhood, of his mother's moods and his father's lack of presence into something comedic while simultaneously reflecting on what this all meant.

*Confronting Apathy* is the memoir in this portfolio. Its discussion of visiting an ailing grandmother in the nursing home is meant to reflect upon the author's shock and reflection of how he should be feeling. It encompasses what a memoir is because it fulfills the idea of narratives being based on personal experiences.

Memoirs is significant to journalism because it can serve as a means of personal experience reflecting life and therefore shaping how society acts and how that can change. Journalism looks to educate the public, while simultaneously making changes to aspects of life that are deemed immoral or corrupt. Memoirs help explore the psyche of people's personal lives and how we, as a society express ourselves.

## **Elevators and Egg Rolls**

Picture walking into the lobby of the building in which you live. You head to over to the elevator and hit the up button. You wait. The elevator door opens and a young woman sees you and says: “Hello, this is the Chinese celebration elevator” and offers up a dumpling.

“I’ve always wanted to do a program on the Chinese new year” said Natalie Tejada, a 22 year-old Senior at the University at Albany. Tejada, a member of residential life at the University, decided to hold an event celebrating the Chinese New Year. Strategically placing “Elevators and Egg Rolls” in the tower of Colonial Quad, Tejada wanted Chinese students to have a place on campus in which they could enjoy their new year. She also wanted to simultaneously educate non-Chinese students on the New Year.

Red plastic decorations surround the elevator so that when the residents enter they not only eat the Chinese food, but experience the culture’s symbols and beliefs. Tejada said the red is there to “scare demons and evil spirits away from stealing livestock.” There are paper lanterns that encircle the elevator which will bring light to the Chinese people. The livestock (in this case in the form of dumplings and fortune cookies) were not stolen by the demons nor did the students experience darkness in the elevator, so Tejada’s preparation did its job. When Tejada was asked why she had chosen an elevator to hold the Chinese celebration in, she said: “Because it’s easier for residents that live in the tower. It is the best way to reach out to them.” She then chuckled and added “it brings the Chinese new year to the students...forcefully.”

The food in this makeshift Chinatown included chicken potstickers (dumplings), chicken sashimi, and other assorted Chinese treats. She made all of the food herself and when asked how long it took she gave a smile, sighed and said: “too long.” As she answered more questions, the

elevator continued to make stops. A student walked in and after being greeted with a smile, he was quickly welcomed to the Chinese celebration elevator.

Kevin Anderson, A sophomore living in Colonial tower, took a dumpling, began eating and soon realized he had forgotten to press his floor number. He was immersed in the Chinese New Year just as Natalie Tejada had wanted.

## **College Students, Religion & Darth Vader**

The world is a hazelnut.

Small. Ovular. Hard. The world is surrounded by a shell and when the time is right, it will release a nut that will be ripe. It will be edible. For now, the world cannot be eaten because, at the moment, it is still surrounded by its crust. It is fragile. An English Hermit is holding the edible world in her hands. She realizes it is not her hands, but the hands of love that hold the spherical nut, the hands of love that hold this world.

“I sometime think of hot beverages as a form of prayer,” Cathy Reid says as she sits comfortably with her a steaming cup of Morning Jo in hand. It is early, about 9 a.m. “You hold it in your hands and feel the warmth...it’s a calming spiritual thing.”

When one steps into Cathy’s office, the first sight will be the 25-year-old Catholic Campus Minister sipping on her daily mug of black gold. Surrounded by different icons and figureheads, Cathy reflects upon her religious journey from southeast Kansas to upstate New York.

If a current college campus was a representation of the world, then after taking a few cursory glances, one may not have any notion of religions’ impact.

According to a 2003 study by the Higher Education Research Institute of over 110,000 college students, a total of 79 percent of respondents said they shared a belief in God and 81 percent said they frequently or occasionally attended religious services. While there are a large number of believers in a higher power as well as many attending services, according to a Barna

study, only 20 percent of people in their 20s kept the same spiritual activity as they had in high school.

For a generation of college students that spend as many hours on Facebook as they do partying, dating and—one would hope—studying, it's no wonder that twentysomethings show a lack of interest in nurturing their spirituality.

While many tend to abandon their faith during their college years, there are some that embrace religion. What do high school students look forward to most after graduation? Sure, the summer ahead is filled with relaxation, partying and pink sunsets. But those students are really craving independence. When they are autonomous and away from the traditional values with which mom and dad raised them.

“Students come to college and have the opportunity to rethink the values they were raised with,” says Barry Trachtenberg, Associate Professor of history and Interim Director for the Center of Jewish Studies at the University at Albany. “Most students tend not to question deeply. But some students are clearly searching for something.”

Some are black, some are white, and one acts as a mix of dark and light blues.

These hijabs represent the differences in personality of the Muslim women attending an event to hear Khalid Latif, the executive director and chaplain for the Islamic Center at New York University, discuss his journey with Islam.

Kamilla Hussein is dressed from head to toe in black. She leaves only her face open. As she listens to Khalid Latif, she remembers her own unearthing of Islam. Kamilla was raised

Muslim. She did not embrace this. But as high school continued, Kamilla realized she wanted to grow spiritually. She stopped partying and started praying.

In college, she had friends that wanted the same growth. She found the Muslim Student Association. This turned her from a secular student into a pious person of Islam.

“It is because I was independent. It was the first time I was ever by myself. I was not constantly watched by my parents and I was able to find myself.” Along with the rest of her outfit, her hijab is black. “The purpose [of the hijab] is to guard and protect the modesty of both men and women.”

The Koran instructs Muslim men and women to dress modestly. “It’s freeing,” Kamilla says. “I’m not subjected to the gaze and desires of men. It gives dignity to men and women and not on a sexual level.”

In a society that may view the hijab as a reflection of slavery and a means to oppress women, Kamilla embraces it. She views it as liberation. Kamilla’s perspective is ironic, but upon her reflection from her high school days of staunch secularism to her college days of conservative Islam, she feels her move toward religion has allowed her to become more intellectual and appreciative of life.

People watching will shout the number of seconds you drink before you decide you cannot handle the world's most widely consumed and third most popular drink anymore.

You may pass out. Maybe you’ll high five your closest peer after realizing you’ve accomplished the sacred keg stand.



This is a part of many students' college lives and one of college's many aspects that turn students away from religion.

Dr. Alexander W. Astin, Professor Emeritus of Higher Education and Organizational Change at UCLA has studied the effects of college life on religion.

He says that students are more likely to become religiously skeptical during college if they engage in a large amount of partying, watch a lot of television, or if their parents go through a separation or divorce.

“Religious skepticism also tends to increase if the student attends a college where the student body is highly liberal politically,” Astin says.

Islam forbids alcohol consumption. Christianity limits it. It's not irrational to think why students may be turned off by religion, but it also illustrates where students' priorities are. According to the Core Institute, The average male freshman consumes 7.39 drinks – a bottle of beer, glass of wine, shot or mixed drink – per week, while the average female has 3.86.

One study from UCLA describes that most students disengage from religion when they begin college, but tend to grow substantially in spiritual curiosity.

Why is this? One of their reasons is because of the independent lifestyle to which college students are exposed. Some choose to use it for questioning and increase their skepticism. Others increase their religious beliefs because they are exposed to diverse people, cultures, and ideas.

This exposure allows them to question and it provides students with more opportunities to connect with their spiritual side.

Chetopa, Kan. has a population of just over 1,000 people.

Cathy remembers the small town life. She recalls what shaped her into the person she is today, a blank canvas.

For Cathy Reid, God was always there, but he was void of life. He was waiting to be drawn.

A fundamentalist church that was less than friendly to women was where Cathy established her Christian faith.

“It was a very abusive theology that would tear people down and tell them they were terrible. Everyone was a horrible sinner and we have done so many horrible things. The idea was to make you feel guilty.” That colored my image of God. He was a man and he was angry.”

The nail tears the through the skin. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each. As he pushes himself upward to avoid the stretching torment, he places his full weight on the nail through his feet. This is Christ’s death. To Cathy, God was a tormentor, a villain, Hannibal Lector. Darth Vader.

“There's an old saying that ‘you are what you eat.’ It's a little bit of a crude metaphor, but I think it does help to explain the Eucharist (or communion). We believe that the bread (or wafer) and wine are mystically transformed into the body of Christ: that is, that Christ is really and truly present to us in the sacrament of communion. In eating the bread and drinking the wine, we become the body of Christ, not just individually, but as a community.”

Cathy Reid had always wanted to be a leader in church. “Only men were allowed to serve communion.” Cathy decided it was time for a change. When looking at what colleges she would attend, one school in Omaha, Neb. intrigued her.

23-year-old Craig Messer is happy. He is only an hour away from his 7 p.m. flight which will arrive in Israel at 11:15 in the morning, only a flight away from seeing his wife.

“Once I was on my own I fell into place.” Craig grew up in a traditional Jewish home in Ocean, N.J. He joined United Synagogue Youth (USY) as a teen, but did not make the leap from Conservative Judaism to modern orthodox until he enrolled at the University at Albany in 2004. He feels that independence is the key to driving one to or from religion.

The finger is on the trigger. It’s ready to take the shot. Sweat drips down slowly from your head as you wait to hear the command to shoot. The key is to protect, not to kill.

This is one of the many actions soldiers the Israeli Defense Force face. Luckily for Craig Messer, his wife opted not to join the IDF. Instead she volunteered for Sherut Leumi.

For the Israelis who have no desire to serve in the Israeli Army, Sherut Leumi gives an Israeli (usually a woman) an opportunity to educate others across the world. They can volunteer at universities, hospitals, nursing homes and health clinics. Craig’s wife came to Albany and ever since she has been knitting his kippahs and cooking his dinners. Craig’s college independence triggered his decision to attend temple services, which led him to meet her.

So as he waits with his purple and black kippah on his head, the airport is full and he, one of 46 million passengers, just purchased a bottle of bourbon for the upcoming Jewish holiday, Purim. He waits to see his wife again.

Cathy decided to attend Creighton University in Omaha. Her preacher from home had some advice for her. “Go up there and convert them,” he said. He knew it was a college for Catholics. Cathy had another mission. “I knew I wanted to major in theology. I never doubted God existed, I just thought he was a jerk. I had a false image of God.”

College was a time for Cathy to explore other means of faith. While God may have been Darth Vader, Jesus was her Luke Skywalker. “I was drawn to Jesus. Jesus was in the same boat as me: obedient to his father, obedient to the church and all it was doing was bringing pain. Jesus was an underdog.”

It’s the same routine. You eat the wafer, you drink the wine and realize that at that moment you are connecting with God. You look up after having the wafer, but you don’t see your typical preacher. Now you see something you thought you never would, a woman.

It was Cathy’s first time at a Catholic Church. She was assigned to the campus ministry. Here was the chance she had been waiting for. “I asked one of the priests what I should do.”

Cathy: “I’m not Catholic so I don’t know if should take communion.”

The Catholic Priest, smiling warmly, responded: “Cathy you’re part of the Universal Church and you should take communion.”

“I had this sudden sense of seeing a woman as the image of God. I think that moment of seeing the women take communion changed a lot for me.”

“I didn’t just have to find a new image of God; I had to find a new image of myself.”

Lightning is burning Luke slowly. Luke feels his demise coming. He can’t save himself. Luke needs help. Darth Vader interferes and kills Emperor Palpatine. Vader has redeemed himself. He is no longer Darth Vader. He is the noble Anakin Skywalker once again.

“Both the age and atmosphere of college is what causes kids to start questioning” Cathy says, having almost finished her mug. “People with faith-based backgrounds don’t doubt as much until college. The whole structure that supported [one’s faith] is no longer there.”

Cathy’s icons and portraits contain the room. One cannot help but gaze.

Cathy discusses one of her favorite images in her office. “Julian of Norwich” was a hermit and holy woman in England in the 1300s. She had a series of visions that revealed to her the depth of God’s love. In one of those visions, she saw herself holding a hazelnut in the palm of her hands. She looked at the hazelnut and understood that it represented everything that existed, and that the entirety of creation was held in existence by the loving hands of God. The icon shows Julian holding the hazelnut, and a mandala in the center shows the hands of Christ (apparent by the nail-marks in the hands) holding the earth.”

“For me, prayer is (ideally) a full sensory experience: the smell and taste of the coffee, the image of the icon and a lighted candle, the sound of quiet music or my own voice, the feel of

warmth from the coffee cup. Focusing my senses helps me be fully present in the moment, which is the heart of prayer.”

What’s her favorite cup of coffee? She thinks about it. “Well, I’m usually more of a tea person, but I do really enjoy a good coffee. I like my coffee with plenty of cream and sugar (definitely can’t do it black!), but probably my favorite kind is a flavored mocha...hazelnut, actually.

## Senseless

Sensa is a weight loss product that advertises heavily on television and online. One can see the infomercials early in the morning and late at night on basic cable networks. Sensa guarantees weight loss without having to go through the trouble of exercising and eating right. Some of the claims from their website include: “Get a gym body without going to the gym” or “You just want to look and feel sexy again. Well, now you can lose weight and reveal that tight body of yours without changing your lifestyle.” One of Sensa’s main selling points is based on the idea that a Sensa user can lose weight not only without exercising, but without dieting as well. “Sensa is clinically proven to help you lose 30 lbs without dieting, counting calories, eating pre-packaged meals or spending all your time working out.” They use glittering generalities like “simplify your life,” “eliminate the negative aspects of dieting” and “Real users. Real Results” as some of their claims. Dr. Hirsch’s office says that clinically proven means that during the development of the product, there have been clinical trials. These trials consisted of participants testing out the research Hirsch has conducted through the years. Clinically proven means that there were positive results in the research, illustrating that the odor and taste did have some effect on weight loss.

The evidence Sensa uses to support the truth of claims and testimonials are from medical experts. The creator of the weight loss product Sensa was based on, Dr. Alan Hirsch, is often cited. “Over the course of 25 years, Sensa creator Dr. Alan Hirsch has conducted ongoing research on the effects of smell and taste on eating habits, ultimately leading him to spearhead one of the largest studies ever conducted on weight loss.” Dr. Hirsch is not the founder of Sensa. Denise, the manager of Dr. Hirsch’s office in Chicago confirmed that Sensa is consistent with Dr. Hirsch’s studies and therefore he can offer assistance to the product with his 20 years of research.

She would not disclose whether or not Hirsch has a financial interest in Sensa. Sensa says that Over a 6 month period, 1,436 women and men sprinkled scented, flavorless "Tastant" crystals on everything they ate. Participants were not required to change their normal diet or exercise program. Sensa says researchers weighed participants at the beginning of the study, then again at the end of the study. On their website they show pictures of people who used to be heavy and have lost weight. They could have lost weight from anything, not necessarily Sensa.

Sensa website gives the study here:

[http://www.trysensa.com/media/pdf/Abstract\\_Poster\\_Use\\_of\\_Stimuli\\_for\\_Weight\\_Loss.pdf](http://www.trysensa.com/media/pdf/Abstract_Poster_Use_of_Stimuli_for_Weight_Loss.pdf).

They claim the study objective is to “to demonstrate that non-caloric tastant crystals sprinkled on food prior to consumption will enhance gustatory evoked satiety, reduce consumption, and represent itself by a reduction in weight.” The results claim that the 1,436 people in the treatment group who completed the program lost an average of 30.5 pounds - nearly 15% of their total body weight. The study can only be seen on the Sensa sponsored websites.

Alan Hirsch discovered that tastants that make an eater feel full. Sensa claims that Hirsch has had “20-plus years of research regarding the impact of smell and taste on weight loss.” Alan Hirsch is a neurologist who received both his B.A. and medical degrees from the University of Michigan. He is considered to be an “acknowledged expert in olfaction (sense of smell)” and is the founder of the smell and taste research foundation—which studies the effects of odors on the brain. Next to his credentials and a brief bio of him the website put up a dateline report (which they also uploaded to YouTube).

The dateline segment chronicles Hirsch’s study on smell and whether enhanced taste and odor can makes one eat less by quickly making them full. It profiles five people who are participating in the study, sprinkling the tastants—particles of food enhancers—on their food.



Three months into the study they all claimed to lose weight. “We’re causing people to feel full faster by using these sprinkles,” says Hirsch. The participants said the sprinkles don’t change the taste of their food. The segment begins with Stone Phillips stating that many diets are crazy, including this one, but contradicts the statement later by saying “until you’ve seen the science behind it.” It appears that the Sensa website creators hope that viewers only watch the first half of the segment in which it says this weight loss study is grounded in science. The second half of this segment proves, though, that this study was never intended to become a diet.

The field reporter for Dateline, Josh Mankiewicz, reminds viewers that this is a study *not* a diet. Hirsch, when asked about his intentions with the study, said he had no plans to sell it as a diet. Dateline even gets a clinical nutrition manger, Nicki Lowenstein, at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in the University of Texas to offer a counter-perspective, “if you eat junk, then that’s what you are.” She says that what’s wrong with a possible diet like this is that participants are “not making any behavioral changes to learn how to keep pounds off.” The story closes with Alan Hirsch saying: “I hate to call it a diet” and when asked how he loses weight, Hirsch said from dieting.

Sensa cites doctors such as Hilton Hudson II, the Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Franciscan Physicians Hospital, Jason Gruss, a Physician Specializing in Bariatric Medicine and Celestine Marie DeTrana, a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. While all of the doctors listed are doctors, it does not mean each is credible in how they support Sensa. Hudson says: “Sensa is a safe and effective weight-loss solution.” He foresees that it can have a “major impact on obesity and related health issues.” There is no specificity, though. Hilton Hudson is the founder of Hilton Publishing Inc., a company that publishes Dr. Alan Hirsch’s books. The receptionist at Dr. Hudson’s office would not say whether Hudson makes a profit off Hirsch, but did say that

Hudson is one of the board members for the Sensa Product. One can assume Hudson would like to continue publishing Hirsch's books in exchange for Hudson's credibility in supporting Sensa. It may actually help one lose weight, but he, along with the other doctors quoted do not factor in the food one eats and its effect. While it may help a user lose weight, by eating junk food constantly there would need to be some form of diet to remain healthy. No doctor mentions any diet or exercise, but just says how effective Sensa is.

There are no side effects listed for Sensa, but what are listed are the problems that won't occur. "With so many diet pills based on stimulants and fat-blockers, it's natural to be cautious of any new weight-loss product." The site goes on to say that Sensa tastants don't directly affect users' digestive systems. All they claim to do is use one's senses of smell and taste to safely and naturally trigger the body's 'feel full' response. The site, along with customer services said that there is no jittery feeling, no anxiety, no digestive problems, no sugar, calories or MSG.

Sensa is comprised of three main ingredients: Maltodextrin , Tricalcium Phosphate and Silica. Maltodextrin, which Sensa claims to have derived from Corn from the USA, is a [polysaccharide](#) that is can be used as a [food additive](#). It is produced from [starch](#) and does not have much effect on the Sensa product, except comprising the form of the Sensa sprinkles. A representative from Sensa said that the main purpose of the Maltodextrin is to "form the shape and consistency of sense." Tricalcium Phosphate was found—in a study by the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* – to contribute to the benefits of high calcium intake during childhood that has "been suggested to increase bone mass accrual." The reason for having this ingredient in Sensa is to make up different smells and flavorings. "These smells and flavorings," says Sensa representative Yasmeeen, "enhance the natural flavoring of the food. When you smell and taste

your food, when you enjoy the food, you feel fuller faster.” Tricalcium Phosphate is used in yogurt and spices as well.

Silica, is an oxide of the element silicon, can be found sometimes in beer, beets, bell peppers, brown rice, whole grains and green leafy foods. It is a Mineral used in potatoes, cucumbers and peppers. This also makes the smells and tastes of food more potent and make the user full faster.

These three main ingredients may make a Sensa user feel full, but the only science that Sensa gives to prove this is that when one enjoys their food, they feel full faster; since Tricalcium Phosphate and Silica act as food enhancers that heighten smell and taste then the fullness effect comes with eating anything. There aren't any specific reasons as to why this is. When asked what it is that makes the user feel full, this is the reason cited, more potent smells and taste make one feel full.

A Salesperson for Sensa, Mishekia, is a user of the product. “I’m actually on the product Sensa myself and I have not experienced anything [harmful]...I’ve lost 15 pounds in 4 months. I’ve tried a lot of weight loss products. One minute I would lose weight on a product, but when I stopped I would gain it back because I didn’t have any support.” Mishekia said that Sensa has an online community where users can chat with a live “coach” for advice and inspiration. “You have so much support here. You can get weight loss buddies. We have celebrities using it as well.”

The website has some personal testimonies from random users and then has celebrities including Patti Stanger from Bravo’s *Millionaire Matchmaker*. The commercials act as an appeal to popularity, claiming that this product is good because these celebrities use it and they lost weight, so it must work. One of their main celebrity endorsers is Dayna Devon who they list as a

journalist. Dayna Devon was an anchor for local news stations until becoming co-host of the entertainment news show *Extra* in 1999. She hosts the infomercial for Sensa. Patti Stanger, while being interviewed for the infomercial, announced a few times when and where her show, *Millionaire Matchmaker*, was on. While these two celebrities claim to have lost weight using Sensa, their appearances on the infomercial seem like more of a publicity stunt than anything else. Regular users like Amanda and Deanna focus on how Sensa changed their lives, but do not talk about how it works. The site says DEANNA LOST 45 POUNDS, and she says: "I went from a size 18 to a size 10. Thanks to Sensa, I got my sexy back and my husband won't stop chasing me around the house!" That her husband now is more sexually attracted to her does not illustrate the goal of this product as much as it does her own life and sexuality.

Intelligent Beauty—the parent company to Sensa is an internet based sales company that specializes in products that encourage a healthier lifestyle. It is the owner of Sensa and says that it had collaborated with Dr. Alan Hirsch to create the product. The word "nurture" was used often when describing their relationship with one another. That was as much detail they would give. I asked if they had funded Sensa, but there was no straight answer given. I was referenced back to the Intelligent Beauty website which said only that: "Intelligent Beauty is a leading ecommerce business incubator focused on the health & wellness, beauty, and fashion industries." And that "Sensa is a leading weight-loss tool and lifestyle brand that has helped hundreds of thousands of people lose millions of pounds." There were no specifics as to the collaboration.

Sensa is approved by the FDA and the label is on their website certifying the product as safe, Next to the label it says "SENSA® works solely on the science of smell and is made entirely from FDA-GRAS approved ingredients." GRAS stands for generally recognized as safe.

Sensa is becoming a popular product among consumers. William—a customer care manager of Sensa located in Alabama— attributes this growth in popularity to advertising. “I know for a fact it’s based on advertising. The more we advertise the more sales we make. People are health conscious these days and they want to find an easier to lose weight. This product has been on the market almost three years and it’s really been expanding.” He says Sensa purposely “cranks up” ads in late January and early February because it is a time when people will begin to rescind their new year’s resolution of exercising.

While Sensa may be increasing in popularity and appeal to those who do not want to deal with the hardships of losing weight, the problems with the product still remain. There is no discussion anywhere about actually living a healthy lifestyle. The main goal of the product is weight loss, not living healthy and eating right. A user can eat whatever he/she wants as long as Sensa is sprinkled on whatever food is eaten. Sensa’s vague infomercials and testimonials online promote “millions of pounds lost” with no feasible evidence. It is a product to be wary of, especially due to the fact that it was never intended to be a diet from the start. While approved by the FDA as safe, Sensa doesn’t appear to be a worthy choice among weight loss products, but that’s up to the consumer.

## Confronting Apathy

“Are we allowed to move her into the room with the window?” my mom asks.

“Well, the thing is if you move her, then she’s likely to start getting more restless from the change of atmosphere. It’d be better to just keep her here in bed,” replies the nurse who looks like she wants to be anywhere but in a nursing home, treating a woman with Alzheimer’s.

My sister gives our 80-year-old grandmother a wave and a smile, like she’s playing with a joyful child. If it wasn’t for her wrinkled skin, liver spotted hands and wheelchair-ridden body, she’d be a child. She is fed by others. She needs to be changed regularly. She is blissfully unaware. My sister stands there and looks me as if to say: “come on, do something, help.” I’m not sure what to do. I can pretend. I can smile. I can wave. But it’s hard. It’s difficult to fake it.

I never remembered my Grandma as someone who could hold a real conversation. I was always told that she was never the same after a car accident in 1981. The car accident that sent her and her father (my great-grandfather) to the hospital and the incident that most doctors say trigger her Alzheimer’s.

Soon after the car accident, my mom saw differences in my grandmother. Grandma would ask her questions that were out of the ordinary:

“Leslie, have you ever seen the picture of your father and I after we were married, the one in front of our baby grand piano? Look how I young was. You know, I was married when I was only 19-years old. It’s really a beautiful picture.”

“Yeah, ma. I’ve seen it.”

As the years went on, her apartment in Brooklyn became cluttered. A once clean home was now a mess of scattered pictures and an un-tuned baby grand piano. As her residency changed from an apartment to an assisted living, her questions were adjusted too. “How’s

school?” became, “So where do you go to school?” And as her well-managed, relatively clean assisted living became a nursing home smelling of urine and poorly cooked food, there were no more questions, just silence.

Then I see my grandma blow a kiss to me. Does she know what she’s doing? Is this her only way of expressing happiness? My mom sets up the stereo. She puts in a CD, the 1949 Broadway musical, *South Pacific*. She plays the song with the few lyrics and melody that grandma remembers. “*I’m gonna wash that man right outta my hair and send him on his way.*” My sister sings it because she knows it’s the one trigger that brings grandma back to life. The music makes her happy. It makes her remember. My grandma sings along for a second, and then forgets. Then my mom decides that feeding her would be better than having the indifferent nurses do it. The mashed potatoes are soggy, the corn is from a can, and the chicken looks like rubber. I can’t imagine eating food resembling that. I can’t imagine being in a nursing home. I don’t want to. But this thought is a catalyst for another. Why am I so focused on the food she’s eating and not her, my grandmother. Don’t I care?

“Eat it, ma, c’mon, you need to eat something,” my mom says to her.

My grandma sits there and lets the food go into her mouth, barely swallowing. I think having Alzheimer’s makes her forget she’s eating. This can’t be the scientific reason, but I can’t help but think every thought that enters her head is momentary, fleeting in a few milliseconds, making it impossible to speak with her.

Unfortunately, as I look at her and try my best to make her happy and make the visit worthwhile for all of us. I expect what’s to come in the coming years. I don’t look forward to it, but part of me also doesn’t know how to react to it. I question my apathy when I think of my grandmother not living. My aunt died last year and when I heard the news, I wanted to react

with more sadness, but I didn't feel anything. Other than how selfish I was for *not feeling*. Death hasn't been something I've been confronted with often.

As I sit in the nursing home and look at my grandmother, trying to enjoy the moment, wondering when she will pass, I think maybe it's for the best that I have this thought to myself. I would never want my family to know that I may be apathetic when someone so close passes. The most I can do now is pretend and that's what I do because in making her smile for a second or less, it helps me feel.