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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: This early essay published in a campus publication is part of an innovative virtual Erma Bombeck Museum. The University of Dayton is releasing it for the first time as part of the launch of the online museum.)

'NOW I AM MISERABLE': ERMA BOMBECK'S UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ESSAY LAUNCHES CAREER

DAYTON, Ohio — In 1948, Erma Bombeck quietly slipped a humorous essay under the office door of Brother Tom Price, S.M., a University of Dayton English professor who served as faculty adviser to the literary magazine, *The Exponent*.

Brother Price's response, "You can write!" gave Erma the "impetus to keep going." She became one of the world's best-loved humorists.

Her essay from the May 1948 issue of *The Exponent* appears below. It will be part of an innovative online museum (www.ErmaMuseum.org) to be officially launched at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop at the University of Dayton on March 9.

Now I am Miserable by Erma Fiste

I felt the need for glasses in my junior year in high school when I ran headlong into a steel beam and promised it a Coke date at Gallahers after the sixth period.

From then on, things went from bad to worse ... I called my mother a "flirt" when she took my arm at street crossings ... I gave my class ring to my bust of Caesar ... I couldn't tell a traffic light from a nose in a Alka-Seltzer ad.

That's why I took the advice of ... oh, what was her name ... she was a lovely little miss ... wore something sorts ... well, she WAS three feet away from me when she spoke ... small matter, this creature suggested an optometrist.

"Hello, Doctor," I said, extending my right hand to a pair of bookends.

"Come in, come in," he boomed. "Now, young lady, I'm going to have you read this chart on the wall for me ... just the top line now ... no, no, come back from the wall and sit in this chair. Now, just the top line."

-over-

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I pondered, "Does it say, 'Soft Music-Party Neat-Gal by Side-Deadbeat ... Burma Shave'?"

"Nooo."

"Or how about, 'I didn't know I was in love with you, till I heard you had a way with the Bureau of Internal Revenue'?"

"Nooooo."

"Prompt me."

"Really, my dear ... I'm afraid you cannot see that far ..."

"Maybe it's 'Tippecanoe and Tyler too.'"

"No, no let's go on with the examination. Answer me this. Is the purple circle with the red dots slanted at a left 30-degree angle above the pink square with the green dragon print or is the purple circle with the red dots to the lower right at a 45-degree slant below the pink square with the green dragon print?"

I ran to the washroom and shut the door. The doctor spoke softly. "Come, come now, my dear. This is merely an examination. I didn't mean to frighten you with my questions. All you have to do is think about them and answer me in a straightforward manner. Come out now, dear ... come on ... I won't hurt you. This is only an examination."

I groped my way to the door and peered through a thin crack. I would give it a try just once more.

I sat in the big leather chair.

He placed an instrument in my eye and we sat facing each other, like we had a card board between us. "Now you just look straight ahead." I watched the doctor's eyes and there in the middle our crossed eyes met.

He blinked.

I blinked right back.

He blinked twice.

I blinked in response.

He straightened and cleared his throat.

"Do I win?" I asked.

Ignoring me, he continued. "Do you get headaches often?"

"Well, no, not really, Doctor ..."

A voice came from the opposite corner, "Yes, Doctor, quite often."

I became indignant. "I don't know who you are, but would you mind waiting for your bus at the bus stop. My doctor is trying to conduct a simple examination and I'll thank you to..."

-more-

The doctor interrupted, "Please, Miss, you're talking to your father." I reddened.

"Now answer me," he went on, "do you feel a strain when you sew, play a piano, or call out bingo numbers?" I shook my head negatively. He recorded my statement.

"I think you're going to be all right. Here, try on these three-inch lenses that magnify things 3,000 times its size. What do you see?"

"The year 1960."

"Foolish child. Now what kind of frames do you think suitable? Here, take your pick of the selection of two. Here is the 'So Long Youth Model' and the 'Mother, Look Again, It's Your Baby' style." I chose the latter.

"There now," he said, adjusting them behind my ears, "you can see the world as it really is."

I saw ... Father didn't look like Gregory Peck anymore, I hadn't really passed my mid-terms at all, that bus driver that I was mad for had a wart on his chin, dresses had gotten longer, and I was miserable.