Encyclopedia of An Ordinary Life – Part 1

In Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life, Amy Krouse Rosenthal uses an encyclopedia format to convey multiple elements of her life in wise, humorous, and sometimes heartfelt entries. She demonstrates strong personal narrative writing by imparting her sense of humor and personality through her entries.

Your assignment is to read the excerpts I have included and respond to the five questions located at the bottom.

After answering the five questions, save your document and turn it in by attaching your answers. Ask for help if you do not know how to complete this.

Excerpts from “Encyclopedia of An Ordinary Life”
By Amy Krouse Rosenthal

**Brother:** My brother, who grew up with three sisters, was I won’t say how many years old when he finally realized that he did not have to wrap the towel around his chest when he came out of the shower.

**Cream Rinse:** Cream rinse always gets stuck in the upper rim of my right ear. Not my left ear. And never shampoo. Just the right ear, cream rinse. I will be driving and glance at myself in the rearview mirror and spot white goo hanging out in there. I’m always like, “Again! The cream rinse! What’s up with this?!” as I wipe it off. You’d think I’d make a special mental note to do some focused right ear rinsing in the shower, but I never think about it until later, usually when I’m in a public place. Amazingly, no one has ever said anything to me about the white glob in my upper ear – whether this is because it’s usually sufficiently hidden by my hair because it’s too awkward to bring up, I don’t know . . .

**Drawing:** I can’t really draw. As a kid, though, I drew all the time; by middle school, even though I wasn’t all that good, I became known as the artist. Markers and paints and ink pens were what I knew, what was readily available. I would still be awhile until I discovered how words and writing could be used as a possible creative outlet.

If I could draw, I would have been able to figure out how to make a woman with long hair pulled back look different from a woman with short hair. If I could draw, I wouldn’t stop at the face, I would enjoy adding arms as well. If I could draw, I would have a lot of excellent art supplies in my house. And I would probably sketch people and then give it to them as a present.

**Escalator:** One would think that by this point in my life, I would have outgrown the fear of getting my shoe caught in the escalator.

**Happiness:** I’m turning left. Look, everyone, my blinker is on, and I’m turning left. I am so happy to be alive, driving along, making a left turn. I’m serious. I am doing exactly what I want to be doing at this moment; existing on a Tuesday, going about my business, on my way somewhere,
turning left. There is nothing disconcerting or unpleasant or unfortunate about this moment. It is exceptionally nice, plain, and perfect.

**Hot:** If something is supposed to be hot, I want it to be hot. If it is not hot, I have no interest in it. A cup of coffee, for example, should be very hot. So should those little washcloths they give you at Japanese restaurants. A lukewarm washcloth is just so depressing. McDonald’s fries are meant to be consumed right out of the deep fryer, so hot that they almost burn your mouth while you eat them and you have to do that thing were you sort of chew with your back teeth only, and with your mouth half open, while blowing on them at the same time.

**Husband:** Jason and I were fixed up on a blind date, by my dad's best friend, John. When I opened my front door and saw him, I knew there was something between us. By the end of our merlot and rigatoni, I knew he was the one. Fifty-two weeks later, he knew. I like how when his sister Michel phones him he just answers yep or uh-huh and then she either talks and he occasionally goes alrighty then or, more characteristically, says nothing at all. I like how they always call each other during exciting TV events like the Grammys or *The Sopranos'* season finale or some Freeview Prince concert on satellite and just sit on the phone together in total silence, sharing the show from their respective city posts. I like that he's had the same best friend since he was three. (Hey, Dave.) I like that he's a good dancer and a surprisingly good jacks player. I like how he barely ever annoys me. I like how we dine at restaurants — either on stools at the bar instead of waiting an hour and a half for a table, or if we do sit at a table, we'll sit next to each other instead of across. I like how he looks when he's making a toast — thoughtful, composed, handsome, you know, like a real gentleman. I like how he laughs when he really laughs hard, like during the Will Ferrell streaking scene in *Old School*. I like how he's forgiving when I shut down and retreat inward. I like how he doesn't give me a hard time about my heap of clothes in the closet, though we both know I have less tolerance for his harmless, scattered piles. I like how he doesn't make me feel bad about my lack of enthusiasm for important adult things like politics and Quicken. I like that I don't mind how he smells when he sweats. I like that when we fight, he tends to have a point, and he makes it skillfully and convincingly. I like how he holds a skillet. I like his hands, they fit good with mine.

**Movies:** I always want to see what happens after the movie is technically over. I want an update on the couple that fell in love in Dolby Surround Sound, to see how they're doing post-euphoria. Have they begun fighting over small increments of time? *(You said you'd be home at seven-fifteen. It's seven-twenty,)* Or in *Ransom*, for example, after they get their son back in the end, I want to see what their family life is like. When they're sitting
around the breakfast table, do they reminisce, *can you believe you were chained up to a bed for a week?*

**Photos, old:** It's a powerful thing, coming across an old photo of someone close to you. It makes you pause - You have to closely examine it. Like a portrait of my grandmother from forty years ago - so vibrant, poised, that nice tweed skirt. Without the mask of old age, her features are more pronounced; she's herself, but crisper. I have a snapshot of my parents from their courtship period, swinging at a park, all smiles and good skin. There they exist as a young man and a teenage woman who love each other, nothing more yet; they are not parents, they have no affiliation to an unborn me. I know how the story unfolds from there - quite happily actually - but in that photo, they are ripe, on the verge, unencumbered, and so very beautiful. I know my own children will one day come across an old photo of me and Jason. *Look at Mom and Dad. They were so young. Look at Mom's hair. And how handsome Dad was.*

**Q-Tip:** Inserting a Q-Tip deep into your ear is a great, undiscussed pleasure.

**Sandwich in Trash:** A friend told me that a former colleague of ours was retiring and that there had been a big farewell party for him. As he told me this, all I could think about was the time I realized that he (the retired fellow) took a half-eaten tuna sandwich out of my garbage can at work and ate it. This was like six years ago or something, and he was a nice enough guy, yet the one and only identity imprint I’ve retained in this image of him salvaging and eating the thrown-out sandwich. I recall feeling both grossed out and incredulous. It was revolting, sure, but he ate it with zero self-consciousness or detectable shame/meekness.

**Ta-Da!** Children get to say *ta-da!*, and I guess magicians, but other than that, it's an underutilized expression. I'm trying to think—an adult might say it as she waltzes in with the turkey, or a homemade cake. But a self-congratulatory *ta-da!* would certainly be warranted for any number of daily accomplishments. I cleaned out the trunk of my car. *Ta-da!* I finished filling out the insurance application. *Ta-da!* I made the bed. *Ta-da!*

**Questions**

1. **Which entry demonstrates the most sincere emotions?** What emotions are demonstrated? How does the writer show sincerity (honesty)?
2. Find and document three examples of internal dialogue. What does each reveal about Rosenthal’s character?

3. Which of the five senses does Rosenthal appeal to the most? Find and document several examples of sensory imagery. Then, detail how each helps you as a reader connect to her stories.

4. Which of Rosenthal’s entries is your favorite? Write 2-3 sentences explaining what Rosenthal does in this entry that you like. What writing skills does she employ that create an effective personal narrative?

5. What type of person do you think Rosenthal is based on her vignettes? Choose 4 characteristics and give a piece of evidence from the text to support each one.