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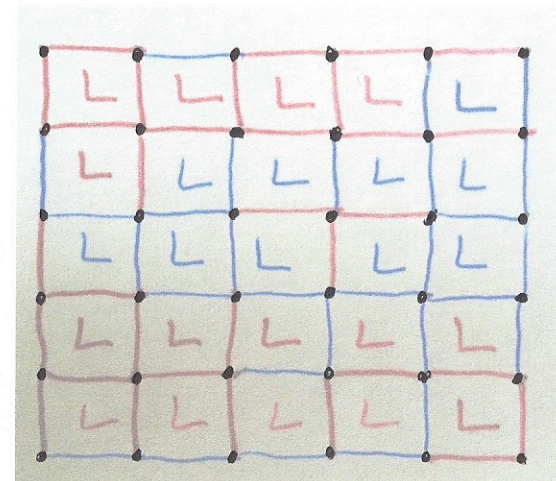
ellipsis (ɪˈlɪpsɪs)
n, pl -ses (-sɪz)

A series of dots, typically three, that usually indicates an intentional omission of a word, sentence or whole section from a text without altering its original meaning.

Depending on their context and placement in a sentence, **ellipses** can also indicate an unfinished thought, *e.g.*,

Before I was a twinless twin, we were . . .

a game of dots



L = Lia

L = Larry

(I went first. I was older.)

(Grammar) Also called: **eclipsis**

We were, us . . .

before memory formed, swimming in our oval oceans, no words to name their colors. Crashing into an elbow. Sliding across a hipbone. Resting against a rib. Curve of comfort. Many days might pass with our toes in each other's face, already familiar when Mom later wiggles each one and calls them *piggy*. Another shift. We reach for each other's hand. Our protection membranes like a window, our palms pressed against each side. Whispers through the space between cells. Our heart music always near.

Until the quake and the oceans emptied. A door opened and I reached back for your hand. Our fingers touched. Laced. You looked frightened. *Don't leave me*, I heard.

I won't. Ever, you heard back. Still you pushed me through that door and we lost our grip. Your thumb went in your mouth. For six minutes, our worlds eclipsed . . .

C16: from Latin, from Greek

elleipsis omission,
elleipein to leave out,
leipein to leave

First Baby: Girl, 6:50 am Second Baby: Boy, 6:56 am.

June 22, 1958. Suburban Hospital. Bethesda, Maryland. A summer Sunday in suburbia. We were healthy, nearly 6 pounds and close to 20 inches each. Born under the sign of Cancer, but on the cusp of Gemini, on a day that embraced doubles. Our pictures were in the *Washington Post* along with two more sets of twins delivered that week on the same maternity floor. Newsworthy in the fifties. A personal best for our mother whose doctor had told her there would be no children with her tipped uterus. When Mom got pregnant a year into their marriage, her dormant oval grew and grew.

...

Third trimester revealed two heartbeats. Pregnant—*er*.

...

Dad and Mom took us home to their newly built split level in a quiet post-war neighborhood in Rockville, Maryland. They could afford it on Dad's government paycheck because they'd optioned to leave both the basement and part of the upper level unfinished. Our street, Gruenther Avenue, honored a WWII General, but the residential development was named for the two branches of Rock Creek that traversed the original 200 acres of wheat farmland.

Larry and I had arrived in Twinbrook.

Depending on their context and placement in a sentence, **ellipses** can indicate a mysterious or echoing voice, or a nervous or awkward silence

1958 . . .

Dad's movie camera captured us crying, our faces angry red, our swollen gums toothless. Unsmiling, empty mouths. The lens lingered on our scrawny nakedness, needing nourishment to fill out our wrinkled skin, needing someone to touch us, but only the eye of the camera witnessed our eyes shutting out the light. We lay close to each other in one crib, our heads almost touching, our nostrils flaring. Occasionally, a flailing foot or wrist found the other's skin, the embodiment of a frantic cry that echoed nearby. Two minutes more, and then another. I can hear our plaintive pleas despite the silent filmstrip of the old technology . . . Were the bottles not yet warmed? Why had no one picked us up? Where were our mother's breasts?

1960 . . .

My brother was standing in his crib, clinging to the rail, his light green blanket worrying in his mouth. Mom's slippered foot stepped on the metal lever and lowered the side. Larry fell into her arms. *Don't wake your sister*, she shushed. *You're my robin, my morning bird*. I opened one eye and watched through the wooden bars of my crib across the room, a strategy I used to learn. Mom called it playing possum. I couldn't see the metal lever on my own crib, but I knew it was there. I'd reached my hand through the slats and felt it. Something more was required to cause the gate to lower . . . more than just touching the cold bar. I was still working that through when Mom opened the venetian blinds and let the light in.

or a leading statement

... I'm sure we can climb out that window.

I'm not, I answered, staring at the narrow, rectangular opening in the powder room on the first floor of our childhood home. Larry's outstretched fingertips were two feet too short.

I'll lift you. Larry threaded his hands together for my five-year-old, Hush-Puppied foot. I grabbed the ledge and pulled myself up onto his shoulders. I thought the outside world would be inviting, but it was hard to see through the frosted glass and cobwebs.

See, it will work.

I had my doubts. How would Larry climb up after me with no one to give him a boost? But in our world filled with Captain Crunch decoder rings and treasure chests with working locks and keys, very little seemed impossible. We were determined to run away after the moon rose, though I can't remember why. Maybe Larry was upset and I was along for the ride. Back then we were often co-conspirators. It had never occurred to us that escape was just as effective through the front door.

We spent the afternoon in the bedroom we shared as twins, sorting our possessions, making weighty decisions about what to bring. We had only a small cardboard box. I don't recall packing any clothes. At five, we wouldn't have thought to take a toothbrush. I'm sure that Larry packed his

pale green blanket—ragged from years of teething and worried twisting and pulling, and the feather he held in his fist with that blanket when he sucked his thumb, stroking his cheek with the soft plume. He didn't go anywhere without them.

I wanted to bring my Chatty Cathy doll with her gently freckled cheeks and nose; the stiff, noisy crinoline under her blue pinafore made her substantial. When I pulled her string, she said, "Please take me with you." But she wouldn't fit in the box, even when I bent her at the waist into an "L", and I had to leave her behind. I packed my pale yellow blanket; it was in good shape with the silk edging still intact.

We stuffed the box and tied it with a string the way the dry cleaners tied Dad's dress shirts. Then we hid the box underneath one of our beds and tried to forget about our adventure. At dinner, we glanced across the table at each other, a secret language that we'd developed because we'd always had each other. We went to bed on time, excited and awake.

Remember, I whispered to Larry from across the room, don't leave without me.

The next morning when the sun peeked through the blinds, we were both still in our beds. Larry hadn't left me—that time.

In linguistics, **ellipsis** or **elliptical** construction refers to the omission from a clause of one or more words that are nevertheless understood in the context of the remaining elements, *e.g.*,

In kindergarten, Lia could skip better than Larry *could skip*.

Lia passed skipping on her report card, but Larry did not *pass skipping* on his *report card*.

Mom studied our two reports cards while Larry napped.

I'm so proud of you, honey. You passed everything. That is very good.

And Larry? I asked.

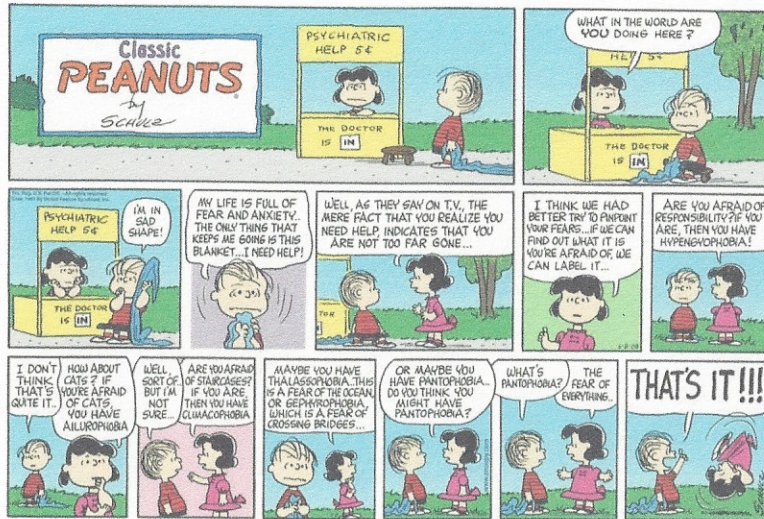
He passed everything . . . except skipping. She frowned.
Took a drag on her Salem. Looked out the window.

I shook her knee to get her attention.

Skipping is easy. I'll teach Larry how.

Mom sent us to different kindergarten classes. Larry was her morning robin. I was her afternoon orangutan. She didn't dress us alike. She wanted us to be our own persons.

Although an **ellipsis** is technically complete with three periods (...), its rise in popularity as a "trailing-off" or "silence" indicator, particularly in mid-20th-century comic strip and comic book prose writing, has led to expanded uses online, *e.g.*,



We were our own persons, opposites in many ways. Larry, the sensitive introverted Linus with dark black hair, carrying his blanket with him; me the bossy extroverted Lucy, always knowing how to solve problems, busy with my many activities and self-importance.

Linus and Lucy—Mom's other nicknames for us, although I didn't understand at first because my hair was copper red and wildly curly. In this, I was alone in the family.

Later on, Dad played this game when we had a new visitor: Line all five kids up and let the house guest guess who the twins were. Larry and I were never chosen. David and Jennie were a year apart and had the same soft brown hair and elfish grins.

I wondered if I belonged to the family at all. But if I'd come from some other family, I didn't think that my parents could have invented such a story that I was a twin to Larry. That was a connection I felt and took pride in. There was a truth to it that gave shape to our world.

(Narrative device) when an **ellipsis** is used to omit a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the reader to fill in the narrative gaps

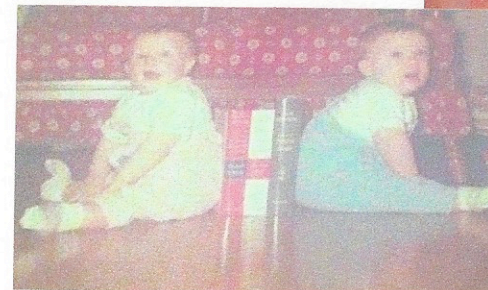
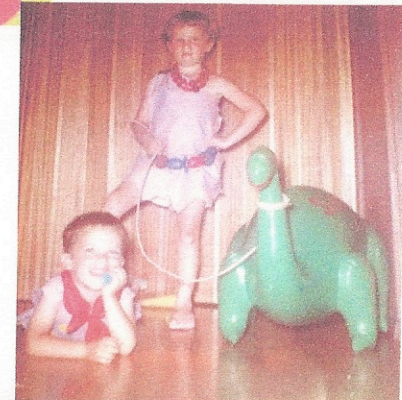
We were

Christmas morning . . .



and Fred and Wilma . . .

and bookends . . .



and we were nap
time poems
written by Eugene
Field . . .

Our favorite was *Pittypat and Tippytoe*, which we thought was written just for us—fraternal twins rioting at their play. How did the author know we begged for bread slathered with butter and sugar?

Pittypat and Tippytoe's days were filled with chaos—missing playthings and smudged walls. Torn frocks. Sometimes even an internecine¹ spat.

What a big word for a children's poem. What a big responsibility to swallow.

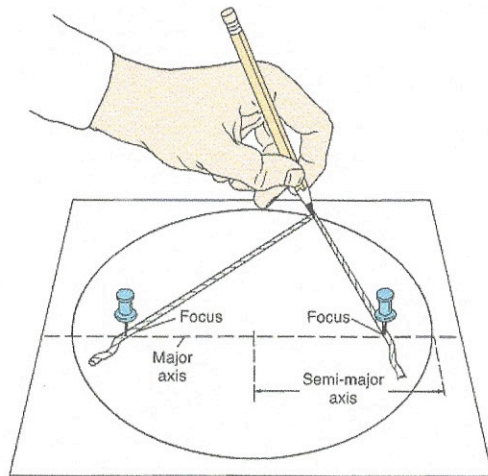


“Fie, for shame! To quarrel so—
Pittypat and Tippytoe!”

¹ **Internecine:** destructive to both sides of the conflict. Origin mid 17th cent. (in the sense [deadly, characterized by great slaughter;]: from Latin *internecinus*, based on *inter* ‘among’ + *necare* ‘to kill.’

An **ellipse** is a curve on a plane that surrounds two focal points such that the sum of the distances to the two focal points is constant for every point on the curve.

Three dots can be transfigured into an **ellipse** when a loop of string is anchored by two pins, or focal points, and is pulled taut by a pencil point.



I was one focal point and you were the other. Twinship tethered us and defined our world. An oval we floated inside in our early days, the proximity of hugs and a shared crib. Our laughter an echo to two gurgling brooks in the woods of our childhood. Our focal points so close together we were almost a circle.

Until our desire for validation from others outdistanced our dots, challenging our connection like a game of tug of war. Still the twine of our twinship did not unravel, but the shape of our ellipse lengthened into nearly a line.

I focussed on science and math, then law; you on drawing and painting, then photography.

Until a different quake rattled your head and fooled your mind. Sent you up the down staircase.

After that delusional episode, you gripped your camera harder.

It let's me freeze a moment in my life so I can try to make sense of it, you told me.

The term "**bipolar**" is sometimes used to describe curves having two singular points (foci), such as ellipses, hyperbolas, and Cassini ovals.

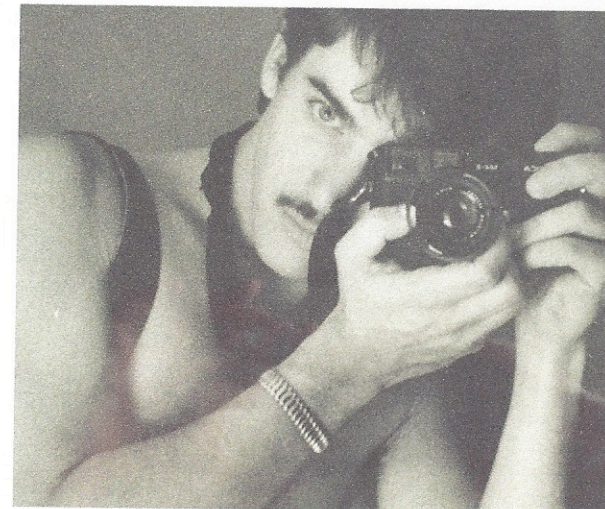
The shape of an **ellipse** (how 'elongated' it is) is represented by its **eccentricity**. The **eccentricity** of an **ellipse**, usually denoted by e or e , is the ratio of the distance between the two foci, to the length of the major axis or $e = 2f/2a = f/a$. For an **ellipse** the **eccentricity** is between 0 and 1 ($0 < e < 1$). When the **eccentricity** is 0 the foci coincide with the center point and the figure is a circle. As the **eccentricity** tends toward 1, the **ellipse** gets a more elongated shape. It tends towards a line segment.

In the early '80s, the term was manic depressive. After Larry's break with reality, while he was visiting me in California, something I just attributed to his artistic sensibility, he returned to Arizona and was hospitalized. The doctor told my parents that it was a once in a lifetime event. That he would stop his pressured speech, and manic creativity, and religious fanaticism, if he took the lithium, which he did for many years.

Until the side effects caused his hands to shake as he tried to focus the camera.

His pills piled up in his sock drawer.

Make it still . . .



Larry
Woodall
Self Portrait

When placed at the beginning of a sentence, the **ellipsis** can inspire a feeling of melancholy or longing

. . . The phone rang about 2 pm on Christmas Eve Day. Larry was calling from the desert. Snow fell outside my bedroom window in D.C.

“This is a pleasant surprise,” I told him. He wanted to make sure his gifts for his niece and nephew had arrived—the t-shirts to commemorate their visit to Arizona over Thanksgiving, when my toddling daughter Rebecca had parroted our warning, “Don’t touch the cactus!” I reassured him that they were wrapped and under the tree, but that Devin would have to grow into his. Larry knew very little about baby sizes.

We chatted about the kids and the upcoming Fiesta Bowl that he would photograph for the AP. It *had* been a pleasant surprise. Larry and I rarely talked on the phone. I didn’t even know his number by heart.

Then he said, “I’m thinking about going to Australia.”

“Really?” I always said *really* to buy time to think. I sat up on my bed. The streetlight outside my window flashed on. “What’s there?”

“Nothing special. I just don’t like being here any more.”

“What would you do?” Maybe getting away would be good. He had been late to Thanksgiving dinner because of a last minute AP assignment to photograph some sports celebrity who’d flown into Phoenix. Larry had walked in,

more tired than exhilarated, with his press badge still hanging around his neck. It grazed my mashed potatoes when he bent down to kiss my cheek.

“Do you have a plan?” I asked.

“I don’t really know. Take photos, I guess.”

I didn’t know much about Australia, so I offered, “Why not go to Germany? It must be so exciting there now that the wall is down.” That made more sense to me. I thought of the awards he had won as a photojournalist.

“You’re not listening,” he accused. Then he got quiet. “I need my life to be simple. Australia is simple. Agrarian. I need to get back to the soil.”

I’d misunderstood—hadn’t been paying attention—had my own hectic family life so far away from his. Did I say, *Larry, please come and stay with me a bit?*

He was hurt and angry. “I would have been a dad in three days.”

Then the dial tone . . .

I thought about all the pictures Larry had taken of my two children at Thanksgiving. How he had laid on the floor to engage Devin on his busy blanket. How Larry had gotten Rebecca to twirl around and around in the nightgown I had made her, captured it riding a rush of air, her giddy laugh

released from the negative he developed. I thought about the picture I had of him cradling her when she was just seven weeks old, a cloth diaper draped over his shoulder, his head bowed to engage her wonderment.

I called Jennie, our younger sister, who lived near Larry. She'd raised her concern that he wasn't doing too well over my Thanksgiving visit.

I told her, "He's counting the days until he was going to be a father." Then I said, "It's Christmas Eve. I can't leave my family this time and fly home."

Ellipsis

(from the Ancient Greek ἔλλειψις, *élleipsis*)
meaning falling short

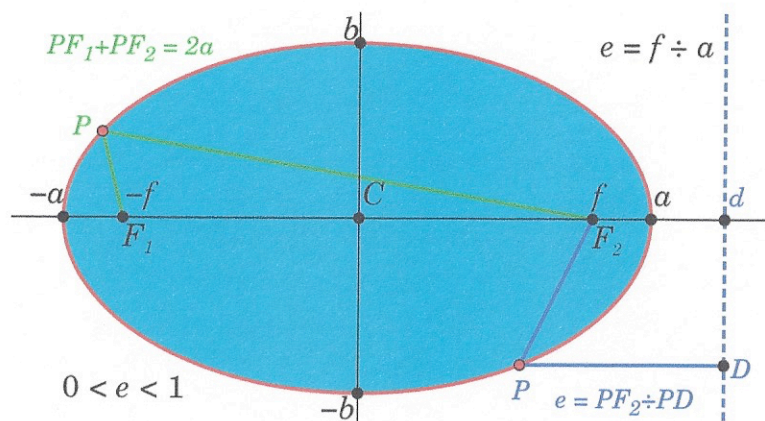
When Larry picked up the gun
and pointed it at his heart,

he . . .

In a large **elliptical** room a person standing at
one focus can hear a person standing at the other
focus remarkably well. Such a room is called a
whisper chamber.

and I heard it in our . . .

How do we measure the distance between our focal points to determine the size and shape of our **elliptical** world?



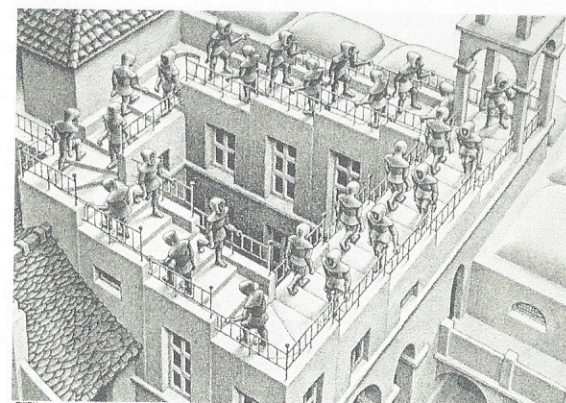
- The length of your black ponytail in high school?
- Our six minutes apart on our birth day?
- The 32 years we shared on this earth?
- The telephone line between us on Christmas Eve?

An **ellipsis** is also often used in mathematics to mean “and so forth,” *e.g.*,

In a list, between commas, or following a comma, a normal **ellipsis** is used, as in:
1, 2, 3, . . . , 100.

Normally dots should be used only where the pattern to be followed is clear, the exception being to show the indefinite continuation of an irrational number such as: $\pi = 3.14159265 \dots$

*Ascending
and
Descending,
1960.
M. C. Escher
(cropped)*



You loved Escher, the orderly vision of something that was

impossible, irrational for the limited left brain to accept. A playful collision between the ordinary and the creatively strange. Boundless in its static depiction.

You picked up a charcoal stick years before you found him. Mom likes to tell how one night—you were maybe eight—she was cooking dinner and you came into the kitchen with your sketchpad and drew an intricate pattern of castle stairs wrapping around a turret. Just standing there. As if you already saw the angles and shadows on the page and merely traced them.

I tried to imitate Escher's flying geese, morphing into mosaic fields in my Advanced Math class in high school. There had to be an equation that would teach me how to do it. I could only draw if I had a ruler or a compass, coordinates on a graph. I could not see the negative space you played in.

Until you left . . .

In the International Morse Code, the letter "S" is represented by three dots.

SOS is the International Morse code distress signal (··· — — — ···).

In popular usage, SOS became associated with such phrases as "*Save Our Ship*" or "*Save Our Souls*" or "*Send Out Succour*".

I have urgently flown home before, packing an overnight carryon with dirty clothes because it was Tuesday at midnight and Wednesday was laundry day, forgetting a toothbrush or my birth control pills, shoving into my purse the emergency phone numbers scribbled on the back of a piece of junk mail that was in reach when the phone call came through. I have abandoned my husband whose eyes gave me permission to go before I'd hung up the phone. I have reneged on making cupcakes for my daughter's school celebration and missed a goodnight kiss with my baby boy, I have boarded a plane while telling myself that life and death hung in the balance of frequent flyer miles,

and this time, when I knew Larry was counting the days until he would have been a father, when he would have fulfilled his promise to our dad to give him a grandchild and carry on the family name, when he would have felt he had made amends for all the trouble in high school, when, except for the abortion and the girl who'd left him, he would have cradled a reality of joy,

I told my sister, "It's Christmas Eve and I'm 3000 miles away, and I can't get on a plane this time."

There are so many ways to formulate an **ellipse** and its **eccentricity**. So many solutions, e.g.,

An **ellipse** in general position can be expressed parametrically as the path of a point

$$\begin{aligned} (X(t), Y(t)), \text{ where} \\ X(t) = X_c + a \cos t \cos \varphi - b \sin t \sin \varphi \\ Y(t) = Y_c + a \cos t \sin \varphi + b \sin t \cos \varphi \end{aligned}$$

as the parameter t varies from 0 to 2π . Here (X_c, Y_c) is the center of the **ellipse**, and φ is the angle between the X -axis and the major axis of the **ellipse**.

The **eccentricity** of an **ellipse** is, most simply the ratio of the distance f between the center of the **ellipse** and each focus to the length of the semimajor axis a :

$$e = \frac{f}{a}$$

The **eccentricity** is also the ratio of the semimajor axis a to the distance d from the center to the directrix:

$$e = \frac{a}{d}$$

The **eccentricity** can be expressed in terms of the flattening g (defined as $g = 1 - b/a$ for semimajor axis a and semiminor axis b):

$$e = \sqrt{g(2-g)}$$

...

Which is to say that I'm limited in my understanding of math as much as I'm limited in my understanding of what my twin brother did. Try as I have, I cannot solve this equation because the answer is . . .

An **ellipsis** in narrative can be used to condense time

1991 . . .

After my twin brother died, I didn't hold my six-month old son. Fear that he would leave me, too, rose up like a wall around his crib. Wouldn't it hurt less if I didn't know his skin? But he was held, and rocked and cradled by my husband and by our nanny, who cooed to him and tucked his white eyelet blanket around him like a second skin. She cooed to me, too; not having many words between us—between our continents. Still I managed to tell her how my twin brother shot himself, the sideways “L” of a thumb and index finger pointing at my heart. “L” for Larry; “L” for Lia. “L” for loss and language. She was *¡Mira!* from Brazil. “L” for Look!

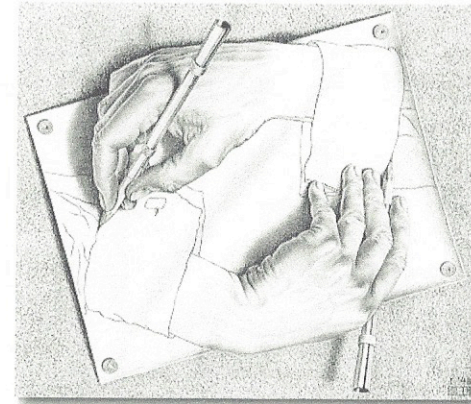
2006 . . .

Our marriage counselor tells me I need to flail more, to let go of my perfection. Flail—a word I don't know, don't use, but it's on p. 14 of *The Shipping News*, the novel I take with me to Cancun, our first vacation without the kids, and again in the introduction of the next thing I read, and maybe spoken by a character in the movie we see, as these kinds of coincidences happen in threes. It stops me mid-sentence. I point it out each time to my husband and we laugh. Although I hadn't laughed when airport security pointed out that his passport had expired. But I hadn't yelled at him either. I am determined to learn to flail.

What happens to an **ellipse** when only one of the two foci is bipolar and disappears, say from a single bullet?

- a. It collapses like a pinpricked balloon?
- b. It somersaults forever in space and time?
- c. It bounces around in a rubber room?
- d. It becomes a bullseye?
- e. It lassoes my right arm and pulls me towards Death?
- f. Its shape shifts into a rectangle—my bed, the quilt I retreat to when I shake?
- g. It snakes into a question mark in every mirror?
- h. It tears apart into two blue hearts, the color of our eyes?
- i. It stitches my mouth shut so I won't scream?
- j. It loops and skates down the page, cursive L's forever together?
- k. It forms an itchy noose?
- l. It finds a new language, a new center, a single focus?

In the language of Morse Code, Suicide begins with an **ellipsis** and ends with one dot.



Drawing Hands, 1948, M. C. Escher.

Is this how you might have described our twinship, Larry?
You drawing us?

Before you put down your pencil and picked up a gun.
Ended you with a single hole in your chest. Destroying not
only your life, but the wholeness of us.

Now I'm picking up that pencil. Now I'm writing you.

Aposiopesis is the use of an **ellipsis** to trail off into silence

You and I will always be children together, taking turns playing with that toy, what was it called, the one with the paddle and the rubber ball attached by an elastic string. No, you are the paddle, the power, the one who catapulted me out into the world, disowning you when you took a dare and streaked the football field, circling the Class of '75; veering away from you when we were walking to the Student Union to have coffee when you decided to fall down and convulse, pretend there was something wrong with you in the middle of campus, just for the fun of it,

away from you,

just as we were getting close enough to see that we were more alike than anyone imagined we could be, but then you swatted me away, again; and I stayed out there in an orbit that circled your life and closed it off until you collapsed and I came flying back,

each time flying back,

to the hospital when you talked to saints on the roof, to the couch when you shaved your head and wouldn't talk at all, to the desert, where there was blood and shoes in your car, but no you, and each time you got better and pounded me away again with your kinetic energy and your charm, until that phone call on Christmas Eve, when your stutter and the static cut the line and set me free, to eclipse you one last time . . .

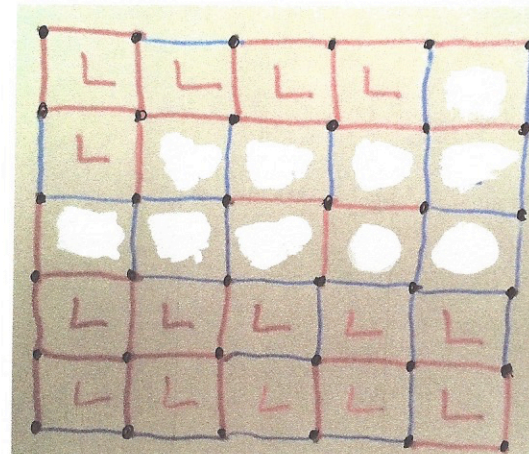
Three dots can be a conclusion. In mathematical proof, the therefore sign (\therefore) is generally used before the logical consequence in a syllogism, *e.g.*,

We are twins

You shoot yourself at age 32

\therefore We are no longer . . .

a game of dots



L = Lia

L = Larry

(I went first. Except for that day.)

We were three dots . . .

Lia Larry Twins
Me You Us

The exception to logic or math
Where $1 + 1$ was 3

until you left—
which we could debate your right to do
to take your dot and plug it with a bullet

become the negative space

but you had no singular right
to steal the dot that was us
collapse the world we shaped together

and send me out and over and up
drown me in my private escherland
of perpetual waterfalls and shifting stairwells

where you could not solve x
and we is an imaginary number
and I am the end of this story.