To me, good art is a controlled representation of real and natural images, where the adjustments and inspiration are often derived from experiments and accidents. I generally dislike the idea of Photoshop, but find it interesting to see the effect of the various tools on an authentic image. I call these effects “accidents” because I don’t use those tools with expectations, but rather see what happens and decide if the result contributes or not to the goal of my image. Always, the textures and colors in an image should be natural. Nothing new should be created – because anything created would be false in the context of that image – but anything can be eliminated.

As a photographer, my motivations are to find and create photographs that tell a story about my life now, and from which I can remember that story in the future. My photographs are not meant only as a scrapbook of friends, events, and factual details, but as a preservation of feelings, emotions and critical moments or stages in my life. My goal with this project was to create an image using real photographs that visually display how I feel about my life now, at a major turning point between college and life undefined.

**Original Images**

The original pictures used in this project are photographs from an earlier assignment on self portraits. They were taken in the SP.747 classroom, using a projector screen for a background and two spotlights for my face and to prevent shadows on the background. I used a Pentax ZX-50 with Ilford ISO 400 B&W film. Each digital portrait is a copy of the original film negative, scanned using the Leafscan 45.
I wanted to use these images together in a larger project because each stood out of the original bunch for a special reason. The first is a beautiful silhouette which carries a very strong mood with such little detail. The second and third images immediately caught my attention because I can see my parents in them, in physical features as well as character.

The first image is almost all in shadow except a sliver of my face. I like this image because the shadows contribute to the universality of the image. The shadows take away enough personal detail that this image can represent any woman, but leave a sliver of a face to emphasize that this is a personal story.

The second image is very different, and I consider it the most powerful in the series because of the strong connection with the camera. Not only is there direct eye-contact, but the whole body is oriented to face the viewer, and in a comfortable position to suggest that this is not a fleeting glance.

The last image was extremely moving to me personally because I can see my mother's characteristics so strongly in my own face. It is a softer and more serious picture, but still represents her beauty and strength.

Techniques and Motivations for Photoshop Editing

The “Notan” effect on each image was interesting, but took away the softer details in the image. I wanted to bring some detail back to the notan by adding a third color with some of the photo’s original texture. To do this, I created a combination between the “notan” and the original picture.

I did this in three steps creating unique white areas using a color gradient tool at various tolerances, leaving some areas untouched, and adjusting each image's brightness and contrast to get solid black, white and medium gray tones.

I used the "Magic Wand" tool to identify fine color gradients in the image. I consider these features "natural" to the image because that data is already embedded in the file, either due to textures or lighting in the original photograph or from scratches or fading of the negative. It's not always obvious what selections the wand will make, especially in grayscale, and the sizes of those
selections are not always complementary to the image. I used the tolerance adjustment on each image to control the scope and size of the wand’s selections, so that they contributed to an outline of each image but left in some of the softer details.

I started erasing these selected areas as an experiment, but liked the results. Missing segments of the image give each a hard edge while allowing some of the softer edges to remain. It also gives the image a feeling of incompleteness: either an unfinished look, like a drawing that hasn't yet been colored in; or an aged look, like a painting with pieces of the image crumbling away.

This dichotomy of ways to view the image is an important translation of the major theme in this project. At this time in a young woman's life, there are moments of both beauty and emptiness. The woman’s character is incomplete, but can be confronted in either of two ways: her character is growing and each black area is free space to be filled in with personal growth, or a life is falling apart and the empty spaces continue to expand taking pieces of a life with it. These options are two extremes but really represent the state of a young woman at the dawn of life as an adult; it is very much the situation in which I found myself upon completion of my undergraduate degree and entering my first year as a college graduate.

For the first time, the unwritten pages of my life had no recommended topics. Life through college is less a blank slate than a suggested path for success: I had completed high school, played sports, learned an instrument, completed college, and made a circle of very important and close friends. Life after college was anything I wanted to make it, an offering both exciting and terrifying in its possibilities.

**Arrangement of the Images**  
The images sit side by side in a very structured and linear arrangement, surely reflecting my preference for order, but also enhancing the focus on the images alone. The images have a wide lateral spacing so that each encompasses its own space. I found that when they were too close, the center image took much of the attention since it is in the middle and has that direct eye-contact with the camera. Separating the images forces the viewer to look at each image individually.
Continuity between the images comes from their similar subject and style, and blending into the white background. It is clear that each image represents the same subject even though there is little detail in the facial features.

I also had to size and crop each image so that the aspect ratio of each matched, contributing to the ordered feeling of the arrangement, and so that size of the figure in each image was comparable to its neighbor. This was important in emphasizing the equality between each photograph, and so that each warrants equal weight and attention.

**Color**

I had tried adding some color to the image, but found any color became a distraction from overall mood and theme. The lines in the images are effective because they separate only three shades. The additional colors complicate the mood and confuse the focus. With the colors, even in such simple shapes and common shades, the view becomes cluttered and it’s hard to find a place to focus. A comparison of the colored image with the previous black and white shows a striking difference in the way individual portraits stand out from the image back and white image. Color seems to draw the eye enough to allow the portraits to start fading into the background.