

*Discovering*  
THE STUDENT



DISCOVERING **THE SELF**  
ESSAYS FROM ENGLISH 100





# INTRODUCTION

The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Fall 2006 semester. The criteria used to evaluate and select these essays included content, originality, a sense of discovery and insight on the part of the student writer, control of form, language and sentence construction and representation of the various types of assignments students are engaged in while in this course. ENG 100, Introduction to College Writing, is a developmental composition course designed for students who show signs of needing additional work on their college-level writing before starting the regular general education composition classes. In this course, students learn about and refine their writing process with a strong focus on the act of revision, engage in critical reading, thinking and writing and write both personal and text-based essays. ENG 100 prepares students for the rigors of college-level writing and introduces them to college expectations.

It is our hope that these student essays reflect the struggle and the joy, the hard work and the rewards that these students have experienced both in their lives and in the classroom. Furthermore, these essays reflect the diversity of our English 100 students and the uniqueness of this course. Our students are entering college straight out of high school and are returning to the classroom after years of work and family, come from urban and rural areas, and represent different races and cultures. And this work is truly their work -- the committee has not made any revisions or corrections to the essays. And as you read, we hope that you will discover the same things that the students have discovered: during their first semester in college they are discovering themselves, realizing that they are part of many communities and defining themselves as individuals, students, scholars and citizens.

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# THE HEARTBREAK OF READING

BRETT DREAS

I have never enjoyed the class or subject of English. One of the worst aspects of English class is having to do reading assignments. I have over the years found very little to no enjoyment or pleasure in having to read an assigned book. Just like Richard Rodriguez in his essay, “The Lonely, Good Company of Books,” I too have found reading to be more of a chore than a fun pass time.

Growing up I never really saw my mom reading for pleasure. As I remember my mom was very much like Rodriguez’s parents, in the fact that I mostly saw my mom reading mail from family, reading bills, or reading other important documents. However, there were small occasions that I did see my mom reading for pleasure. It was not, however long novels or paperback books that she was reading, it was magazines. The most popular magazine that appeared at my house was, “Oprah Magazine”, which I thought to be hysterical because of the magazine’s content. I thought so because the content seemed to be pointless and displayed too broad of point of views.

As I got older and reading became required more and more, I found that I never adapted to liking reading like many of my peers. After years of hard work and dedication I was one of a select number of students picked to participate in AP English my senior year. The reason this event becomes relevant is to be enrolled in the class I was required to read the books, The Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick. This came to mind after Rodriguez stated, “I read The Scarlet Letter... And whatever I read I read for extra credit” (192). It is crazy to think that he read these and other books so young for extra credit and also that he found pleasure from reading so many books. I as a senior in high school was required to read these books and found no enjoyment. If I was given the choice to read these books as extra credit I would have

still read the books, yet my enjoyment level would have not changed.

Another aspect that came to mind while reading this essay is how Rodriguez thought of books and reading as his way to be educated. He makes this statement in paragraph five, “Books were going to make me ‘educated’. That confidence enabled me” (192). As I read that statement I realized that in my life I have never really thought of books as my educators. In fact I believe I have been educated from real life experiences and life lessons through family, friends, and teachers. The first aspect of my being educated was through real life experiences like, trying to take the ACT, there is no instruction manual, and you have to rely on the knowledge you have gained over your lifetime of hard work. The life lessons I have learned are the most valuable education I have realized. From family members I have learned, to follow orders, to respect others, and to be loyal. From friends I have learned, to be supportive, to be caring, to be kind hearted, and to be humble. From my teachers I have learned to be a critical thinker, to be patience, to be determined, to be goal orientated, and to be understanding.

As I’ve stated before I have never really got in to reading. Rodriguez stated, “what bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required” (192). When I was required to do isolated reading it drove me insane and also leads to falling asleep. I have trouble sitting down for long periods of time and reading a book with out falling asleep. I have tried sitting in a chair, on the floor, a park bench, and standing. Still I somehow manage to start falling asleep, and let me tell you that is a little dangerous standing up. When isolated reading is required I all ways come up with other things to do. Whether it is other homework, hanging with friends, playing video games, or eating. I have a really bad habit of doing this until I must have the assignment read for class. Just like the other day I told my girlfriend I was going to write this paper and I sat down and stared at the book and thought to myself

that doing this assignment did not sound fun at the moment. So I went to a friend's room to hang out with a group of peers and stayed until midnight. At what time we decided to travel to the local McDonald's to get food because we all had the midnight munchies and still had papers to write. I however, ate my food and went to bed because I was sleepy. However I left out that I was reading myself to sleep because It helps me to fall asleep better.

"My habit of reading made me a confident speaker and writer of English" (Rodriguez, 194). After reading this statement I realized that I was a strong speaker without having read a long list of classic literature. I think that Rodriguez thinks that it helped him, but the ability to give a good speech is a well-developed topic, and a strong personality. I think that I have given some good speeches mostly because I have done my research and I feel like I can confidently deliver the speech to my audience. I do not think that book learning can really help someone all that much with getting up in front of a group of your peers and delivering a speech. That ability comes with practice and involvement with your peers. Also I think I have developed a good writing style with out reading a large number of books. I feel that through my years teachers have helped mold me into a well-developed writer not a textbook with long definitions of what a well-written essay looks like.

This is the one and only time you will ever read me saying that I like to read sometimes for pleasure. Rodriguez talks about his finding reading pleasure in paragraph nine when he states, "In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity" (193). When I get to pick my reading material I too also can enjoy my reading experience. When I read such things as the Harry Potter series, or the Chronicles of Narnia. When I have time to read these kinds of books I really do enjoy my time reading. I find it easy to stay awake because I become involved in the story that I am reading. The action in the story keeps me involved and guessing what is going to hap-

pen next. Most of the required books given for assignments are boring and I always seem to find better things to do with my time. Some of these books even give me a headache while I am reading and then all I want to do is stop reading and go to sleep. When having to write summaries about reading assignments I find myself less involved and therefore my assignments suffer and do not turn out like I would like them too.

In conclusion I really do dislike reading assignments, however I will always do my work even if get it done the night before. In a way Rodriguez and I are similar in the fact that we once were both ashamed to read, the only thing is I really have not changed. I do have one time that I can find reading pleasurable and that is when I get to pick the topic to read. I guess the real thing I learned after writing this paper is that I want to read interesting information rather than what everyone expects me to read. I guess in a way I am a rebel, but who ever said that being a rebel was bad?

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## THE LOVE OR HATE FOR READING

AMANDA FORBACH

**G**rowing up many people may or may not like to read. When I was growing up I hated to read, because I struggled to pronounce the words. I also was made to read, and I didn't enjoy doing it. Like Richard Rodriguez the author of "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," he also had problems reading and didn't enjoy reading. As I became older and had more help, I became more intrigued in reading. I started

reading for fun. Like Eudora Welty the author of “One Writer’s Beginnings,” I loved to read and loved the visualization that I got from it. In Rodriguez’s essay he mentions when he was younger he started to read and he would have to spend more time looking up the definitions for words that he didn’t understand in the dictionary. Richard Rodriguez says, “I need to look up whole paragraphs of words in a dictionary. Lines of type were dizzying, the eye having to move slowly across the page, then down, and across...” (191). You can tell that Rodriguez started to dislike reading, because for him after that reading became more a requirement than a pleasure doing. He also mentions that he would have to stay after school in a small crowded room with his teacher and sit there and read with her, for almost six months. Rodriguez says, “At the end of each school day, for nearly six months, I would meet with her in the tiny room that served as the school’s library but was actually only a storeroom for used textbooks and a vast collection of National Geographics. Everything about our sessions pleased me: the smallness of the room; the noise of the janitor’s broom hitting the edge of the long hallway outside the door; the green of the sun, lighting the point started to have help with his reading.”

Before I started to have help with my reading and pronunciation of words, I was always the student that never wanted to read, because I knew that I had a problem reading out loud. Growing up for me was hard. It was harder during school than anything else, because I would always have to leave during a certain time of the day and go to this room where this lady would be sitting and waiting for me. We would first start off by talking about the day before and how that day was going, then we would do exercises to get the mouth ready to pronounce words. I hated that part of the session, because it made me feel even more stupid. After having help for a couple of years I became better at reading and pronouncing my words, and I became one of the students that always wanted to stand up

and read their paper in front of the class.

In Rodriguez’s essay he tells about his childhood and how his parents didn’t really influence him to read. Rodriguez says, “For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible... Nor did I see them read for pleasure” (191). Reading this quote I could tell that Rodriguez wasn’t influenced by his parents to read for pleasure, and that school books were just used for that year and never kept for fun. Rodriguez also mentions a time when his mother tells him “Don’t write in your books so we can sell them at the end of the year” (191). His mother must of not been a caring person about books, because she wanted to sell the school books that he had for the year, to get money back.

My childhood is similar to Rodriguez’s. My parents were always busy, and didn’t have the time to read to me. My father was always at work in Kansas City and my mother was always working and trying to keep my family in order. My mother personally loved to read a lot when I was younger. She would always be sitting somewhere in the house by herself near a lamp, quietly reading a romance novel. Having school books kept wasn’t an option for me, because the school had to keep them, so there would be books for the next year. My mother really did care about our school work. Our fridge was always full of papers. My mother always wanted to read to me, but there was always something going on. She knew that I had problems reading, so she would always check and see how well my improvements were going.

In Eudora Welty’s essay she talks about how there was always books in her house to read. For her reading became something that she enjoyed doing when she got older. Welty say’s, “Yet regardless of where they came from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them-with the books themselves... with their smell and their weight and with their possession in my arms, captured and carried off to myself” (162). Eudora Welty de-

scribes the smell and the feeling when she got them just as long as she had them. To Welty books were always supplied to her, because her parents wanted her to read. Welty says, “My father was all the while carefully selecting and ordering away for what he and Mother thought we children should grow up with. They bought first for the future” (163). Welty’s parents were truly thinking about their children’s future, even if it would cost some strain on them financially.

Just like Eudora Welty, I started to love books and I read them for pleasure. When I became older I started to love mystery books. My favorite author to this day is Agatha Christie, and her book And Then There Were None. In this book the author gives so many details on how the people were murdered. For me I felt like I was standing there watching the person kill the victim. I remember a specific part in the book that was so shocking. It was when the killer ended up being the owner of the hotel, and placed a fake murder of himself and fooled everyone, which he ended up killing. Being able to visualize a scene like that makes me read even more.

When I was younger my life was like Richard Rodriguez’s; we both had problems with reading and didn’t like it. We both also had to read, because we had to and not for pleasure. My life now is like Eudora Welty’s, the both of us love to read and do it, because we enjoy it. I have learned that reading has showed me that you can get enjoyment out of something so simple. Books have made me become more appreciative of what I’m able to learn from them.

## CHANGING WITHIN

JAMES HARNETT

Over time what you consider to be your dream as a child may not be the same dream you have later. Life experiences will change what we find most important to us

and our dreams will evolve as we grow older. Many of the experiences in our lives will shape our future and we will carry on with in us what we find most significant to us. This was the case for me: even though my interest have changed while growing up, the need to bond with others, and the feeling of wanting to help others have carried on.

Wanting to help others as a child, I entertained dreams of becoming a veterinarian because of my love of animals. When I was young I did not connect much with the other kids my age and found myself spending hours with neighborhood dogs. I felt as though I had an unspoken bond with animals. I could spend hours playing fetch with those dogs. After hanging out with the neighborhood dogs for such a long time I got to know their owners. Eventually, the owners trusted me to take their pets on walks. I can even remember the one dog’s name; he was a Siberian husky named Byron. I spent most of my time one summer taking him on walks through the woods and everywhere else I would go. I could tell him anything and he kept those secrets like a treasure box would hide forbidden jewels. He understood me too. I could tell by the way he looked at me that he knew if I was sad or when I was excited. He would react different to my emotions. For example if I was upset and he noticed he would calmly come to me. Sitting by my side he would put his head in my lap. If I was in a good mood he would jump around wagging his tail vigorously to see me so happy. I thought because of these good relationships with the dogs in the neighborhood I would become a veterinarian, but my realization of what the job could entail such as euthanasia and other things like surgery hindered that profession for me. I could not see myself performing these tasks on animals even though it may be helping them.

When I became of age to work I did not have the time I used to have to just run around hanging out with neighborhood dogs. My first job was in a kitchen at a local restaurant as a dishwasher which I enjoyed a lot. The cooks

at the restaurant were uneducated and ill mannered, yet completely well rounded in a down to earth way. The bonds of camaraderie and loyalty I would learn from these cooks have stayed with me through out my life. My connection with these crazy people was unbreakable. They were so loud, raw speaking, and rough at first, but would end up being some of the best people I have ever met. We would play tricks on each other all the time. One example of this was on Christmas they got egg nog to celebrate the holidays and intentionally neglected to tell me of the rum that was mixed in the drink. I did not notice the rum because the mixture was so mild. However, after a few glasses I began to feel the effects which at first they thought were funny, but soon they realized I was trashed. I did not know what I was going to do because I would be going home soon and my parents would be upset. The cooks were quick to come to my defense. To give me time to sober up they called my mother and told her I would be working later. They also had me go lie down while they did all the clean up for me that day. Some people would think what they did was wrong, but their intentions were not malicious; they were just having fun that went too far. Soon I became like family to these cooks and I was moved from dishwasher to breakfast cook. The cooks gave me the feeling of someone that mattered and because of that bond I began to think I wanted to become a chef.

I thought being a chef would be a lot of easy work with lots of pranking one another and joking around. So I took home economics in high school and in that class I realized later that my passion for becoming a chef was not from the right reasons and I hated cooking. Cooking at a local restaurant is much different from working as a professional chef. I did not realize the hard work and mathematical skills involved in culinary arts. I hate mixing up batters, measuring ingredients and waiting for the food to cook. I think I thought being a cook was what I wanted to do because I fell in love with the people at the restaurant and I really

did not actually like the profession of cooking. However, the feeling of bonding with others was gained with these cooks and would end up carrying on with me to my new passion of becoming a social worker.

Social work and counseling are a profession I have been considering for years. Years after working with these cooks I had left my home town. I lived on and off the streets of Philadelphia for five years. My own life experiences while living on the streets of Philadelphia have made my passion for helping others even more concrete. I have met people from all over the country with different stories and problems which brought them to the streets. While I was living on the streets if a homeless person came to me and asked for money, if I had it, I would take them to a fast food restaurant and get them something to eat. I like the idea of helping others with their daily lives and leaving them with skills to improve their lives. When someone comes to you with a problem and ask for your assistance it can be invigorating. The feeling I get when someone takes my advice and good comes out of it for them makes it worthwhile. Now, at the age of twenty-five many life changing experiences have happened to me and I have just begun college to achieve a degree in social work.

I have learned that I want to take my degree in social work to a large city and help kids get off the streets. Helping others with their lives is a choice I have found I am compelled to do. Though my interests have changed from time to time, I believe the core of helping others and feeling connected to life itself is what I found in all these other possible professions. Being a veterinarian I would have been helping animals and building an unspoken connection with them. The bond I had with the cooks will be similar to the friendships I will have with the kids I will be helping. I believe as we age our life changing events will mold and instill within us what our true passions are.

## CREATING A MAN

JEREMY HOFFMAN

Nearly every family, even the most dysfunctional, has family traditions. Like Rick Bragg describes in, *All Over But the Shoutin'* I was also raised by, a mother who sacrificed herself for her children, and an emotionally scarred father with dependency problems, while also being from a culture where learning how to fight is more important than receiving an education. Through life's experiences and my family teaching me to learn from others mistakes, I have decided I wanted to surround my children with love and give them all the resources I didn't have to be successful.

I grew up similar to Bragg, poor, and from a broken family being raised by my mother who forfeited her education at sixteen to start having children. Like Bragg's mother who wore clothes, "from the Salvation Army bin"(23) and waited on "the welfare checks, the government cheese"(65), my mother also sacrificed everything for the betterment of her children. She managed to put enough food on the table to feed three kids, and keep a roof over our heads by working two jobs. Along with that she did all the housework, laundry, and cooking for five people. I don't ever remember her getting to take a real vacation or even having any time to herself. While dealing with all this she still managed to get her G.E.D., more importantly what I am most proud of her for, she graduated with an accounting degree from Missouri Western State University in 1996, which just so happened to be the same year I graduated high school.

My stepfather's emotional and dependency problems made it hard for him to be a good father figure, and help me along the journey of becoming a man. My childhood wasn't filled with great joy or memories of a father that anyone would want to claim. One memory much like Bragg describing his father to, "kick the mortal hell out of a man in a parking lot,"(7) I was with my stepfather at one of

his Y-League basketball games. He got into a fight with another man, and at first I was terrified from all the chaos, then I found myself naturally drawn closer to see, hear, and learn all I could. After the fact, after my step-dad kicked his ass and was expelled from the league for a year, I found out what the guy did. He simply called my step dad out in front of all his friends, thinking he would scare him into backing down, thus making himself look like an "Alpha Male." My stepfather would rather die than let a man question his male fortitude in that way. He told me to, "never take shit from anyone, especially if they think they are better than you," and then he followed with, "family and honor is all we have, boy." According to my stepfather, an education of the streets would take me farther than any book would. As Bragg felt of his father, I remember feeling that "in some sick way I admired him"(7).

Much like Bragg's family, my family didn't bring me up emphasizing education, and as in his family, knowing how to fight and how to protect your manhood, were much more important. I was told from a young age that I didn't need to go to college. My cousin would say, "you can work construction or sell real estate and make just as much without having to pay all that money." Well, I did receive an education, it was one that doesn't grant you a degree, but I had to pay for it. I did have to pay for it, that was in time wasted and time lost. "Education is the key to freedom,"(Eder Hall Lobby, MWSU) and, "Only the educated are free,"(Epictetus, Discourses) are quotes that have stuck with me since the day I read them. These statements carry much weight, in fact, they carry more truth than most people realize until it is too late. To most of my family being educated is thought to be a handicap instead of an accomplishment, furthermore, to be considered a man you must know how to stand up for yourself and fight. At the time I didn't realize they were teaching me to become a working fighting man, instead of an educated civil man. Like Bragg saying in his culture, "it was com-

mon, acceptable, not to be able to read, but a man who wouldn't fight, couldn't fight, was a pathetic thing"(7). With the plethora of pent up anger in my culture, along with the will to take it out on the unsuspecting, there was enough fighting to make a man out of anyone.

The way of living and thinking I was accustomed to navigated me though my younger years, actually until I started having children and building a family of my own. I then started to think of the values and beliefs I wanted to instill in my own kids, and I decided I wanted to start a new family tradition, a tradition based on education and religion. I strive to surround them with the love and opportunities that I didn't have. That way they, as they become adults, they can make educated, moral decisions concerning their own pertinent choices in life. Through all life's lessons and experiences, I now believe an education is the key that unlocks the doors that otherwise have no key.

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Quote on wall in Eder Hall Lobby, MWSU

## FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

CARA JUDD

**H**ow well does one really know their parents? As much as we would like to think we do, most of us truly do not. My entire life I grew up thinking I knew everything about my parents, when in fact I was just looking through a tiny peephole in the door that lead to their lives. As an adult my parents have only started to let me in. It has been a slow process, but I am thankful for even the littlest

insight into their lives. There are three things my parents have given to me in the more recent years of my life that I hold as my greatest possessions. To my parents these items were viewed as something they needed to get rid of because they resembled a time in their lives that they would like to forget. These possessions are an antique pearl necklace, my father's wedding ring, and my father's military coat. They help to define me as a family oriented, loving, and optimistic individual.

On the night before my wedding my mother gifted me with a beautiful set of pearls. It was a necklace of exquisite antique beauty. The pearls, slightly yellowed with age, were oddly shaped. They were not the perfect round pearls you would find today. Each and every individual pearl had a slightly different shape; some had the tiniest dimple or imperfection. I recognized the pearls immediately because I had seen them many times in the past in my mother's jewelry box. When I was a little girl my mother and I would play dress up. She would let me dress up in some of her most beautiful dresses and then she would help me put her jewelry on. There was always one piece of jewelry I admired and wanted to wear but was never allowed to touch. It was this pearl necklace, although I never knew why I couldn't touch the necklace. My mother would just tell me that it was very old and special to her. Yet she never wore the necklace herself.

I am not sure I can describe the overwhelming love I felt for my mother at that moment knowing she was giving me what I thought was one of her most prized possessions. As I held the pearl necklace in my hand I could tell right away that those pearls were much older than I and had probably been worn around several necks. I knew immediately that these pearls had a story behind them that I was eager to hear. My mother told me about the night before her wedding when her mother had given the pearl necklace to her. These pearls have been handed down several times from mother to daughter on the night before

their wedding. My Great – Grandmother was the first to receive the necklace in 1913 when she married her first husband. The necklace at that time was a gift to her from her husband on the day they married. The tradition was started with her and has not ended yet. The sad almost tragic story behind them is that every marriage since has ended barely before they began. Some might think they are a symbol of bad luck, but through the years I have decided they might have been part of some bad luck, but were not the cause of it. I think these pearls signify something greater, that behind all endings are new beginnings.

About a year after I got married my father decided to give me the wedding ring my mother gave to him. The ring is white gold; it has a braided design on both sides of the ring. The ring is really pretty plain, just the usual wedding band worn by most men. Although the ring is worn and is showing signs of age, to me the ring was so much more. The ring was my parents, it was the time they created me, and it was a time when they were happy and in love. My parents have been divorced since I was three. My father had kept the ring locked up for safekeeping until the day he could give it to me. He told me that he wanted me to have the ring now and that he hoped it would bring me better luck than it brought him. My father, like me is a very emotional and easily hurt individual. My mother was his first true love and although he has remarried and loves his wife very much I don't think he will ever love anyone the way he loved my mother. My father's wedding band sat in my jewelry box until the day that I divorced my husband. After that day I have worn it on my thumb to signify the changes I have made in my life and the new beginnings that have yet to come. The cool slick metal is a comfort to me when I am feeling down about something. It serves as a reminder to me that things can only look down for so long before they begin to look up.

A year ago my father gave me his military coat. It is dark green with two blue patches on it, one on the right embroidered

with the word AIRFORCE and one on the right embroidered with the name KALB. The coat is very worn; it has several spots on it where the material has started to fray and fall apart. It is made of a thick almost canvas like material. At one time the coat had a fur lining, which has since gone missing in action. My father was stationed in Caribou, Maine at Loring Air Force Base. Therefore the coat was built for extremely cold conditions. He was going through some old things and thought that I would like to have the coat, because it was from a time when my parents were starting their lives together, it was also from the place of my birth. When I took the coat from my father I immediately put it on. The coat was warm and comforting to me, it had a fresh almost outdoors scent to it, but felt soft and weather beaten. It smelled like my father and reminded me of him. My father has never lived very close to me, he lives in Ohio and I live in Missouri. Sometimes just putting the coat on is enough to lift my spirits. It is almost like I am able to hug him just by putting it on.

My mother's pearl necklace, my father's wedding ring, and my father's military coat are all my most prized possessions, because they define the person that I am today and the person that I have yet to become. I am a very family oriented and loving individual, but I am a bit more optimistic than my parents. My life has not always gone the way I wanted it to and has been emotionally trying at times, but I have learned that with every ending is a new beginning.

## MY HEAVEN

MICHAELA LINDSEY

Going down the narrow gravel road we were kicking up dust for miles behind us. The worn down and tattered seats squeaking in pain as we bounce up and down with the hit of every pot hole in the beat up 1992 silver two

door Ford Tempo. The static radio from the missing antenna, the roof liner, once tight and smooth, now held up with thumbtacks, the grey dust coming through the vents. All six of us crammed into the tiny car, hearts pounding, smiling ear to ear, and our problems from that day had all of a sudden disappeared. We were going to heaven. When I say heaven I mean heaven. You're on top of the world. Everything is quiet, besides the mooing cows, and barking dogs chasing after the stray cats. It's peaceful and pure. You and nature, the simple things of life. It's the place where everything is perfect, and all is right in the world.

Heaven on earth for me is in Stewartsville, Missouri. A small hick town where the only thing around besides farm land and timber are the eight small towns just like it that surrounds it. The closest city is a 25-minute drive, and if you want to have a lot of fun you're an hour or two away from it. For such a small town it has two gas stations, two banks, a post office, a small grocery store, and a small diner that serves early morning coffee and specials for lunch to the old farmers, and the mechanics. The buildings are all run down, and remind me of a Hollywood movie set ghost town when I drive down Main Street. The hottest place to hang out is at the edge of town at the DX. The pieced together shop that everyone takes their cars, trucks, tractors, etc. to, to get this or that fixed. It just takes a little longer to get the simpler things like an oil change, tires rotated, or an inspection because the mechanic gets side track from catching up on the latest gossip. It's hard to do anything without everyone knowing about it within a few hours. The people, most of them, are small town simple-minded people that have nothing better to do than butt into everyone else's life. There is only one place to get away from it all.

The blinding reflection of the sun off the shiny rippled silver metal silo. The metal dented and rusted over from the many years of use. Abused and battered like the sun-leathered skin of the farmer that trusts its walls like an old friend with its harvest each year.

The gravel shuffling under my feet, the echoes from each step up the cold metal staircase, as I enter my safe hide out. As you look out into the horizon you see the rolling hills, shades of green and brown. Hearing the dry weathered corn stalks rustling against each other from the breeze of the cool night air. The crickets and locust getting louder and louder as the sounds from the town fade away. Hearing the cars on the gravel as they cruise around the winding paths in the land as if it were a roller coaster. The blue, green, yellow, red, and orange rainbow of color as the sun sets. Thinking about how beautiful and simple life really is, if you would only step back and live instead of rushing life away.

This old field with a run down silo may not be much to many people, but for my friends and me it's where not even our biggest fears could scare us. What were going to do with our lives after high school, how were going to make it through college, dealing with the pain of loss in our lives. Losing parents, friends, family members. Feeling lonely like we have no one behind us to lean on when we feel like we could fall. You think you know who you really are and who you want to be and what you want to do with your life. Everyday when you are around your family and friends you tend to stray away from that. Going to this safe place, my heaven, it's the place that brings you back to reality. When its just you alone with your thoughts and feelings it snaps you back to realize exactly what it was that you wanted to be. It makes me wonder how something this plain and simple can bring such happiness. Wishing that everyone could share something this powerful with people they care about.

Seeing the city lights off in the distance, the cool breeze now sending chills through our body, looking up into the big black sky full of gleaming stars, we peacefully make our way down the cold, creaking staircase to leave, with a serenity that we know will not last forever. For now, we leave until the stress and pressure of life leads up back to our safe place. Pull-

ing out of the open lonely field, back onto the gravel we see the silo slowly fade away in the distance through the dust.

## WORK OR SCHOOL

JAROD POWELL

In this day and age school is taken for granted. Growing up I never liked going to school, but I was told and knew that school will better me in the long run. Like every child I still didn't want to go and saw no point in going until I interviewed my grandmother and she told me how school was for her when she was young. She helped me see that I was fortunate to be able to go to school.

When my grandmother was growing up, school was second and work was first. When interviewing my grandmother it was hard for me to listen to how hard it was for her just to go to school. For example, my grandmother was the oldest of ten kids and her mother, with the help of my grandmother, had to do everything to provide for her younger siblings and her. My grandmother's father passed away from a heart attack when she was eighteen. Through her senior year of high school she worked long hours for an Amoco Gas Station. As my grandmother was telling me all of this I stopped and ask her, "How were you juggling school and work?" My grandmother said, "Jarod, it was harder than giving labor to your big headed uncle Reggie."

My grandmother explained to me how she would go to school three days of the week and work six days of the week. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday she would go to school because she said, "Those were my hard classes." After she would get out of school at 2:00 P.M. she would go to work from 4:00 P.M. to 12:00 A.M. On Tuesday and Thursday, the days she wouldn't go to school, her best friend would bring her the homework home and she would take it to school the next day. The reason she

didn't go to school on those days was because she would work from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. and then watch her neighbor's kids for fifty dollars a week. I asked her when would she do her homework and she said, "Everyday, but the stuff I didn't finish I would do at work on Saturday, because it would be slow and I would be there from 12:00 P.M. to 12:00 A.M." Just sitting there listening to my grandmother tell me about how she worked like a slave made me think I would rather go to school all day and everyday than work the way she did.

While working like a slave on a farm my grandmother became pregnant, so she had to make the biggest decision of her life. She had to decide whether to stop working or go to school full time. With a disgraced look on her face my grandmother told me, "I dropped out of high school to work full time to support my family and baby. It was my family suffers or I drop out, so I did what I had to do." She began working full time and delivered a baby in the process. My grandmother claimed, "Life was so hard and not a second of the day went by without me thinking why I dropped out of school."

My grandmother regretted the decision of dropping out of school, so two years later she went back to high school and got her diploma. My grandmother stated, "It wasn't easy at all, because all the subjects I took when I was a senior seemed harder now." For example, her favorite subject when she was going to school was Calculus. She states, "It seemed so new to me which made it so hard. I was determined to graduate, no matter what, even if my classes seemed harder." She was so driven on getting her diploma that she decided to start working only on the weekends.

After working less and going to school full time, she had finally accomplished her goal of getting her diploma. She stated, "I was happier than a kid in a candy store." With graces in her eyes my grandmother showed me her diploma and said, "You have an opportunity to do something more than what I did, so take advantage of it." With those words I knew then

that I was fortunate to be able to go to school.

My grandmother let me see that life without school is hard work, which I'm never trying to do. My grandmother helped me realize that not all people are blessed with the opportunity to go to school everyday. For example, some may have to work like my grandmother, but that doesn't make them a bad person. However, they just shouldn't give up like she did because all work is acceptable. On the other hand, going to school will better a person in the long run. Last but not least, I feel very fortunate to be able to go school and not have to work a nine to five job. Thanks to my grandmother showing me the importance of an education, I appreciate the opportunities I have.

## THE CHALLENGE

HEATHER SEEVER

Many people long for something better in life. It creates a desire to learn an advanced craft. The desire builds with time, but because of all the complications and requirements that are associated with reaching higher education, most people don't even try. I, as well as many others in college, have found that furthering our education is easier than living our lives without fulfilling that desire. I have worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse for five years next to Registered and Advanced Practice Nurses, which has made me see the gap between my education and their education. Realizing the abundance of information that I want and have yet to learn in nursing, I have decided to return to college and get my bachelor's degree.

In high school I found that the lessons came easy for me, but the teachers talked down to me like I was in grammar school, causing me to feel like they thought that I wasn't smart enough to understand the concepts they were teaching. They seemed to think that we needed

to be pulled along slowly through the information. I felt that they didn't challenge me to become more than what I was, but instead made me bored of education and as soon as I got out from under the requirement of high school, I left all concepts of school behind. It took a long time and a great many prods from people in my life before I finally decided to go back to school. I thought I would start out small by going to a vocational school to get a practical nurse's diploma. This helped me on the road to getting a degree, because it helped to slowly wean me back into the life of a student. This also helped me to learn of my strengths and weaknesses toward school and being a student. I decided that I could use this information to help me get a degree.

My mother has always held more than one job, she works very hard and achieves her goals, and therefore I have followed in her footsteps. She never felt unable to accomplish anything. I take after her in that I am the type of person who needs to be doing something. If I am in a rut, I would have to challenge myself to get out of it. I knew I had it in me to work hard enough to become whatever it was that I wanted to be. I also knew that I wanted to further my career and become a registered nurse.

I have had several influences in my life. While I was working at a local nursing home in which a nursing instructor from Missouri Western was working with me. She told me that if I didn't feed my hunger for knowledge and natural talent by returning to school, I would regret it later. I then spoke with my grandma who agreed. My grandma, Evelyn Kudra, told me that it is important to strive for a more educated life. She said that the knowledge we receive is passed on to the next generation and helps us to have a better world. She wanted me to know that she regrets not pushing herself to continue her education, because she could have set a better standard for her children. I decided to find out what I wanted to become and what I would need to become just that.

I have always been a caring and giv-

ing person with a knowledge of medicine and a hunger to learn; therefore, I have chosen to return to school for a bachelor's degree in nursing. I looked at the schools that I could choose from and decided to look into Missouri Western. It was in my home town and accepted some of the credits I had earned in Practical Nursing School. I met with a counselor from Missouri Western and we spoke about the requirements of the school and the separate requirements of the nursing programs. I felt that the degree was in reach and applied, and received acceptance to, Missouri Western.

The requirements for a BSN (bachelors in nursing) are numerous. I would need to test out for some of the class credits and meet the general education requirements of the school. According to the college catalog, the nursing requirements include a transitional class to baccalaureate nursing, and many health, nutrition, and biology classes (160-170). In order to meet these requirements I would need to apply and be accepted into the nursing program, which requires that I must already have completed or be in the process of completing the college prerequisites. After being accepted I would start actual nursing classes.

After receiving my degree, I would like to teach in a nursing school while going to graduate school for nurse anesthetist and nursing education. This will feed my knowledge along with helping me to feed my family. According to the Health Resource Partners' internet site a nurse anesthetist will make around \$116,000 a year and a nurse educator could expect to make at least \$40,000 more a year. I plan to get my B.S.N. (Bachelors of Science in Nursing) at Missouri Western and move on to the University of Colorado in Denver to pursue a Masters in Nursing with a minor in education. After speaking with Mary Roderich, a retired nurse educator at Beaverton Community College in Beaverton, Oregon, I know that there is a great need for instructors in nursing schools. She also told me that there are thousands of qualified nursing applicants turned away each year because there aren't enough

instructors for them all. This lets me know that when I retire to teaching alone, there will always be a job for me.

I have been privileged, in that I am working towards my dream, which is in reach. I love nursing and teaching others what I know. I also love school. I love the hard work, the helpful faces, the abundance of information and most of all, the challenge. I believe that college is the place for me. As Caroline Bird says, "College is an ideal place for those young adults who love learning for its own sake..." (176). If this sentence was the paint, I am its portrait. I have always felt the need to challenge myself to accomplish my goals and dreams. I know that I have the ability to learn the necessary information to succeed in becoming a Registered Nurse with a bachelor's degree.

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## FOLLOWING YOUR DREAMS

DAVID A. SHAW JR.

**A**t some time in our lives some of us have aspiration of being someone who helps others like a lawyer, doctor, or teacher. The hope of making a difference in someone's life or doing something that effects others in a good way. My ambition has been to share with others those things which I hold as true. I not only want to look after people's physical conditions but their spiritual as well. Becoming a preacher has been a dream of mine because I have a strong desire to share God's Word with others and nursing will be my profession as I follow my dream.

I was an unmotivated student in high school. Dating and socializing were more important to me than my education. The high school I attended was Central High School in Saint Joseph, Missouri. I was the type of student who rarely did his home work and would sleep in algebra class. I was often late to class because of my inability to properly prioritize the education over the socializing. I even missed school frequently not caring how it would affect me. My mom and I fought on a regular basis about me missing school. In my senior year of high school I decided I had enough of school and got my General Education Diploma and went into the military. I greatly regret the fruits of my youth because I wished I had applied myself in school and went on to college when I was younger. The lack of initiative has resulted in me taking developmental courses in college. I have mostly learned life's lessons the hard way. I now make sure that I don't miss a class and study hard to be the best student I can be.

My work ethic comes from God because the bible says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not men" (NIV Colossians 3:23). This could not have been done on my own because growing up I was in the habit of just getting by, my character has been one of laziness. I have been

a Christian since May 23, 1999 and in this time I have learned that my work habits not only say something about who I am but say something about what I believe. My studies about laziness in the scriptures have been beneficial to me along with much prayer to help me overcome my character of being a sluggard. If it were not for God in my life I would not be the person I am who does his homework and goes to class. The strength I have received from the Lord to no longer live my old life and live a new life in Christ Jesus is incredible.

The reason I am going to school to become a nurse when I ultimately want to preach is I need a means to support my family. In the essay "Where College Fails Us" Caroline Bird states, "Whatever college graduates want to do, most of them are going to wind up doing what there is to do" (171). The education I receive going to college to be a nurse is not my ultimate goal but it is what I have to do and it will enhance me as a preacher. According to my wife Angela, "Your messages are easy to understand and flow well." She also said, "I wondered if you were meant to preach" and "you did very well." Several of my courses will help to make me a good preacher such as English, Oral Communication, and College Writing and Rhetoric. The reason these courses will better me as a preacher is that they will help me to be a better writer in writing my sermons and they will better prepare me to be a better speaker.

In order to start the Nursing Program I must first complete my general courses and support courses and then take my nursing classes in my junior and senior years. Some of the support courses I must take are various Biology courses, Chemistry 104, Psychology, and Anatomy and Physiology. My completion of the general and support courses along with my grade point average do not guarantee I will go into the Nursing Program. It is very competitive to get into the Nursing program and so I need to do my best in all my classes. I must be accepted by a selection committee who reviews all applicants. It states in Missouri Western State University's College Catalog, "an appli-

cant must maintain a 2.5 Grade Point Average” (156) and I must complete 95 credit hours of course work in nursing. After I have completed the program I must apply to the State Board of Nursing, pass the licensure examination, and a criminal background check is conducted.

Once I graduate from Missouri Western I hope to find a job as a nurse in a doctor’s office or at a school and eventually I desire to preach full time. I want to work as a school nurse because I would be off when my kids are off including snow days and the summer. This would allow me to spend quality time with my family and so would me being a preacher. If I was able to be a full time preacher I would have more time to spread God’s word to people and share about His love for us. According to Erik Smith, the preacher at Prairie Hills Church of Christ, “One of the challenges of being a preacher is that you’re not in it for the money, our retirement plan is spiritual.” I can make a living being a full time preacher but I will not get rich preaching. If I am unable to find a job as a school nurse the next option for me is a doctor’s office. I do not want to work at the hospital because of the long hours and schedules that would make it hard to spend time with my family or pursue my dream of preaching. I currently preach the last Sunday of the month in the evenings.

I am living out the ambitions I have for myself in going to college and to already be preaching once a month to the congregation I attend is inexpressible. The support I have received from the Eldership at Prairie Hills Church of Christ in being allowed to preach is beneficial to my growth as a preacher. The congregation has been wonderful to my family and me. I am also thankful to my wife and Erik for encouraging me to follow my dreams. I am most of all grateful to God for His unfailing love and grace for an unmotivated, selfish wretch like me. I know that with God I can follow my dreams.

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## THE EMPTINESS FILLED

DAVID A. SHAW JR.

At some point in life some of us have a religious experience. In Rick Bragg’s All Over but the Shoutin’ he describes his observations of religion and his lack of conviction. Bragg states, “I never felt so alone before” (88). Like Bragg, my encounter with the beliefs of others and the way they worshipped God left me feeling empty and unfulfilled growing up. We both quit attending church after some time because pretending to be something we did not experience or feel was pointless. Even though Bragg and I both started on the same path, Bragg was unable to find a fulfilling relationship with God while I was able to fill the emptiness and become whole.

Bragg and I both were raised “to believe God is watching over us” (52), being taught that all is observed by the Almighty is confusing as a child. We were told that God would protect us and keep us from harm. Bragg felt

as though God must have blinked or that “ He had something in His eye” (52) when Bragg’s momma, brothers, and he left his grandparents’ home to live with his dad. Bragg felt this way about God because he felt as though God could not be watching with all of the terrible things that took place in the big house. Bragg’s mom was repeatedly beaten by his dad and at times his dad was physically abusive to Sam and him as well, these and many other things made Bragg feel cynical toward God being all seeing.

Bragg’s distrustful attitude toward God is shown when Bragg wrecks his car. Bragg saves up money he earns with some help from his uncle and buys a 1969 General Motors convertible. The car is a muscle car and his uncle warns him “that’un will kill you” (112). Bragg assures his uncle Ed that he will be careful with it and then spent a lot of time racing with the car. One night Bragg was racing a hundred miles per hour when he lost control on a sweeping turn on the highway and flipped the car upside down in a ditch. He was unharmed in the accident in spite of his careless driving and not a wearing seatbelt. Several people told Bragg, “ the Lord was riding with you” (113). The wreck was bad and he should have not walked away from the wreck. Bragg thinks to himself, “the Anniston Star the next day would read: LORD RIDES WITH BOY, WRECKS ANYWAY” (114). Bragg does not share in everyone’s view of the matter of being fortunate to be alive, instead of seeing that God protected him in the accident he sees it as God allowing the accident to happen. Bragg did not grow up seeing God in the lives of his parents and this was responsible for him not viewing God as he should.

Bragg’s mom worshiped God from the comfort of her home while Bragg sought after God. The television evangelists “brought not only His Word, but salvation” (Bragg 79). He talks about reaching out to touch the black and white tube himself a few times to get saved but never felt anything. Bragg’s mom would not go to church for fear that she would be looked down upon. He would have to go to church

without his mom or brothers. Bragg talks about taking a Bible he has not read and a quarter to give if needed. In talking about waiting for his ride to the Hollis Crossroads Baptist Church, Bragg said he was “waiting for the One Living God to reveal Himself to me” (83). Bragg’s struggle to understand and believe in God consumed a large part of his childhood as did mine.

Bragg talks about the preacher at Hollis Baptist Church saving people one at a time, young, old, and even those who had been saved once already. The preacher kept saving people every week until he had enough people for a big baptismal. Bragg said, “I saw one, only one” and that it “...was the most beautiful thing...” he had saw (87). Bragg talks about eventually not going to church because he kept waiting for a religious experience to come that never did.

My step dad and mom worshiped in a similar manner as Bragg’s mom and searching for God was up to me. My step dad would read us stories from the bible on special holidays but seldom went to church. Mom always talked about God as some distant observer kind of like the way Bragg was taught to view Him. I wrestled to understand who He was as Bragg did and knew that God didn’t live in a TV. Like Bragg, there was no real commitment to God by the adults in my life. The church going in my family was left to my little brother, sister and me. My mom and step dad would only go occasionally and to say that is probably stretching it. Every Sunday morning we would get ourselves up and get ready. The bus to Patee Park Baptist Church would pick us up right in front of our house. It seemed like to me at the time that mostly only kids worshiped God because of the fact that only kids would ride the bus and mostly only kids without parents would be at church. The message at church was so confusing as well.

I, like Bragg, remember the preacher giving the invitation at the end of the sermon every Sunday. He would preach Fire and Brimstone from the pulpit and then everyone would

go back to their lives as normal with no real long lasting change. I had trouble understanding why he would preach such a message of condemnation to people who he had saved the week before. When enough people had been converted, there would be a baptismal just like Bragg talked about, except it was in the building in a ready-made kind of baptismal. I kept waiting to feel different and lost hope when I did not. I, like Bragg, quit going due to the loneliness that I felt.

I studied the Bible with some people I had met in Great Lakes that really helped me understand God's will in my life and understood why I felt so empty. At the time, I was not ready for the commitment that God required but I now know why I felt so alone. I made the decision when I quit studying and going to church that I would not pretend to be something I was not.

Bragg was never able to find God, where as I, after giving up, did find Him and was finally able to fill the emptiness and be whole. Bragg was never able to have a meaningful relationship with a woman. I after many failed relationships met my soul mate, the woman who loved me enough to challenge me to change. Looking back at that ultimatum that my wife Angela gave me, I see that it was exactly what I needed to turn my life around. Without Angela in my life I don't believe I would have ever become truly committed to God or found fulfillment in a relationship with Him. My wife's love helped me to see God's love and understand that it was my selfishness that made me feel alone and empty. I am forever grateful to my wife and to God for putting Angela in my path. God was watching after all, thanks be to God!

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## MY BAT

BRETT A. SPITZER

It's no longer pretty blue like it was when I new. It is a little small for me as I've grown a few inches. It even has a few scars from the repeated use it received. If you could reverse time, 11 years, you would see a brilliant, shiny new blue bat purchased just for that summer of baseball. I would enjoy many experiences with my bat, obtaining it, practicing hitting; but the greatest that summer, for its intended use was producing a game-winning hit.

The bat came upon my brother and me kind of by accident. We were at the local Wal-Mart looking through the sporting-goods section. Michael and I decided we needed a new bat that would make us hit farther and better every time we stepped up to the plate. The only hurdle in obtaining this new wonderstick was grandma. She would be the final say in our quest for the bright, shiny, new blue bat we had both agreed upon as our choice. After a lengthy few minutes of bargaining that seemed doomed from the minute we both said "grandma, we found something we both have to have," the baseball bat was in the cart. A surefire commitment to buy, we couldn't be more excited.

The first use had to come as soon as we arrived home, no less than five minutes after checkout. We went to the huge field next to us and had a little hitting practice. My brother and I couldn't believe our grandma said yes to such an expensive gift. Our thoughts on getting a new bat would be met with, "but there are already bats for you to use at the games." Today that was far from the truth, we were superstars already. All we needed was our new bat, and we could hit anything that came near us, or so we thought.

A nice leisurely summer break was upon me again. This time I would use the first part of the summer to try a new sport. Baseball was a game I liked playing with friends, but I never played in an organized league on an ac-

tual team. Signups began in the late springtime before school even let out. It made the wait that much harder. I wanted to put my skills to use as a member of a team, but schoolwork had precedence at this point in the game.

The time for practices was a welcomed event. No one likes to practice for a goal that seems so far away. I didn't mind that we wouldn't play for a few more weeks, I was happy to just get started. My new teammates were a mixed group, some from my class and some for the class below me, including my brother. We started out looking pretty shaky, not knowing where to throw the ball or how others liked to play a particular position. Our coach tried to get our personalities and skills to mesh as one. Sometimes tempers flared and no one agreed on anything. It seems so pointless now the arguments we had, where to have the next pizza party at, who should lead stretching for the day. To us, it was our chance to be the main focus. We all wanted our chance in the spotlight for all to see.

The first few games came and went; we weren't yet getting the hits like we envisioned at the store. Our next game was in Maryville, Missouri, a long drive it seemed like. The game was at the best field we had played on. It looked like something out of a movie. It was so well taken care of it could have been for major leaguers. The outfield was also huge. I thought "how am I going to be able to cover all of that out in left field?" I would find out it wasn't so big once you were on the field and running to the ball. Maybe a little larger than our home field but nothing we should worry about.

My first chance up to bat I took a few practice swings. I was used to being struck out; it was the norm for me. The first pitch came in slow motion, I could actually see it leave the pitchers hands and come floating towards me. I had to take a swing at this great opportunity, PING, the ball bounced off the bat with such force I was shocked. I looked to deep left field as the ball was rolling past the fielder stopped by the wall. I couldn't believe what happened. Usually, I just went up to bat, swung a few

times and that was it. I finally realized I needed to get to first and now. The fielder had caught up to the ball, and it was already enroute to the second basemen. I could have made it an easy double or a triple if I knew what I was doing but I didn't care. I had my first hit! I just sat on first with the biggest smile on my face. My teammates were proud of me. Everyone wanted to use my bat, the one that hit the farthest in that big ballpark.

The experiences with my bat will always be remembered. The hit propelled us to win the game and me to experiencing greatness, if only for one night. The best game of my short-lived career and actually belonging to a team are lessons not taught at school. My own little paradise was first base that night. I made it there all on my own.

## WHERE COLLEGE FAILS US

BRETT A. SPITZER

In Caroline Bird's article "Where College Fails Us," the reader looks at a new theory that college maybe isn't the right choice for every individual. Many young people think that college is the only choice. Consequently, school administrators and parents alike don't push many other options on the students. Parents automatically think they know best in regards to their children. Furthermore, they pressure their new graduates to attend so they can brag on little Billy or Susie. They then subject themselves to harsh realities of too many graduates saturating the workforce. The author makes very valid points regarding the investment of time and money, young people trying to fit into the workplace, vocational needs of society, and values that college-goers obtain from their experiences.

The investment of hard earned dollars and more importantly time, is unmistakably the biggest sacrifice anyone will make in order to obtain a college degree. There are never enough hours in a day to complete all

the tasks scheduled; a dilemma all students face everyday. The monetary investment of college is very high. Incidentally, when compared to saving the capital in money market account, the best choice may not always point to college. A further argument presented by Bird, “This calculation was made with the help of a banker and his computer, comparing college as an investment in future earnings with other investments available in the booming money market of 1974, and concluded that in strictly financial terms, college is not always the best investment a young person can make” (Paragraph 23). This argument fails to acknowledge the average high school graduate; a person who lacks the money to immediately invest and reap the gains. Sure it would be nice to reap the gains after the money has had time to compound, but what about using the money for a first home, a new car or furnishing an apartment. This would diminish the investment, and then college would be the better choice in the long run.

Eighteen-year-olds cannot fit into our society untrained. In fact, they are too young most of the time to have any working experience. Additionally, very few want to do little, if any work for unrealistic wages. Bird points out, “Some observers say the fault is with the young people themselves—they are spoiled, stoned, overindulged, and expecting too much” (Paragraph 3). Most will have volunteer work that won’t exactly amount to work experience. An employer has real demands; the tasks completed before the deadline or else. Whereas a volunteer is praised just for showing up and “making a difference;” whether making a contribution or just padding their college resumes.

Vocational training has emerged as a cheaper alternative than college and often shorter in the time needed for completion. The need for workers that perform from the start of their employment has reached new levels. As highlighted by Bird, “Worse than that, when the specialists turn up for work, they often find that they have learned a lot of things in classrooms that they will never use, that they

will have to learn a lot of things on the job that they were never taught, and that most of what they have learned is less likely to “come in handy later” than to fade from memory” (Paragraph 16). For instance, the boss cannot afford to waste valuable time to train the new guy up to speed. Furthermore, college can’t supply every profession with all the workers they will need. Instead vocational schools pick up this slack, and train individuals who maybe lack the willpower to sit in a classroom for four years listening to lectures. They actually put tools in the hands of the students, and show how to operate them and execute the whole plan. Some students learn better visually, and they will thrive in this type of environment. On the other hand, others will not know how to implement this into completion of a task. Vocational schools offer degrees, but they are not held in high regard like a college degree. Incidentally, this may steer people focused on a GPA back to the college option.

College-goers will obtain many things from college; values, consequently, will be one of them. Indeed, people will perceive values differently than the next person. As noted by Bird, “When we speak of students acquiring “values” in college, we often mean that they will acquire the values—and sometimes that only means the tastes—of their professors” (Paragraph 29). Experiences that will drive attendees for the rest of their lives are being showcased by many public affairs offices as the most important part of college. Even more, the friendships developed will continue to grow and expand into further options later in life. Administrators constantly direct students to think of their after college lives when selecting classes, roommates, and activities. Will the time spent here make an impact? These as well as others, remind students that one day college will come to an end, and they alone will be accountable for the time spent. No one can give a list of values that will need to be mastered while attending college. The student must learn and cultivate his or her own values at their own pace and discretion.

Since the publishing of the writers work, the growing job market has changed dramatically. One can't just look at jobs available to new graduates in the United States. Foreign countries now consume graduates at an alarming rate. While the factories have decided to relocate, the workers have followed the demand, wherever it may take them. Bird also incorrectly assumes that colleges are withdrawing from the responsibility of feeding, housing and protecting students. Colleges have made leaps and bounds concerning student welfare and activities. Food courts along with new or renovated dormitories are all features students enjoy as of late. Simultaneously, colleges have increased patrols of their campuses, with the addition of their own police academy graduates.

Finally, the institution of higher learning has changed overall in the last several decades. Investments of resources have increased, but younger employees create an interesting situation in the workplace. Further, vocational needs have evolved, and lastly students' values have taken a huge shift in thinking. The landscape of the nation's colleges will never be the same. College students have embraced the changes and adapted very well.

## I LEARNED ABOUT FLYING FROM THAT

PAUL SUMMERVILLE

**M**y flying career actually started as a young boy growing up and hanging around my dad's airport. My love of flying and interest in airplanes led me to my first solo flight when I was 14 years old. My flight from Shreveport, Louisiana, 14 years later was a turning point in my flying career because of the lesson I learned that night.

My father was my flight instructor. He was an ex-Navy fighter pilot, a crop duster, and a certified flight instructor. He had ac-

cumulated thousands of flying hours and years of experience. I had spent countless hours listening to his experiences and trying to learn from them. Part of his routine when he was teaching someone to fly was to sit around and "hangar fly" as he would call it. This generally consisted of listening to one or more of his stories about things I was not supposed to do. He had many of these stories. Some were his personal lessons and others were his observations. One of the things he always stressed to his students was "never fly a single engine airplane at night." As I sat and listened I often thought these stories were about somebody else. I never really thought about anything ever happening to me.

I was 28 years old and had just returned home after spending eight years in the Navy. My dad had talked me into coming home to run the flying service as he was thinking of retirement. By this time I had my pilot's license and my aircraft and power plant mechanic license credentials I would need in the business I was to run. I had accumulated about 1500 flight hours and had several years' experience as an aircraft mechanic.

This particular day I was going to fly to Shreveport, Louisiana, to pick up some parts for a customer's airplane I had in the shop. This was typically an hour and a half flight each direction. It was a trip I had made many times before. I contemplated that if I left home by one p.m. it would give me plenty of daylight in which to get home. The first leg of the flight was uneventful. When I arrived, I was faced with an unexpected delay in getting my parts and another delay in getting fuel for my aircraft. Then I realized I had an important decision to make. If I left for home at this time of day I would arrive in the dark.

I thought of previous counsel about flying in the dark with one engine but my eagerness to go home shaded my judgment. If I left quickly only about the last 30 or 40 minutes of the flight would be at night. I was familiar with the airplane and had sufficient fuel for the trip including my reserve. I also had work

to do that was waiting at the shop. I did not want to spend the night and come home in the morning. Being young and somewhat foolish I decided to make the flight. I had flown at night before with other pilots and the thought of thirty minutes in the dark did not bother me. I knew I could do it.

After take off I turned south and climbed to 6000 feet, normal altitude for this trip. Thinking about the upcoming darkness I climbed another 4000 feet. When I reached my cruising altitude I leveled off and trimmed the plane for straight and level flight. Everything was going good. I knew in about half an hour I would be home. It was dark as I reached down toward the floor for the fuel selector valve. It was time to change to a full tank for the remainder of the flight. Looking at my gauges I verified both main tanks were full. I slid the selector valve to the right and felt the click as it went into place. I could not see it but felt confident it was in its proper place.

About a minute after switching tanks everything got quiet. The engine had quit. At first the seriousness of the situation did not dawn on me. I had immediately turned toward the Natchitoches airport beacon that I could see in the distance. Then I realized I would never make it to the airport. I was too far away. I now knew why the counsel, "never fly a single engine airplane at night". There I was, two miles up in the dark sky. I could not see the ground to pick out a road, pasture or any suitable place for an emergency landing. At this altitude I had about 15 minutes of flight time remaining. My mind is racing, trying to recall all of those countless stories, desperately searching for something. From somewhere in the past I remember a statement from my dad. When something goes wrong undo whatever it was that I just did. I fumbled for the selector and moved it back to the left. I had about twenty two hundred feet left when the engine came back to life. I applied full throttle and climbed all the while heading toward the Natchitoches beacon. The runway lights were a beautiful sight. I landed and parked the

aircraft. I was totally limp. I could not exit the plane for some time.

I went into the hangar and borrowed a flashlight and investigated. My fuel selector detent pin was damaged and the click I had felt was actually the number two tank which was the empty one. Had I been prepared for night flight and had a flashlight with me its possible that I might have noticed the fuel selector on the wrong tank rather than relying on my own judgment and feel. Many thoughts came to me as I sat there looking at that selector and thinking of the things that might have happened that night. The aircraft which was not mine would surely have been destroyed. I would have been severely injured if not killed. The thought of all these things was terrifying. I was so upset after this experience that even after coming home and sharing my experience with my dad and my wife I still could not sleep that night. Dad listened to the story without any apparent emotion and when I was finished he told me he was sorry that I had to learn things the hard way even though sometimes this was the best way. He did say that he was glad that I had not been hurt.

I was extremely lucky. My consequences could have been much worse. Never again will I gamble with fate. I try listening and learning from others without having to experience it myself. In thinking about the situation I understand Dad's caution. At that time I was thinking he was telling me not to fly at night because of my lack of skill. I realize his lessons were given to teach me the value of insuring my safety and keeping the odds in my favor.

## MY FAVORITE FOSTER HOME

PAUL SUMMERVILLE

**F**or many children, growing up without a sense of belonging can be a traumatic experience. Just after my sixth birthday, Ben, my younger brother, and myself were taken

away from my parent's house in Alexandria, Louisiana and placed into our first foster home. We never saw mom and dad again in our childhood. This would be the first of thirteen different homes that we lived in throughout the next eight years. We spent the last four of these years at "Uncle Roys" where we finally settled down. This foster home, the last of 13, was the most memorable because it was the first place we had ever lived where someone cared about us and we had a sense of belonging.

Prior to going into foster homes, my family life was very disruptive. I was born in Salem, Oregon and lived there about seven months. From there we moved to Amarillo, Texas where we spent less than one year before my dad lost his job again and we had to move on. We went to Kansas City, Kansas where dad found employment at another radio station. As usual, my mom's drinking caused dad to lose his job once more and we moved to Minden, Louisiana where my brother Ben was born. Approximately six months later we were on the road again and relocated to Alexandria. There were many times of loneliness and neglect as I would be left to care for my brother while dad worked and mom bar hopped. Many times I heard the comment made about kids being, "in the way."

It was the summer of 1954 when this movement in and out of foster homes began. One day my dad told me that a lady was going to come for Ben and I and take us to live somewhere else for awhile. I thought this was exciting not understanding the purpose of it all. I still have feelings of hostility when I think about that first home. It was the second night we were there, right after we had gone to bed when the attack came. I was sharing a bed with another foster boy and we were talking and laughing as six year olds will do. Mrs. D. as everyone called her came into the room and jerked the covers off of my feet and beat me with a belt. She said bedtime was not the time for talking and the sooner I realized this the better off we all would be. The next day I

could not tie my shoes because my feet were swollen so badly.

In another home that we lived in I was playing and running through the yard. One of the girls who lived there was running also and ran into a barb wire fence and cut a terrible slash under her eye. I was blamed for this and the fact that she almost certainly would be disfigured because of the scar on her face from the stitches. For the next four years we bounced around from house to house never staying in one place for much longer than six months. It wasn't until 1958 that stability found us. We were moved to "Uncle Roy's" out in the country.

My thinking after seeing the house for the first time was how big and old it looked. There was a long red dirt road lined with pine trees leading up to the house. I could see the massive tin roof shining in the sun from the main road. There were two chimneys, one on each end of the house. A screened porch stretched all the way across the front of the house with three separate doors leading into the house. The house was made of wood which was grey and weathered where the old white paint had cracked and in many places was nonexistent. All around the house was a chain link fence, just high enough to keep the farm animals out of the yard. Upon entering the house the smell of biscuits cooking permeated the air, something I remember to this day.

There were more rooms than I had ever seen in any house before. There were five bedrooms in one end of the house each with a closet and one bedroom had a fireplace. There was a kitchen, dining room, family room, storage room, bath room, formal living room and one additional bedroom at the other end of the house. The floor was made of wood, worn smooth throughout from the many footsteps that had passed across its bare surface. I thought I would get lost as I was led to my bedroom, all the way at the other end of the house. There I was shown my bed, my very own personal bed that I did not have to share with anyone. I later found out that this farm

was over 800 acres and had been in the family for more than three generations. Uncle Roy was born in this house and his grandfather had been born in a house at the back of the farm.

The first evening we were introduced to the rest of the family at the dining table. There were eight foster boys living there including Ben and I. Everyone called our new guardians Uncle Roy and Aunt Meddie. They had no children of their own and had been keeping foster children all of their married life. The evening table became our family gathering place. It was a place for making plans for the next day. It was a place for discussing what went on during the day, how our day at school was or just talking about what we had been doing and where we had been that day. We would ask Uncle Roy what he would be doing tomorrow. That way we would know where to look for him when we came home from school. He might be in the hay field or plowing corn or working in the garden or hauling or cutting wood somewhere or working with the cows.

There were many things I learned while living at Uncle Roy's. There were three tractors, a team of mules, various wagons and farm implements, milk cows, riding horses, chickens, pigs, everything imaginable that one could find on a farm. I was taught to drive the tractors, milk cows, feed the chickens, and care for the horses and all the other animals. I learned how to hunt and fish, how to work in a garden, how to cut wood, how to build a fire, and sharpen an axe. I learned how to take care of myself and the value of honesty and integrity. But most of all, I learned how good it felt to be needed, to be cared for and cared about. We were not treated as children as I had been accustomed to. I cannot remember ever hearing a hostile word from either Aunt Meddie or Uncle Roy. There was never any threat of physical discipline of any sort. We learned from each other. We just naturally followed the example of those who had been living there the longest to learn the routine of life.

At five in the morning Uncle Roy would come into the main room of the house

and in his deep voice would shout, "Up boys." There was only one bathroom in the house. Outside, close to the barn was an outhouse one could use if necessary. We took turns getting ready for school, made our beds, straightened up our room and headed for breakfast where we would all sit down to hot biscuits and home made cane syrup, eggs and bacon or ham. By seven we would be at the end of the driveway, about a quarter of a mile away, waiting on the school bus. This trip into town would take an hour in good weather. Most days found us back at the driveway around four thirty where we would run to the house to change out of our school clothes, grab a biscuit and head out to our agreed upon tasks that had been discussed the night before.

Work never really seemed like work, it was just things that had to be done in order to survive. We lived almost completely off of what we raised or grew. Our garden was very large, about two acres. We all helped to plant and prune and take care of it from early spring until winter, even then we had turnips and pumpkins and things that would grow in the cold weather. We cut all of the wood needed to heat the house with the two fireplaces. We milked two cows each morning and night. We raised chickens for eggs and for eating, along with cows and hogs which would be butchered and sometimes smoked in the fall of the year. There were acres of corn and purple hull peas and sugar cane for homemade syrup. All through out the summer there were all sorts of berries to pick and nuts to gather which Aunt Meddie would make into jam, jelly and pies.

We all anxiously awaited the beginning of hunting season in the fall. Everything that was hunted was brought home and put on the table. We always had an ample supply of rabbit, squirrel, ducks, deer and anything else in season. Fishing was a favorite pastime for some of us. Campouts on the creek banks and setting and baiting catfish lines and the excitement of seeing the poles bent over and wiggling with some unknown fish on the end of the line was a thrill.

One of my first accomplishments while living there was to conquer the shotgun. Behind the seat of Uncle Roy's truck was the biggest shotgun I had ever seen. It was there for anyone to use. From the first time I saw it I wanted to shoot it. I just knew it was going to knock me in the dirt. One of the boys took me out to the barn one day and loaded it and handed it to me. It was so long and big I could hardly hold it up. Trembling with excitement I took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. I knocked the old bucket off of the fence post and from that time forward I was in love with that gun. I killed my first squirrel with it a short time later. I have one just like it today that I will never part with.

The summertime was hay season. Uncle Roy had a hundred acres or more of hay ground that we farmed for our own stock for winter food. We also would travel around the countryside mowing, raking, bailing, and hauling hay for neighboring families. It was on one of these trips coming home from a neighbors hay field that I wrecked the tractor. We were in a hurry to get home and head for the swimming hole. I was driving too fast and hit a hole in the road and flipped the tractor on its side in the ditch. I was thrown clear as the tractor went over and was only scraped up. We pulled the tractor upright and out of the ditch and I slowly drove it home. Uncle Roy looked at the tractor and then at me and only said, "I'm glad you are O.K." When I think of this today I feel ashamed that I acted so foolishly when I was entrusted with such responsibility. This is the way we were taught. We didn't have to be chastened or grounded or punished. We knew when we had made a mistake and he knew it would not happen again.

The hay business was the only outside source of income for Uncle Roy that I ever knew of. Our commission was five cents a bale which we would save up until the end of the job and then it would be divided equally among those who helped. From this we had spending money with which to buy ammunition for hunting season or maybe fishing gear

or whatever we wanted. Even though we worked hard, there was always time for fun.

Sunday was always a day of rest or at least a day that we did not work. Every Sunday morning we went to church about five miles away. Those who were big enough got to take turns driving the car to church and someone else got to drive back. We all had the opportunity to drive in the field but it was special to be able to drive down the gravel road to church where there were others to see you. After church, dinner was always fried chicken, mashed potatoes, some sort of vegetable and as always, biscuits and syrup.

As long as the weather would permit there was always a board game called Pollyanna on the porch with Uncle Roy. In the winter time it would be inside in front of the fireplace. Those who chose not to play were free to go swimming, horseback riding, visiting girlfriends or whatever they wanted to do. One favorite pastime was a place up in the hills behind the hayfield where we would spend hours digging for arrowheads.

The time at Uncle Roy's seemed short but it made a permanent impression on me. I always prayed for and wanted a home of my own. I thought I had it there. Then the time came to move again. Ben and I were told that a family wanted to adopt us. Once again the lady and the car arrived to take us for another trip, this time to the Summerville's.

My period at the Summerville house was brief. I was almost fifteen and halfway through the ninth grade. Ben was seven and I think he was the reason for the adoption. I had made it plain in times past that we would not be separated. The Summerville's had wanted a boy or boys and this was a package deal. I lived there only a little over three years and after graduation left home and joined the Navy.

During these last three years at the Summerville home I made many trips back to Uncle Roy's. I would go there on the weekend to help cut wood in the fall. I would go hunting with him and on occasion would just

go on Sunday to play Pollyanna. I was there to visit Aunt Meddie before she passed away with cancer. I was at Uncle Roy's funeral a few years later. I have made several more trips back to the house. I have brought my family to the farm and showed them where I lived. The old house is falling apart now. It doesn't seem nearly as big as it once did. It was abandoned years ago but the remnants are still there. The last time I was there, about four years ago, the front porch had fallen in and the roof over the dining room was caved in and the varmints were living in the remains of the floor. The fence post where I shot the bucket was still standing. It was still home and always will be.

## THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

JOSHUA TEMPLE

The insecurity of working a factory job allows you to realize the value of a good education. In "Some Lessons From The Assembly Line" by Braaksma, he states that he never questioned going to college due to his experiences in the factory life (Braaksma 17). Working in a factory showed Braaksma what life would be like without a education and taught him to appreciate what school would do for him. As for myself I learned and experienced what it would be like without a higher education when I left for basic Training over the summer.

For Braaksma, working the factory life during the summer between college semesters gave him the advantage of a life time. Braaksma says, "Sweating away my summers as a factory worker makes me more than happy to hit the books" (17) . Working in a automotive plant in southwest Michigan making subassemblies for a car manufacture Braaksma spent his summers "stamping, cutting, welding, moving or assembling parts" (17) . For Braaksma, he chose to work as a temp in the factories over working at a restaurant busing tables or working at a clothing store folding cloths for

the overtime pay and because living at home is much cheaper then living on campus for the summer (17) . Working the factories gave Braaksma a chance to experience the real world while still going to school giving him a heads up for what's to come in the future.

Going through basic training between my senior year of high school year and my freshman year of college has given me advantages over my peers. Basic has given me the physical and mental advantages in both the school aspect and in the military. Over the summer I was heavily drilled on respect and dedication. I was taught to respect my elders and people in higher positions than myself. That if someone has been given a leadership role, they have earned it for a reason. I have learned that elders have a lot to offer in guidance and wisdom. For they have experienced life and have gone through and over come many obstacles in life and have learned a great deal from that. Elders are like a human encyclopedia on life and they are always ready to share their experiences with you. As a private we are taught to be dedicated to our job and our mission. As a private you are also taught how to become a leader and take charge of a situation even in high stress areas. Becoming a leader has given me the opportunity to excel in the work place, becoming a closing manager at Orielly's and becoming very involved in organizing and running events for the school and the military. I have even moved up in the National Guard to a student first sergeant where I am given the responsibility to be in charge of over 200 privates and I am being guided and directed by the sergeants to where they teach me and mold me into a better leader. Basic Training has also pushed me physically harder than I have ever been pushed before. Training and working in the most stressful situations I have ever been in, such as going through a gas chamber and training outside all day in 110 degrees plus weather for weeks at a time. Going through basic training before college allowed me to refocus on school and give me more of a reason to finish college.

Work experiences gave Braaksma the determination to stay in school and showed him how lucky he is to get an education. One of the reasons Braaksma gave to stay in school was that “As frustrating as the work can be, the most stressful thing about blue-collar life is knowing your job could disappear overnight” (17). Braaksma explains that companies relocate overseas and downsize leaving employees out of jobs as it could possibly happen to him in six months as a co-worker explained to him (17). For some of Braaksma’s friends and fellow students a higher education wasn’t appealing and was a forgone conclusion. But for Braaksma he says that “Factory life has shown me what my future might have been like had I never gone to college in the first place” (17). Doing well in school always seemed to be on Braaksma’s mind because as he says “When I’m back at the university, skipping classes and turning in lazy rewrites seems like a cop-out after seeing what I would be doing without school” and “The things that the factory work has taught me-how lucky I am to get an education, how to work hard, how easy it is to lose that work once you have it- are by no means earth shattering” (17). Those lessons that he learned inspired him to make the best out of college before having to go into the real world for good.

Basic has opened my eyes to what I would be doing if I don’t continue on with my education. It has shown me that if I don’t continue on with school that I would be left doing all the grunt work and getting paid a lot less than someone with an education. A higher education moves you up in rank and gives you better opportunities being in the military. Such as being a private, the lowest rank in the military, you get stuck doing the lower and harder jobs. Like running supply to people and being on the front lines more often than not because your not as valuable in a way. You would have less training and knowledge then say an officer who tells others what to do and is one of the key people in an area because they’re in charge of everyone an organizes what is to be done. So

if I don’t excel in school and get a good education all the benefits of going to college would go to waste. The better pay and a chance to be someone in charge, watching over my fellow troops instead of being watched. For me an education will give me a chance to be that officer in charge of the troops and bring home a hefty pay check and lots of military benefits.

Working over the summer and going to school during the year helped teach Braaksma a few lessons about life. “All the classes in the world could not have prepared me for the battles with the machine I ran in the plant” (17). Showing Braaksma how difficult life can be but you can always overcome it. After working twelve hour work days over the summer Braaksma noticed that “People my age always seem to overestimate the value of their time and knowledge” (17). For Braaksma he doesn’t take anything for granted because he has seen what life would be like for someone who does and the difficulties it brings. The lessons and experiences Braaksma has learned “will stay with me long after I head back to school and spend my wages on books and beer” (17).

For myself, work has prepared me for school by teaching me responsibilities and leadership. Work has taught me discipline and respect. It has taught me how to schedule my day in order to accomplish all my tasks and to get my work done in a timely manner. It has taught me how to plan ahead and make a list of things to be done. This helps me with school because it allows me to plan ahead for classes and my school work, teaching me good time management. The leadership I have learned in the military has helped me to excel at work, in becoming a manager, and in school bringing me to the top of my class. In both Braaksma’s and my experiences in our work environments we have learned a great deal and have realized the value of a good education.

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## THE STRUGGLE TO READ AND SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

JOSHUA TEMPLE

School has many influences on a person's future. Some of these influences could be reading or writing. In Richard Rodriguez's story, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," Rodriguez learned the value of reading at a very young age by challenging himself to read books beyond his level. He read hundreds of books before reaching high school, but never learned to read them for their purpose or insight. Through his teachings in high school Rodriguez learned that a book could open opportunities and could also introduce you to people, while showing you places you would never have dreamed of (Rodriguez 193). From my own experiences I too have struggled with reading and connecting to what I have read. In this paper I will compare the similarities and differences of school between myself and Rodriguez.

Elementary school posed problems for me academically. In the 2nd grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia and put into a remedial class for my reading and writing. I would meet in this class once a day to focus in on my reading and writing. The teacher would give me extra attention when it came to spelling. I always hated spelling and still struggle with it today. I was given a hand help electronic spell check to use in my other classes and on my tests when in elementary and middle school. I also had no time limit on the test I took and I also couldn't be marked down for spelling words wrong. When it came to reading, I had no interest in it. Everything looked long and

boring, I didn't see why anyone would want to sit down and read something. All they were to me were words with no rhythm or tone. I found no interest in the extra help I was receiving in school either. It made me feel like I was retarded in my own way and degrading. I always felt unconfident in my work and my ability to do well in school.

Rodriguez had similar problems in school but took a very different outlook on the help he received. Rodriguez had a hard time connecting with the books he read in school because he was reading for the number of books that he could read, not for the meaning and feeling inside the books. Stating, "whenever I read I read for extra credit. Each time I finished a book, I reported the achievement to a teacher and basked in the praise my effort earned" (192, 193). Only seeing that reading was vital for his success in school not the real meaning behind books. For Rodriguez, reading was a chore, something to look down on.

Going through school Rodriguez wondered if there was something to learn from reading. While in school Rodriguez was placed in a remedial class for his problems with reading and understanding books. At the end of the day Rodriguez would meet in a small storeroom used as a classroom with a old nun. They would read National Geographic, and used text books (Rodriguez 192). Rodriguez enjoyed the quietness of the room and the colors that shined in from the sun. The nun and Rodriguez would take turns reading. While listening to the nun read Rodriguez feel in love with the nuns poetry as she read. She "ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me" Rodriguez stated (192). Through this reading Rodriguez learned the meaning of fellowship when reading and felt the feeling that took over him as the nun read to him passionately. "I simply concluded that what gave a book its value was some major idea or theme it contained" that through reading "I would become learned like my teachers" Rodriguez explained (193). He felt placed

inside the stories as if they came alive. For the first time Rodriguez had a sense of a fellowship between the reader and the author.

For myself, I didn't learn this feeling until my 10th grade year. I had read the book The Outsiders for class, and felt in love with it. I read ahead of the assigned pages for class and found myself wrapped up in the story. I was amazed how a bunch of teen age guys lived on their own and dealt with a rival group; and how they hid out in an old church when they killed a member of a rival group. I felt like I was one of the characters when I was reading. The story reminded me of myself and my friends. How we stuck together when trouble came our way and how we were such a close net group of friends. The life like description that the author put into the story grasped me and pulled me in. I couldn't get away. Reading for me became something I came to enjoy and connect to.

Rodriguez also found a book he could connect with. Well maybe a series of novels instead. Rodriguez loved to read the Dickens novels, he feel in love with the fat novels that contained hundreds of pages. That after reading the first hundred pages he would learn the characters names and care for what happen to them. But he would then get forced away from the story as they ended. Rodriguez also enjoyed The Human Comedy, by William Saroyan. The "narrator's warmth and the charm of his story" drew Rodriguez in (193). But while enjoying the stories Rodriguez found them to be of little value. For Rodriguez, it was the weight of the book that marveled him. Though all of his reading Rodriguez was able to use the stories he read in high school. Rodriguez stated, "I was able to say something about Dante and Descartes and Engles and James Baldwin in my high school term papers" (194). Books proved to bring Rodriguez success in school. Not only in writing but also making him a confident speaker in class with the knowledge gained from his reading. Rodriguez explains that, "I vacuumed books for epigrams, scraps of information, themes- anything to fill the hollow

within me and make me feel educated" (194). That, "More than anything else in my life... these books have made me all that I am" (194). Rodriguez indeed learned the meaning of reading a book and all that they contained.

School has had two very different views of learning for me. In my English classes, in grade school I was always told that I was a bad writer and I always had problems reading. In grade school I never had a teacher that was able to teach me writing punctuation in a way that I understood. But when I got to college I learned that I wasn't that bad of a writer after all. That it just took some adjusting and finding a way to connect with what you are writing. I had a lot of grammar and punctuation to learn, but was able to learn it in my English class and apply it to my writing. One thing I have learned is that when it comes to writing I have to do more work to get my thoughts in place. I have learned that writing out my thoughts on paper and writing the order that I want to write my paper while including the headings helps me to write a effective paper. For the first time ever I have found myself doing well in English and actually enjoying the class while learning things I should have learned long before college. College has also opened me up to reading and I have learned that I enjoy it too and that it's not something to fear. I have also learned that there are topics and books that would interest me. Reading Jonathan Kozol's book, Savage Inequalities opened me up to new topics I would have never read and gave me a new understanding of books and their value. For me I am now wanting to read books like Kozol's or books on war. I have learned that first hand experience action books seem to catch my attention more than fantasy books. I am know looking into reading "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien about a man who fought in war and wrote about it. To where before I started college I had no interest in reading. But as I am going though college I have learned to appreciate the importance of reading and that I too am a good writer.

Going to college verses not going posed

two very different life styles. To me college is long and hard. College adds another four to five years of school and debt while some of your friends are out in the real world working, making money and living a regular life. They may find jobs working at a factory all day for the rest of their life while I find myself working away at the books. My friends have weekends off to enjoy and play around while I sit in my dorm studying and working on homework. College also opens many doors for my future. College gave me a chance to excel in the work field, moving up in a job and the military.

While going through my first semester of college I learned the importance of reading and how reading will help with the rest of my career and adulthood. That understanding what you read and becoming a good reader takes practice and determination. I have winged away from the help I once received in grade school and have taught myself to seek help when ever needed. Much like Rodriguez has learned to appreciate what is inside the book. I have learned not to be dependent on excesses and extra attention. But have found many resources available to me and people who are willing to sit down and help me with my work when needed. Just as Rodriguez used his teachers as inspiration to do well and excel in school. I too have learned the importance of reading and writing from my teachers. Rodriguez and I both have experienced the similarities and differences of school.

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## TIMES HAVE CHANGED

SEAN WHITERS

Reading my first three tasks, I can see that I am not a quitter. Football is what has taught me this quality that will help me in the future. I have beaten obesity. I have overcome chemistry class. I've developed into an ok football player all with hard work and persistence. Through life my elders have unknowingly given me an excuse to fail. I refuse to believe that I will not succeed because of the color of my skin. I believe times have changed, and I can achieve anything. I will be successful despite my families influence that blacks were and will not be given an opportunity for success.

Subsequently black youths are not taking responsibility for their actions. I am not like many of today's black youth who take on the attitude of a James Baldwin. He felt that the Negro didn't have a chance in America. He wrote words like "God gave Noah the rainbow sign. / No more water the Fire next time". He was basically saying that blacks didn't have a chance and would never become equal. Maybe even God had forgotten about us. James Baldwin wrote most of his books in the 1960's. I understand why he said things like that. The problem is black people still walk around blaming the "white man." I'm not saying racism isn't still around, and blacks a lot of times have been put in a bad position from the start; but, you can't blame white people for everything. They are not forcing us to have children at a young age. They are not forcing us to drop out of high school. We as a people are making bad decisions. My cousin made the mistake of bringing drugs to school. He was trying to make extra money even though he lives comfortably without it. He was caught in the act of selling marijuana. The district expelled him for a semester. His grandmother has put into his head he only got expelled because he's black and they wouldn't have expelled the little white girl. He's not going back next semester. He feels he won't be given the chance to suc-

ceed. The district was generous if you ask me. Our elder ones are why a lot of black youths take on a “you cannot win attitude.”

I recently had my own issue. I have been struggling in my English class. I felt that my papers were worth a lot more than I received. Especially, the second one I wrote. It didn't help when I saw other people's paper that I knew weren't as good as mine. They were getting like twenty more points. I was upset because I really wanted to have a high GPA in college. Since I was so lazy in high school, graduating with a 2.0, I wanted to prove myself in the classroom. The worst thing I did was let my momma know. She told me the instructor was probably a racist and wants to fail me but can't because I did all my work. I'm thinking to myself that's not going to help my grade. Somehow my granny found out. She told me how things were in the old days, and that she wasn't surprised. My mom and granny's word can be powerful to me but not in this situation. I figured asking someone my age would be better. I let my older sister know I needed help with my writing. She told me to send my papers to her. I did and she corrected them. She said the same thing my instructor was telling me. My sentence structure is poor, so is my grammar, and punctuation.

Although I love my momma and granny, I'm glad I didn't listen to them. That would've been taking the easy way out. My sister let me know exactly what I needed to hear. “Sean, you are a college student: professors grade tougher.” It's like I forgot that simple fact. My cousin was not strong enough to realize that he is the problem and not the “white man.” His grandmother and his family have unknowingly created a built-in excuse for him in life. I respect what our parents and ancestors went through but could you imagine the advice James Baldwin would give a black child today. A built-in excuse will crush every dream you have. With every good dream comes a time period of failure. That's just the way God meant for humans to learn. A baby cannot walk the first time it tries to. Just like a

baby, I will learn from my failure and make my dreams come true.

I have many dreams. My dreams are realistic and will become real with hard work and patience. A couple of them I feel will be easy. I want to have a family; true happiness and live comfortably. I have one dream that will be a tough task. I want to inspire troubled inner city teens to turn their life around. The best way for me to accomplish this is by coaching high school football. I have some things that need to be done first, before I can become a coach. First, I will have to graduate from college as a Physical Education Major. Second, I need to learn as much as I can from my coaches, while playing football here at Missouri Western. Once I'm finished with those things I can worry about communicating to a teenager. I honestly don't think that will be problem. I feel with my background I can relate to an inner city teen better than anyone else. Becoming a head football coach will take time, but I'm a hard worker. That is why my dream is realistic. One day someone will see my talents and hire me as Head coach.

My dreams would not be realistic if I listened to my elders. Quitting would become acceptable in my life. For as long as I can remember, anytime I've had a problem with white authority my people always want to pull the race card. If you consider the things I want to accomplish, I would not quite make it with that mentality. I had to learn on my own, that most of time it was my fault. Owning up to my mistakes will propel me to a successful life. It's too bad because not all black youth have gotten this epiphany during their life. Even a drug dealer had dreams at one point in life. As a lot of us have done, the dealer looked around. Thought to himself, “this is the only way I can live.” Not realizing he has been influenced by the people that love him. I feel every dream should be realistic, but not owning up to your mistakes will crush them.

The belief that blacks don't have a chance to be successful in today's world is ludicrous. My granny and other family members

have unknowingly put this thought into my mind from day one. I have run from this mindset, for only a short period of time. I must stay focused and continue to run from it. That's the only way my dreams will come true. So granny I'm sorry but things have changed.

